



## "To see if we can write on this machine..."

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To see if we can write on this machine

I think he thought that girl was candy. It was the best thing, if you were young and had just got to New York. That and the clarinets and even they were called licorice sticks. But Joe wasn't young. Forty, fifty even if a day. One of those men who stop somewhere around sixteen. Inside. So even though he wore button up the front sweaters and round toed shoes, he was a kid, a strapping, and candy made him smile. He liked those peppermint things that last the livelong day, and thought everybody else did too. Passed them out to Gistan's boys and the other kids that grouped around them on the stoop like grapes. You could tell they'd rather chocolate or something with peanuts, but his smile, passing that crumpled white paper sack around, you would have thought he was Santa's Santa.

Maybe she was. Candy, I mean. Leaning on her fist, big old eyes staring outside but looking inside. I could see it after a while--after he told me about it. Um hm. He told me. Told me all

about it. next to those white flowers. I had no defense.

\*\*\*How could I? Tell anybody all about it. I couldn't even tell my wife and if I couldn't tell Violet it was because I couldn't tell myself because I didn't know all about it. Candy. No. That's something you lick, suck on, and then swallow and it's gone. No. It was something else. More like blue water and white flowers, but together, somehow. Together. I needed to be there, where it was and where it was was Dorcus. stay there. Right after

She had long hair and bad skin. A quart of water twice a day would have cleared it right up, her skin, but I didn't tell her that because I liked it like that. Little half moons clustered underneath her cheekbones, like faint hoofmarks. There and on her forehead. I bought the stuff she told me to, but glad none of it ever worked. Take my little hoof marks away? Leave me with no tracks at all? In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to find a trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, just like tracking Dorcus led me to that

blue water next to those white flowers. I had no defense. Something else takes over when you get the two together and you might get up out of your chair to go buy two or three cigarettes, have the nickel in your pocket and just start walking, then running and end up somewhere in Staten Island, for crying out loud, Long Island, maybe, staring at goats. Or you could find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the heart you can't live without. I wanted to stay there. Right after I shot her and the crowd pressed in different ways, and the music was so good. I wanted to stay right there. Catch her before she fell and hurt herself because I could feel it--the water that blue, flowers big as my hand, white. Together. Dorcus. Me and you. Here's my hand, take it. Take my hand, girl, please. It's just me and you, and I'll let you do anything you please, anything, but I have to have that feeling. I can't lose the feeling of you, where you are and where the blue is right next to flowers, I tell you, big as my hand. *Don't on the book for that day. Minnie said you had a*

I was looking for the trail. Five days, all through the city. I had the gun but it was not the gun--it was my hand I was holding out to touch you with. Five days. First High Fashion on 131st street because I thought you had a hair appointment on Tuesday. Second Tuesday of every month it was. But you wasn't there. Some women came in with fish dinner's for Salem Baptist, and the blind twins were playing guitar on the corner, and it's just like you said--only one of them's blind; the other one is just going along with the program. Probably not even brothers, let alone twins. Something their mamma cooked up for a little extra change. They were playing something sooty, though; not the gospel like they usually do, and the women selling fish dinners forwined and talked about their mother bad, but they never said a word to the twins and I knew they were having a good time listening because one of the loudest ones could hardly suck her teeth for patting her foot. They didn't pay me no mind. Took me a while to get them to tell me you weren't on the book for that day. Minnie said you had a

touch up Saturday and how she didn't approve of touch ups not just because they were fifty cents instead of a dollar and a quarter for the whole do, but because it hurt the hair, heat on dirt she said, hurt the hair worse than anything she knew of. Except, of course, no heat at all. What did you have the touch up for? That's what I first thought about. Last Saturday? You told me you were going with the choir on the el out to Coney Island, and you had to leave at nine in the morning and wouldn't be back till night and that's why. And that you'd missed the last trip, and your aunt found out about it so you had to go on this one, and that's why. So I didn't ask Melvonne for her apartment. No need. But how could you have a touch up the Saturday before and still make it to the el station by nine o'clock in the morning when Minnie never opens up before noon on Saturday because she's open till midnight getting everybody readied up for Sunday? And you didn't need to keep the second Tuesday regular appointment, did you? I dismissed the evil in my thoughts because I wasn't sure that the sooty music the blind twins

were playing wasn't the cause. It can do that to you, a certain kind of guitar playing. Not like the clarinets, but close. If that song been coming through a clarinet, I'd have known right away. But the guitars--they confused me, made me doubt myself, and I lost the trail. Went home and didn't pick it up again until the next day when Melvonne looked at me and covered her mouth with her hand. Couldn't cover her eyes though; the laugh came flying out of there. ~~Did I want to know about a girl not out of high school yet~~

~~and~~ ...I sat on the stoop a while. Nobody there but Mrs [tk] rubbing her knees. Across the street, leaning up against the iron railing, I saw three roosters. Not even ten in the morning and they shone like patent leather. Smooth. Couodn't b e more than twenty , twenty-two. Young. New York, I thought. That's New York. Each one wore spats, and one had a handkerchief in his pocket same color as his tie. Had his hat pushed over a tad much. They were just leaning there, laughing and so on and then they started crooning, leaning in, heads together, snapping fingers. New York,

you know what I mean. Closed off to themselves, smart, young roosters. Didn't have to do a thing--just wait for the chicks to pass by and find them. Belted jackets and handkerchiefs the color of their ties. Waiting for the biddies. Waiting for them. They didn't have to trail anybody, look ignorant in a beauty parlor asking for a girl in front of women who couldn't wait for me to leave so they could pat on to the sooty music and talk about what the hell did I want to know about a girl not out of high school yet and wasn't I married to old hateful Violet? You think Melvonne would have covered her mouth in front of them? Or made them pay her in advance for the use of her place of a Saturday? Never would have happened because roosters don't need Melvonne. Chickens find the roosters and find the place too and if there is tracking to be done, they do it. They look, they figure. Roosters wait because they are the ones waited for. Only old cocks like me need the blue water so bad, the white flowers so big they have to get up from the stoop, cut Mrs.[tk] off in the middle of a sentence and try to walk

not run to the little park on Convent where we sat and you crossed your legs at the knees so I could see the green shoes you carried in a paper sack out the house so your aunt wouldn't know you tapped down Lenox and Riverside Drive and St. Nicholas Place in them instead of the oxfords you left the house in. While you flicked your foot, turned your ankles for the admiration of the heels, I looked at your knees and believed my heart would break. I didn't touch. I told you you were the reason Adam ate the apple and its core. That when he left Eden, he left a rich man. Not only did he have Eve, but he had the taste of the first apple in the world in his mouth for the rest of his life. The very first to know what it was like. To bite it, bite it down. Hear the crunch and let the red peeling break his heart. ~~not after I lost the feeling, the~~

~~plan~~ You looked at me then, like you knew me, and I couldn't take your eyes in because I was loving the hoof marks on your cheeks.

I ran there, to the very spot, same bench. Two white men were sitting there, but I sat right next to them until they got

disgusted and moved to another bench and off of ours. D. and J. Carved on the third slat from the edge. But that was later on. When I brought you treats, worrying each time what to bring that would make you smile and come again the next time. How many phonograph records? How many silk stockings? The little kit to mend the runs, remember? The purple metal box with flowers on top full of Schrafft's chocolates. Cologne in a blue bottle that smelt like a whore. Flowers once, but you were disappointed with that treat, so I gave you a dollar to buy whatever you wanted with it. Half a week's rent. A whole day's pay. Just for you. Anything just for you. To bite down hard , chew up the core and have the taste of red apple skin to carry around for the rest of my life. It could have stopped there, but not after I felt the feeling, the place where the water met the fowers, where one was mixed up with the other, the blue all over the petals big as my hand. In Melvonne's nephew's room with the ice man's sign in the window. Your first time. And mine in a manner of speaking. For which, and

I will say it again, I would strut out the Garden, strut! as long as you held on to my hand, girl. Dorcus, girl, your first time and mine? I chose you. Nobody gave you to me. Nobody said that's the one for you. I picked you out. Wrong time, yep, and doing wrong by my wife. But the picking out, the choosing. Don't ever think I fell for you, or fell over you. I saw you and made up my mind. My mind.