

Jazz Important Quotes

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“Maybe she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know.”

Violet’s husband shot and killed his 18 year old lover. Violet’s introduction to her existence is at the girl’s funeral, where she attempts to mutilate the body. The above quote is used by the narrator to explain why Violet suddenly becomes obsessed with learning everything that she can about the one who caught her husband’s eye. She tried cheating, she tried loving Joe. None of it worked, so she has decided to try loving the girl that is now dead.

“It promised to be a mighty bleak household, what with the birds gone and the two of them wiping their cheeks all day, but when spring came to the City Violet saw, coming into the building with an Okeh record under her arm and carrying some stew meat wrapped in butcher paper, another girl with four marcelled waves on each side of her head. Violet invited her in to examine the record and that’s how that scandalizing threesome on Lenox Avenue began. What turned out differently was who shot whom.”

A bit of foreshadowing is included in this paragraph. Violet has met a girl of a similar age and tastes as the one her husband shot. She invites the girl into her home and a strange relationship is formed between Violet, Joe, and the girl. The last sentence indicates that history will be repeated to an extent but that there will be a few differences in the outcome.

“His name was Joseph, and even before the sun rose, when it was still hidden in the woods, but freshening the world’s green and dazzling acres of white cotton against the gash of a ruby horizon, Violet claimed him.”

Violet’s first introduction to Joe is when he falls out of a tree that she is sitting under. They cannot see one another, but spend the entire night talking and laughing. Violet falls immediately and deeply in love with him. Joe is enamored with Violet for her spunk. More importantly, they communicate much better earlier in their relationship.

“‘You’re in trouble,’ she says, yawning. ‘Deep, deep trouble. Can’t rival the dead for love. Lose every time.’”

Joe loves Dorcas. He loves her so much that he shoots her. He then spends his days mourning her loss. Violet is left as the surprised and angry spouse. As it is pointed out, she is unable to compete with Dorcas even in death. Dorcas was young and beautiful, taken too early by Joe. Violet brings Dorcas’s picture into her house and spends as much time as Joe staring at it.

“As he puts on his coat and cap he can practically feel Victory at his side when he sets out, armed, to find Dorcas. He isn’t thinking of harming her, or, as Hunter had cautioned, killing something tender. She is female. And she is not prey. So he never thinks of that. He is hunting for her though, and while hunting a gun is as natural a companion as Victory.”

Joe searches multiple times for his mother. His searches parallel his hunt for Dorcas. He takes the gun even though he tells himself that he will not do anything to harm her. Perhaps he might have killed her regardless. Having the gun on hand made it inevitable.

“Joe Trace counted on flirty laughing women to buy his wares, and he knew better than to take up with any of them. Not if he wanted to be able to lean over a pool table for a shot exposing his back to his customers’ husbands. But that day in Alice Manfred’s house, as he listened to and returned their banter, something in the wordplay took on weight.”

Joe makes his living as a salesman. He is always in and out of others’ homes. Of course, he mostly deals with women while their husbands are away. When he is made much of by Alice and Dorcas, it marks the house as special in his mind. The women become even more attractive to him. Dorcas’s youth draws him.

“Perhaps that’s why, standing there on the porch, unmindful of her behind, she easily believed that what was coming up the steps toward her was another true-as-life Dorcas, four marcelled waves and all.”

Violet carries a strange obsession for Dorcas. In killing Dorcas, Joe made her into someone that neither he nor Violet can forget. Violet puts up Dorcas’s picture in their living room. After she’s taken it down, she meets Felice. Felice was Dorcas’s friend and reminds Violet and Joe of Dorcas.

“All in all, he made three solitary journeys to find her. In Vienna he had lived first with the fear of her, then the joke of her, finally the obsession, followed by rejection of her. Nobody told Joe she was his mother. Not outright; but Hunters Hunter looked right in his eyes one evening and said, ‘She got reasons. Even if she crazy. Crazy people got reasons.’”

Joe's mother is a character known as Wild. She is described as a wild woman. He tries hard to find her, looking for the person who should have raised him but does not. The lack of a relationship with a mother that is alive as far as he knows drives Joe to a small amount of insanity. It may be one of the reasons why he reacts the way he does when Dorcas moves on to another man.

“I told you again that you were the reason Adam ate the apple and its core. That when he left Eden, he left a rich man. Not only did he have Eve, but he had the taste of the first apple in the world in his mouth for the rest of his life. The very first to know what it was like. To bite it, bite it down. Hear the crunch and let the red peeling break his heart.”

Joe is speaking to Dorcas about temptation. He is explaining why he was so tempted by her and why he gave in. The passage is one of many examples of the beautiful language in the book. The words flow like the jazz music they are meant to imitate. They speak of something that is wonderful and terrible all at the same time.

“She moved in with a family of six in Tyrell and worked at anything to be with Joe whenever she could. It was there she became the powerfully strong young woman who could handle mules, bale hay and chop wood as good as any man.”

When Violet meets Joe, she settles in right where he is. She blossoms in strength and love. She also gives up her former life for him. She loves him that much. He loves her, too. Years later, after they have settled in the City and been married a long time, the love is gone and Violet wonders where it went.

“You don't have nothing to do with it. You never know when I come and you won't see anything. Everything be like it was when you left, except if there's some little thing you want fixed you want me to do. You won't see nothing but some change on the table there that I leave for a reason you don't know nothing about, see?”

Joe has a lot of experience sweet-talking women. He has to be good at it to earn money. In this passage, he is trying to convince his upstairs neighbor, Malvonne, to allow Dorcas and him to use her apartment for their affair. He offers her money, handyman help around her apartment, and the potential to be protected from unwanted visitors like Sweetness. In the end, she allows it to happen even though she knows Violet will be angry and hurt.

“I call them cracks because that is what they were. Not openings or breaks, but dark fissures in the globe light of the day.”

The narrator points out that life's cruelties have caused “cracks” in Violet's character. She does not see herself as part of a life that is being led. She sees herself as an observer, watching others do the living. Sometimes things are going just fine, and then Violet steps into a crack and things get crazy. Her odd behaviors draw much interest from the neighbors.

