



JChap4/Change to Chap 5

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Chap 5
Charge to

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I think he thought that girl was candy. It was the best thing, if you were young and had just got to the City. That and the clarinets and even they were called licorice sticks. I'd Joe had been in the city x years and wasn't young. Fifty if a day. But I imagine him as he was one of those men who stop somewhere around sixteen. Inside.

So even though he wore button-up-the-front sweaters and round-toed shoes, he was a kid, a strapping, and candy could still make him smile. He liked those peppermint things that last the livelong day, and thought everybody else did too. Passed them out to Gistan's boys and the other kids that clustered grouped around them on the stoop like grapes. You could tell they'd rather chocolate or something with peanuts, but by his smile, as he passed passing that crumpled white paper sack around, you would have thought he was Santa's Santa.

Maybe she was. Candy, I mean. Leaning on her fist, big old eyes staring outside but looking inside. I could see it after a while--after he told me about it. [Or talked about it.] although

had
of - if while he stopped blowing
his nose long enough to tell somebody how it would go.

even while he talked he wondered how he could. Tell anybody all
It's not a thing you tell except to a very tight friend like Victory
 about it. "~~I couldn't tell my wife.~~" he said, "~~and~~ ^{but even} if I had the
 chance I don't beleive I could have told ^{him} Victory and if I couldn't

tell Victory it was because I couldn't tell myself because I didn't
 know all about it. Candy. No. That's something you lick, suck on,
 and then swallow and it's gone. No. ^{This} ~~It~~ was something else. More
 like blue water and white flowers, but together, somehow. Together.
 I needed to be there, where ^{the two mixed} ~~it was~~ and where ^{that} ~~it was~~ was Dorcus. *fx*

"She had long hair and bad skin. A quart of water twice a day
 would have cleared it right up, her skin, but I didn't ^{suggest it} ~~tell her~~
~~that~~ because I liked it like that. Little half moons clustered
 underneath her cheekbones, like faint hoofmarks. There and on her
 forehead. I bought the stuff she told me to, but glad none of it
 ever worked. Take my little hoof marks away? Leave me with no
 tracks at all? In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to
 find ^{the} ~~a~~ trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and
 it led me right to her, just like tracking Dorcus led me to that

*the track
reveals itself
begins to stalk
show into little
signs.*

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blue water next to ~~these~~ white flowers. I had no defense.

feet Something else takes over when you ~~get the two together~~ *got a certain combination* and you

might get up out of your chair to go buy two or three cigarettes,

have the nickel in your pocket and just start walking, then running

and end up somewhere in Staten Island, for crying out loud; Long

Island, maybe, staring at goats. Or you could find yourself in a

crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the

heart you can't live without. *I* I wanted to stay there. Right after

I shot her and the crowd pressed in different ways, and the music

was so good. I wanted to stay right there. Catch her before she

fell and hurt herself because I could feel it--the water that blue,

white flowers big as my hand, ~~white~~. Together. Dorcus. Me and you. Here's

my hand, take it. Take my hand, girl, please. It's just me and

you, and I'll let you do anything you please, anything, but I have

to have that feeling. I can't lose the feeling of you, where you

are and where the blue is right next to flowers big as my hand.

so you weren't on the back for that day. Minnie said you had a

I was looking for the trail. ~~Five days~~, all through the city.

I had the gun but it was not the gun--it was my hand I was holding out to touch you with. Five days. First High Fashion on 131st street because I thought you had a hair appointment on Tuesday .
^{First}
~~Second~~ Tuesday of every month it was. But you wasn't there. Some women came in with fish dinners from Salem Baptist, and the blind twins were playing guitar on the corner, and it's just like you said--only one of them's blind; the other one is just going along with the program. Probably not even brothers, let alone twins. Something their mamma cooked up for a little extra change. They were playing something sooty, though; not the gospel like they usually do, and the women selling fish dinners frowned and talked about their mother bad, but they never said a word to the twins and I knew they were having a good time listening because one of the loudest ones could hardly suck her teeth for patting her foot. They didn't pay me no mind. Took me a while to get them to tell me you weren't on the book for that day. Minnie said you had a

touch up Saturday and how she didn't approve of touch ups not just because they were fifty cents instead of a dollar and a quarter for the whole do, but because it hurt the hair, heat on dirt she said, hurt the hair worse than anything she knew of. Except, of course, no heat at all. What did you have the touch up for? That's what I first thought about. Last Saturday? You told me you were going with the choir on the el out to Coney Island, and you had to leave at nine in the morning and wouldn't be back till night and that's why. And that you'd missed the last trip, and your aunt found out about it so you had to go on this one, and that's why. So I didn't wait for Violet to leave and unlock Melvonne's apartment. No need. But how could you have a touch up the Saturday before and still make it to the el station by nine o'clock in the morning when Minnie never opens up before noon on Saturday because she's open till midnight getting everybody readied up for Sunday? And you didn't need to keep the ^{first}~~second~~ Tuesday regular appointment, did you? I dismissed the evil in my thoughts because I wasn't sure

that the sooty music the blind twins were playing wasn't the cause. It can do that to you, a certain kind of guitar playing. Not like the clarinets, but close. If that song had been coming through a clarinet, I'd have known right away. But the guitars--they confused me, made me doubt myself, and I lost the trail. Went home and didn't pick it up again until the next day when Melvonne looked at me and covered her mouth with her hand. Couldn't cover her eyes though; the laugh came flying out of there.

...I sat on the stoop a while. Nobody there but Mrs [tk] rubbing her knees. Across the street, leaning up against the iron railing, I saw three roosters. Not even ten in the morning and they shone like patent leather. Smooth. Couldn't be more than twenty , twenty-two. Young. The City, I thought. That's the City for you. Each one wore spats, and one had a handkerchief in his pocket same color as his tie. Had his hat pushed over a tad much. They were just leaning there, laughing and so on and then they started crooning, leaning in, heads together, snapping fingers.

of which who are

500 ... for the use of her place ... covered per hour after per hour. covered per hour after

City men, you know what I mean. Closed off to themselves, smart, young roosters. Didn't have to do a thing--just wait for the chicks to pass by and find them. Belted jackets and handkerchiefs the color of their ties. ~~Waiting for the biddies. Waiting for~~

~~them.~~ They ~~didn't~~^{hadn't} have to trail anybody, look ignorant in a beauty parlor asking for a girl in front of women who couldn't wait for me to leave so they could pat on to the sooty music and talk about what the hell did I want to know about a girl not out of high school yet and wasn't I married to old hateful Violet? You think

Melvonne would have covered her mouth in front of ~~them?~~^{those roosters} Or ² made roosters pay her in advance for the use of her place of a Saturday?

Never would have happened because roosters don't need Melvonne.

Chickens find the roosters and find the place too and if there is tracking to be done, they do it. They look; they figure. Roosters

wait because they are the ones waited for. Only old cocks like me

need the blue water so bad, the white flowers so big they have to

get up from the stoop, cut Mrs.[tk] off in the middle of a sentence

and try to walk not run to the little park on Convent where we sat

*the first
time
n*

and you crossed your legs at the knees so I could see the green

shoes you carried out the house in a paper sack so your aunt

wouldn't know you tapped down Lenox and Riverside Drive and St.

Nicholas Place in them instead of the oxfords you left the house

in. While you flicked your foot, turned your ankles for the

admiration of the heels, I looked at your knees ~~and believed my~~ ^{but}

~~heart would break.~~ I didn't touch. 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. ^{park-} ~~of red apple skin to~~ ^{on the bench} ~~the rest of my life.~~

~~is Alice's apartment~~

~~It~~ You looked at me ~~then~~, like you knew me, and I couldn't take

your eyes in because I was loving the hoof marks on your cheeks.

~~the other, the blue all over the petals big as my hand. In~~

I ran there, to the very spot, same bench. Two white men were sitting there, but I sat right next to them until they got ~~disgusted~~ ^{Nervous} and moved to another bench and off of ours. D. and J. Carved on the third slat from the edge. But that was later on. When I brought you treats, worrying each time what to bring that would make you smile and come again the next time. How many phonograph records? How many silk stockings? The little kit to mend the runs, remember? The purple metal box with flowers on top full of Schrafft's chocolates. Cologne in a blue bottle that smelt like a whore. Flowers once, but you were disappointed with that treat, so I gave you a dollar to buy whatever you wanted with it. Half a week's rent. A whole day's pay. Just for you. Anything just for you. To bite down hard, chew up the core and have the taste of red apple skin to carry around for the rest of my life. It could have stopped there, but not after I felt the feeling, the place where the water met the flowers, where one was mixed up with the other, the blue all over the petals big as my hand. In

Melvonne's nephew's room with the ice man's sign in the window.

Your first time. And mine, in a manner of speaking. For which, and

I will say it again, I would strut out the Garden, strut! as long

as you held on to my hand, girl. Dorcus, girl, your first time and

mine. I chose you. Nobody gave you to me. Nobody said that's the

one for you. I picked you out. Wrong time, yep, and doing wrong

by my wife. But the picking out, the choosing. Don't ever think

I fell for you, or fell over you. *On fell in love with you. I didn't fall in love. I rose in it.* I saw you and made up my mind.

My mind. And I made up my mind to follow you too. That's something

I know how to do from way back. Maybe I didn't tell you that part

about me. My gift in the woods that even Hunter looked up to and

he was the best there ever was. Ever."

Joe did have a gift in the woods. That was the way he found

~~his mother~~ the woman he thought was his mother. He had this

ability to find lost things and things hiding from you. And in

Virginia, it was ^{a gift} as valuable as money most of the time--more

valuable other times. ~~As it was when no one but Joe could actually~~

*But it wasn't the old man, it was Joe
who found*

~~locate at will~~, the place where the woman called Wild lived, although it's true that except for old man Hunter, everybody else tried to make sure that she stayed hid, stayed away from them because a thing like that could harm you. Pregnant girls were the most susceptible, but so were the grandfathers. Any fascination could mark a newborn: melons, rabbits, wisteria, rope, and ~~they~~ ~~tell me~~ worst of all is a shed snakeskin. So the warnings the girls got were part of a whole group of things to look out for lest the baby come here craving or favoring the mother's distraction. Who would have thought old men needed to be cautioned too; told and warned against seeing, smelling or even hearing Wild?

at h. She lived close, they said, not way off in the woods or even down in the riverbed, but somewhere in that canefield--at its edge some said or maybe moving around in it. Close. Cutting cane could get frenzied sometimes when young men got the feeling she was just yonder, hiding, and probably looking. One swing of the machete could lop off her head if she got sassy or too close, and it would

be her own fault. That would be when they cut bad--too high up on the stalk or raggedy. Just thinking about her, whether she was close or not, could mess up a whole morning's work.

The grandfathers, way past slashing but still able enough to bind stalks or feed the sugar vats, used to be thought safe. ^That is until Hunter got tapped on the shoulder by fingertips that couldn't be anybody's but hers. When he snapped up, he saw the cane stalks shuddering but he didn't hear a single crack. Because he was a trapper more used to wood life than tame, he knew when the eyes watching him were up in a tree, behind a knoll or, like this, at ground level. You can see how he was confused: the fingertips at his shoulder, the eyes at his feet. First thing came to mind was the woman he named himself, some twenty years ago because, after tending her, that was the word he thought of: Wild. He was sure he was tending a sweet young girl back then, but when she bit his cheek, he thought, O, she's wild. Some things are like that. There^e'is no gain fathoming more.

He remembered her laugh, though, and how peaceful she was in the beginning, so her fingertips didn't frighten him, but they did make him sad. ^{So sad he} ~~too sad to report~~ the sighting to his co-workers, old men like him no longer able to cut all day. ~~That's probably~~ ^{knowing she was near} why ~~there weren't prepared~~ for the way their blood felt just ~~thinking about her and for how trembly their legs got in her~~ company. The pregnant girls marked their babies or didn't, but the grandfatherers--unwarned--went soft in the head, walked out of the fields, left their beds in the shank of the night, wet themselves, forgot the names of their grown children and where they'd put their razor strops.

When Hunter knew her--tended her--she was sweet but touchy. touchy and a bit stuck on that City man. ^{to see the two of them} together was a regular surprise: the City man with his head of yellow hair long as a dog's tail next to her skein of black wool. If Hunter had handled it right, maybe she would have stayed in the house, learned how to dress and talk to folks. He thought she was

When they caught a glimpse or heard that little-girl laugh

the touch of in the cane field

dead. Local people used the story of her to caution children and pregnant girls and it saddened him to learn that instead of ^{resing} ~~resing~~, she was hungry still. Though for what, exactly, he couldn't say, less it was for that ^Ccity man with air the color of his name.

Hunter didn't tell, but the news got out anyway: Wild was not a used-to-be-woman whose neck cane cutters liked to imagine under the blade, or a quick and early stop for hard-headed children. She was out there--for real. Someone saw Hunter jump, grab his shoulder and, when he turned around to gaze at the canefield, ^{loud enough to hear:} ~~he~~ ^{cd} ~~out~~ ~~to himself~~ "Wild. Dog me, if it ain't Wild." The pregnant girls just sighed at the news and went on sweeping and sprinkling the dirt yards, and the young men sharpened their blades til the edges whistled. But the old men started dreaming. Like Hunter, they remembered when she came, what she looked like, why she stayed and that city Negro she set so much store by.

Not too many people saw the city man. The first wasn't Hunter who was off on some long trek looking for enough fox to sell. ^Tthe

^{Patty}
 first was ~~Betty's~~ boy, Honor. He was looking in on Hunter's place
 while he was gone, and on one of the days he stopped by--to do a
 little weeding maybe and see if the chickens were still alive--it
 had rained all morning. Sheets of it made afternoon rainbows
 everywhere. ^{Later,} He told his mother ~~Betty~~ that the whole cabin was
 rainbowed and when the man came out the door, ^{and} Honor looked at his
 wet ^{he} yellow hair and creamy skin, ~~and first~~ thought Hunter had come
 back dead. Then he realized he was looking at a whiteman and never
 believed otherwise, even when the proof was there for all the world
 to see.