



L3

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-

L3

1 folder (partial)

Contact Information

Download Information

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:05:29 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/d504rq91q>

L 3

THE OCEAN IS MY MAN NOW. HE KNOWS WHEN TO REAR AND HUMP HIS BACK. WHEN TO BE QUIET AND SIMPLY WATCH A WOMAN.* HIS HEART IS DEEP DOWN THERE, BUT I PAY ATTENTION AND KNOW IT AS WELL AS HE DOES. THAT KIND OF UNDERSTANDING CAN ONLY COME FROM PRACTICE AND I HAD A LOT OF THAT WITH MR. COSEY. I FATHOMED HIS ^{MIND} ~~HEART~~ TOO. NOT RIGHT AWAY, OF COURSE, I WAS JUST A GIRL WHEN I WAS INTRODUCED TO HIM—A YOUNG, AMBITIOUS MAN WITH A SON AND A SICK WIFE WHO NEEDED CARE EVERY MINUTE OF THE DAY AND NIGHT. HE SAID HER NAME, JULIA, SO SOFT YOU COULD HEAR THE LOVE IN IT AS WELL AS THE SORROW. THEIR SON, BILLY BOY, WAS TWELVE WHEN MRS. COSEY PASSED AND EVEN THOUGH I WAS ONLY FOURTEEN, IT WAS THE MOST NATURAL THING IN THE WORLD FOR ME TO STAY ON AND LOOK AFTER THE TWO OF THEM. ONLY A WIDE HEART COULD HOLD THAT MUCH LOVE FOR A WIFE AND HAVE SO MUCH ROOM LEFT OVER. IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO

* ~~He has~~ never ~~been~~ a false-hearted man
=

LEARN THAT. I TRIED TO MAKE BILLY BOY UNDERSTAND HOW BIG HEARTED HIS FATHER WAS, BUT HE NEVER LEARNED OR BELIEVED IT. NOT THE WAY HIS OWN WIFE DID. BILLY BOY COSEY AND MAY HATHAWAY GOT MARRIED, IN A BIG HURRY, I MIGHT ADD, AND OVERNIGHT THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW UNDERSTOOD WHAT SUPERIOR MEN REQUIRE. IF I WAS A SERVANT IN THAT PLACE; MAY WAS ITS SLAVE. HER WHOLE LIFE WAS MAKING SURE THOSE COSEY MEN HAD WHAT THEY WANTED. THE FATHER MORE THAN THE SON; THE FATHER MORE THAN HER OWN DAUGHTER. AND WHAT MR. COSEY, WIDOWER, WANTED IN 1930 SHOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE. THAT WAS THE YEAR THE WHOLE COUNTRY BEGAN TO LIVE THE WAY UP BEACH PEOPLE DID—IF THEY WERE LUCKY, THAT IS. IF NOT, THEY KILLED THEMSELVES OR TOOK TO THE ROAD. MR. COSEY, HOWEVER, TOOK ADVANTAGE. HE BOUGHT A BROKE DOWN 'WHITES ONLY' CLUB AT SOOKER BAY FROM A MAN HONEST ENOUGH TO SAY THAT ALTHOUGH HE SWORE TO GOD AND HIS PAPPY HE WOULD NEVER SELL TO NIGRAS, HE WAS HAPPY AS A CLAM TO BREAK HIS OATH AND TAKE HIS FAMILY AWAY FROM THAT GNAT-INFESTED SIDEWALK FOR

HURRICANES.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT IN THE TEETH OF THE DEPRESSION COLORED PEOPLE WOULD WANT TO PLAY, OR IF THEY DID HOW COULD THEY PAY FOR IT? MR. COSEY, THAT'S WHO. BECAUSE HE KNEW WHAT A HARMONICA PLAYER ON A STREET CORNER KNEW: WHERE THERE WAS MUSIC THERE WAS MONEY. CHECK THE CHURCHES IF YOU DOUBT IT. AND HE BELIEVED SOMETHING ELSE. IF COLORED MUSICIANS WERE TREATED WELL, PAID WELL AND CODDLED, THEY WOULD TELL ONE ANOTHER ABOUT SUCH A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD WALK IN THE FRONT DOOR NOT THE SERVICE ENTRANCE; EAT IN THE DINING ROOM NOT THE KITCHEN; SIT WITH THE GUESTS, SLEEP IN BEDS NOT THEIR AUTOMOBILES OR IN A WHORE HOUSE ACROSS TOWN. A PLACE WHERE THEIR INSTRUMENTS WERE SAFE, THEIR DRINKS UN-WATERED, THEIR TALENT HONORED SO THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO GO TO COPENHAGEN OR PARIS FOR LOVE. FLOCKS OF COLORED PEOPLE WOULD PAY TO BE IN THAT ATMOSPHERE. THOSE WHO HAD THE MONEY WOULD PAY IT; THOSE WHO DIDN'T WOULD FIND IT. IT COMFORTS EVERYBODY TO THINK OF ALL NEGROES AS DIRT POOR,

AND OF THOSE WHO WERE NOT, WHO EARNED GOOD MONEY AND KEPT IT, AS SOME KIND OF SHAMEFUL, MIRACLE. WHITE PEOPLE LIKED IT BECAUSE NEGROES WITH MONEY AND SENSE MAKE THEM NERVOUS. COLORED PEOPLE LIKED IT BECAUSE, IN THOSE DAYS, THEY TRUSTED POVERTY, BELIEVED IT WAS A SIGN OF HONESTY. TOO MUCH MONEY WAS SUSPECT. HAD A WHIFF OF EVIL AND SOMEBODY ELSE'S BLOOD. MR. COSEY DIDN'T CARE. IF RESENTMENT ~~OR JEALOUSY~~ WAS THE ONLY TAX HE HAD TO PAY, IT WAS CHEAP. HE WANTED A PLAYGROUND FOR FOLK WHO THOUGHT THE WAY HE DID, WHO BUSIED THEMSELVES MAKING MONEY INSTEAD OF GROANING, WHO HAD A PLAN INSTEAD OF A PALM.

BUT IT HAD TO BE SPECIAL: EVENING DRESS IN THE EVENING; SPORT CLOTHES FOR SPORT. AND NO ZOOT SUITS. FLOWERS IN THE BEDROOMS, CRYSTAL ON THE TABLE. MUSIC, DANCING AND, IF YOU WANTED TO, YOU COULD JOIN A PRIVATE CARD GAME WHERE MONEY CHANGED HANDS. NOTHING BIG; NOTHING CRUDE. JUST A FEW FRIENDS, MUSICIANS, DOCTORS WHO ENJOYED THE EXCITEMENT OF

LOSING WHAT MOST PEOPLE COULDN'T EARN.

TK

MAY, A PREACHER'S DAUGHTER BRED TO HARD WORK AND DUTY, TOOK TO THE BUSINESS LIKE A BEE TO POLLEN. AT FIRST THE TWO OF US MANAGED THE KITCHEN, WITH BILLY BOY WAITING TABLES. WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE QUEEN AT THE STOVE WAS ME, SHE MOVED TO HOUSEKEEPING, BOOKKEEPING, PROCURING AND HER HUSBAND BOOKED THE MUSICIANS. I THINK I DESERVE HALF THE CREDIT FOR THE WAY THE BUSINESS GREW. GOOD FOOD AND FATS WALLER IS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME COMBINATION. STILL, YOU HAD TO ADMIRE MAY. SHE WAS THE ONE WHO ARRANGED EVERYTHING, SAW TO THE LINEN, PAID THE BILLS, CONTROLLED THE HELP. THE TWO OF US WERE LIKE THE BACK OF A CLOCK. MR. COSEY WAS ITS FACE TELLING YOU THE TIME WAS NOW.

WHEN WE WERE JUST TWO FEMALES—MAY AND ME—THINGS WENT ALONG FINE. IT WAS WHEN THE GIRLS GOT IN THE PICTURE—CHRISTINE AND HEED— THINGS BEGAN TO FRAY. OH, I KNOW THE "REASONS": CIVIL RIGHTS, INTEGRATION, CANNERY SMELL. BUT

THE FRAY STARTED WAY BEFORE THAT. NINETEEN FORTY TWO, I PLACE IT. THE HOTEL WAS CLIMBING FAST. THAT WINDOW OVER THERE LOOKED OUT ON PARADISE. TK

TWO YEARS AFTER HIS SON DIED, MR. COSEY DECIDED HE HAD TO HAVE MORE, LOTS MORE, CHILDREN. ^(over)CELESTIAL WOULDN'T DO, OF COURSE, ALTHOUGH I SUSPECT HE CONSIDERED HER. CAN'T BLAME HIM IF HE DID. SHE WAS SOMETHING. BUT I'D BET MY LIFE SHE TURNED HIM DOWN. OTHER THAN HER, HE TOOK CASUAL WOMEN CASUALLY. AN UNUSED WOMAN IS WHAT HE WANTED, I GUESS. FOR MOTHERHOOD—THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL WANT. I UNDERSTAND THAT BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. ANYWAY MR. COSEY WANDERED AROUND A BIT AND ENDED UP IN THE MOST LIKELY PLACE FOR MAKING BABIES AND THE LEAST LIKELY FOR A VIRGIN. UP BEACH WHERE EVERY WOMAN'S OBITUARY COULD HAVE READ "DEATH BY CHILDREN." MARRYING HEED WAS THE FIRST STEP TO RUINATION. YOU SEE HE CHOSE A GIRL ALREADY SPOKEN FOR. NOT BY A BOY FRIEND. AND NOT PROMISED TO ANYONE BY HER PARENTS. THAT TRASH GAVE HER UP LIKE THEY WOULD A PUPPY. NO. SHE BELONGED

He never did and like most men
~~assumed~~ assumed the fault was
hers.

TO CHRISTINE AND CHRISTINE BELONGED TO HER. THAT WAS A
THING, THOSE TWO.

I WAS CLOSING IN ON FORTY AND HAD BEEN RUNNING THE
KITCHEN FOR TEN YEARS. I WAS STILL LIVING IN UP BEACH THEN IN MY
MOTHER'S HOUSE. I LIKED WALKING THE SHORE ROUTE HOME IF
WEATHER PERMITTED. THE SKY IS EMPTY NOW, ERASED, BUT THEN THE
MILKY WAY WAS COMMON AS DIRT. ITS LIGHT MADE EVERYTHING A
LOVELY BLACK AND WHITE MOVIE. NO MATTER WHAT YOUR PLACE IN
LIFE OR YOUR STATE OF MIND, HAVING A STAR PACKED SKY BE PART OF
YOUR NIGHT MADE YOU FEEL RICH. AND THEN THERE WAS THE SEA.
FISHERMEN TELL ME THERE IS LIFE DOWN THERE THAT LOOKS LIKE
WEDDING VEILS AND ROPES OF GOLD WITH RUBY EYES. THEY SAY
SOME MAKE YOU THINK OF THE COLLARS OF SCHOOL TEACHERS OR
PARASOLS MADE OF FLOWERS. THAT'S WHAT I WAS THINKING ABOUT
WHEN ON MY WAY HOME I SAW MR. COSEY WITH HIS SHOES IN HIS
HAND WALKING NORTH BACK TOWARD THE HOTEL. I WAS UP AT THE
GRASS LINE HOPING TO CATCH A BREEZE STRONG ENOUGH TO GET

THE SMOKE SMELL OUT OF MY UNIFORM. HE WAS FURTHER DOWN, SLOSHING THROUGH THE WAVES. I RAISED MY HAND TO SAY "EVENING," BUT SOMETHING—THE WAY HE HELD HIS HEAD, MAYBE, OR A KIND OF PRIVACY WRAPPED ABOUT HIM—STOPPED ME. I WANTED TO WARN HIM BUT I JUST KEPT ON WALKING. THEN I SAW SOMEBODY ELSE. A WOMAN SITTING ON A BLANKET MASSAGING HER HEAD WITH BOTH HANDS. I STOOD THERE WHILE SHE GOT UP, NAKED AS TRUTH, AND WENT INTO THE WAVES. THE TIDE WAS OUT SO SHE HAD TO WALK A LONG TIME FOR THE WATER TO REACH HER WAIST. TALL, RAGGEDY CLOUDS DRIFTED ACROSS THE MOON AND I REMEMBER HOW MY HEART KICKED. POLICE-HEADS WERE ON THE MOVE THEN: THEY HAD ALREADY DROWNED THE JOHNSON KIDS; ALMOST KILLED THE CANNERY GIRL. BUT THIS WOMAN KEPT ON WADING OUT AND I COULD TELL SHE WASN'T AFRAID OF THEM—OR OF ANYTHING BECAUSE SHE STRETCHED, RAISED HER ARMS, DOVE. I REMEMBER THAT ARC BETTER THAN I REMEMBER YESTERDAY. SHE WAS OUT OF SIGHT FOR A TIME AND I HELD MY BREATH AS LONG AS SHE DID. FINALLY SHE SURFACED. I BREATHED AGAIN WHILE SHE SWAM BACK TO SHALLOW

WATER. SHE STOOD UP AND MASSAGED HER HEAD AGAIN. HER HAIR,
FLAT WHEN SHE WENT IN, ^{rose up, and} SLOWLY TOOK ON THE SHAPE OF THE
CLOUDS DRAGGING THE MOON. THEN SHE—WELL—MADE A SOUND. I
DON'T KNOW TO THIS DAY WHETHER IT WAS A NOTE, A SCREAM OR A
CALL. ALL I KNOW IS THAT IS WAS A SOUND I WANTED TO ANSWER.
EVEN THOUGH NORMALLY I'M REAL QUIET. CELESTIAL. SHE WAS
SOME OTHER THING.

I WATCH MY MAN FROM THE PORCH. IN THE EVENING MOSTLY,
BUT SUNRISE TOO. THERE USED TO BE WHITE WICKER CHAIRS OUT
HERE WHERE PRETTY WOMEN DRANK ICED TEA WITH A DROP OF JACK
DANIELS OR CUTTY SARK IN IT. NOTHING LEFT NOW, SO I SIT ON THE
STEPS OR LEAN MY ELBOWS ON THE RAILINGS. IF I'M REAL STILL AND
LISTENING CAREFULLY I CAN HEAR HIS VOICE. YOU'D THINK WITH ALL
THAT STRENGTH, HE'D BE A BASS. BUT, NO. MY MAN IS A TENOR.