



Chapter 5/Change to Chap 4

No Known Copyright

Princeton University Library reasonably believes that the Item is not restricted by copyright or related rights, but a conclusive determination could not be made.

You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

Princeton University Library Disclaimer

Princeton University Library claims no copyright governing this digital resource. It is provided for free, on a non-commercial, open-access basis, for fair-use academic and research purposes only. Anyone who claims copyright over any part of these resources and feels that they should not be presented in this manner is invited to contact Princeton University Library, who will in turn consider such concerns and make every effort to respond appropriately. We request that users reproducing this resource cite it according the guidelines described at <http://rbcs.princeton.edu/policies/forms-citation>.

Citation Information

Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Chapter 5/Change to Chap 4

1 folder (partial)

Contact Information

Download Information

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 12:45:03 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/2n49t626z>

Chap 4 } change to

Jchap5

Jchap 4

Vio/2 July 13, 1989; revised July 22, 1990; Sept 23, '90

She sat there sucking malt through a straw wondering who on earth that other Violet was that walked about the City in her skin; peeped out through her eyes and saw other things.* ~~Some of the things that other Violet saw were dim, shadowey--some things were clear and much too big.~~ The Violet ~~that~~ ^{Not only} knew the knife was in the parrot's cage and not in the kitchen drawer, ~~remembered~~ ^{and} ~~who~~ ^{that Violet} remembered what she did not: scraping marble from the parrot's claws and beak weeks ago. She had been looking for that knife for a month. Couldn't for the life of her think what she'd done with it. But that Violet knew and went right to it. Knew, too, where the funeral was going on, although it could not have been but one of two places[tk and tk] come to think of it. Still that Violet knew which of the two, and the right time to get there. Just before the closing of the casket, when the people who were going to faint fainted and the women in white dresses were fanning them. And the ushers, young men the same age as the deceased--from the dead girl's high school class, with freshly barbed heads and ghost

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

2

white gloves--gathered; first in a tight knot of six and then separated into two lines of three, ^{they} moved down the aisle from the back where they had assembled and surrounded the bier. They were the ones that that Violet had to push aside, elbow her way into. And they did. Step aside, thinking maybe this was some last minute love desperate to make itself known before it couldn't see and might forget the sleeping face it treasured. The ushers saw the knife before she did. Before she knew what was going on, the boy ushers' hard hands--knuckle-tough from marbles and steelies, from snowballs packed to bullet strength, from years of sticks sending hardballs over the hoods of motor cars, into lots with high fences and even into the open windows as well as the closed of people living four floors up, hands that had held the boy's whole body weight from the iron railings of the [tk] bridge let alone the monkey bars in [tk] park--these hands were reaching toward the blade she had not seen for a month at least and was surprised to see now aimed at the girl's haughty, secret face.

It bounced off, making a little dent under her ear lobe, like a fold in the skin that was hardly a disfigurement at all. She could have left it at that: the fold under the ear lobe, but that Violet, unsatisfied, fought with the hard-handed usher boys and was time enough for them, almost. They had to forget right away that this was a fifty-~~some~~ year old woman in a fur collared coat and a hat pulled down so far over her right eye, it was a wonder she saw the door to the church not to speak of the right place to aim her

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

3

knife. They had to abandon the teachings they had had all their lives about the respect due their elders. Lessons learned ^{from} ~~by~~ the old folks whose milky light eyes watched every thing they did, commented on it, and told each other what it was. Lessons they had learned from the younger old folks (like her) who could be their auntie, their grandmother, their mother, or their mother's best friend who not only could tell on them, but could tell them; could stop them cold with a word, with a "Cut that mess out!" shouted from any window, doorway or streetcurb in a two block radius. And they would cut it out, or take it downstairs, behind the trunks, or off in [tk] park, or better still, in the shadow of the el where no lights lit what these women did not allow, don't care whose child it was. But they did it nevertheless. Forgot the lessons of a lifetime, and concentrated on the wide, shining blade, because who knew? Maybe she had more than one cutting in mind. Or maybe they could see themselves hang ^{dog} at the dinner table trying to explain to these same women or even, Jesus! the men, the fathers and uncles, and grown cousins, friends and neighbors, why they had just stood there like street lights and let this woman in a fur collared coat make fools of them and ruin the honorable job they had worn white gloves for. They had to wrestle her to the floor before she let go. And the sound that came from her mouth belonged to something wearing a pelt instead of a coat.

By then the usher boys were joined by frowning men who carried the kicking, growling Violet out while she looked on in amazement.

she had been misting since New Year's Day

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

4

She had not been that strong since Virginia, since she loaded hay and handled the mule cart with a four lead rein. But ²⁰ [tk] years doing hair in the City had softened her arms and melted the shield that once covered her palms and fingers. Like shoes taking away the tough leather her bare feet had grown, the City took away the back and arm power she used to boast of. A power that Violet had not lost because she gave the usher boys, and the grown men too, a serious time.

That Violet should not have let the parrot go. He forgot how to fly and just trembled on the sill, but when she ran home from the funeral, having been literally thrown out by the hard-handed boys and the frowning men, "I love you" was exactly what neither she nor that Violet could bear to hear. She tried not to look at it as she paced the rooms, but the parrot saw her and squawked a weak "Love you" through the pane. ~~* who had disappeared New Year's Day and~~ Joe did not come home that night ^{of the funeral} or the next, so she knew the parrot was there because she kept going up and down the stairs from her apartment door to the front door to see if he was coming down the street or was sitting on the stoop. At two in the morning, again at four, she made the trip, peered out into the dark street, solitary except for a pair of police and cats peeing in the snow. The parrot, shivering and barely turning his green and blonde head, told her each time "Love you."

"Get away," she told him. "Go on off somewhere!"

The second morning he had. All she saw, down in the dark

* who had been missing since New Year's Day

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

5

cellar well beneath the stoop, was a light yellow feather with a tip of green. And she had never named him. Had called him "my parrot" all these years. "My parrot." "Love you." "Love you." Did the dogs get him? Did some night-walking man snatch him up and take him to a house that did not feature mirrors or keep a supply of ginger cookies? Or did he get the message--that she said "My parrot" and he said "Love you." and she had never said it back or even took the trouble to name him--and manage somehow to fly away on wings that had not soared for six years. Wings grown stiff from disuse and dull in the bulb light of an apartment with no view to speak of.

The malted was gone and although her stomach seemed about to lose its stitching, she ordered another and took it over to one of the little tables behind the [tk] that Duggie had placed there against the law that said if he did it , it made the place a restaurant. There she could sit and watch the foam disappear, the scoops of ice cream lose their ridges and turn to soft, glistening balls like soap bars left in a dishpan full of water. She had meant to bring a package of [tk Ovaltine?] to stir into the malted milk shake, because they didn't seem to be doing any good. The hips she came here with were gone too, just like the power in her back and arms. Maybe that Violet, the ^{one} who knew where the butcher knife was and was strong enough to use it, had the hips she had lost. But if ^{that Violet} ~~she~~ was strong and had hips, why was she proud of trying to kill a dead girl, and she was proud. Whenever she

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

6

thought about that Violet, and what that Violet saw through her own eyes, she knew there was no shame there, no disgust. That was hers alone, so she hid behind the [tk] at one of Duggie's little illegal tables and played with the straw in a chocolate malt. She could have been eighteen herself, just like the girl, reading [tk magazine] and playing ^{at the window} ~~at drinking~~ ^{for fun} malts in the drug store. Did ~~she,~~ ^{Dorcus} ~~this~~ Dorcus girl, like [tk magazine]? did the blonde ladies with winged hair capture her? Did the men in golf shoes, and V-neck sweaters? How could they if she found herself stuck on a man old enough to be her father? A man who carried not a golf club, but a sample case of Lucky Heart products. A man whose handkerchiefs were not lightweight cotton poking from his jacket pocket, but red and large and spotted with white dots. Did he ask her to warm with her own body his spot in the bed on cold winter nights before he slid in? Or did he do it for her? He probably let her put her spoon into his pint of cream and scoop off the melty part, and when they sat in the dark of the Lincoln Theater he wouldn't mind a bit if she stuck her hand down in his box of popcorn and came up with a fistful of it the sonofabitch. And when "Wings Over Jordan" came on he probably turned the volume down so he could hear her when she sang along with the choir, instead of up so as to drown out her rendition of [tk]. Turned, too, his jaw to the light of the bulb so she could press out between her thumb nails the hair root caught in a pore the dog. And another damn thing. (The malt was soup now, smooth and cold.) The twenty-five dollar bonus prize of a blue

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

7

shaded boudoire lamp or an orchid colored satin-like ladies robe that he won and was due to him for having sold all that merchandise in one month--did he give that to her the heifer? And took her to Indigo on Saturday and sat way back so they could hear the music wide and be in the dark at the same time, at one of those round tables with a slick black top and a tablecloth of pure white on it, drinking rough gin with that sweet red stuff in it so it looked like soda pop, which a girl like her ought to have ordered instead of liquor she could sip from the edge of a glass wider at the mouth than at its base, with a tiny stem like a flower in between while her hand, the one that wasn't holding the glass shaped like a flower, was under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, and he bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don't you know, and she wore it for him thin as it was and too cold for a room that couldn't count on a radiator to work through the afternoon, while I was where? Sliding on ice trying to get to somebody's kitchen to do their hair? Huddled in a doorway out of the wind waiting for the trolley? Whereever it was, it was cold and I was cold and nobody had got into the bedsheets early to warm up a spot for me or reached around my shoulders to pull the quilt up under my neck or even my ears because it got that cold sometimes it did and maybe that is why the butcher knife struck the neckline just by the ear lobe. That's why . And that's why it took so much wrestling to get me down, keep me down and out of that

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

8

coffin where she was the heifer who took what was mine, what I chose, picked out and determined to have and hold on to, NO! that Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no that Violet is me. The me that hauled hay in Virginia and handled a four mule team in the brace. I have stood in cane fields in the middle of the night when the sound of it rustling hid the slither of the snakes and I stood still waiting for him and not stirring a speck in case he was near and I would miss him, and damn the snakes my man was coming for me and who or what was going to keep me from him? Plenty times, plenty times I have carried the welts given me by a two tone peckerwood because I was late in the fieldrow the next morning. Plenty times, plenty, I chopped twice the wood that was needed into short logs and kindlin so as to make sure Mr. [tk] had enough and wouldn't go hollering for me when I was bound to meet my Joe Trace don't care what, and do what you will or may. He was my Joe Trace. Mine. I picked him out from all the others wasn't nobody like Joe he make anybody stand in cane in the middle of the night; make any woman dream about him in the daytime so hard she miss the rut and have to work hard to get the mules back on the track. Any woman, not just me. Maybe that is what she saw. Not the fifty year old man toting a sample case, but my Joe Trace, my Virginia Joe Trace who carried a light inside him, whose shoulders were razor sharp and who looked at me and never saw anybody else. Could she have looked at him and seen that? Under the table at the Indigo was she

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

9

drumming on a thigh soft as a baby's but feeling all the while the way it used to be skin so tight it almost split and let the iron muscle through? Did she feel that, know that? That and other things, things I should have known and didn't? Secret things kept hidden from me or things I didn't notice? Is that why he let her scoop the melty part from around the edges of his pint of ice cream, stick her hand down in his salt and butter popcorn. What did she see, young girl like that, barely out of high school, with unbraided hair, lip rouge for the first time and high heeled shoes. And also what did he? A young me with high yellow skin instead of black? A young me with long wavey hair instead of short? Or a not me at all. A me he was loving in Virginia because that girl Dorcus wasn't around there anywhere. Was that it? Who was it? Who was he thinking of when he ran in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Somebody golden, like my own Golden Gray, who I never ever saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers? Help me god help me if that was it, because I knew him and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one made me crazy about him in the first place. Is that what happened? Standing in the cane, he was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about, and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the Golden ^{boy} Gray I never saw either. Which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he.

I got quiet because the things I couldn't say were coming out of my mouth anyhow. I got quiet because I didn't know what my

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

10

hands might get up to when the day's work was done. The business going on inside me I thought was none of my business and none of Joe's either because I just had to keep hold of him anyway I could and going crazy would make me lose him.

Sitting in the thin sharp light of the drugstore playing with a long spoon in a tall glass made her think of another woman occupying herself at a table pretending to drink from a cup. Her mother. She didn't ever want to sit at the table, alone in the moonlight, sipping boiled coffee as long as it was there, and pretending to sip it when it was all gone; waiting for morning when men came, talking low as though nobody was there but themselves, and picked around in our things, lifting out what they wanted--what was theirs, they said, although we cooked in it, washed sheets in it, sat on it, ate off of it. That was after they had hauled away the plow, the scythe, the mule, the sow, the churn and the butter press. Then they came inside the house and all of us children put one foot on the other and watched. When they got to the table where our mother sat nursing an empty cup, they took the table out from under her and then, while she sat there alone, and all by herself like, cup in hand, they came back and tipped the chair she sat in. She didn't jump up right away, so they shook it a bit and since she still stayed seated--looking ahead at no one--they just tipped her out of it like the way you get the cat off the seat if you don't want to touch it or pick it up in your arms. You tip it forward and it lands on the floor. No harm done

Stitched separately into her skirt

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

11

if it's a cat because it has four legs. But a person, a woman, might fall forward and just stay there a minute looking at the cup, stronger than she is, unbroken at least and lying a bit beyond her hand. Just out of reach.

There were five of them, Violet the third, and they all came in the house finally and said mama; each one came and said it until she said uh huh. They never heard her say anything else in the days that followed, when ^{huddled in an abandoned shack} neighbors brought things: a pallet, a pot, some pan bread and a bucket of milk. Advice too: "Don't let this whip you, Rose. You got us, Rose. Think of the young ones, Rose. He ain't give you nothing you can't bear, Rose." But had He? Maybe this one time He had. Had misjudged and misunderstood her particular back bone. This one time. This here particular spine.

Rose's mother, True Belle, came when she heard. Left her cushiony job in Baltimore and came to ^{with *} ~~x~~ to take charge and over. The little girls fell in love right away and things got put back together. Slowly but steadily, for about four years, True Belle, got things organized. And then Rose jumped into the well and missed all the fun. Two weeks after her burial, ^{Rose's} ~~her~~ husband arrived loaded with ingots of gold for the childrn, two-dollar pieces for the women and snake oil for the men. For Rose he brought a silk embroidered pillow to comfort her back on a sofa nobody ever had, but would have been real nice under Rose's head in the pine box--if only he'd been on time. The children ate the chocolate from the ingots of gold and traded the heavenly paper

* With ¹⁰⁰ ~~sewn one~~ ^{Eagle dollars}
2 stitched separately into her skirts
to keep them quiet.

pieces for the women and snake oil for the men. For Rose he brought a silk embroidered pillow to comfort her back on a sofa nobody ever had, but would have been real nice under Rose's head in the pine box--if only he'd been on time. The children ate the chocolate from the ingots of gold and traded the heavenly paper among themselves for reed whistles and fishing string. The women bit the piece of silver before knotting it tightly in their clothes. Except True Belle. She fingered the money and, looking back and forth, from the coin to her son-in-law, shook her head and laughed.

"Damn," he said. "Aw, damn," when he heard what Rose had done.

Twenty-one days later he was gone again, and Violet was married to Joe and living in ^{the City} New York when she heard from a sister that he'd done it again: arrived with treasures weighing his pockets and folded under the cap on his head. His trips back were both bold and secret for he had been mixed in and up with the Readjustment Party and when a verbal urging from landowners had not worked, a physical one did the trick and he was persuaded to transfer his self some place, any place, else. Perhaps he planned to find some way to get them all out; in the meantime he made fabulously dangerous and wonderful returns over the years, although the interims got longer and longer, and while the likelihood that he was still alive grew fainter, hope never did. Any time any time, on another brittle cold Monday or in the blasting heat of a Sunday night, he might be there, owl-whistling from the road,

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

12

among themselves for reed whistles and fishing string. The women bit the piece of silver before knotting it tightly in their clothes. Except True Belle. She fingered the money and, looking back and forth, from the coin to her son-in-law, shook her head and laughed.

"Damn," he said. "Aw, damn," when he heard what Rose had done.

Twenty-one days later he was gone again, and Violet was married to Joe and living in New York when she heard from a sister that he'd done it again: arrived with treasures weighing his pockets and folded under the cap on his head.

He made several such appearances over the years, although the interims got longer and longer, and while the likelihood that he was still alive grew fainter, hope never did. Any day, any day, on another brittle cold Monday or in the blasting heat of a Sunday ^{night} afternoon, he might ^{be} there ^{out-hoisting} there, hollering from the road, dollar

bills sticking from his cap, jammed into the cuffs of his trousers and the tops of his shoes. Candy stuck in clumps in his coat pocket along with a tin of Frieda's Egyptian Hair Pomade. Bottles of rye, purgitive waters and eaux for every conceivable toilette made a companionable click in his worn carpet bag.

He'd be in his seventies now. Slower for sure, and maybe he'd lost the teeth that made the smile that made the sisters forgive him. But in Violet's mind (as well as the minds of those who stayed in x) he was out there somewhere gathering and putting by delights to pass out among the homefolks. For who could keep him

down this irregular birthday-every-day man who dispensed gifts and stories that kept them so rapt they forgot for the while a bone-clean cupboard and exhausted soil; or believed a child's leg would straighten itself out by and by. In his company forgetfulness fell like pollen. But for Violet the pollen never blotted out Rose. In the midst of the joyful resurrection of this phantom father, accompanying the distribution of his bounty both genuine and fake, Violet never forgot Rose or the place she had thrown herself into—a place so narrow so dark it was pure, breathing relief to see her prone in a wooden box. Rose. ^{Dear} Rose. What was the thing, I wonder, the one and final thing she had not been able to endure or repeat? Had the last washing split the shirtwaist so bad it could not take another mend and changed its name to rag? Or had it been the news of the young tenor in the choir mutilated and tied to an x, his grandmother refusing to give up his waste-filled trousers, washing them over and over although the stain had disappeared at the third rinse. They buried him in his brother's pants and the old woman pumped another bucket of clear water. Might it have been the morning after the night when the craving (that was once hope) got out of hand? When longing squeezed, then tossed her before running off promising to return and bounce her again like an india rubber ball? Or was it that chair they tipped her out of? Did she fall on the floor and sit there deciding right then that she would do it. Someday. Delaying it for four years while True Belle came and took over but remembering it as a door, closed and locked, with

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

14

pointless hours and days on the other side? Biding her time until the moment returned --with all its mewing hurt or overboard rage--and she could turn away from the door to step toward the limile^tssness beckoning from the well. What could it have been to make a mother lose sight of her children?

True Belle was there, chuckling, competant, stitching by fireleight, gardening and harvesting by day. Pouring x tea on the little girls' cuts and bruises, and keeping them at their tasks with spell binding tales of her Baltimore days and the child she had cared for there. Maybe it was that: knowing her daughters were in good hands, better hands than her own, at last, and Rose was free of time that no longer flowed, but stood stock still when they tipped her from her kitchen chair. So she dropped herself down the well and missed all the fun.

As she grew older, Violet could neither stay where she was or go away. The well sucked at her dreams, but the notion of leaving frightened her. It was True Belle who forced it. There were bully x crops in x and people for twenty miles around were going to pick it. Rumor was the pay was ten cents for young women, a quarter for men. Three double seasons in a row of bad weather had ruined all expectations and then came the day when the blossoms jumped out fat and creamy. Everybody held his breath while the landowner squinted his eyes and spat. Two laborers [x and x] walked the rows, touching the tender flowers, fingering the soil and trying

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

15

to puzzle out the sky. Then four days of light, fresh rain and all of x was downy with the cleanest cotton they'd ever seen. Softer than silk, and out so fast the weevils, having abandoned the fields years ago, had no time to get back there.

Three weeks. It all had to be done in three weeks or less. Everybody with fingers showed up and was hired on the spot. X\$ a bale, some said, if you grew your own; X\$ if you had a white friend to carry it up for pricing. And for pickers, ten cents a day for the women and a case quarter for the men.

True Belle sent Violet and two of her sisters in the fourth wagon load to go. They assembled at dawn, ate what was handed out and shared the meadows and the stars with local people who saw no point in going all the way home for five hours sleep.

Violet had no talent for it. She was 17 years old but trailed with the twelve year olds--making up the last in line or meeting the others on their way back down the row.. For this she was put to scragging, second picking the bushes that had a few inferior puffs left on the twigs by swifter hands than hers. Humiliated, teased to tears, she had about decided to beg a way back to x when a man fell out of the tree above her head and landed at her side. She had lain down one night, sulking and abashed, a little way from her sisters, but not too far. Not too far to crawl back to them swiftly ^{if} the x trees turned out to be full of spirits idling the night away. The spot she had chosen to spread her blanket[?] was under a handsome ^{black walnut tree} that grew away from the woods next to the meadow

strip bordering the acres of cotton.

The thump could not have been a raccoon's because it said ow. Violet rolled away too scared to speak, but raised on all fours to dash.

"Never happened before, " said the man. "I've been sleeping up there every night. This the first time I fell out."

Violet could see his outline in a sitting position and that he was rubbing his arm then his head then his arm again.

"You sleep in trees?"

"If I find me a good one."

"Nobody sleeps in trees."

"I sleep in them."

"Sounds soft-headed to me. Could be snakes up there."

"Snakes around here crawl the ground at night. Now who's soft-headed?"

"Could've killed me."

"Might still. If my arm ain't broke."

"I hope it is. You won't be picking nothing in the morning and climbing people's trees either."

"I don't pick cotton. I work the gin house."

"What you doing out here, then, Mr. High and Mighty sleeping in trees like a bat?"

"You don't have one nice word for a hurt man?"

"Yeah: find somebody else's tree."

"You act like you own it."

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

17

"You act like you do."

"Say we share it."

"Not me."

He stood up and shook his leg before trying his weight on it., then limped toward the tree.

"You not going back up there over my head."

"Get my tarp," he said. "Rope broke. That's what did it."

He scanned the night for the far reaches of the branches. "See it? There it is. Hanging right there. Yep." He sat down then, his back resting on the trunk. "Have to wait til it's light, though," he said and Violet always believed that because their first conversation began in the dark (when neither could see much more of the other than silhouette) and ended in a green and white dawn, that night time was never the same for her. Never again would she wake, struggling against the pull of a ^{narrow} black well. Or watch first light with the sadness left over from finding Rose in the morning twisted into space much too small.

His name was Joseph and even before the sun rose[?], when it was still hidden in the woods, but freshening the world's green and making acres of white cotton dazzle against the gash of a ruby horizon, Violet claimed him. Hadn't he fallen practically in her lap? Hadn't he stayed? All through the night, taking her sass, complaining, teasing, explaining, but talking, talking her through the dark. And with daylight came the bits of him: his smile and his wide watching eyes. His buttonless shirt open to a knot at the

waist exposed a chest she claimed as her own smooth pillow. The shaft of his legs, the plane of his shoulders, jawline and long fingers--she claimed it all. She knew she must be staring, and tried to look away, but the music in his voice brought her eyes back each and every time. She grew angry when she heard workers begin to stir, anticipating the breakfast call, going off in the trees to relieve themselves, muttering morning sounds--but then he said, "I'll be back in our tree tonight. Where you be?"

"Under it," she said and rose from the clover like a woman with important things to do.

She did not worry what could happen in three weeks when she was supposed to take her two dollars and ten cents back to True Belle. As it turned out, she sent it back with her sisters and stayed in the vicinity working x. The straw boss had no faith in her, having watched her working hard to fill her sack as quickly as the children, but she was highly and suddenly vocal in her determination. She ^{moved in} lived with a family of six in x and worked x to be with Joe whenever she could. It was there she became the powerfully strong young woman who could handle mules, bale hay and chop wood as good as any man. It was there where the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet grew shields no gloves or shoes could match.

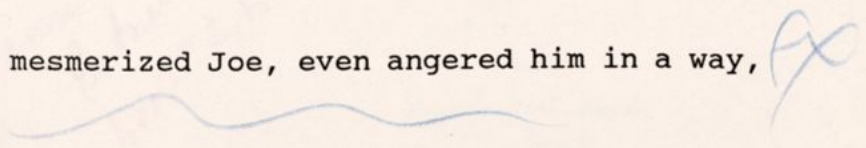
All for Joe Trace, a sometime hunter who lived with an adopted family, worked gins and lumber and cane and cotton and corn, who butchered when needed, plowed, fished, sold skins and game--and

July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

19

who was willing. He loved the woods. Loved them. So it was shocking to his family and friends not when he agreed to marry Violet, but that he agreed to take her to Baltimore where she said all the houses had separate rooms and water came to you--not you to it. Where colored men worked harbors for x\$ a day, pulling cargo from ships bigger than churches, and others drove up to the very door of your house to take you where you needed to be. She was describing a Baltimore of twenty-five years ago and a neighborhood neither she nor Joe could rent in, but she didn't know that, and never knew it, because they went to ~~New York~~^{the} City instead. Their Baltimore dreams were displaced by more powerful ones. Joe knew people living in ~~New York~~^{the City} and some who'd been there and come home with tales to make Baltimore weep. The money to be earned for doing light work--standing in front of a door, carrying food on a tray, even cleaning stranger's shoes--got you in a day more money than any of them had earned in one whole harvest. White people literally threw money at you--just for being neighborly: opening a taxi door, picking up a package. And anything you had or made or found you could sell in the streets. In fact, there were streets where colored people owned all the stores; whole blocks of handsome colored men and women laughing all night and making money all day. Steel cars sped down the streets and if you saved up, they said, you could get you one and drive as long as there was road.

Suddenly something mesmerized Joe, even angered him in a way,



July 13, 1989
Violet/2 revised

20

and permitted him to leave his fields and woods and secret lonely valleys. To give away his fishing pole, his skinning knife--every piece of his gear but one, and borrow a suitcase for thier things. He took his bride on a train ride exciting enough to ~~break both~~ ^{pop their eyes.} ~~their hearts~~ and danced on into the City.

Violet thought ~~New York~~ ^{it} would disappoint them; that it would be less lovely than Baltimore. Joe believed it would be perfect. When they arrived, carrying all of their belongings in one valise, they both knew right away that perfect was not the word. It was better than that.

Committed as Violet was to hip development, even she couldn't drink the remaining malt--watery, warm and flat--tasting. She buttoned her coat and left the drugstore not noticing that it was spring. In the City.

, as that
violet did,

- ① The problem
came with the people?
- ② Conversation
between
Violet & Joe