

Third Time's the Charm

It had made the first page of the newspaper: “City of Raleigh Hires First Negro Non-Custodial Employee.” She sat in the drive-through window of the municipal building, cashiering and representing the race. She took them all: water bills, tickets, checks, cash, and folding money. Accustomed as she was to their surprised smiles, she noted the slight hesitations and the averted eyes, the wonder of her blackness in the white spaces of their minds. The day he came, she saw his persona mimicked in the wasteful roar of his truck, of its largesse, a half ton more than anyone needed to have to drive to town to pay a bill. She recognized in him the die-hard cracker look of the farmer whose land her parents sharecropped when she was a child and the look of wild abandon he had when they picked up and left “after all he did for them.” “I can take your payment here, Sir,” she said, in a voice that rivaled honey for its sweetness. So, when he put nothing in the drawer and said, instead, “I don’t give my money to no niggers,” she already had started to smile. She directed him—politely—up to the second floor. And when he left the truck in the no parking zone, she quietly picked up the phone, and informed her favorite policeman that there was a truck parked in the no parking zone. When he came back to the truck, he cursed the ticket and walked back up, and again asked—despite the fact that the word “Cashier” appeared in big, black letters above her booth—where he could pay the ticket. “I can take it right here, Sir,” she said to his reddening face. But, after taking the time to remind her of her niggerdom again, he went back upstairs. Having taken the lead of their little racial dance, she called upstairs the second time, and in a smiling voice, suggested that the officer come right down. That second ticket almost glowed in the afternoon sun. And she waited, until the third time, when he walked up to the booth and gave her his money and she wasn’t a nigger anymore.

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of the Neuse time is un-lynched
it sweetly drifts by