

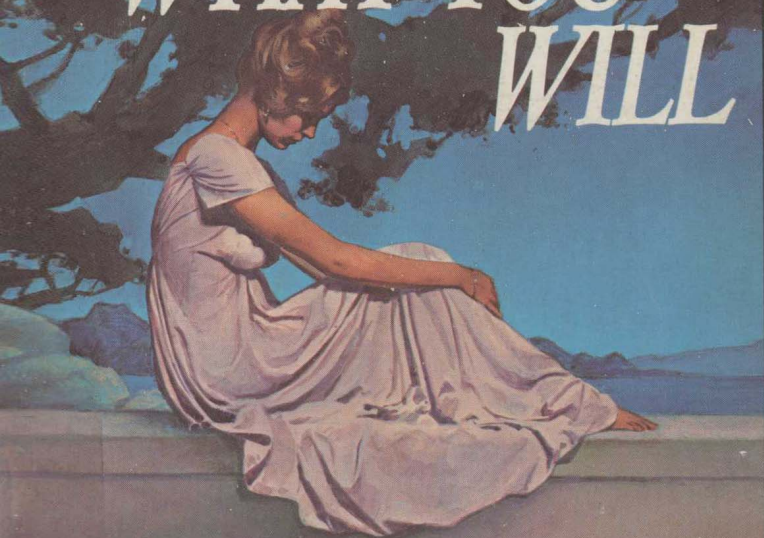
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Joyce Carol Oates

***DO WITH ME
WHAT YOU WILL***

A FAWCETT CREST BOOK

Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut

DO WITH ME WHAT YOU WILL

**THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE
ORIGINAL HARDCOVER EDITION.**

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Selection of the Literary Guild

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**Excerpts of this novel appeared in *Antaeus*, *Playboy Magazine*,
Tri-Quarterly, and *Works in Progress*.**

**All the characters and events in this book are fictitious and no
resemblance to real persons is intended or should be inferred.**

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November 1974

For Patricia Hill Burnett

*. . . the world as it stands is no illusion,
no phantasm, no evil dream of a night; we wake
up to it again for ever and ever; we can neither
forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it.*

— H E N R Y J A M E S

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*DO WITH ME
WHAT YOU WILL*

PART ONE

*Twenty-eight Years,
Two Months,
Twenty-six Days*

1

Premeditated crime: the longer the meditation, the dreaming, the more triumphant the execution!

He was looking again at the school, memorizing the building. But he had already memorized it. Yes, he had already learned everything about it, and now he was sitting in his car, parked, and looking at it. He was very calm. It was ten o'clock in the morning.

Emmet Stone Elementary School. It was set back in a cramped yard, not far from the boulevard and its thunderous trucks, a building of three stories—heavy and protective and exciting as a prison, made of dark-streaked brick, with basement windows of opaque mud-splashed glass and iron bars that belled slightly outward, also splashed with mud. He had never seen the inside of the school, but dreamily he imagined its bleak, echoing corridors, shoulder high in a kind of dark wood, and shoulder to ceiling in another color, maybe faded green. He could loose himself to wander weightlessly along the corridors, glancing into the classrooms, into the cloakrooms and the lavatories, seeing the bleak, correct rows of washbowls, the footprints of dried mud that were the size of children's feet, no larger.

The front yard was wide but not very deep, so that the noise of the trucks must be distracting in those front classrooms; he could imagine the rumbling, the vibrations. He could imagine someone at one of the windows, glancing out to see him, his car parked here—but he had a new, handsome, gleaming car and would not attract any attention. There were hundreds of such cars in this city.

A wide concrete walk led from the street to the front doors of the school, dividing the yard exactly in two. Trees had grown in the yard at one time, but now only three stumps remained. Children had scrawled words on them, not decipherable from where he sat; he had memorized the appearance of those words, but had never read them. They were shapes, signs, like hieroglyphics, with a secret meaning. To

the left of the building was a narrow side street and on its right was an asphalt playground that ran the length of the school building, back to a rear street that was also narrow. A six-foot fence protected the playground from the street, an ordinary chain-link fence that had begun to rust and come loose in places. In fact, in eleven places. Scraps of newspaper and children's lunch-bags and wax paper and other harmless debris had been caught in the fence, soaked with rain and then baked dry, shredded. The asphalt of the playground was cracked everywhere and weeds grew up through the cracks, highest along the fence. Some of the weeds had begun to flower in small yellow buds, more each day, a handful more each day. . . . He thought the flowers very beautiful, though they were only weeds. And yet it was the prim, drab fence and the building that excited him.

Emmet Stone Elementary School. The universe condemned to a few acres of city real estate. With high, dirty windows, at which a stray face sometimes appeared, a face floating inside, mysterious, unknowable, above the ridge of blackened brick that formed the window ledges. Fugitive faces, half imagined, children or adults?—it dizzied him to wait for them, and then not to really see them, to not quite see them. They were ghostly, but the building itself was inert, totally visible, a small fortress. The cornerstone was marked with the faint numbers 1923.

It was May 4, 1950.

He checked his watch: still ten o'clock. He adjusted his glasses, which fitted his face poorly, and sat behind the wheel of his new car, fighting back a smile of excitement. That was the one thing you should never do if you are alone—you should never smile. His eye roamed freely over the barren front yard and its small hills and holes and tree stumps, and rested for a moment at the basement window that had been broken and mended with what looked like a square of cardboard, and then to the arched doorway, to the words *Emmet Stone Elementary School* chiseled above the doorway, then over to the playground and the fence. He reached around to the back seat and picked up a hat and put it on his head; he had to adjust it with care on his thick, high, curly hair.

He got out and closed the door gently behind him, so gently that it did not even catch. No matter. He checked his watch again and saw with pleasure that two minutes had passed, very quickly. Over at the fence he paused, as if by accident, to light a cigarette. He fumbled for a while in the pockets of his coat, absentmindedly, letting his eye move swiftly around the