



Chapter 7: Consolata

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSOLATA

In the deepest part of the cellar Consolata woke to the exhausting disappointment of not having died the night before. Each morning, her hopes dashed, she lay on the cot repelled by her slug-like life (which she managed to get through) by sipping, sipping, sipping from ^{dusty} ~~velvet~~ bottles with handsome names. Each night she sank into sleep determined it would be the final one.

Already in a space that looked like a coffin, already in love with the dark, long removed from appetites, craving only oblivion, she struggled to understand ~~what was~~ the delay. "What for?" she would ask and her voice was one among many that packed the cellar from rafter to stone floor. Several times a week she left the cellar but only at night or in the shadowy part of the day. Then she would stand outside in the garden, walk around a bit, look up at the sky to see the only light it had that she could bear. One of the women, Mavis usually, would insist on joining her. Talking, talking, always talking. Or a couple ^{of} others would come. Sipping from the ~~velvet~~ bottles ^{with handsome names} made

it possible to listen to them, even answer, sometimes. Other than Mavis, who had been there the longest, it was getting harder to distinguish among them. What she knew of them over the past years she had mostly forgotten and it seemed less and less important to remember any of it because the timbre of each of their voices told the same tale: disorder, deception and, ^{what} ~~as~~ Sister Roberta warned the Indian girls against, drift. The three d's that paved the road to perdition and the greatest of these was drift.

Over the years they had come. ^{the} first during Mother's long illness; the second right after she died. Then two more. ^{each} one asking permission to stay a few days but never leaving. They stayed on living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax collector, wanted with a woman in love with death. Consolata ^a ~~A~~ looked at them through the bronze or gray or blue of her various sunglasses and saw broken girls, frightened girls, weak and lying. When she was sipping she could tolerate them, but more and more she wanted to break their necks. Anything to stop the bad food, the unintelligible music, the fights, the raucous empty laughter, the claims. But especially the drift. The fact that they not only did nothing, except the obligatory, ~~but~~ they had no plans to do anything. Sister Roberta would have pulped their hands. Instead of plans they had wishes--foolish

babygirl wishes. Mavis talked endlessly of crazy money-making ventures: beehives, something called "bed and breakfast"; a catering company; ^gand an orphanage. One thought she had found a treasure chest of money or jewels or something and wanted help to cheat the others of its contents. Another was slicing her thighs, her arms, secretly. Making thin red slits in her skin with whatever came to hand: razor, safety pin, paring knife. Wishing to be the queen of scars. One other longed for cabaret life, a place where she could sing the pitiful little songs she wrote. Consolata encouraged these dreams, which seemed so silly to her, with padded, wine-soaked indulgence for they did not infuriate her as much as their whispers of love. One by one they would float down the stairs, carrying a kerosene lamp or a candle, like virgins entering a temple or a crypt, to sit on the floor and talk of love. As if they knew anything at all about it, she mused. They spoke of men who came to caress them in their sleep; of men waiting for them; of men who should have loved, would have loved, might have loved them except--except--except.

On her worst days, deep in the cellar as well as the maw of depression, she wanted to kill them all. Maybe that was what her own pointless slug life was being prolonged for. That and the cold serenity of God's wrath. To die without His forgiveness condemned

her soul. But to die without Mother's broke her heart. She could have given it freely if Consolata had told her in time, confessed before her mind faded to singsong. On the last day Consolata had climbed into the bed behind her and, tossing pillows on the floor, raised up the feathery body and held it in her arms and between her legs. The small white head nestled between her breasts. Mother had entered death like a birthing, rocked and sung to by the woman she kidnapped as a child. Kidnapped three, ^{children} actually; the easiest thing in the world in 1925. ~~Sister~~ ^{a Sister} Mary Magna, who was not a ^{Mother} ~~Superior~~ then, refused to leave two children in the garbage they sat in on the street. She ^{picked them up,} simply took them to the hospital, ^{she worked in and} cleaned them in a sequence of baking soda, Glover's Mange, soap, alcohol, blue Ointment, soap, ^{on their sores.} alcohol and carefully placed iodine. She dressed them and, with the complicity of ^{other} ~~her~~ sisters, took them with her to the ^{ship} ~~dock~~. ^(Cover) ~~Who would~~ ^{Nobody} question ^{ed} a nursing sister ^s among ~~five other nuns~~ paying cut-rate passage for three urchins. for there were three now, Consolata being ^{a last minute decision} an ~~afterthought~~ because she was already ⁹ ~~10~~ years old. ^{By anyone's standards} ~~It was called~~ ^{the swatching was a} rescue, for whatever ^f ~~lie~~ the exasperated, headstrong nun was dragging them to, it would be superior to what lay before them in the shit strewn paths of that city. When they ^{docked} ~~arrived~~ in Curacao Sister Mary Magna placed the ^{two} small ones in an orphanage. But by then she

They were ^{American} six ^{runners}
~~she was~~ on their way back to the
states after 12 years of being upstaged
by Portuguese orders.
↑ older, better funded.

had fallen in love with Consolata. The green eyes? the tea colored hair? ~~perhaps~~ ^{perhaps} or her smoky sundown skin ~~maybe~~ her docility? She took her along as a servant to the post to which the difficult nun was now assigned. An asylum/boarding school for Indian girls in some desolate part of the American west.

For 30 years Consolata worked to ^{hard} ^{earn and} remain Mary Magna's pride, her singular accomplishment in a world of teaching, nurturing, tending in countries ~~(her countrymen and women)~~ could not pronounce. ~~For 30 years~~ ^a Consolata ^R slept in a panty, minded students her age and older, scrubbed tile, fed chickens, prayed, peeled, gardened and laundered.

For 30 years she gave her heart, ^{fiercely} as surely as if she had ~~belonged to the~~ st Order, to God's son. ~~He whose way was narrow~~ ^{For 30 years she followed the} but scented with sweetness. ^{For 30 years she served Him} ^{perfect and so} ^{perfectly available} Whose love was so great it dumbfounded wise men and the damned. ^{He who had} God become human so we could know Him touch Him see Him in the littlest ways. ~~God~~ ^{became} become human so His suffering would be like ours, that His death throes, His doubt, despair, His failure would speak for and absorb throughout earthtime what we were vulnerable to. ^{These} ^{surrender} Thirty years of devotion to the living God cracked like a robin's egg when she met the living man. ~~Thirty years of loving surrender~~ turned in an eyeblink to ~~love-driven capitulation.~~

People were building houses ^{fencing} and plowing land some fifteen miles south of Christ the King. In 1954 they had ^{begin to build a} a feedstore, grocery store

Smashed
marble
figures

taken
the
veil
herself.

and, to Mary Magna's^s delight, a pharmacy closer than ~~the one in~~ ^{ninety miles} ~~Derry~~. There she could purchase the bolts of anti-septic cotton for the girls' menstrual periods, the needles that kept them busy ^e ~~m~~inding, embroidering, and the aluminum chloride with which she made deoderant.

On one of these trips, Consolata accompanied Mary Magna in the school's ~~banged up~~ wood paneled station wagon. (over)

Horses were galloping off into ^(over) yards, down the road. ~~The~~ people were screaming with laughter. Small girls with red and purple flowers in their hair were jumping up and down. A boy holding ^{on} for dear life onto a horse's neck was lifted off and declared winner. Young men and boys swung their hats, chased horses and wiped their laughing eyes. As Consolata watched them in the sunlight they roused in her a dim memory of her birthplace. ~~(over)~~ Of just such skin and just such men, dancing with women in the streets, dancing to music she had forgotten, music beating like a panicked heart, torsos still, hips ^(over) making small circles above legs moving so rapidly it was fruitless to decipher how such ^{ability grace} ~~movement~~ was possible. These men were not ^{however} dancing; they were laughing, running, calling to each other and to women doubled over in glee. But Consolata knew she knew them.

It was a while before Mary Magna could get the pharmacist's

(And they lived in a hamlet not a City full of people black and glittering like crow feathers.)

Before they ~~entered~~ reached the
newly cut road it was clear
~~that~~ something ^{odd} was happening.
Something ~~that~~ unharnessed under
the scalding sun.

A city of people ~~with~~
black and shiny as crow feathers

attention. Finally he walked them back to his house where part of the front porch served as the pharmacy section, and ^{opened the door} ~~let them in~~.

^{It was while} Consolata waited on the steps ^{that she} and saw him for the first time.

Sha sha sha sha. Sha sha sha sha. The buried panic, undead, fluttered ^(over) in her chest. She did not see him again for two terrified months.

Months of fervent ~~prayer~~ and extra care taken with chores. The

school was enjoined to close. The good, sweet Indian girls were long

gone. Snatched away by their mothers and brothers or graduated into, semi-professional ~~the school took~~ for X years the school had been accepting a life of ~~it~~. ~~Now they had~~ wards of the state: girls who ~~clearly~~

thought the sisters were crazy most of the time, sinister ~~guards~~ the

rest of the time. Two had already run away; only four remained.

^{the sisters} Unless ~~they~~ could persuade the state to send them more wayward

Indian girls, the orders were to ~~prepare~~ for closure, reassignment. The

property, a benefactor's gift, ^{Jon} ~~untaxable~~ ^{church and} ~~and, so far~~ ^{discoverable} with no natural ^(oil gas) resources, was impossible to unburden. The state had wayward girls

all right, since wayward could mean anything from truancy to ^{bedwetting} to

stuttering in class, but preferred to place them in protestant schools

where they could at least understand the ritual if not the clothes of

the teachers. Catholic churches and schools in Oklahoma ^{were} ~~being~~ rare as

Charge (hen's teeth.)

^{therefore} so with everybody distracted, Consolata's fumbling, dropping

Eager to return to the ^{festive} knot of
people further ~~along~~ down the Road.

~~Left~~ ^{perfunctory} ~~like an after thought~~, he looked
casually, ~~like an after thought~~, he looked
her way. She looked back and thought
she saw ~~a~~ hesitation in his eyes if ~~but he~~
~~didn't~~ wot in his stride. Quickly she ducked
into the automobile.

A lean young man astride a horse, leading
another. ~~He wore a~~ Shintles, ~~for~~ a-glitter
with perspiration, his hips rocking ~~slowly~~
in the saddle back and forth, back and
forth. Sha. Sha. Sha. Sha. He rode
past her ^{and disappeared into} the feed lot. ~~When~~ ~~such~~

Mary Magna ~~came~~ emerged with her
purchases ~~and~~ Complaining a little about
something - the price the quantity - Consolata
~~she~~ found herself inattentive - and ~~the~~
~~two of them~~ ~~was~~ hurried to the station
wagon. Consolata ~~following~~ carrying the
blue-tissued roll of surgical cotton
followed behind. Just as she opened the
passenger door he passed. ~~Walking~~ ^{Prodding} won. ↑

things, ^{rushing suddenly} ~~sudden~~ rushes into the chapel to pray were nuisances but not signs of alarm distinguishable from their own. ~~She deliberately did~~ ^(over) not return to Ruby, ^{In the end} but it didn't help. He came to her.

She was weeding ^{along} the vegetable garden ^{bared and} with two restless girls on a clear summer day when a male voice said,

"Excuse me, Miss."

His shirt was open at the collar and ^g ~~at~~ he wanted ^{over} ~~was some~~ ^{black} peppers.

He was 29. She was 39. And she lost her mind. Completely.

Consolata was not a virgin. One of the reasons she so gratefully accompanied Mary Magna was the dirty pokings her tenth year subjected her to. But since then she had known no male nor wanted to which must have been why being love-struck after 29 years of ^{Diety} ~~adult~~ life took on an edible quality.

What did he say? [;] come with me? What they call you? How much for a half peck? Or did he just show up the next day for more of the hot black peppers. Did she walk toward him to get a better look? Or did he move toward her? In any case, with something like amazement, he'd said "Your eyes are like mint leaves." Had she answered "And yours are like the beginning of the world" aloud or were these words confined to her head? Did she really drop to her

When asked she ~~was~~ invented
excuses in order

knees and encircle his leg or was that merely what she was wanting to do?

"I'll return your basket. But it may be late when I do. Is it all right if I disturb you?"

She didn't remember saying anything to that, but her face surely told him what he needed to know because he was there and she was there and he took her hand in his. Not a peck basket in sight.
that night that night
↑ ↑ ↑
Sha sha sha.