



JChap6: Golden Gray

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-

JChap6: Golden Gray

1 folder (partial)

Contact Information

Download Information

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 12:53:26 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/sj139651f>

Chapter 6

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

Before this - his
journey and
seeing the woman.

~~I was wrong about that. I see him as if he were here now.~~

I think about him and don't hate him anymore Not to say I understand him. I mean. I mean to say I don't know how to judge him anymore. Was he what True loved and Violet too? Or the vain and hincty pinch-nose worrying about his coat and the ivory buttons on his vest? Come all that way to insult not his father but his race.

—> When he stopped the buggy, turned the horse around, ^{perhaps} was it because the figure on the wet grass was everything he was not ^{as well} and a proper protection against and anodyne to what he believed his father to be and therefore [if it could just be contained, identified] it ^{was} would not also ^{be} himself? Or was it ^{the figure the vision} a thing that touched him before the fall? A ^{vision} something that, at the moment when his scare was sharpest, looked like home comfortable enough to wallow in? That could be it. But who could live in that hair? ^{that skin?} Anyway, ^{that hair, that black skin} two gallops beyond ^{them} her face the absence of it was unthinkable. And if he shuddered at the possibility of her leaning on him, of her sliding a bit to the left and actually resting while she slept on his shoulder, it is also true that he overcame the shudder. Swallowed, maybe, and clicked the horse.

which
may be
why

I like to think of him that way. ^{Sitting so bright in the carriage} Rain matting the hair over his collar, forming a little pool in the space between his boots. His squint as he tries to see through sheets of water. Then

1

but
he already had
lived in it: True
Belle had been his
first and major love.

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

without warning ^{the road} it stops and there is a burning white dollar of a sun cooking up there in its sky. Now he can hear things outside himself. Soaked leaves disentangling themselves one from another. The plop of nuts and the flutter of partridge removing their beaks from thier hearts. So carefully is he listening he does not see the one mile marker with ^{Vernonsville} 'Vienna' carved vertically in the stone. He passes it by and then sees the roof of a cabin not fifty furlongs ahead. It could belong to anyone, anyone at all. And mabye, with the pity of its fence enclosing a dirt yard in which a rocker without arms lay on its side, a door fastened with a bit of rope for a lock but gaping at its hinges, maybe it did belong to anyone.

Golden Gray reigns his horse. This is a thing he does well. The other is play the piano. Dismounting, he leads the horse close enough to look. Animals are somewhere; he can smell them, but the little house looks empty, if not cast off completely. Certainly the owner never expected a horse and carriage to arrive--the fence gate is wide enough for a stout woman but no more. He walks the horse a way to the right and discovers, behind the cabin and under a wrinkled tree he does not know the name of, an open stall full of shapes. Leading the horse he hears a groan from the woman, but doesn't stop to see whether she is waking or dying or falling off the seat. At the open stall he sees that the shapes are tubs, sacks, lumber, wheels, a broken plow, a butter press and a metal

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

trunk. There is a stake too, and he ties the horse to it. Water, he thinks. Water for the horse. What he thinks is a pump in the distance, is an ax handle still lodged in a stump. There was the downpour though, and a good bit of it has collected in a washtub near the chopping stump. So his horse can be watered, but where are the other animals he smells but does not see or hear? Out of the shaft, the horse drinks greedily and the carriage tips dangerously with the unequal distribution of his trunk and the woman. Golden Gray examines the fastenings before going to the rope locked door of the little house. That is what makes me worry about him. How he thinks first of his clothes, and not the woman. How he checks the fastenings, but not her breath. It's hard to get past that, but then he scrapes the mud from his Baltimore soles before he enters a cabin with a dirt floor and I don't hate him much anymore.

Inside light comes slowly, and, tired after forcing its way through oiled paper tacked around a window set into the back wall, rests on the dirt floor unable to reach higher than Golden Gray's waist. The grandest thing in the room is the fireplace. Clean, set for a new fire, braced with scoured stones, from which two iron arms for holding kettles extend. As for the rest: a cot, wooden, a rust colored wool blanket fitted neatly over a thin and bumpy mattress. Not cobs, certainly not feathers or leaves. Rags. Bits of truly exhausted and unusable fabric shoved into a ticking shroud. It reminds Golden Gray of the pillow True Bell made for

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

King to sleep on at her feet. She had ^{been given} the name of a powerful male dog, but she was a cat without personality, which is why True Bell liked her and wanted her close by. Two beds and one chair, as it turned out. The person who lived here sat alone at the table, but had two beds; one in a second room entered by a door stronger and better made than the one to the house itself. And in that room, the second one, is a dresser and a woman's frock folded in the top drawer. He looked, just as casual as you please. Opened up the dresser drawer, and saw the dress and would have opened the others, but the dress reminded him of what should have been in the front of his mind. The woman slumped out in the yard in his carriage. Did he think she would wake up and run off, relieving him of his choice if he left her alone? Or that she would be dead which was the same thing. He was avoiding her I know. Having done the big thing, the hard thing, by going back and lifting her up from grass as tall as his knees, by not looking to see what he could see of her private parts, of seeing only the shock of her legs, knowing the hair on them ^{was} thick enough to part with a fingnail once it was dry. He did not look at the hair on her head, or her face, turned away into the blades of grass. Already he had seen the deer eyes that fixed on him through the rain, fixed on him as she backed away, fixed on him as her body began to turn into flight. Too bad she didn't have the sense of a deer ^{had} and looked in the direction she was going, soon enough to see the giant maple in time. In time.

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

When he went back for her he knew, ~~believed~~, the deer eyes would be closed. ^{Suddenly} ~~Now~~ he was not sure. ~~Now~~ they might be open and she ~~might not have run away or died.~~ ¶ He leaves the dresser, the second room, and steps into the yard. The sunlight bangs his own eyes shut and he holds his hand over them, peeking through his fingers until it is safe. The sigh he makes is deep, a hungry air take for the strength and preserverance all life, but especially his, requires. Can you see the fields beyond crackling and drying in the wind? The blade of blackbirds rising out of nowhere, brandishing and then gone? The oder of the invisible animals accentuated in the heat mixing now with out of control mint and something fruity needing to be picked. No one is looking at him, but he behaves as though there is. That's the way. To carry yourself the way you would if you were always under the reviewing gaze of an impressionable but casual acquaintance.

She is ^{still} there. Hardly distinguishable from the shadow of the carriage hood underwhich she sleeps. Everything about her is violent, or seems so, but that is because she is exposed, and there is nothing to prevent Golden Gray from believing that an exposed woman will explode in his arms, or worse, That he will. She should be stuffed into the ticking along with the bits of rag, stitched shut to hide her movable lumps. But she is there and he looks into the shadow to find her face, and her deer eyes too, if he has to. The deer eyes are closed, and thank God will not open easily for

did not know still there - she
if she was
could have gotten up
and run away - but he believed
hoped

His great hope
that they
were close
him strength to

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

they are sealed with blood. A lip of skin hangs from her forehead and the blood from it has covered her eyes, her nose and one cheek before it jelled. Darker than the blood though are her lips, thick enough to laugh at and to break his heart.

I know he is a hypocrite; that he is gathering a story for himself to tell somebody, to tell his father, naturally. How he was driving along, saw and saved this wild black girl. No qualms. No qualms. See look, here, how it ruined my coat and soiled beyond repair a shirt you will never see another one of. I have gloves made from the skin of a very young cow, but I did not use them to hoist her, carry her. From the grass to the carriage; from the carriage into this cabin that could belong to anyone. Anyone at all. I lay her on the wooden cot first thing because she was heavier than she looked, and in my haste forgot to lift the blanket first to cover her. I thought of the blood, I think, dirtying the mattress. But who could tell if it was already dirty or not? I didn't want to lift her again, so I went into the other room and got the dress I'd seen there and draped it best I could over her. She looked more naked then, than before I covered her, but there was nothing else I could do.

He is lying, the hypocrite. He could have opened his big fat trunk; removed one of the two hand embroidered sheets, or even his dressing gown and covered the girl. He's young. So young. He thinks his story is wonderful, and that if spoken right, will

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

impress his father with, with his willingness, his honor. But I know, we know, better. He wants to brag about this encounter, like a knight errant, bragging about his coolness as he unscrews the spike from the monster's heart and breathes life back into the fiery nostrils. Except this monster without scales or flaming breath is more dangerous for she is a bloody-faced girl of moving parts, of beautiful hands and lips to break your heart. Why doesn't he wipe her face, I wonder. She is more savage, perhaps this way. More graphically rescued. If she should rise up and bite him it would satisfy him even more and confirm True Bell's warning about the man who saved the rattler, nursed the rattler, fed the rattler only to discover that the last piece of information he would have on earth was the irrevocable nature of the rattler. So Golden Gray, sits at the table in the single chair, ^{he} considers retrieving the ^{after} rocker in the front yard, his trunk, and changing into fresh clothes, for the ones he is wearing, still wet at the seams and cuffs, are filthy with sweat, blood and soil. He was thinking about that, his next move, when he heard slow, muffled hoof clops. Glancing at the wild girl to make sure the dress and the blood were intact, he opened the door and peered into the yard. Floating toward him parallel to the fence was a black boy astride a mule.

He would have said, "Morning," although it wasn't, but he thought the man was white and not to be spoken to without leave. Drunk, too, he thought, because his clothes were those of a gent

* He is young, and he is hunting, so I forgive

him self-deception and grand fake gestures. and when I think about him I don't hate him anymore

too quickly
from a big
can liquor he
has found.

worrying about his coat
sipping too quickly - and not tending to the girl.

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

who sleeps in his own yard after a big party rather than in his wife's bed, and wakes when his dogs come to lick his face. He thought this white man, this drunken gent, was looking for Hunter, waiting for him, needing the wild turkeys now, now, goddamn it--or the pelts, or whatever it was Hunter promised, owed or sold.

"Hello," said the drunken gent, and if the black boy doubted for a minute whether he was white, the smile that came with the greeting convinced him.

"Sir."

"You live around here?"

"No, sir."

"No? Where from then?"

"Out Vienna way."

"Is that right? Where you on your way to?"

It was better when they asked questions most times. If they said anything flat out it was something nobody wanted to hear. The boy picked at the burlap of his sack. "See about the stock. Hunter say I'm to see about it."

See that? The smile was gone. "Hunter?" the man asked. His face was another color now. More blood in it. "You said Hunter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he? Is he close?"

"Don't know, Sir. Gone off."

"Where does he live. What house?"

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

O, thought the boy, he doesn't know Hunter but he's looking for him." This here one."

"What?"

"This here place his."

"This? This is his? He lives here?"

The blood left him and showed up his eyes better. "Yes, sir. When he home. Ain't home now."

Golden Gray frowned. He thought he would know it right wasy, without being told and, surprised that he had not, he turned around to look at it. "You sure? You sure this he where Hunter lives? Hunter Bill?"

"Yes, Sir."

"When's he coming back?"

"Any day now."

Golden Gray ran his thumb across his bottom lip. He lifted his eyes from the boy's face and stared out across the fields still cracking in the wind. "What you say you come by here for?"

"See about his stock."

"What stock? there's nothing here but my horse."

"Out back." He pointed with his eyes and a gesture of his hand. "They roam now and again. Hunter say I'm to look see they get back if they break out." Golden Gray didn't hear the pride in the boy's voice. Hunter say I'm ... "because he was so terrified he laughed. This was it, then. The place he meant to come to and

Golden Gray: Summer, 1990

any day now the blackest man in the world would be there too.

"Okay, then. Go on about it then."

The boy tsched his mule --for nothing, and had to kick his sides with creamy heels before the animal obeyed.

"Say!" Golden Gray held up his hand. When' you're done, come back here. I want you to hep me with something. Hear?"

"Yes, sir. I be back."

behold and be held by. In whatever crevices it lies, under whatever branch. Or maybe it stalks treeless and open places, lit with an oily sun. This part of me that does not know me. Has never touched me or lingered at my side. This gone away hand that never helped me over the stile, or guided me past the dragons, pulled me up from the ditch into which I stumbled. Stroked my hair. Fed me food; took the far end of the lead to make it easier for me to carry. Never held itself out, extended from my body, to give me balance as I walked thin rails or logs, round and slippery with danger. When I find it, will it wave to me? Gesture, beckon to me to come along? Or will it even know who or what I am? It doesn't matter. I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then, the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its own muscles and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen.

His horse understood and bore him along with just a flick or two of the whip. Steadily it plodded, through valleys without