



SW Chapter 3

No Known Copyright

Princeton University Library reasonably believes that the Item is not restricted by copyright or related rights, but a conclusive determination could not be made.

You are free to use this Item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use.

Princeton University Library Disclaimer

Princeton University Library claims no copyright governing this digital resource. It is provided for free, on a non-commercial, open-access basis, for fair-use academic and research purposes only. Anyone who claims copyright over any part of these resources and feels that they should not be presented in this manner is invited to contact Princeton University Library, who will in turn consider such concerns and make every effort to respond appropriately. We request that users reproducing this resource cite it according the guidelines described at <http://rbcs.princeton.edu/policies/forms-citation>.

Citation Information

Morrison, Toni. 1931-

SW Chapter 3

1 folder (partial)

Contact Information

Download Information

Date Rendered: 2019-09-05 01:04:52 PM UTC

Available Online at: <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/b8515s97v>

SW Chapter Three

May 10, 2001

~~Sad little orange trees were running as fast as they could. The sudden freezing weather had killed the young fruit so they ran lightly and unburdened along the edge of Route 12, slowing 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.~~

^{memorable} It formed the structure of her dreamlife. From silly to frightening, every dream ~~she~~ ^{Christine} had took place on or near Route 12, and if not visible in

~~the dream, it seemed to lurk just outside the image, ready to assist the~~

~~nightmare or provide the setting for an inexplicable fantasy.~~ ^{Three} Four times ^{Route 12}

offered her escape. The first was on foot, the second by bus and each time

the orange trees lining the road ~~adjusted their pace to hers, baptizing her~~ ^{anointed}

~~journey with a/citric-sweet incense.~~ ^{light} ^{perfume}

~~Now she drove the road with similar haste, provoked by the same~~

the incoherent pleasure of a (sweet dream) (over)

freezing weather having killed the young fruit the odor of their ^{along with} ^{an aroma} ¹

1943 - runs then sent to M.V
1946/7 - ret then runs away
1971 - ret. for funeral then runs off

As ^{Now, as} ^{Pressing} ~~she~~ pressed the gas pedal, her
~~the~~ ~~had~~ had the feel
~~the~~ ~~haste~~ ~~was~~ ^{became} like that of a
nightmare: ~~panting~~ urgently
in stationary time. ~~Route~~

~~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 ^{while} ~~but~~ its dank interior smelled like ~~an~~

~~state home for~~ ~~un-cared for senior citizen.~~ Christine rolled ^{down then up then down} ~~a~~ window down. She once

fought a better class of car than this because of an odor. Tried to kill it and

everything it stood for, but trying mostly to kill the White Shoulders stinging

her sinuses and clotting her tongue. 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 hammer swings

against the windshield, the razor cuts through ^{plump} ~~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 had.

Fighting a Cadillac was never easy but doing it in bright day light in the

frenzy of another woman's cologne was an accomplishment that deserved

serious witnessing by the person for whom it was ^{meant} ~~designed~~. Dr. Rio was

spared, according to Christine's landlady, by his new woman. A mistake

^{had} Manila said. The new woman should have let him ^{learn} ~~see~~ the lesson ^{observe} ~~the~~

warning of what a displaced woman could do—and sealed her own rental in his arms.

with Thoughts of Dr. Rio ~~dulled her apprehension about Heed.~~ And regret over her mis-managed life faded ~~too~~ as did the embarrassment of her battle with his beloved Cadillac. In spite of the humiliating end of their affair, the three years with him--well, near him; he was mightily un-divorceable--were the best ones. 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 the women were saddened by guilt and cried on the betrayed wife's lap. Yet twenty years after she'd been replaced by fresher White Shoulders Christine still recalled her kept years as the best ones. When she met Dr. Rio her forty-one years to his sixty made him an "older" man. Now, in her mid-sixties, the word meant nothing. He was beautiful. An elegant dresser, successful gp, passionate, playful. Her last good chance for happiness wrecked by the second oldest enemy in the world: Another Woman. Manila's girls said Dr. Rio gave each new love a gift of a ~~certain~~ cologne. Christine had thought it was unique—a private gesture from an imaginative lover. He preferred it; she learned to. Had she stayed longer

~~at~~^{l's} with Manila or visited her whores once in a while, she would have discovered at once Dr. Rio's particular pattern of bull shit: he fell in love, courted, offered the (same) beautiful apartment on Trelaine Avenue and sent Dracena and White Shoulders on the day the replacement moved in. Unlike roses or other cut flowers, Dracena was meant to speak legitimacy, permanence. The White Shoulders—who knew? Maybe he read it somewhere, in a men's magazine invented to show men the difference between suave and a shampoo. Some creaky, unhip glossy for teenagers disguised as men that catalogued seduction techniques as if any technique at all was needed when a woman decided on a man. He could have sent a ~~jar~~^{bottle} of Clorox and a dead Christmas tree—she would have done whatever he wanted for what he made available. Complete freedom, total care, reliable love-making, reckless gifts. Trips, short and secret lest his wife find out, parties, edginess and a satisfactory place in the pecking order of a certain middle-class Black society that understood itself to swing, if the professional credentials and money were right.

Route 12 was empty except for a few pick up trucks, encouraging Christine to ~~speed and~~ remember. How abrupt the expulsion from first class

speed remembrance?

SW Chapter Three

cabins on romantic cruises to being head-pressed into a patrol car; from a

coveted table at an NMA banquet to rocking between her own elbows on a

mattress aired daily to rid it of the previous ^{visitors'} night's bouquet of semen. ^{When she went} Back

to Manila's dependant on ^{her} the immediate but short-lived generosity of a

~~landlady~~ ^{Christine} ~~madam~~, she poured the remains of her own White Shoulders down the

toilet and packed her shoes, pride, halter top, brassiere and pedal pushers

into a shopping bag. Everything but the diamonds and her baby spoon.

Those she zipped into her purse along with Manila's loan of fifty dollars.

The girls had been cheerful most of the time; other times not. But they ^{so} all

^{enjoyed their} had hearts of gold—gold they had slipped from wallets, ^{but} pants pockets or

^{their optimism was boundless} mild forms of blackmail. They told Christine not to worry. Some woman

was bound to de-dick him one day, and besides, she was still a fox and ^{there were lots of} and ^{players}

every good bye ain't gone. Christine was not cheered. Thrown out of the

apartment after she had refused for weeks to leave quietly; given no time to

get her furs, suede coat, leather pants, linen suits, the St. Laurent

shoes—not even her diaphragm. ¹⁹⁴⁷ This goodbye was final. The four

Samsonite suitcases she had left home with in ¹⁹⁴⁷ 1950 held all she thought

she would ever need. In 1975 the Wal-Mart shopping bag she returned

SW Chapter Three

with contained all she owned. Considering how much practice she had

had, her exits from Silk had gotten worse and worse. The first one as a ^(over)~~A~~

^{thirteen}~~seventeen~~ year old ~~was~~ the result of an ad hoc decision made during a

~~11~~ ~~and~~ ^{failed in 8 hours} ~~temper tantrum~~; the second one, ^{at seventeen was} ~~planned~~, but ~~was~~ equally disastrous. Both

^{escapes} ~~leaving~~ homes were fed by disorder and malice, but the third ~~and last~~, in

1971, was a calm attempt to avert the murder she had in mind. Leaving

other places: Harbor City, ^{Grafenwoehr} ~~Jackson~~, Tampa, Waycross, Chattanooga –or

any of the ^{TOWNS} ~~places~~ that once beckoned was easy. Until Dr. Rio had her

forcibly evicted for no good reason she could think of except a wish for

another Dracena or a younger model for the furs he passed along from one

mistress to another. Following days of reflection at Manila's (named by her

father for his heroic exploits) Christine discovered a way to convert a

return to Silk in shame and on borrowed money into a noble ^{battle} ~~struggle~~ for

justice: ~~Her~~ lawful share of her father's estate.

Heed's look, cold and long, was anything but welcoming so Christine

just pushed past her through the door. With very few words they came to

an agreement of sorts, because May was ^{hopeless} ~~sick~~, the place ~~was~~ filthy, Heed's

arthritis was deforming her hands and because nobody in town could stand

^{disabling}

13 year old fasted in eight hours;

either one of them. So the one who had attended private school kept house while the one who could barely read ruled it. The one who had been sold by a man battled the one who had been bought by one.

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 shell ~~ink~~. 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~~ ^{still,} ~~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 ^(over) 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~~ ² 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 ^{a pair} ~~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 faster one. Transfixed,

needlessly ~~unnecessarily~~
(swerving)

gone off track in order just to
~~to save~~ its sister

..

! *
~~stomach~~

* preferred

SW Chapter Three

Christine watched ^{them} ~~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 lifted eyelids. William Cosey, one time owner of many houses, a hotel resort, two boats and a bank-full of gossiped about, legendary cash, always interested people but he had excited the county to fever when they learned he had left no will. Just doodles on a 195⁵~~7~~ menu outlining his soggy desires. Which turned out to be 1. "Julia II" to Sandler Gibson. 2. Montenegro Coronas to Chief Buddy Silk. 3. the Hotel to Billy's Boy's wife. 4. the Silk house and "whatever nickels are left" 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

SW Chapter Three

Tom Collins, he had sat down one night with some booze-y friends and scrawled among side orders and the day's specials, appetizers, main courses and desserts, the distribution of his wealth to those he thought he loved. Fourteen years later, during the argument following his death, the booze-y friends were located and verified the event, the hand writing and the clarity of the mind that seemed to have had no further thoughts on the matter. Questions rose like snake heads: Why was he giving Sandler his newest boat? What Coronas and who was Meal Daddy? The lead singer of The Purple Tones, said Heed. No, the manager of the Fifth Street Lovers, said May, but he's in prison can inmates receive bequests? they're just ^{records} 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"? Heed's claim was strong--especially since she called her husband Papa. Yet, since, other than May and 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, no history of working at

SW Chapter Three

the hotel, except for a few years as a minor, weakened Christine's position. 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 Cosey child" of a drunken man's vocabulary.

Gwendolyn East, Attorney at Law, however, thought otherwise and told Christine grounds for reversal were promising. In any case, she said there was room for appeal, review, even if no mitigating evidence was found. For years Christine searched for such evidence: the hotel, the house and found nothing (except keys and traces of May's ^{lunacy or} ~~obsessions~~). If there was anything—a real, typed up intelligible will—it would be in one of Heed's many locked desks behind her bedroom door also locked nightly against 'intruders.' Now 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 ^{Viviane} had said that morning at breakfast. Christine's jaw had 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 ^{grinned}

^{while} pronounced ^{ing} "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?

That afternoon, after mulling over what ~~that Junior~~ ^{the} girl told her, Christine made up her mind. She waited until Junior went up to the third floor. Dressed in clothes Heed must have leant her (a lilac suit not seen in public in thirty five years) Junior looked like a Sunday migrant. Except for the boots, last night's leather was gone. Romen was puttering around in the sunshine, inspecting ice damage done to the shrubs. Christine called him to help her with the garage door stuck in ice that had not melted though the temperature had climbed, then told him to wash the car. When he was done she drove off, picking up speed as quickly as she could to get to Gwendolyn East before the lawyer's office closed.

Christine's entanglements with the law were varied enough to convince her that Gwendolyn was not to be trusted. ^{The lawyer} ~~She~~ may know the courts but she didn't know anything about police—the help or the damage they could do long before you saw a lawyer. The police who led her away from the Cadillac were gentle, respectful, as though her fury was not merely

SW Chapter Three

understandable but justified. They handled her like a woman who had assaulted a child molester rather than a car. Her hands were cuffed in front, not behind her back—and loosely. As she sat in the patrol car the sergeant offered her a lit cigarette and removed a shard of head light glass from her hair. Neither officer pinched her nipples or called her names or suggested what a blow job could do for racial justice. The one time she had been in a killing frame of mind with a hammer instead of a switchblade in her hand, they treated her like a white woman. During four previous arrests—for incendiary acts, causing mayhem, obstructing traffic and resisting arrest-- she had nothing in her hand and was treated like dog shit.

Came to think of it,
~~Funny.~~ Every love she had led straight to jail. First Frank Holder, PFC,

whom she married at seventeen, got them both arrested at an illegal social club. Then ~~Gravey~~ *Gradey*, whose revolutionary pamphlets she passed out and with

whom she had lived the longest, got her thirty days, no suspension, for inciting mayhem. Other loves had ended in ~~theatrical eruptions~~ *overflung and emotional displays of passion* the law had *for which*

more precise
~~other~~ names ~~for~~: cursing meant assaulting an officer; yanking your arms

when cuffed meant resisting arrest; throwing a cigarette too close to a police car meant conspiracy to commit arson; running across the street to get out

over flowed and ended in

of the way of mounted police meant obstructing traffic. Finally Dr. Rio. A Cadillac. A hammer. A gentle, almost reluctant, arrest. After an hour's wait, minus write-up or interview, they ^{gave her back the shopping bag and} let her go. ^{as she slunk down the street. She had been}

Go where, she wondered, Man-handled out of her (his) apartment after a two-minute supervised reprieve to get her purse. No clothing ^{CAN} to leave the premises, they said, but she was allowed to take some underwear and her cosmetics bag which, unknown to the lawyer-paid ^{thugs} goons, included a baby spoon and twelve diamond rings. Aside from that (the rings she would never sell) she had a recently cancelled credit card and seven dollars in change. She was as lonely as a twelve-year old watching waves ^{erase} suck away her sand castle. None of her close friends would risk Dr. Rio's

displeasure; the-not-so-close ^{ones} were chuckling with glee over her fall. So she walked to Manila's and persuaded her to ^{allow take her in.} let her a room. For just a few days. For free, ^{It} which was a much harder request since Manila did not run a whore house, ^{serious even impudent} but rented rooms to ^{She simply} interested ladies. ^{needful women:} ^{selecting for} ^{her room was} ^{was impudent}

which was what ^{hateful people} every body called her home.

the forlorn, the abandoned, those in transit, That these women had ^{regular} guests or remained in transit for years was not her concern.

- ① Theatre & bordello
- ② meeting with Gwendolyn

Christine had ~~been~~ two of those prerequisites in
1947.