



Sporting Woman: Story Voice

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Citation Information

Morrison, Toni. 1931-

Sporting Woman: Story Voice

1 folder (partial)

Contact Information

Download Information

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:06:36 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/bz60d183h>

July 28, 2000

[STORY VOICE]

The women's legs are wide open. Their ^{spread} spread ^{could} may be taken for an invite but its mostly provocation: ^{yet} What looks within reach may be way out of reach. ^{I don't recall exactly when I first saw them. FE} ~~If you see a magazine, a Sunday supplement or watch tv you can't help noticing how these modern girls do.~~ Still, straddling a

^{fancy} chair or dancing crotch out on tv, they're not all that different from women who ~~used to~~ live around here. This is back country, quiet and God fearing, so that kind of recklessness—the kind city men know how to plunder—^{is} ^{runs} was hidden and ran too deep for short shorts or a camera.

But then or now, long skirts or none, they never could hide the innocence—a kind of pity kitty hopefulness. Especially the tough ones with their box cutters and bad language, or the glossy ones with two-seated cars and a pocketbook lining full of drugs. None of them can hide the sugar-child, the winsome baby girl curled up somewhere inside, near the spine, maybe, or under the heart. Naturally all of them

I first noticed it: ⁱⁿ A magazine maybe or on tv
but it was in the 70's I'm sure. Back ^{when} ~~then~~ ~~FK~~
prostitutes ~~were~~ looked up to for their honesty
~~looked like the only honest women~~
around. set the style

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have a story. Too much notice, not enough, or the worst kind. Some tale about dragon daddies and ice-veined men, ^{or} of love-blind mamas and friends who did them wrong. Each story has a monster in it that made them tough ^{instead of} ~~but not~~ brave, so they open their legs ^{rather than} ~~instead of~~ hearts where ^{that} ~~the~~ folded child is.

Sometimes, when the cut is deep and no woe-is-me story is enough, a big, country wide tale is the only thing that does the trick, that explains the craziness heaping up and holding the women down. And a scarey story satisfies what a bitter one can't.

We have a good one around here. It's old, though, and was close to forgotten until we had to haul it out to explain what happened to the widows ~~and that girl too~~. Our story is about some hellions called Claras--fish women who bust up out of the ocean to harm loose women and eat disobedient children. It's a shivery ^{kind} ~~sort~~ of tale that came out of nowhere back in the forties when a couple of "see there, what'd I tell you?" things happened at the shore. Like that Up Beach woman who made love in the sand with her neighbor's

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husband and the very next day suffered a stroke at the cannery, the crab knife [tech. term] ^{frozen} in her hand. She wasn't but 24 at the time. Or [^] that other woman—she was from Harmony and wouldn't have anything to do with Up Beach people—well she hid some letters and a purchase deed under her father-in-law's fishing shack only to have loggerheads dig them up. Three suns hadn't set when the greedy daughter-in-law broke her hip trying to keep the breezes and the neighbors away from the papers that damned her. Although nobody flat out saw the Claras during the shame of those guilty women, we ~~all~~ knew they were around and knew what they looked like too because, earlier, one evening in 1945, some hard-headed children swam past the safety rope and drowned. As soon as they were pulled under, the dark clouds gathering above the heads of screaming parents, [^] and dumb struck picknickers turned into the profiles of gate-mouthed women whooping for joy. Some of us took for thunder what others heard as laughter. From that time ^{ON IN} to the fifties the Claras loitered in the surf or [^] flopped across the beach ready to pounce around sunset (when lust is

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keenest, when loggerheads lay eggs and tired parents get negligent).

All the best demons, of course, are hungry at suppertime, but the Claras liked to troll at night when the hotel was full of visitors drunk with dance music, or the salt air or maybe just the temptation of starlit water. Those were the days when Cosey's Resort was the best and best known vacation spot for colored folk on the east coast.

Everybody came: Lil green, Fatha Hines, Jimmy Lunceford etc. tk and guests from as far away as Michigan and New York couldn't wait to get down here. ^{Sooker Bay} ~~Crooked Beach~~ swirled with brand new mothers and young school teachers. All over the place children rode their fathers' leg shanks and buried uncles up to their necks in sand. Grandparents watched over red thermos jugs with white handles, and orange crates full of crab meat salad, ham, chicken, yeast rolls and loaves of lemon flavored cake, oh my. Then, all of a sudden, in 1958, bold as a pack of Jezebels, the Claras showed up in bright daylight. A clarinet player and his bride drowned at noon. The inner tube raft they were floating on washed ashore dragging streams of scale cluttered hair. Whether

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the bride had played around during the honeymoon was considered and whispered about but the facts were muddy. She sure had every opportunity. Cosey's Resort had more handsome single men per square foot than anyplace outside St. Louis or even New Orleans. They came partly for the music but mostly to dance by the sea with pretty women.

After the drowned couple was separated--sent to different funeral parlors--women up to no good and mule headed children didn't need further warning because they knew there was no escape: fast as lightening, night time or day, Claras could shoot up out of the waves to punish wayward women or swallow the ^{unruly} misbehaving young.

^{When} ~~Lasted, it did, until the Resort went out of business;~~ ^{bust} ~~then story died~~ ^{lost its}

^{grip *} ~~too.~~ A few people sinking crab castles in the back bays remembered

it, but with no more big bands or honeymooners; with the beach

picnics and swimmers gone; when ^{Sucker Bay} ~~Crooked Beach~~ became a treasury

of sea junk and Up Beach itself drowned, nobody needed or wanted to

recall salt wet females with scaley legs and foaming hair. ^{But} ~~Forty~~ ¹

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years on, we brought them back.

Except for me,
Most of us live in Harmony now and, except for a few fish
shacks, Up Beach is twenty feet under water; but the hotel part of
Cosey's Resort is still standing. Sort of standing. Looks more like it's
rearing backwards—away from hurricanes and a steady blow of sand.
Odd what ocean front can do to empty buildings. You can find the
prettiest shells right up on the steps, like scattered petals or cameos
from a Sunday dress and you wonder how they got so far from the
ocean. Hills of sand piling in porch corners and along the bannisters
are whiter than the beach, and soft, like sifted flour. Roses, which all
the time hate our soil, rage here, with more thorns than blackberries
and weeks of beet red blossoms. The wood siding of the hotel looks
silver plated, its peeling paint like the streaks on an unpolished tea
service. The big double doors are padlocked. Nobody has smashed
their glass panels. Nobody could stand to do it because the panels
mirror your own face as well as the view behind your back: acres of
chive grass edging the sparkly beach, a movie screen sky and an

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ocean that wants you more than anything. No matter the outside loneliness, if you look inside the hotel seems to promise you gifts and the company of your best friends. Secrets, too, crowd those long corridors and closed up rooms. And music. The shift of a shutter hinge sounds like the cough of a trumpet; piano keys waver one note above the wind.

Tr see back

not far from
Back in 1978 Bill Cosey's widow sold seventy-five of his inland *thirty-two* acres to an Equal Opportunity Housing developer for forty four homes so

cheap
reasonably priced and generously financed even Up Beach people *anybody* could

the part
afford them. That section of Harmony is called Oceanside—which it

when the govt built
isn't—and *is* full of people who commute to offices and hospital labs

twelve miles north, as well as former Up Beach folk. (It's easy to tell

2
which is which by their hands.) The sale of Cosey land had just closed,

the acres barely plotted when Up Beach mothers were pumping mud from

their spigots. Dried up wells and wobbly stilt houses forced the stubborn

ones give up the sight of the sea, its groovy breeze and apply for a two

fx sequence
1
although it started out housing veterans and retired
for elderly people thrown out of work and to food stamps. Now it's
it soon became a solution
due to campaigns led by two churches
mighty close

2

Our weather is soft, mostly, with peculiar
light: pale mornings fade into white noons;
then by 3:00 the colors are wild enough

? Riding
one another?

to scare you ~~(blondy?)~~. ^{Acres of jade} ^{nesting against} ^{Rocks?}
and sapphire ^{waves} ^{rock up foam} ^{fighting} each other
~~for life~~, ~~the sky~~ ^{under a} behaving as though
it's from some other planet - one without

rules where the sun can be robin egg blue if
it wants to and clouds ^{can be} red as a rose. The

Sand is like sugar - which is ^{the first thing} ~~what~~ the Spanish
thought ^{first} when they saw it ~~and named it~~ ^{for all time} Sacra, ^{they} ^{called} ^{it, A} ^{name}
~~which~~ ^{me} tore up into Sooker.

before
real
whites

No body can get enough of the ^{warm} breezes except when they
come from the south carrying the Cannery smell to
the beach, even right into the hotel. Then guests know
what me up beach people put up with everyday and
why Bill Casey moved his family out of the hotel and
built ^{that} a big house on his (Post Road) land. Fish odor
wasn't all that bad a thing in those parts. Like marsh stench
and pruney, it was just another variety to the senses.
But in the 60's it became a concern. A new generation of
to b. 1/1/6

Sp. W

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per cent HUD mortgage. When everybody had pulled out none of us gave the Claras a thought. Trouble, ruin, flood after flood followed by drought after drought, turning marshland into mud cakes so dry even the mosquitoes quit—we thought it was just life being itself. It didn't cross our minds that the Claras had what they wanted all along: three and a half miles of Atlantic beach front theirs alone for play. The story was dead to us and would have stayed that way except for the disappeared Cosey widows. Meaner than most and stand offish, they were quickly missed because we paid them the constant attention disliked folks always attract. People said they must have struck a deal, trading beach front for the Claras' protection and we were waiting to see if any good could come from that much sin. For a long time it looked as though we would wait forever. Then the girl came. After that, after all their business was in the street, they vanished from the face of the earth, whipping up so much feeling folklore was all we had left to chew on. Even though we knew from the beginning the story was trash: just another wicked women tale made up to scare females and correct children. We knew it wouldn't

* That and the sight of women shuddering chairs - never only putting thighs together when their skirts were as shabby as underpants.

unemployment

By the time
most people

tidewater

Saw all that

work &
back of
movie
nobody had given
nobody had
had a
cloudy
thought
to
remind
them
of
the
Claras

And everybody's

Draw *

Clara

There was no
blame.
That way

female vacationers complained about what it did to
their dresses, their appetites even their love making.
I remember Vida trying to ^{in the dining room} calm the girlfriend of a famous
singer who was carrying on about ~~not~~ her steak tasting like
shrimp. Hurt me, because I ~~don't~~ ^{never} fail in the kitchen.
Bill Casey always believed that's what ruined his business.
That the whites let him have all the oceanfront ^{he} ~~wanted out~~ because the Cannery kept it ^(unprofitable) ~~(uninteresting)~~ to
them. But the smog that blanketed Up Beach every
day hit Sooker Bay ^{only} once or twice a month — and
never from February to Aug when nets were empty
and the Cannery closed. No. Something else wrecked
~~Casey's~~ ^{his} Resort. Freedom, I think. Folks who bragged
about Casey vacations in the 50's boasted in the 70's
about Hyatt's, Hiltons, cruises to the Bahamas and
Ocho Rios. For some reason a freedom won felt
better than a freedom snatched.

In any case

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~~work, wouldn't~~ explain. Even Eve, poor thing, can't carry this modern
world's misery. We need ^{Something} something else. Better. A brand new tale.

New page
CHAPTER ONE

^{the streets of Harmony} outrageous
The day she walked ~~into Oceanside~~ was ^{peculiar} for that part of the
county. Chafing winds kept the temperature low and the sun was
helpless to move outside thermometers more than a few degrees above
freezing. Tiles of ice had formed at the shoreline and, inland, ^{Government's} the thrown-
together houses on Post road whined like puppies. Ice slick gleamed then
disappeared in the early evening shadow causing the sidewalks she
marched along to undermine even the most agile tread. She should have
bent her head and closed her eyes to slits in that weather, but, being a
stranger, she stared wide-eyed at each house searching for the address

Place:

- ① May locking Christine in. her bedroom.
Key left in the lock from the days when
May locked the door (in Once upon a time
section)

~~then~~ Her
mother re-entered
but (absent)

- ② "The bleak thing" appears to both (world and
color) in that room. Then they begin to
talk ~~to~~ just to hear a voice. Ocean
had no smell or sound. Like world w/o a
future or a past. Just a ^{ridges of} stone and no one
to imagine it other wise.

The way ~~we~~ always knew it was. In

Such a world, ~~the voice~~ is a ~~flap~~ ^{everyone deep down}: a claw a flap-
Sound - any sound

~~but~~ ~~the~~ voice is the miracle

Chap 10
(before they
talk)

~~It's as tho their tho invisible~~
~~friend became visible.~~ There you

Are - ~~in camp~~ ^{with your invisible friend -} companions on the

beach - ^{so} ~~you~~ ^{are} eating ice cream together - ~~and~~ when

a ^{real} girl appears shocking the wavelets.

Or ~~perhaps~~ ^{maybe} you are ~~then~~ listening to the friend no body sees
except you - intent on ~~the~~ words only you can hear,

when a real voice says Hi want some?

It's like that when children