

Racebook: Or, How He Found His Nubian Princess

Don Ray Smith

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White Joe Normal wants to find the black girlfriend he hasn't seen in 35 years.

The sistuh who joins him in the search has other plans.

Middle-aged Joe Normal is on the hunt to find Bernie Armstrong, his college girlfriend. The problem is, he dated his "Nubian Prin-cess" at Rolling Flatts State College in 1981, and he hasn't seen her since he broke her heart.

At Racebook's outset, Joe is a recent widower. Six months earlier, a careless hunter in Kentucky mistook Joe's wife Franki for a white-tailed deer and shot her dead. Since then, Joe has avoided attempts by any females to get close to him.

One night, alone with his beers and Bee Gees disco music, Joe digs out his old college yearbook and finds the picture of Bernadette Armstrong, his one-time college sweetheart. Joe is determined to launch an obsessive hunt for his long-ago "Nubian Prin-cess." Although his friend Rudolph thinks Joe is "trippin" over trying to find his old girlfriend, he agrees to help him. But Rudolph doesn't want to play Tonto to Joe's Lone Ranger, especially not back in the 'hood. He passes the job onto Denise, who Rudolph recently moved in with.

At first, Denise is put off with being asked to work with another white man, since her voluptuous looks have brought her many a leer from men of all colors, as Sales Director for the upscale *Hotel Kentuckian*. But the longer she is around Joe, the more she is intrigued by his passion for the long-lost sistuh. Besides, Denise's own relationship with Rudolph seems to amount to nothing more than sex and day-to-day routine. Rudolph, she decides, will never hold the promise of a wedding ring, a family or a real future for her. As she accompanies Joe on his quest to find his Bernie, her attraction for Joe grows stronger. She wants to become Joe's *new* Bernie.

Rotating chapters tell the back story of how Joe "crossed over" to become friends with the small clique of African American students on campus, and then, a year later, to find Bernie. Their romance is one of the first black/white affairs (although she is half Korean) at Rolling Flatts, a small school set deep in the eastern Kentucky mountains. To some students, Joe and Bernie represent a new world order. Mimi McKenzie, on the other hand, is one coed who is so jealous she can't stand it. Rejected by Joe their freshman year, she still sees Joe as a tempting conquest. In trade for sexual favors, Mimi directs two not-so-bright student slackers to rough Joe up and tell him to end his romance with his "nigger girl" Bernie. If he doesn't, they warn him, his black girlfriend will meet with a far uglier fate.

The two jump Joe in a deserted school parking lot and beat him badly enough to put him in a hospital. From his hospital room, Joe breaks up with his Nubian Prin-cess. Bernie, having convinced herself that she would someday have a wonderful life with her beautiful white boy, is devasted. She drops out of school. Joe is ostrasized by the black students for what he has done to Bernie, and he leaves school at the end of the year, never to go back.

Joe's search in the present continues, as hopes and fantasies, relationships and realities, all have to be dealt with. Ultimately, Joe, Rudolph and Denise must decide what, when it comes to love, is important enough for each of them to hang onto.



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