



## SW Chapter 2

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## Chapter Two

Vida set up the ironing board. Why the hospital had cut out the laundry service for everybody except "critical staff"-- doctors, nurses, lab technicians-- she couldn't fathom. Now the janitors, food handlers as well as the aides like herself, had to wash and press their own uniforms, reminding her of the Cannery before Bill Cosey hired her away for the first work she ever had that required hosiery. She wore hose at the hospital, of course, but it was thick, white. Not the lovely, sheer ones required behind the receptionist's desk at Cosey's Resort. Plus a really good dress, good enough for church. It was Bill Cosey who paid for two more, so she would have a change and the guests wouldn't confuse the wearing of one dress as a uniform. Vida thought he would deduct the cost from her pay, but he never did. His pleasure was in pleasing. "The best good time," he used to

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

say. That was the Resort's motto and what he promised every guest: "The best good time you ever had." And it was no accident that famous people kept coming back. Even when little disturbances in the service or the atmosphere appeared, it didn't dissuade them from extending their stay or returning the next year. All because of the beaming Bill Cosey and the wide hospitality his place was known for. His laugh, his embracing arm, his instinctive knowledge of his guest's needs smoothed over every crack or stumble. From an overheard argument among staff or a silly, overbearing wife-ignorant as a plate-- to petty theft and a broken <sup>ceiling</sup> fan. Bill Cosey's charm and L's food won out. When the lamps ringing the dance floor were <sup>glowing</sup> ~~lit~~ and turning in the ocean air; when the band warmed up and the women, dressed in <sup>noire</sup> ~~voile~~ and crepe and trailing jasmine scent in their wake; when the men with beautiful shoes and perfect creases in their gabardine trousers held chairs for the women so they could sit knee to knee at the little tables,



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

then a missing salt cellar or harsh words exchanged much too near the public didn't matter. Partners swayed under the stars and ~~bore~~ <sup>didn't mind over long</sup> intermissions ~~languidly~~ because ocean sound kept them jollier and kinder than their cocktails. Later in the evening, when those who were not playing whist, or telling stories in the bar; when couples sneaked off in the dark, the remaining dancers would do steps with outrageous names: boogie woogie, black bottom, jitterbug, sand, Lindy hop. Names musicians made up to control, humiliate and excite <sup>✓</sup> their audiences all at the same time.

Vida believed she was a practical woman with as much sense as heart, more wary than dreamy. Yet she pursued with pleasure the memory of those nine years, beginning right after the birth of her first child, Dolly, in 1962 to ~~the~~ <sup>close of the</sup> months after the Resort ~~closed~~ in 1971. Then Bill died and the Cosey girls fought over his coffin. Once again L restored order. Just as she always had. Two words ["I'll tell."] hissed into their faces stopped them

check later

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

cold: Christine put the switchblade back in her pocket book; Heed, picking

up her wide straw hat, moved to the other side of the grave. Standing

there, one to the right, one to the left of Bill Cosey's <sup>coffin</sup> ~~body~~, their faces, as

different as honey from soot, looked identical. <sup>Evil</sup> ~~Rage~~ does that. Burns off

everything but itself. Their private hatred blazed through the public

ceremony and seared everything but <sup>its own image</sup> ~~memory~~. After that nobody could

doubt the best good times were over. If Heed had any notion of keeping

<sup>the way it had been</sup> the place going she was quickly disabused of it when L quit that very day.

She lifted a lily from the coffin and never set foot in the hotel again—neither

to pack or collect her chef's hat or her white oxfords. In Sunday shoes with

two inch heels she walked from the graveyard all the way to Up Beach,

claimed her mother's shack and lives there still. Heed did what she had to

and what she could to maintain the Resort, but a sixteen year old disc jockey

working a tape machine appealed only to locals. No one with real money



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

would travel distance to hear it, would book a room to listen to music they had at home; would seek on open air dance floor crowded with teenagers doing dances they never heard of and couldn't manage anyway. Especially if the meals, the service, the bed linen were no longer what they had been ①

Vida slid the iron's nose around the buttons, frustrated once more by the slot in the metal that some male idiot thought would actually work. The same fool who believed a three ounce iron was better than a heavy one. Lighter, yes, but it didn't iron anything that needed it. Just things you could un-wrinkle with your own warm hands: T shirts, towels, cheap pillow cases. But not a good cotton uniform with twelve buttons, two cuffs, four pockets and a collar that was not a lazy extension of the lapels. This was what she had come to? Vida knew she was lucky to have the hospital job, but that good fortune did not prevent her from preferring the long ago one that paid less in every way but satisfaction. Cosey's Resort was more than a

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

playground; it was <sup>a school</sup> ~~an education~~ and a haven where people debated death in the cities, murder in Mississippi and what they planned to do about it, other than grieve and stare at their children. Then the music started, convincing them they could manage it all and last.

She hung on, Heed did. For the five years before Cosey actually died—she paraded around like an ignorant, <sup>hateful</sup> ~~mean~~ version of Jackie Kennedy—refusing advice, firing the loyal, hiring the trifling, fighting May who was the one who really gave her hives. She couldn't fire her step-  
~~daughter~~ <sup>daughter</sup> while the father was alive, even if he spent most days fishing and <sup>(doodling on menus and)</sup> most nights singing Nat Cole tunes with tipsy friends. For it came to that: a commanding, beautiful man surrendering to feuding women, letting them take care of him and all he had built. How could they do that, she wondered. If they didn't love him, they had to love the place, what it had been. How could they let gangster types, day workers, cannery scabs and



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

payday migrants in there dragging police attention along with them like a  
<sup>tail</sup>  
smell? Vida wanted to blame the new clientele for May's

kleptomania—Lord knows what those day workers took home—but May had  
been stealing long before Vida got there. In fact, her second day at work,  
standing behind the desk, was marked by May's habit. A family of four  
from Ohio was checking in. Vida opened the registration book for their  
signature. The date, last name and room number were neatly printed on  
the left. A space on the right for the guest to sign. Vida reached toward the  
marble pen stand but found no pen there or anywhere near. Flustered, she  
rummaged in a drawer. Heed arrived just as she was about to hand the  
father a pencil.

"What's that? You're giving him a pencil?"

"The pen is missing, Mam."

"It can't be. Look again."



"I have. It's nowhere."

"Did you look in your purse?"

"Excuse me?"

"Your coat pocket, maybe?" Heed glanced at the quests and produced a resigned smile as if they all understood the burdens of inadequate help. Vida was seventeen years old and a new mother . The position Mr. Cosey had given her was a <sup>high</sup> ~~great~~ and, she hoped, permanent leap out of the fish trough where she used to work and her husband still did. Her mouth went dry and her fingers shook as Heed confronted her. Tears were marshaling to humiliate her further when rescue arrived wearing a puffy white chef's hat. She held the fountain pen in her hand; stuck it in the holder and, turning to Heed, said, "May. As you well know."

That's when Vida knew she had more to learn than registering guests and handling money. As in any workplace there were old alliances here; <sup>shifting</sup>

negotiations, poisonous battles and wan victories. Bill Cosey was royal; L,

the woman in the chef's hat, priestly. All the rest: Heed, Vida, May, waiters,

cleaners were court personnel. fighting for the monarch's smile.  
at the table

mtk- She had surprised herself bringing up that old gossip about Cosey's death. Hating gossip bred of envy, she wanted to believe what the doctor said: natural consequence of a coronary. Or even what May said: heart broken by? Civil Rights. Or even what L said: sorrow. Broken-hearted?

check  
a  
some  
has  
band  
or  
two  
But not what Sandler said: syphilis rampant. But Vida had seen the cloudy water cloud before he drank it and his reach, not to his chest where the explosion took place, but to his throat. Yet those who might have wanted him dead (Christine, ~~the~~ & various white businessmen) were nowhere near. Just her, L, and ~~two~~ one waiter. God. What a mess. (rk physical details of the death) →

Beneath the house under the light of a single bulb, Sandler chuckled. Vida

was on her game. He had been struck by the girl's legs. In freezing wind,

not a goose bump in view—just tight, smooth skin with the promise of strong

muscle underneath. Dancers' legs: long, unhappy at rest, eager to lift, to

open  
spread, to wrap themselves around you. He should be ashamed, he

thought, as the chuckle grew into smothered laughter: an over fifty

grandfather faithful to and in love with his wife giggling into a boiler dial in





S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

the cellar, happy to be arousable by the <sup>unexpected</sup> casual sight of young thighs. He knew his gruffness with her was a reaction to the feelings she stirred and believed she knew it too.

Sandler peered at the dial wondering if an 80\* setting would be likely to produce 70 degrees in his bedroom, since the current 70\* setting was equaling 60\* there. He sighed over the problem: a furnace seldom needed in that climate seemed as confused about its workings as he was. And sighed again as he recalled the freezing girl who must be a northerner indifferent to 30\*. He could not imagine what she wanted with either one of those Cosey women. He would ask Romen to check it out. Or maybe not. Asking his grandson to spy would introduce the wrong element in a relationship already burdened with mutual distrust. He wanted Romen upright—not sneaking around women on some frivolous errand. It would undermine his moral position. Still, if the boy happened to report



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

something, he would be pleased to hear it. As anybody would. The Coseys had always been a hot topic. In these parts—Oceanside, Sooker Bay, Up Beach, Silk—their goings <sup>g</sup>one were the heart of conversation for fifty years. Naturally so, since the Resort affected them all. Provided them with work other than fish and pack crab; attracted outsiders who offered years of excitement and agitated talk. Otherwise they never saw anybody but themselves. The withdrawal of that class of tourist was hard on everyone, like a receding wave that left shells and kelp script, <sup>Scattered</sup> lifeless and <sup>unreadable</sup> ~~unintelligible~~, behind.

There were cold spots in the Oceanside house. Places the heat seemed never to enter. Hot spots too. And all of his tinkering with thermostats and base heating and <sup>pipe</sup> filters was just that-tinkering. Like his neighbors', his house was <sup>built</sup> ~~designed~~ as a gesture: two inch nails instead of four, light weight roofing guaranteed for ten years instead of thirty, single

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

thickness panes rattling in their molding. Each year Sandler became fonder of the neighborhood he and Vida moved away from. She had been right, certainly, to leave Up Beach when they did, before the drought that ended in flood, and she never gave it or its ruin another thought. As he did almost every day. Just as now, on a very cold night, longing for the crackle of fire in a <sup>stingy</sup> ~~hopelessly inadequate~~ pot belly stove, the <sup>aroma</sup> ~~smell~~ of clean driftwood burning. He couldn't forget the picture the moon turned those Up Beach cabins into. Here, in this government improved and approved housing with too much man made light, the moon did nothing kind. The planners believed that dark people would do fewer dark things if there were twice as many street lamps as anywhere else. Only in fine neighborhoods and the country were people entrusted to shadow. So even when the moon was white and full and blazing, for Sandler it was like a bounty hunter's far off torch, not the blanket of beaten <sup>gold</sup> ~~silver~~ it once spread over him and the



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

ramshackle house of his childhood, exposing the trick of the world, its

~~the~~ <sup>Cleverness</sup> ~~of the world~~ <sup>He wanted it again</sup>  
delicious deceit which is to make us think it is ours. His own moon releasing

a wide gold finger to travel the waves and point directly at him, no matter

where he stood on the beach it knew exactly. <sup>bright</sup> The gold finger, as direct and

personal as a mother's touch, <sup>found</sup> would find him, <sup>knew</sup> know him. And although he

<sup>understood that</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>came</sup> knows it comes from a cold stone incapable of even indifference, he also

<sup>knew</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>was</sup> knows it is pointing to him alone and nobody else. Like the wind-blown girl

who singled him out, breaking out of evening wind to stand between

garage light and sunset, backlit, spotlighted and looking only at him.

Bill Cosey would have done more. Invited her in to warm herself,  
offered to drive her where she wanted to go, instead of barking at her,  
doubting her accuracy. Cosey would have succeeded, too, as he almost  
always did. Vida, like so many others, had looked on him with adoring  
eyes, spoke of him with forgiving smiles. Proud of his finesse, his money,

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

the example he set that goaded them into thinking that with patience and savvy, they could do it too. But Sandler had fished with him and while he did not claim to know his heart, mind or wallet, he knew his habits.

They were lee, bobbing in a cove. NTk

Sandler had been surprised by the invitation since Cosey usually <sup>shared</sup> reserved his boat <sup>with only</sup> for special guests and <sup>mostly</sup> the Sheriff <sup>who suggested today</sup> called Boss Silk—one

member of a family that had named a whole town after itself. Cosey had approached him in the road where Sandler was parked waiting for Vida.

He aligned his pale blue Impala with Sandler's pick up and said, "You busy tomorrow, Sandler?"

"No, sir."

"Not working?"

"No, sir. Cannery's closed on Sunday."

"Oh, right."

\* most often the Sheriff,  
mostly for Chief Buddy Silk,

Expand  
✓



"You need me for something?"

(See insert 1)

/ Mtk

"I aim to fish a little. First light. Thought you might like to join me."

Working fish all day Sandler did not connect catching them with fun.

He'd rather shoot than fish, but there was no way to decline. Vida wouldn't like it, besides he had heard that Cosey's boat was smart.

insert — 2

They met at the pier at four a.m. and pushed off immediately, in silence. No weather chat or wagers about the haul. Cosey seemed less hearty than the evening before. Sandler put the change down to the seriousness of handling the little cruiser, tacking into the ocean then landward to a cove Sandler knew nothing about. Or else it was the oddity of being alone together. Cosey didn't mix with local people, which is to say he employed them, joked with them, even rescued them from difficult situations. But none was welcome at the hotel's tables or on its dance floor.

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

Price kept most of them away, but even when a family collected enough money to celebrate a wedding there, they were refused. Pleasantly.

Regretfully. Definitely. There was some spotty rancor over the obvious rejection, but most didn't mind, thought it reasonable. They had neither the clothes nor the funds, and did not wish to be embarrassed by those who did. In those days it was enough to watch the visitors, admire their cars and the quality of their luggage; to listen to the distant music ~~out~~ and dance to it in the dark, in the dark, between their own houses, in the shadow underneath their own windowsills. It was enough to know Bill Cosey's Hotel and Resort was gorgeously, triumphantly, there.

"Bonita come back in here," <sup>had</sup> said Cosey. "Way station for them, I guess." He brightened and pulled out a thermos of coffee that, Sandler discovered, was so laced the coffee was more color than flavor. It did the trick. They were soon deep in the merits of Cassius Clay which seemed to



S W Chapter Two

April 26, 2001

*an argument gawelling and scaring under Medgar's the murder*  
~~both quell and underline the sorrowful anger about Medgar Evers.~~

(fx)

The catch was poor, the banter jovial until sunrise when the talk turned ~~serious~~, intimate. Cosey, looking at some lively worms in the belly of a catfish said, "If you kill the predators, the weak will eat you alive."

"Everything has its place," Sandler replied.

"True. Everything. Except women. They're all over the place." *damn*

Sandler laughed.

"In the bed," continued Cosey, "the kitchen, the yard, at your table, under your feet, on your back."

"That can't be all bad," offered Sandler.

"No. No. It's great. Great."

"Then why ain't you smiling?"

Bill Cosey turned to look at Sandler. His eyes, though bright from drink, radiated pain like cracked glass.

But S. doesn't  
want to think  
about it. His  
marriage is his  
baby news

Vida is  
and all he  
wining of  
perfection

Dolly is  
all he  
needs of  
hope.

~~It is a beautiful  
combination of  
the needs of both  
of them.~~

Do you know every law in the  
land is made <sup>to destroy</sup> for Negroes?

Laughing - <sup>That</sup> Can't be true

It is true

What about - (S. <sup>couldn't remember</sup> ~~doesn't~~ know any laws  
about anything <sup>and</sup> except murder)  
Casey <sup>Spurlock</sup> ~~Spurlock~~ think about <sup>that</sup> ~~it~~.

but he is sure  
most law is about money

that wouldn't help his argument  
and that color and says so.



April 26, 2001

*meant 3*  
Sandler left the basement. When he entered <sup>the</sup> kitchen, Vida was <sup>at the ironing board!</sup> ~~ironing~~ humming <sup>singing</sup> along to some blues-y country music on the radio. Thinking, <sup>perhaps</sup> maybe, of those <sup>splintered</sup> ~~cracked~~ glass eyes, he grabbed her shoulders, turned her around and held on tight while they danced.

\*\*\*\*\*

Maybe girl tears, worse than the reason he shed them, were natural—a weakness the others recognized and pin pointed even before he punked out. Even before the melt had flooded his chest when he saw her hands, curving down from the snow white shoe laces that <sup>banned</sup> ~~held~~ them. They might have been mittens pinned crookedly on a clothes line, hung there by some slut who didn't care what the neighbors said. And the plum polish on nails bitten to the quick gave the mitten-tiny hands a womanly look and made Romen think she herself was the slut—the one with no regard for what people might think.

He was next in line. And ready too, in spite of the little hands and in spite of the mewling in her throat. He stood near the headboard charged by Theo's brays and his head bobbing above the girl's face which was turned to the wall and hidden beneath hair undone by writhing. His belt unbuckled, anticipation ripe, he was about to become the Romen he'd always known he was: chiseled, dangerous, loose. Last of a group of six. Three had left as soon as they were finished—slapping fives on their way out of the bedroom and back to where the party raged. Freddie and Jamal sat on the floor, spent but watching as Theo, who had been first, took seconds. Slower this time, his <sup>whinney</sup>~~whiney~~ the only sound because the girl wasn't mewling anymore. By the time he withdrew, the room smelled of vegetables and grapes and wet clay and only the silence was fresh.

Romen stepped forward to take Theo's place, then watched in wonder as his hands moved to the headboard. The knot binding her right wrist



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

came undone as soon as he touched it and her hand fell over the bedside.

She did not use it at all—not to hit nor scratch or push back her hair. Romen untied the other hand still hanging from the Pro Ked laces. Then he wrapped her in the spread she was lying on and hoisted her into a sitting position. He picked up her shoes, high heeled, an X of pink leather across the front—good for nothing but dancing and showing off. He could hear the whooping laughter—that came first— then the jokes and finally the anger, but he got her out of there through the dancing crowd and onto the porch. Trembling, she held on tight to the shoes he handed her. If either had been drunk earlier, they weren't anymore. A cold wind took their breath away.

He didn't know her name—<sup>then</sup> Faye or Faith?—and was about to say something when suddenly he couldn't stand the sight of her. If she thanked him he would strangle her. Fortunately, she didn't say a word. Eyes frozen wide she put on her shoes and straightened her skirt. Both of their coats,

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

his new leather jacket and whatever she had worn, were inside the house.

The door opened; two girls ran out, one carrying a coat, the other holding up a purse.

"Pretty-Fay! What happened?"

Romen turned to go.

"What happened to you, girl? Hey, you! You do something to her?"

Romen kept walking.

"Here, put it on. He bother you? Well, who? Who? Look at your hair! Pretty-Fay!"

He heard their shrieks, their concern as cymbal clashes stressing, but not competing with, the trumpet blast of what Theo had called him: the worst name there was; the one word whose reverberation, once airborne, only a fired gun could end. Otherwise there was no end—ever.

For the past three days he had been a joke. His easily won



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

friendship—four months old now—lost. Holding the stare of any one of the six, except for Freddie, was a dare, an invitation, and even when he didn't stare back or meet their eyes at all, the trumpet spoke his name. They gathered without him at the link fence; left the booth at Patty's Burgers when he sat down. Even the flirty-est girls sensed his undesirability, as though all at once his clothes were jive: T shirt too white, too pressed; sneakers laced all wrong.

On the first day following the party, nobody refused him court time but he never got a pass and when intercepted he had to try for a dunk wherever his position because there was no one to receive the ball. They dropped their hands and looked at him. If he made a rebound they fouled it away from him and the trumpet spat before he could see who blew it. Finally they just tripped him and walked off the court. Romen sat there, panting, eager to fight but knowing that if he answered the fouls, the

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

tripping, the trumpet spit, it would be the same as defending the girl again.

Somebody he didn't know and didn't want to. If he fought back he would

be fighting not for himself, but for her, Pretty-Fay; proving the connection

between them—the wrong connection. As though he and her had been tied

to a bed; his legs and hers <sup>forced</sup> spread open.

Lucas Breen, one of the white boys whose hoop skill was envied, dribbled and shot by himself at the far end of the court. Romen got up and started to join him, but realized in time there was another word in the trumpet's repertoire. He passed Lucas with a glance, muttering, "Hey."

The second day was miserable, lonelier. Freddie brought him the jacket he'd left and said, "Hey, man. Don't get shook," but didn't hang around to say more. After he saw Pretty-Fay's friends, the two who had come running out with her coat and purse, waving at him through the window of the school bus, he began to ride the commuter bus. Readily he



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

chose the inconvenience of walking two miles to and from the stop to avoid the possibility of seeing Pretty-Fay herself. He never did. Nor did anyone.

The third day they beat him up. All six, including Freddie. Smart, too. They hit him everywhere except his face, just in case he was a snitch as well, happy to explain a broken mouth or swollen eye; girl enough to point a weak finger at them if questioned. All six. Romen fought well; raised a lump or two, kneed deep into a groin, tore a shirt till they got his hands behind his back and tried to break his ribs and empty his stomach at the same time. That last was starting to happen when a car drove up and honked. Everybody scattered, including Romen who stumbled away holding his stomach, more fearful of being rescued than of passing out with vomit on his jeans. He threw up behind a mimosa tree in the woods back of Patty's. Contemplating his grandmother's cooking in the grass, he began to

S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

wonder if he could ever live his body down. He did not question Theo's contempt or Freddie's disgust. He shared both and couldn't understand what had made him melt at that moment—his heart bursting like a pump for a wounded creature who a few seconds earlier had been a feast he was eager to gnaw. If he'd found her in the street his reaction would have been the same but in the company of and part of the pack who put her there—shit! What was that thing that had moved him to untie her, cover her, Jesus! Cover her! Cover her up! get her on her feet and out of there? The little mitten hands? The naked male behinds convulsing one after another after another after another? The vegetable odor mixed solid with a booming bass on the other side of the door? As he put his arm around her and led her away he was still erect, folding only as they stepped together out into the cold. What made him do it? Or rather who?

But he knew who it was. It was the real Romen who had sabotaged



S W Chapter Two  
April 26, 2001

the newly chiseled, dangerous one. The fake Romen preening over a stranger's bed was tricked by the real Romen who was still in charge here in his own bed, forcing him to hide under a pillow and shed girl tears. The trumpet stuttering in his head.