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SW Chapter 3

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Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:04:50 PM UTC Available Online at: <u>http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/g158bn873</u> The sad little orange trees were running as fast as they could. No fruit weighed them down in October, so they ran lightly along the edge of the highway, pausing only when Christine lifted her foot from the gas pedal. Then they cut their pace to a stroll. For forty miles west of Silk, land was turned over to fruit trees; forty miles north, to tobacco. A glass of orange juice and a cigarette made bad neighbors, thought Christine–each one canceling out the effects of the other while holding its ground. And forty was also the number of years since she first ran away. The first escape was by bus, the second by car and each time the orange trees adjusted their pace to hers.

Now she drove the same road with the same haste, spurred by the same person. Only this time she was not taking flight; she was staking claim. Romen's version of washing the car did not include opening its doors, so the Oldsmobile sparkled on the outside but its interior smelled of damp. Christine rolled a window down remembering that she had fought with a better car for less. Tried to kill it (instead of its owner) and everything

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it stood for but trying mostly to kill the Pine Scent that choked her nostrils and clotted her brain. The owner, Dr. Rio, never saw the damage because his new girl friend had the car towed away before the sight of it could break her lover's heart. So Christine's bat swings against the windshield, the razor cuts through butter soft leather; the ripping out of radio knobs; the ribbons of tape (including and especially Al Greene's tk) that she draped over the dash board and steering wheel he only heard about, never saw. And that hurt as much as his dismissal. Fighting a Cadillac was never easy but doing it in bright day light in a Pine Scent frenzy was an accomplishment that deserved serious witnessing by the person for whom it was designed. Dr. Rio was spared, according to Christine's landlady, by his new woman. A mistake Christine thought. The new woman should have let him see the lesson-the warning of what a displaced woman could do-and assured her own rental in his arms.

The road was empty except for a few pick up trucks now and again, encouraging Christine to speed and day dream. Scenes of herself being led away by police; rocking between her own elbows on her landlady's couch; packing her shoes, pride, halter tops and pedal pushers into a shopping

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bag. Everything but the diamonds and her silver baby spoon. Those she zipped into her purse along with the landlady's loan of fifty dollars. Some exit: thrown out of the apartment when she refused for weeks to leave quietly; given no time to get her suede coat, her leather pants, her lininsuits, the St. Laurent shoes-not even her diaphragm. The four Samsonite suitcases she had left home with in 1950 held all she thought she would need. In 1975 the Wal-Mart shopping bag contained all she owned. Considering how much practice she had had, her exits had gotten worse and worse. The first one as a seventeen year old was sudden; the second one better planned but disastrous. The third time she left with murder on her mind. Each time leaving home was harder, fed more and more by disorder and malice. But leaving Harbor City, Jackson, Tampa, Waycross-or any of the places that once beckoned her got easier. Until the final return to Silk in shame and on borrowed money.

Heed's look was cold and long, so Christine just pushed past her through the door. With few words they came to an agreement of sorts, because the place was filthy, Heed's arthritis was deforming her h ands and nobody in town could stand either one of them. The one who had attended

private school kept house while the one who could barely read ruled it. A bad bargain, a hopeless truce and for tk years the dance of mutual hatred and suspicion hooked them together-need being tighter than love.

Christine braked for a turtle crossing the road but, swerving right to avoid it, she drove over a second one trailing the first. She stopped and looked in the rear view mirrors-left one, right one and overhead- for a sign of life or death: legs pleading skyward for help or a cracked immobile shellmtk .Her hands were shaking. Seeing nothing, she left the driver's seat and ran back down the road. The pavement was blank, the orange trees at rest. No turtle anywhere. Had she dreamed it, the second turtle? The one left behind, the one trying to keep up and failing, Miss Second Best crushed by a tire rushing to save its sister? Scanning the road she did not wonder what the matter was; did not ask herself why her heart was sitting up for a turtle creeping along Route 12. Then she saw a movement on the south side of the road where the first turtle had been heading. Slowly she approached and was relieved to see two shine-y green shells edging toward the trees. The car wheels had missed Miss Second Best and while the driver was shuddering in the car, she had caught up to the leader. Transfixed,

Christine watched the pair disappear, returning to her car only when another slowed behind it. As she left the verge, the driver smiled, "Ain't you got no toilet at home?"

"Go around, motherfucker!"

He gave her a thick finger and pulled away.

The lawyer might be surprised-- Christine had no appointment--but would see her anyway. Each time she forced herself into the office, Christine had been accommodated. She was a Cosey, after all and in Harbor City the name still garnered respect. William Cosey, owner of houses, a hotel resort, two boats and gossiped about, legendary cash, always interested people in the county, one way or another, but he had excited them to fever when they learned he had left no will. Just doodles on a 1957 menu stating his posthumous desires. Which turned out to be 1. Julia II to Sandler Gibson. 2. Montenegro Coronas to Chief Buddy Silk. 3. Hotel to Billy's Boy's wife. 4. the Silk house to "my sweet Cosey child." 5. His '55 convertible to L. 6. His stick pins to Meal Daddy and on and on down to his record collection to Blind Josephus "the best blues guitar player on God's earth." Feeling good, no doubt, from the Tom Collins, he had

sat down one night with some friends and scrawled among side orders and specials, appetizers, main courses and desserts, listed the distribution of his wealth to those he thought he loved. During the argument following his death fourteen years later, the friends had been located and verified the event, the hand writing and the clarity of the mind that had taken no further steps to make his wishes known. Questions rose like snake heads: Why was he giving Sandler his newest boat? What Coronas and who was Meal Daddy? The lead singer of tk, said Heed. No, the manager of the tk, said May, but he's in prison can inmates receive bequests? they're just cigars, fool he didn't even identify you by name so what and why give a convertible to somebody who can't drive you don't need to drive a car to sell it this ain't a will it's a comic book! They focused on stick pins and cigars and the current value of old 78's--never asking the central question. Who was "my sweet Cosey child"? Who indeed? Heed's claim was strong-especially since she called her husband Papa. Yet, since, biologically speaking, Christine was the only "child" left, her claim was equal to Heed's. Or so she and May thought. But years of absence from home, no history of working at the hotel, except for a few years as a young girl, worked against

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her. The court examined the greasy menu, lingering perhaps over the pineapple flavored slaw and Fat's Mean Chili, listened to three lawyers and tentatively (until further evidence could be provided) judged Heed the "sweet child" of a drunken man's memory.

Gwendolyn East, Attorney at Law, however, thought otherwise and told Christine grounds for reversal were promising. In any case there was room for appeal, review, even if no mitigating evidence was found. For years Christine searched: the hotel, the house and found nothing (except tik). If there was anything it would be in one of Heed's many locked desks behind her bedroom door also locked nightly against 'intruders.' The matter was urgent. No more waiting for the other to die or, at a minimum, suffer a debilitating stroke. Now a third element was in the mix. Heed had hired a girl. To help write her memoirs, Junior had said at breakfast. Christine's jaw dropped at the thought of the word "write" connected with some one who had gone to school off and on for less than five years. Scooping grapefruit sections, Junior had pronounced "memoirs" just the way illiterate Heed would have. "Of her family," said Junior. What family, Christine wondered. That batch of beach rats who bathed in a barrel and

slept in their clothes? Certainly not the Cosey family she had married into?

No. She didn't believe it for a minute. Heed was up to something. Maybe writing her own will. Maybe getting ready to evict. Christine made up her mind that afternoon. Romen was puttering around in the sunshine, inspecting ice damage done to the shrubs etc. Christine asked him to wash the car, and when he was done, she called him to help her with the garage door stuck in ice that had not melted though the temperature had climbed. Then she drove off, picking up speed as quickly as she could to get to Gwendolyn East before the lawyer's office closed. MTK/TR

Thoughts of Mr. Rio displaced apprehension. Regret, too, faded as well as the embarrassment of her battle with his beloved Cadillac. The three years with him--well, near him; he was mightily un-divorceable-were the best. She had seen movies about the misery of kept women, how they died in the end or had suffering illegitimate babies who died also. Some times they were saddened by guilt and cried on the betrayed wife's lap. Even now, tk years after she'd been replaced, Christine recalled her kept years as the best. Complete freedom; total care. Reliable love; reckless gifts. Trips, parties, edginess... He was an older man. To her forty-one

years, his sixty was "older." Now in her sixties the term meant nothing. He was a beautiful man. Elegant dresser, successful gp.