



## Jchap9

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Morrison, Toni. 1931-

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1 folder (partial)

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Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 12:47:06 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/xk81jq948>

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rev. 1.30.91

*bright*

In good weather, on the prettiest day of the year it started. A day so pure and steady trees preened. Standing in the middle of a concrete slab, scared for their lives, they preened. Foolish, reckless, yes, but it was that kind of day. Lenox widened itself, and men came out of their shops to look at it, to stand with their hands under their aprons or stuck in their back pockets and just look around at a street that spread itself wider to hold the day. Veterans in half uniform and half civilian stopped looking gloomy at working men; they rolled cigarettes and settled down on the curb as though it was a Duncan Fyfe. And the women tip tapping their heels on the pavement tripped sometimes on the sidewalk cracks because they were glancing at the trees to see where that pure, soft but steady light was coming from. The rumbling of the M11 and M2 was distant, far away and the Packards too. Even those loud Fords quieted down, and nobody felt like blowing his horn or leaning out of the driver's side to try and embarrass somebody taking too long to cross the street. The sweetness of the day made them generous enough to holler "I give you everything I got! you come home with me!" to a woman tripping in shiney black heels over the cracks. Young



men on the rooftops changed thier tune; spit and fiddled with the mouthpiece for a while and when they put it back in and blew out their cheeks it was just like the light of that day, pure and steady and kind of kind. You would have thought everything had been forgiven the way they played. The clarinets had trouble because the brass was cut so fine, not low down they way they love to do it, but high and fine like a young girl singing by the side of a creek, passing the time, her ankles cold in the water. The young men with brass probably never saw such a girl, or such a creek, but they maade her up that day. On the rooftops. Some on 254 where there is no protective railing; another at 131, the one with the apple green water tank, and somebody right next to it, 135, where lard cans of tomato plants are kept, and a pallet for sleeping at night. To find coolness and a way to avoid mosquitoes unable to fly that high up and unwilling to leave the tender neck meat down below near the street lamps. So from Lenox to St. Nicholas and across 135th Street, Lexington, from Convent to the Park you could hear them playing out thier maple sugar hearts, tapping it from four hundred year old trees and letting it run down the trunk, wasting it because they didn't have a bucket to hold it and didn't want one either. They just wanted to let it run that day, slow if it wished, or fast, but a free run down trees bursting to



give it up. That's the way the young men on brass sounded that day. Sure of themselves, sure they were holy, standing up there on the rooftops, facing each other at first, but when it was clear that they had beat the clarinets out, they turned their backs on them, lifted those horns straight up and joined the light just as pure and steady and kind of kind.

No day to wreck a life already splintered like a cheap window pane, but Violet, well you had to know Violet. She thought all she had to do was drink malts and eat pork and she'd put on enough weight to fill out the back of her dress. She usually wore a coat on warm days like this to keep the men at curbside from shaking their head in pity when she walked by. But on this day, this kind, pretty day, she didn't. Nobody cared about her missing behind, and neither did she that day because she came out of the door and stood on the porch with her elbows in her hands and her stockings rolled down to her ankles. She had been listening to the music penetrate Joe's sobs which were quieter now that she had returned Dorcus' photograph to Alice Manfred. But the space where the photo had been was real. Perhaps that's why, standing there on the porch, unmindful of her behind, she easily believed that what was coming up the steps toward her was the true-to-life Dorcus, four marcelled waves and all.



to at She carried an Okeh record under her arm and a half pound of stewmeat wrapped in pink butcher paper in her hand.

"My mother and my father too lived in Tuxedo. I almost never saw them. I lived with my grandmother who said they don't live in Tuxedo; they work there and live with us. Just words: live, work. I would see them once every three weeks for two and a half days, and all day Christmas and all day Easter. I counted. Thirty-six days if you count the half day--which I don't, because most of it was packing and getting to the train-- plus two holidays makes thirty-eight days, but really only twenty-eight because the half days shouldn't count. Twenty-eight days a year. When they'd come home, they'd kiss me and give me things, like my ring, but what they really wanted to do is go out dancing somewhere (my mother) or sleep (my father). They made it to church on the Sunday, but my mother is sad about that because all of the things she should be doing in the church--the suppers, the meetings, the fixing up of the basement for Sunday School parties and the receptions after funerals--she had to say no to, because of her job in Tuxedo. So more than anything she wanted gossip from the women in Circle A Society about what's been going on; and she wanted to dance a little and play bid whist. My father preferred



to stay in a bathrobe and be waited on for a change while he reads the stacks of newspapers me and my grandmother save for him. The Amsterdam, the Age, Crisis, Messenger, the Worker [etc. tk]. Some he <sup>took</sup> takes back with him to Tuxedo because he can't get them up there. He likes them folded properly if they are newspapers, and no food or fingerprints on the magazines, so I don't read them much. My grandmother does and is very very careful not to wrinkle or soil them. Nothing makes him madder than to open a paper that is badly folded. He groans and grunts while he reads and once in a while he laughs, but he'd never give it up even though all that reading worries his blood, my grandmother said. The good part for him is to read everything and argue about what he's read with my mother and grandmother and the friends they play cards with. <sup>when I</sup> Once I thought if I read the papers we'd saved, I could argue with him. But I picked wrong. <sup>I was thirteen and</sup> I read about the white policemen who were arrested for killing some Negroes and said I was glad they were arrested, that it was about time. He looked at me and said, the story hit the paper because it was news, news! which is to say for the hundreds of other killings nobody was arrested at all. I didn't know how to answer him and started to cry so my grandmother said Sonny, go somewhere and sit down, and my mother said, Walter, shut up about all that to her. She took me shopping after that for some



things[tk] her bosses in Tuxedo wanted, and I didn't ask her why she had to shop for them on her off days, because she wouldn't have taken me to [Tiffany's] where it's quieter than when Reverend [tk] asks for a minute of silent prayer. When that happens I can hear feet scraping and some people blow their noses. But in Tiffany's nobody blows a nose and the carpet prevents shoe noises of any kind. Like Tuxedo. Years ago when I was little, before I started school, my parents would take me there. I had to be quiet. Twice they took me and I stayed the whole three weeks. It stopped, though. My mother and father talked about quitting but they didn't. They got my grandmother to live in our house.

Twenty-eight days. I'm seventeen now and that works out to less than five hundred days. Less than two years out of seventeen. Dorcus said I was lucky because at least they were there, somewhere, and if I got sick I could call on them or get on the train and go see them. Both of her parents died in a very bad way and she saw them after they died and before the funeral men fixed them up. She had photograph of them sitting under a painted palm tree. Her mother was standing up with her hand on the father's shoulder. He was sitting down and holding a book. They looked sad to me, but Dorcus couldn't get over how good looking they both were. She was always talking about who was good looking and who



wasn't. Who had bad breath, who had nice clothes, who could dance, who was hincty. She was funny and we had the best times. All through high school, every day. It stopped for a while, a couple of months when she started seeing that old man. I knew about it from the start, but she didn't know I did. I let her think it was a secret because she wanted it to be one. At first I believed she was shamed of it, or shamed of him and was just in it for the presents. But she liked secret stuff. Planning and plotting how to decieve Mrs. Manfred. Slipping sexy underwear on at my house to go walking in. Hiding things. She always did like secrets. She wasn't ashamed of him either. He's old. Really old. Fifty. But he met her standards of good looking, I'll say that for him. Dorcus should have been prettier than she was. She just missed. She had all the ingredients of pretty too. Long hair, wavey, half good, half bad. Light skinned. Never used skin bleach. Nice shape. But it missed somehow. If you looked at each thing, you would admire that thing-- the hair, the color, the shape. All together it didn't fit. Guys looked at her, whistled and called out fresh stuff when we walked down the street. In school all sorts of boys wanted to talk to her. But then they stopped; nothing came of it. It couldn't have been her personality because she was a good talker, liked to joke and tease. Nothing stand-offish about her. I don't know



what it was. Unless it was the way she pushed them. I mean it was like she wanted them to do something scarey all the time. [tk example ; steal things, or go back in the store and slap the face of a white sales girl who wouldn't wait on her, or beat up somebody who had snubbed her]. Beats me. Everything was like a picture show to her, and she was the one on the railroad track, or the one trapped in the sheik's tent when it caught on fire. That's what made her like that old man so much at first. The secrecy and that he had a wife. He must have done something dangerous when she first met him or she would never have gone on sneaking around with him. Anyway, she thought she was sneaking. But two hairdressers saw her in that nightclub, Mexico, with him. I spent two hours in there listening to what they had to say about her and him and all kinds of people who were sneaking out. They had fun talking about Dorcus and him mostly because they didn't like his wife, a woman they called Violent. She took away thier trade, so they had nothing good to say about her, except crazy as she was, she did do hair well and if she wasn't so crazy she could have got a license proper instead of taking away their trade. They're wrong about her. I went to look for my ring and there is nothing crazy about her at all. I know my mother stole that ring. She said her boss lady gave it to her, but I remember it in Tiffany's that



day. A silver ring with three tiny turquoise stones. The salesgirl went to get the package my mother came to pick up. She showed the girl the note from her boss lady so they would give it to her, (and even showed it at the door, so they would let her in). While the sales girl was gone, we looked at the velvet tray of rings. Picked some up and tried to try them on, but a man in a beautiful suit came over and shook his head. Very slightly. I'm waiting for a package for Mrs. x my mother said. The man smiled then and said "Of course. It's just policy. We have to be careful." When we left my mother said, "Of what? What does he have to be careful about? They put the tray out so people can look at the things, don't they? So what does he have to be careful about?" She frowned and fussed and we took a taxi home and dared my father to say something about it. The next morning, they packed and got ready to take the train back to Tuxedo Junction. She called me over and gave me the ring she said her boss lady had given her. Maybe they made lots of them, but I know my mother took it from the velvet tray. Out of spite I suppose, but she gave it to me and I love it, and only lent it to Dorcus because she begged so hard and it did match the bracelets at her elbow. She wanted to impress Acton. A hard job since he never gave her anything the way the old man did. After she quit him and picked up with Acton, she was different.



She did for Acton what the old man used to do for her-- give him little presents she bought from the money she wheedled out of the old man and from Mrs. Manfred. Nobody ever caught Dorcus looking for work, but she worked hard scheming money to give Acton things. Stuff he didn't like, anyway, because it was cheap, and he never wore that ugly stick pin or the silk handkerchief either because of the color. I guess the old man taught her how to be nice, and she wasted it on Acton who took it for granted, and took her for granted and any girl who liked him.

"I have to get on home. If I sit here too long, some man will think I'm looking for a good time. Not anymore. After what happened to Dorcus, all I want is my ring back. To have and to show my mother I still have it. She asks me about it once in a while. She's sick and doesn't work in Tuxedo anymore, and my father has a job on the Pullman. He is happier than I've ever seen him and when he reads the papers and magazines he still grunts, but he gets them first and freshly folded and his arguments aren't so loud. "I've seen the world now," he says. He means Tuxedo and the train stops in Pennsylvania and Ohio and Indiana and Illinois. "And all the kinds of whitepeople there are. Two kinds," he says. The ones that feel sorry for you and the ones that don't. And both amount to the same thing. Nowhere in between



is respect." He's as argumentative as ever, but happier because riding trains he gets to see Negro<sup>e</sup>s play baseball 'in the flesh and on the lot, goddamnit,' and is convinced whitepeople are scared to compete with Negroes fair and square. My grandmother is slower now, and my mother is sick, so I do most of the cooking. My mother wants me to find some good man to marry. I want a good job first. Make my own money. Like she did. Like Mrs. Trace. Like Mrs. Manfred used to before Dorcus let herself die.

I stopped in there to see if he had my ring, because my mother kept asking me about it, and because I couldn't find it when I rummaged around in Mrs. Manfred's house *instead of going with ~~her~~ classmates to* after the funeral. But I had another reason too. The hairdresser said the old man was all broke up. Cried all day and all night. Left his job and wasn't good for a thing. I suppose he missed Dorcus, and thought he was a murderer. But he must not have known about her. How she liked to push people, men. All except Acton, but she would have pushed him too if she had lived long enough or if he had stayed around long enough. It was just for attention or the excitement. I was there at the party and I was the one she talked to on the bed. I thought about it for three months and when I heard he was still at it, crying and so on, I made up my mind to tell him about her. About what she said to me. So on my way home from the x market, I stopped by x to get the record my



mother wanted. I walked by the house on <sup>LENOX</sup> where Dorcus used to meet him, and there on the porch was the woman they called Violent because of what they said she did at Dorcus' funeral. <sup>Couldn't</sup> I didn't go to the funeral. I saw her die like a fool and was too mad to be at her funeral. I didn't go to the viewing either. I hated her after that. Anybody would. Some friend she turned out to be. All I wanted was my ring, and to tell the old man to stop carrying on so. I wasn't afraid of his violent wife because Mrs. Manfred let her visit and they seemed to get on okay. Knowing how strict Mrs. Manfred was, all the people she said she would never let in her house and that Dorcus should never speak to, I figured if Violent was good enough for her to let in, she was good enough for me to not be afraid of. I can see why Mrs. Manfred let her visit. She doesn't lie, Mrs. Trace. Nothing she says is a lie the way it is with most older people. Almost the first thing she said about Dorcus was "She was ugly. Outside and in." Dorcus was my friend, but I knew that in a way, she was right. All those ingredients of pretty and the recipe didn't work. Mrs. Trace I thought was <sup>of course</sup> just jealous. She herself was very very dark, bootblack, my grandmother would say. Very thin too, and wore her hair straightened and flat, slicked back like a man's except that style is all the rage now. Nicely trimmed above her ears and at the kitchen part too. I



think her husband must have done her kitchen for her. Who else? She never stepped foot in a beauty parlor or so the hairdressers said. I could picture her husband doing her neckline for her. The clippers, maybe even a razor, then the powder afterwards. He was that kind, and I sort of know what Dorcus was talking about while she was bleeding all over that woman's bed at the party. Dorcus was a fool, but when I met the old man, I sort of understood. He has a way about him. And he is handsome. For an old man, I mean. Nothing flabby on him. Nice shaped head, carries himself like he's somebody. Like my father when he's being a proud Pullman porter seeing the world, and baseball, and not cooped up in Tuxedo Junction. But his eyes are not cold like my father's. Mr. Trace looks at you. He has double eyes. The sad ones that let you look inside him, and the clear ones that look inside you. I like when he looks at me. I feel, I don't know, interesting. He looks at me and I feel deep--as though the things I feel and think are important and different and...interesting. I think he likes women, and I don't know anybody like that. I don't mean he flirts with them, I mean he likes them without that, and this would shock the hairdressers, but I really believe he likes his wife. When I first went there he was sitting by the window staring out, not saying anything. Later on Mrs. Trace brought him a plate with



x. He said "Thank you, baby. Take half for your self." Something about the way he said it. As though he appreciated it. When my father says thanks, it's just a word. Mr. trace acted like he meant it. And when he leaves the room and walks past his wife, he touches her. sometimes on the head, sometimes just a pat on her shoulder. I've seen him smile twice now and laugh out loud once. Then nobody would know how old he is. He's like a kid when he laughs. But I had <sup>to</sup> visited <sup>twice</sup> them ~~three~~ or ~~four times~~ before I ever saw him smile. And that was when I said animals in a zoo were happier than when they were left free because they were safe from hunters. He didn't comment; he just smiled as though what I said was new or really funny.

[tk: V's remark] ? I can't change it."

That's why I went back. The first time was to see if he had my ring or knew where it was, and to tell him to stop carrying on about Dorcus because maybe she wasn't worth it. The next time, when Mrs. Trace invited me to supper, was more to watch how he was and to listen to Mrs. Trace talk the way she did. A way that would always get her into trouble.

"I messed up my own life," she told me. "Before I came North I made sense and so did the world. We didn't have nothing but we didn't miss it."

Who ever heard of that? Living in the city was the

best thing in the world. What can you do out in the country? When I visited Tuxedo, back when I was a child, even then I was bored. How many trees can you look at? That's what I said to her. "How many trees can you look at? And for how long and so what?"

She said it wasn't like that, looking at a bunch of trees. She said for me to go to x and look at the x on the corner and see if it was a man or a woman or a child.

I laughed but before I could agree with the hairdressers that she was crazy, she said, "What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?"

"The way I want it?"

"Yeah. The way you want it. Don't you want it to be something more than what it is?"

"What's the point? I can't change it."

"That's the point. If you don't, it will change you and it'll be your fault cause you let it. I let it. And messed up my life."

"Messed it up how?"

"Forgot it."

"Forgot?"

"Forgot it was mine. My life. I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else."

"Who? Who'd you want to be?"

"Not who so much as what. White. Light. Young again."



"Now you don't?"

"Now I want to be the woman my mother didn't stay around long enough to see. That one. The one she would have liked and the one I used to like before....My grandmother fed me stories about a little blond child. He was a boy, but I thought of him as a girl, and she lived inside my mind. Quiet as a mole. But I didn't know it till I got here. The two of us. Had to get rid of her."

She talked like that. But I understood what she meant. About having another you inside that isn't anything like you. Dorcus and I used to make up love scenes and describe them to each other. It was <sup>smutty</sup> fun and a little smutty. Something about it bothered me, though. Not the loving stuff, but the picture I had of myself when I did it. Nothing like me. I saw myself as somebody I'd seen in a fashion magazine. Then it would work. If I pictured myself the way I am it seemed wrong.

fun, but

"How did you get rid of her?"

"Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her."

"Who's left?"

"Me."

I didn't say anything. I started thinking maybe the hairdresser was right again because of the way she looked when she said 'me.' Like it was the first she heard of the word.

Mr. Trace came back in then, and said he was going to sit outside a while. She said, "No, Joe. Stay with us. She won't bite."

She meant me, and something else I couldn't catch. He nodded and sat down by the window saying "For a little while."

Mrs. Trace looked at him and said, "Your little ugly friend hurt him and you remind him of her."

I could hardly find my tongue. "I'm not like her!" I don't know why I said it so loud. They both turned to look at me. So I said it even before I asked for the ring. "Dorcus let herself die. The bullet went in her shoulder, this way." I pointed. "She wouldn't let anybody move her; said she wanted to sleep and she would be all right. Said she'd go to the hospital in the morning. "Don't let them call," she said. "No ambulance; no police, no nobody." They did it anyway. Call the ambulance, I mean. but it didn't come until the next day after they had called twice. The ice, they said, but really because it was colored people calling. They wanted to carry her downstairs, put her in a car and drive to the emergency ward. She said no. She said she was all right. The blood had stopped, she said. To please let her rest. She bled to death all through that woman's bed sheets on into the mattress, and I can tell you that woman didn't like it one bit. That's all she



talked about. Her and Dorcus' boyfriend. The blood. What a mess it made. I'm telling you."

The two of them, they just looked at me. I thought they would never say another word until Mrs. Trace said, "Come to supper, why don't you. Friday evening. You like catfish?"

I said sure, but I wasn't going to. The hell with the ring. But the Thursday before, I thought about the way Mrs. Trace said "me."

I wondered about it. The way she said it. Not like the 'me' was some tough somebody, or somebody she had put together for show. But like, like wonderful. Like satisfying. Like real. Like somebody who wouldn't steal a ring to get back at whitepeople and then lie and say it was a present from them. I wanted the ring back not just because my mother asks me have I found it yet. It's beautiful. But although it belongs to me, it's not mine. I love it, but there's a trick in it, and I have to agree to the trick to say it's mine. Reminds me of the tricky blonde child living inside Mrs. Trace's head. A present taken from whitefolks, given to me when I was too young to say no thank you.

It was buried with her. That's what I found out when I went back for the catfish supper. Mrs. Trace saw it on Dorcus' hand when she stabbed her in the coffin.

I had a funny feeling in my stomach, but I had to

ask her just the same--why did she mess up the funeral that way. Mr. Trace took out his handkerchief.

"Lost myself," she said. "Put me down someplace and forgot where."

"How did you find it?"

"I looked."

We sat there for a while nobody saying anything. Then Mrs. Trace got up to answer a knock at the door. I heard voices; "Just right here and right here. Won't take but two minutes." "I don't do two minute work." "Please, Violet, I wouldn't ask if it wasn't absolutely necessary, you know that."

They came into the dining room, Mrs. Trace and a woman pleading for a few curls "just here and here. And maybe you can turn it down up here. Not curled, just turned know what I mean?"

"You all go up front, I won't be too long." She said that to Mr. Trace and me after we said 'evening' to the hurry-up costumer, but nobody introduced anybody.

Mr. Trace didn't sit at the window this time, He sat next to me on the sofa.

"Felice. That means happy. Are you?"

"Sure. No."

"Dorcus wasn't ugly. Inside or out."

I shrugged. "She used people."

"Only if they wanted her to."



"Did you want her to use you?"

"Must have."

"Well, I didn't. Thank God she can't anymore."

"You mad cause she's dead. So am I."

"You the reason she is."

"I know. I know."

"Even if you didn't kill her outright; even if she made herself die, it was you."

"It was me. For the rest of my life, it'll be me. Tell you something. I never saw a lonelier more helpless creature in my life."

"Dorcus? You mean you still stuck on her?"

"Stuck. Well if you mean did I like what I felt about her. I guess I'm stuck to that."

"What about Mrs. Trace? What about her?"

"We working on it. Faster now, since you stopped by and told us what you did."

"I didn't tell you everything yet. I suppose I should."

"There's more?"

"It was the last thing she said. Before she... went to sleep. Everybody was screaming who shot you, who did it. She said, tommorow. I'll tell you tomorrow. Then she called my name. Felice. Come close. I put my face right there. I could smell the fruit on her breath. She was sweating, whispering to herself, like. Couldn't seem

to keep her eyes open. Then she opened them really wide and said there's only one apple. Sounded like 'apple.' Just one. Tell Joe. See? you were the last thing on her mind. I was right there, right there. Her best friend, but not best enough for her to want to go to the emergency room and stay alive. She let herself die right out from under me with my ring and everything and I wasn't even on her mind. So. That's it. I told you."

That was the second time I saw him smile but it was more sad than pleased.

"Felice," he said. And kept on saying it. "Felice. Felice." With two syllables, not one, like most people do, including my father.

The curled hair woman came past on her way out the door, chattering, saying thanks so much see you Joe sorry to interrupt bye honey didn't catch your name you a blessing Violet a real blessing bye.

I said I had to go too. Mrs. Trace plopped down in a chair with her head thrown back and her arms dangling. "People are mean," she said. "Plain mean."

Mr. Trace said, "No. Comic is what they are."

He laughed a little then, to prove his point, and she did too. All of a sudden they were laughing hard. Made me laugh to hear them, though I didn't think the woman was all that funny. When I asked for my sweater, Mrs. Trace said, "Come back anytime. I want to do your



hair for you anyway. Free. Your ends need clipping."

Mr. Trace stood up and stretched. "This place needs birds."

"And a victrola."

"Watch your mouth, girl."

"If you get one, I'll bring the record back. When I come to get my hair done."

"Hear that, Joe? She'll bring the record."

"Then I best find me another job." He turned to me, touching my elbow as I walked to the door. "Felice. They named you right. Remember that."

I'll tell my mother the truth. I know she is proud of having stolen it; of having dared to do something like that to get back at the white man who thought she was stealing even when she wasn't. My mother is so honest she makes people laugh. Returning a pair of gloves to the store when they gave her two pair instead of the one pair she paid for; giving quarters she finds on the seat to conductors on the trolley. It's as though she doesn't live in a big city. When she does stuff like that, my father puts his forehead in his hand and store people and conductor people look at her like she is nutty for sure. So I know how much taking the ring meant to her. How proud she was of breaking her rules for once. But I'll tell her I know about it, and that it's what she did, not

the ring, that I really love. *of that is having friends*

I'm glad Dorcus has it. It did match her bracelet and matched the house where the party was. The walls were white with turquoise draperies at the windows. The furniture fabric was turquoise too, and the throw rugs the hostess rolled up and put in the spare bedroom were white. Only her dining room was dark and not fixed up like the front part. She probably hadn't got around to doing it over ~~it~~ in her favorite colors and let a bowl of wax fruit be the only decoration. Her bedroom was white and gold, but the bedroom she put Dorcus in, a spare one off the dark dining room, was plain. *be happy*

"I didn't have a fellow for the party. I went along with Dorcus and Acton. Dorcus needed an alibi and I was it. We had just renewed our friendship after she stopped seeing Mr. Trace and was running around with her "catch." Somebody a lot of girls older than us wanted and had too. Dorcus liked that part--that other girls were jealous; that he chose her over them; that she had won. That's what she said. " I won him. I won!" God. You'd think she had been in a fight. What the hell did she win? He treated her bad, but she didn't think so. She spent her time figuring out how to keep him interested in her. Plotting what she would do to any girl who tried to move in. I guess that's the way you have to think about it. That's the way all the girls I know think: how to get



then hold on to a guy and most of that is having friends who want you to have him, and enemies who don't. Snubbing, making fun of, tricking, even fighting them. Suppose you don't want to? Suppose you don't want to win? somebody else? Suppose I just want to win that 'me' Mrs. Trace found. One named Felice.

"It's warm tonight. Maybe there won't be a spring and we'll slide right on in to summer. My mother will like that--she can't stand the cold--and my father, chasing around looking for colored baseball players 'in the flesh and on the lot,' hollering, jumping up and down when he recounts the plays to his friends, he'll be happy too. No buds are on the trees yet but it's warm enough. They'll be out soon. That one over there is aching for it. It's not a man tree; I think it's a child. Well, could be a woman I suppose.

"Her catfish was pretty good. Not as good as the way my grandmother used to do it, or my mother used to before her chest wore out. Too much hot pepper in the dredging flour the way Mrs. Trace fixed it. I drank a lot of water so as not to hurt her feelings. It eased the pain."