



"Heed was sure..."

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Heed was sure she knew Christine better than she knew herself. And not withstanding an acquaintance merely twelve hours old, she knew Junior too, and now she knew what the soon to be lovers were thinking: how to fool an arthritic old woman, how to use her to satisfy and hide their cravings. Heed knew all about that too. About cravings sharp enough to bring tears of rage to grown up eyes. Like May's when she learned who her father-in-law would marry. And young eyes. Like Christine's when she knew her best friend was the chosen one. Both of them, mother and daughter, went wild just thinking about his choice of an Up Beach girl for his bride. A girl without a night gown or bathing suit. Who had never used two pieces of flatware to eat. Never knew food to be separated in special plates. Who ^{slept on the floor and} bathed on Saturday in a washtub full of the murky water left by her sisters. Who might never get rid of the Cannery fish smell. Whose family salvaged newsprint not for reading but for the privy. Who could not form a correct sentence; who knew some block letters but not script. Under those circumstances she had to be braced every minute of the day. Papa protected her, but he wasn't around all the time or in every place where people could mess with her because May and Christine were not the only

ones, as a particular afternoon proved. With the necessary prowess of the semi-literate, Heed had a flawless memory, and like most non-readers, she was highly numerate. She remembered not only how many gulls had come to feed off a jelly fish but the patterns of their flight when disturbed. Money she grasped completely. In addition she had hearing as sharp and powerful as the blind.

The afternoon sizzled. She sat in the gazebo eating a light lunch. Green salad, iced water. Thirty yards away a group of women lolled in the shade of the porch drinking rum punch. Two were actresses, one of whom had auditioned for "Anna Lucasta"; two were singers; the other one studied with Katherine Dunham. Their conversation wasn't loud but Heed caught every word of it.

How could he marry her? Protection. From what? Other women. I don't think so. Does he play around? Probably. Are you crazy, sure he does. She's not bad looking. Good figure. Way past good; she could be in the Cotton Club. Except for her color. And she'd have to smile some of the time. Needs to do something with her hair. Tell me about it. So, why, why'd he pick her? Beats me. She's hard to be around. Hard how? I

don't know; she's sort of ^{physical}~~mental~~. (Long laughter.) Meaning? You know, jungle-y. (Choking laughter).

While they talked four rivulets coursed down the side of Heed's glass, breaking paths through moisture. Pimento eyes bulged in their olive sockets. Lying on a ring of onion a tomato slice exposed its seedy smile, one she remembers to this moment.

Papa insisted she learn how to run the hotel and she did learn in spite of local sniggering, and May's and Christine's sabotage. They smoldered in an outrage kept lit by the radiance the couple brought with them to breakfast and their anticipatory glow at supper. Thoughts of Papa and her together in bed drove the two of them to more and newer meanness. The war had already been declared on the wedding gown Bill Cosey had ordered from Texas. Expensive, beautiful, it was way too big. L pinned it for alteration, but the gown could not be found until the afternoon of the ceremony when it was too late. L folded the cuffs, safety-pinned the hem, still it took a lot for Heed to grin her way down the stairs into the hotel lobby and through the ceremony. A ceremony unobserved by Heed's own family because, other than Solitude and Righteous Morning, none of her family