

65-94

Doll ^{like to flower}
Althea ^{because it's}
^{so close to white, red}

When You Whistle, the Wind Will Blow

~~that person~~
Present tense

A benediction of crickets and locusts, a ^{cool} breath of fall, ~~black~~ ^{leaves} ~~hanging~~ ^{hanging} in pods from the ^{topiary} ~~paraph~~ of vines ~~to~~ ^{the} ~~in~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~Creek~~, and nobody now to bother Doll Walker because ~~they~~ ^{all of} ~~had~~ ^{Cornerville} ~~accepted~~ after 5 years they've accepted that she is crazy, by rights and by turns of trouble, ^{spawned like a} ^{web} ^(spide) over ^{the} ^{some} ^{odd} years now marked by the fact that she has ^{is} ^{living} moved into the old jail ^{alone} on ~~Trabbsome~~ ^{Trabbsome} Creek.

She picks her way thru the gum woods and up the banks of ^{rotting} ~~dead~~ grapevine leaves & pine straw, not even afraid of snakes, now that she is fifty, now that she has survived danger worse than snakes or even that fear of snakes (She has severed and ^{bested} ~~overdone~~ people & can rest now).

It is morning, August, prelude to fall; the ^{overcast} ~~sky~~ above the opening of her ^{front} yard peers thru the thicket where behind her the surge of the blackwater stream, scented with willow, gives way to ^{the} ^{ground} ~~left~~ traffic at the ~~along~~ ^{along} 94 ~~at~~ ^{the} ~~crossing~~ ^{at} Cornerville Crossing.

She steps free of the snarl of vines & heads toward the ~~sun~~ ^{flashed it} ~~stained~~ brick jail with bars on the broken window and halts when she sees a young Negro woman ^{at} ^{the} ^{door}. She knocks & waits, they turn scaming ~~the~~ ~~shade~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ^{two} ^{Negro} ^{shadows} on the north curve of the ^{road} ^{gravel}. At first not spying Doll, ^{small} ^{throng} & grey-blond & tucked as into the back drop of woods.

Doll watches the woman's cream-brown face switch from open wondering to surprise as she

pick Doll from the ~~leaves~~ ^{leaves & woods} tree shadows.

The woman slides her hands into the pockets of her long denim shirt & strolls toward Doll, stopping at the in the exact shade of the magnolia.

"I'm looking for a ~~man~~ woman called Doll, Doll Walker," she says.

Doll ~~steps from that shadow~~ ^{steps from that shadow} to the overcast patch of light and stares at her.

The woman looks about at the next door house, the road, toward the highway where a semi roars past, screeching its brakes at the crossing. Then she says, "A woman at the Delta Store said I could find her at the old jail. Is this it?"

Doll starts to speak out, speaks low. "It is. I'm her."

"No, I...," says the woman, squinting at Doll (puzzled face)

"I'm Doll Walker," says Doll. "And you'd be? She knows, Doll knows without knowing that this is her, the child with no name come to ~~claim~~ stake her claim on that dead part of Doll."

~~That's~~
"You're supposed to be a black woman," says the woman, tossing her tapered head as if to better think. ~~Not look & saying at Doll.~~

"And you're supposed to be dead, long-gone," says Doll, walking past her to the spout on the north wall of the jail, stopping ~~turning~~ ^{turning} it a steeper, swinging water, absorbed in its silver trickle. When she looks up, maybe the ghost will have vanished.

She hasn't
~~done~~

"What's your name?" says Doll.

"Althea - like the flower, 'Cause it's so close to
pinks white, 'il guess."

"You are." Doll looks at her own white ^{fore} arm, the
underside, the top is tan and blonde hair. "Why'd
you come here?"

"To see why my real mama gave me away." The woman
stands at the corner of the old jail with her arms crossed.
"Now 'il know."

Doll turns of the spigot, watching it. "You don't
know nothing. Nothing."

"Then tell me."

"Tell what can't be told?"

"What?"

"Dads & they tell you at the Detta that 'il's
crazy?"

"Hunted at it."

"Then let that suffice." Doll stares at the
woman. "Go on back where you come from.
~~And~~ Let it go."

"'il been looking two years now... 'il can't."

"What if 'il tell you 'il don't want nothing to
do with you, daughter or not? What if 'il tell you
'il'm not up's to ~~bring~~ ^{bring} ~~up~~ ^{up} over what's dead
I knowed?"

"Then 'il reckon 'il'd say, do anyhow. You owe
me that."

"'il don't owe nobody now. 'il quit owing
people a while back." Doll walks toward the
back, along the cool, dark wall. Can hear the

(Smart black) shoes in the green
woman following.

"How old are you now?" Doll ask.

"29 now."

"I know it ~~was~~ just ~~didn't~~ ^{don't} feel like counting."
Doll ~~start~~ ^{open} the ~~back~~ ^{front} door - there are two
books connected by ~~trapped~~ ^{trapped} broken window that
reach from ~~trapped~~ ^{trapped} ~~but~~ - to the second floor - and steps into the
kitchen, a big low-ceiled ~~street~~ ^{street} room - gray & cool
with [stone & counter cabinet set]

"Why do you live here?" ask the woman behind
her, rubbing her arms.

"Why not?"

"It's not a home, it's a jail."

~~It's~~

"It's where I belong."

"Why do you try into that?"

"What?" Doll open the coffee maker, pour
one cup of coffee to indicate the other isn't staying
long enough to drink.

"Why do you try into the ~~fact~~ ^{fact} that people
think you're crazy?"

"I am."

"I don't believe that," says the woman &
sits at the richly white table.

"Maybe I'm just making a statement, maybe
I just feel safe in being crazy."

"You don't want to talk about ^{me} do you?"

"I can handle my part, I just can't handle
other people's perceptions of my part."

I can
handle
my part;
I just
can't handle
other
people's
perceptions
of my
part.

more empty, more shock

The young woman places her head on her arm, and Doll places her coffee cup on the table & goes back to the coffee maker & pours another cup and takes it to her.

"Let me tell you this," says Doll. "I don't want your pity, ya hear."

Doll looks up with liquid brown eyes. "You won't get it, not from me."

Doll sits, facing her. Sipping coffee. "How'd you find me?"

"A place in Mobile, Ala., did some investigating."

"That's where ya live, huh?"

"No. The Valdosta."

"That close, huh?"

"Yeah." The young woman sips her coffee, black, like it or not. "You don't feel a thing for me ~~do you?~~ do you?"

"Do you for me?"

"No."

"No problem." Doll sips, sets the ^{empty} cup down. "Blood don't mean nothing."

"It always thought it would."

"So now ya know." Doll lifts the empty cup to her lips to hide their trembling.

"How'd ya get knocked up by a black man?"

Doll slams the cup down hard, sets eyes, walking the dirt cell row. "You've got a foul mouth."

"Not really." The young woman watches her. "Just don't know what to expect."

"Nothing."

"You'd not gone tell me about my daddy, are you?"

Alphabet

"Daddy doesn't quite fit here."

"How come?"

"No real daddy to it."

"How you mean?"

"A daddy's somebody who maybe rode you on his neck, or plucked a splinter from your heel."

"He did & do that, I know. Nobody else did neither."

"I would like to know if you ever had a family. What do you get along?"

"I'll swap stories with you."

~~Ha ha~~

"Well sitz gain, "Wouldn't even out, no matter what you've been through."

"You think you got a monopoly on trouble, don't you?"

"You don't like me much, do you?"

"I don't."

"Well, I like you, I can tell you that. I don't want to but I do."

"What about me do you like?"

"That you've got the grit to tell me you don't like me. That you came after all these years. Come, that's the thing now, ain't it?"

"It's a ^{choice} prerogative now."

"You've got an education?"

"I went high school. I work for a doctor, read a lot."

"Well, you get that honest."

"You worked for a doctor?"

"No, I read." (I + peruser in the real education though, ^{senior?} it?)

"Tell me, just tell me," ^{Delia} pleads, reaching across the ^{table} touch Della's arm. ^{Do}

Della sits back, wry at her touch.

"Black ~~don't~~ rub off on you."

"I didn't think that ... It's not."

"Prejudiced? I bet!" She crosses her arms.

"It must not be, had it?"

~~How~~

"Listen," says ^{Delia} ~~Delia~~ ^{stands}, "I didn't come here expecting a ^{handy} white woman. I came here expecting a humble black ^{man} ~~woman~~, glad to see me."

"Sit on I'm huh?"

"Yes, I don't know." She is steady at the door with her hand on the knob. "I'll just go on back where I came from, O.K.?"

"You'd be smart tho."

"You want me to?"

"Yes."

The young woman leans on the door, facing it, and starts to cry. Her trench neck.

Della sits there, ^{tweaking} her eyes, feeling ~~do~~ her heart wry. "Come sit down," she says. "Come sit, but when I'm done, I want you to promise to go."

Post tense
first person

I graduated from Highschool right here in Covington in 1963. Got married to the same boy I'd dated since I was 15. Name was Gene. Fresh & bright, you know the type. Guess we thought he'd get around having to go to Viet Nam if we got married. Dad & work that way. By the summer of 64 he was gone & I was back home with my mom & daddy, looking for work & waiting each day to hear if Gene had made it ^{clearcut} through one more day. I didn't love him, I guess, but I lasted for him - same thing when you're young.

Anyhow, about a month after he left, I got tired of moping around the house and counting fly specks on the ceiling and borrowed my daddy's old pickup to go swim in the river at Mayday, Truth is, feeling a little guilty to be swimming & swimming when Gene was probably picking thru Viet Nam jungles with his toes rotting off. So I didn't stay long. A bunch of boys & girls I knew from school drove up ~~the~~ bridge, and I figured somebody might write to Gene & tell him I was there - who knew what? - and he'd think I was running around on him. The swim (jealous) but not mean-jealous 'just jealous enough to make he feel special. Back then,

just as I started to pull drive up the gullied Sandy camp, onto the high way, I saw another pickup load of boys ^{heading} ~~coming~~ ^{forward} towards the camp river, so I assumed I knew had been

don't
we

chewing with Gene, so I turned west, crossing
the concrete bridge & then left along a dirt road
short cut ~~that~~ to ~~go~~ that would lead to another highway
back to Cornville.

The first thing I thought when I passed the falling-down
house on Sickle road and saw Bosman & his boys on
the porch, was God! I'd hate to have to meet up
with that bunch. The second thing I thought, when Daddy
old puk up & putered & died, was ~~now~~ Now I might have to.

Everybody in Cornville knew them for scoundrels, but
I wasn't particularly afraid of them. I was Gene's wife,
and though Gene wasn't friends with them, they respected
him. I thought, enough not to mess with me, even
with him gone to Veet Nam.

I got out of the back & slipped on my shirt &
shorts over my ~~wet~~ swim suit. I'd been swimming at
the river bridge on May day, got scared somebody there
would write to ~~Gene~~ I tell him I was being unfaithful,
left & took a back road thru the woods to get to
Cornville. And there it was, snook dab in the
middle of nowhere about to face Bosman & his
boys.

The sun was going down over the west woods,
shiny orange thru the pines & making striped
shadows on the dirt road. Sand cool under my
bare feet and a breeze on my ~~my~~ face that would never
be the same again.