



## "dress and started in."

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"dress and started in."

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dress and started in. "Let's," she said. "Let's polish this. Let's move that, clean here, wipe there..." How could we help but smile. Mr. Cosey most of all, seeing his son had chosen a wife certain to be a plus.

She moved Billy Boy from waiting tables to tending bar and then booking performers which left Mr. Cosey to think about money and play. Even pregnancy didn't slow her down. May was the first mother I saw who weaned her baby at three months. When Billy Boy died in '35 and Mr. Cosey went low, May and me kept things up and going. For the next seven years she dedicated herself to the Hotel's business, leaving Christine to me to raise. Seven years of her hard work were rewarded with "I'm taking a wife. You know her. Christine's little friend." Rewarded by watching her father-in-law marry her twelve year old daughter's playmate and put that playmate ahead of everything including herself, her ~~own~~ daughter and all she had worked for. Not only that. She was supposed to teach and train the playmate to take charge of us. Most people married young back then, (the sooner a girl was taken over by a man, the better) but eleven? It was worrisome for sure, but there was more to it than age. May's new mother-in-law was not just a child, she was a Johnson. In no wild dream could she



dollar bill, May said, a dollar and fifty cents refund was due. But we all knew Mr. Cosey never bought anything cheap—or if he did, it came to have value in time. Like a child who would soon grow up and bear other children. Which brings me to the other thing bothering May. The Johnsons were not just poor and trifling, their girls were thought to be mighty quick in the skirt-raising department. So what must have attracted Mr. Cosey to Heed in the first place could infect her daughter. Before May had even begun instruction about menstruation or thought of sheltering Christine from unsuitable boys, her home was throbbing with girl flesh made sexy, an atmosphere that Christine might soak up faster than a fruit cake soaks up rum. And all because Mr. Cosey wanted children.

Well, that's what he told his friends and maybe himself. But not me. He never told that to me because I had worked for him since I was fourteen and knew the truth. Just like he avoided Christine because she had his father's gray eyes, he picked Heed ~~because~~ to make old Dark groan. That was the truth but not all of it. He liked her. Besides, like a lot of folk did when war plants desegregated, his sporting woman had left town.

saw <sup>a</sup> the familiar <sup>look</sup> ~~glint~~ in her daughter's eyes. Like before, they whispered about Heed, refreshed themselves with old stories of how she tried to trick them into believing she could write; the chop that fell to the floor because she couldn't manage the knife; how her coddling of Mr. Cosey failed to limit him to her sheets; the hat she chose for his funeral. Mother and daughter became friends at last. Twenty-five or so years of ~~shame~~ at the other one's behavior was gone. Dead the question of what was best for the race because Heed answered it for them. She was the throw back they both had fought. Neither won but they agreed on the target so I guess that's why May smiled into that lovely dawn.

Heed closed her fingers. Christine decorated hers. No matter. They battled on as though they were champions instead of sacrifices. A crying shame.