



## Chapter 6 [Original Chap. 7/Husband]

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[original Chap. 7/Husband]

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## Chapter Six

Correctional girls knew better than to trust a label. "Let set for 5 minutes, then rinse thoroughly" was a suggestion, not an order. Some products needed fifteen minutes; others would cook the scalp instantly. Correctionals knew all about grooming hair—braiding, curling, shampooing, straightening, cutting. And—before coloring privileges were taken away—(x sprayed y with a blast of Natural Instinct)—they practiced tint and dye with professional single mindedness.

Junior slid the tail of a fine-tooth comb through Heed's hair. Then filled the silver valley with a thick stream of Velvet Tress. She had lubricated each parting with Vaseline to take down the pain of its lye. Upon completion she tipped Heed's head gently—this way and that—to check the nape and hairline. The rims of Heed's ears were lightly scarred either from old dye

burns or awkwardly held straightening combs. Junior ran a gloved forefinger slowly over the wounded skin. Then she bent the ear to blot the excess liquid with cotton. Satisfied that the roots were wet and steeping, she tucked the hair into a shower cap. Washing utensils, folding towels, she listened to Heed drone—the voluptuous murmur that always accompanies hair dressing. Massage, caress by devoted hands are natural companions to a warm water rinse, to the shy squeak of clean hair. In a drowsy voice full of amusement Heed explained the barber's chair she was sitting in. How Papa said no chair in the world was more comfortable; that he had paid x for it but it was worth y. How home decorating issues could not keep him from moving it into the bathroom of their new house. How much Heed treasured it because in the early days of their marriage he took great pains to teach her how to manicure, pedicure, keep all his nails in perfect shape. And how to shave him too with a straight razor and strop. She was so little she had to stand on a stool to reach. But he was nothing but patience and she learned. Encouraged by Junior's obedient but interested silence, she went on to say she never felt clean enough in those early days. Folks from her neighborhood were mocked for living near a fish factory and although



she had never worked one minute in the place, she suspected she was suspected of its blight. Even now it was the worse thing about her hands, how limited<sup>ing</sup> her habits of hygiene had become.

Junior wondered if Heed was trying to ask for a pedicure as well as a bathing hand. Although it was not the fun of group showers at Correctional, soaping a body—any body—held a satisfaction only a Settlement child could know. Besides, it pleased him to see her taking care of his wife; as it pleased him to watch her and Romen wrestle naked in the back seat of his twenty-year-old car; ~~just~~<sup>9</sup> as it tickled him to know she was wearing his shorts.

She turned on the <sup>L</sup>~~bow~~<sup>^</sup> dryer. Warm then cool air played on Heed's scalp encouraging reminiscence.

"We were the first colored family in Silk and not a peep out of one white mouth. Nineteen forty <sup>five</sup>~~seven~~. The War was just over. Everybody had money but Papa had more than most, so he bought this house. He was good friends with the sheriff [whose family named it for themselves and by themselves.] We owned x acres, all of Oceanside but it wasn't Oceanside then. It was a rundown orchard full of birds. Hand me the towel."

Heed patted her temples and looked in the mirror. Next to her Junior rinsed utensils.

"We had two Victory celebrations. One at the hotel for the public; and a private one here at the house. The one at the Hotel..." Heed stopped. Memory of those two kinds of Victory parties in 1945 was swamped by another pair of celebrations, two years later. A sixteenth birthday plus graduation party for Christine. A family dinner at the house ~~preceding~~ <sup>then</sup> a public celebration at the Hotel. In May of 1947, Heed had not seen her used-to-be friend in four years. The Christine that stepped out of Cosey's Cadillac was nothing like the one who, in 1943, had left home rubbing tears from her cheeks with her palm. The eyes above those cheeks had widened—and cooled. Two braids had become a page boy smooth as the wearer's smile. They did not pretend to like each other and hid curiosity like pros. The sun, dipping and red as <sup>a raspberry</sup> ~~watermelon~~, left its heat behind—moist and buzzing. Heed remembered the baby-powder smell from the bowl of gardenias; their edges browning like toast. And hands: a casual wave at a fly, pressing a dinner napkin to a damp upper lip; Cosey's forefinger playing his mustache. In silence they waited for L. She



had cooked a sumptuous meal and prepared a lavish cake. Sixteen candles waited to be lit in a garden of sugar roses and ribbons of blue marzipan. Earlier, the conversation had been polite and hollow, punctuated by the grating ceiling fan and meaningful looks between May and Christine. Cosey, in the grip of post-war excitement, had talked about his plans to improve the hotel including a Carrier air cooling system.

"Wouldn't that be wonderful," said Christine. "I had forgotten how hot it gets here."

"We'll do the Hotel first," said Cosey. "Then the house."

Heed feeling a flush of authority chimed in. "The bedroom fans are in good shape, but I do feel badly about the one in this room."

"You mean 'bad.' You feel 'bad.'"

"That's what I said."

~~"You said 'badly'." Feel is an intransitive verb in your sentence and is modified by an adjective. If you really mean you feel 'badly', then you are saying something like 'My fingers are numb and therefore they don't touch things well. Now if you....'"~~

"Don't you sit at my table and tell me how to talk."

"Your table?"

"Be quiet, you two. Please? Just be quiet."

"Whose side you on?"

"Do what I say, Heed."

"You taking her side!" Heed stood up.

"Sit down, you hear me?"

Heed sat down in the thumping silence of <sup>staring at spoiling</sup> ~~magnified hand~~ <sup>S</sup> and

gardenia petals until L entered with a champagne bucket. In her presence Heed calmed enough to hold up her glass for the pouring.

"The other one," he said. "That's a water glass."

May didn't try to hide her smile as she exchanged gleeful glances with her daughter. When Heed caught the smile, the look, she burst out of herself and, throwing the incorrect glass at her husband, rushed past him toward the stairs. Cosey rose and grabbed her arm. Then with a kind of old-timey grace, he put her across his knee and spanked her. Not hard. Not vicious. Methodically, reluctantly, like you would any other brat. When he stopped there was no way for her to get out of the room onto the stairs. No way at all, sweet Cosey child, but she



made it. The conversation that picked up as she climbed the stairs was relaxed, as though an awful smell ~~that had been~~ distracting the guests had been eliminated at last.

Junior cut off the dryer. "What about your own family? You never

talk about them."

Heed made a sound in her throat and waved a hand.

Junior laughed. "I know what you mean. I'd swallow lye before I'd live with my folks."

Heed glanced at Junior's face in the mirror, thinking: That's what it is, what made me take her on. We're both out here, alone. With fire ants for family.

"Listen." She reached back to touch Junior's elbow. "There is something I want you to do for me. Together. We have to do it together. There's something in it for you as well as me."

"Sure. What?"

"There's some documents I need. But they're in a place I can't get to alone. You'll have to take me there and then you have to help me find them."

→ ( She should have known then what the rest of her marriage wd be like: on to her affair?

TK more family?



"Take you where?"

"To the Hotel. The attic. We'll need a fountain pen."

Junior couldn't find him. Even in his study wearing his tie, there was no trace of <sup>his</sup> after shave. Maybe she didn't need him to tell her. To approve. Maybe he took for granted she'd know what to do. First, check on Christine; make sure she was unaware; make sure they were still friendly in case Heed's plans went bust. Getting Heed out to the car unseen by Christine should be easy since the house schedule was as reliable as Correctional's. [see notes]

Later, that evening, she joined Christine sitting in the <sup>back</sup> yard smoking.

"Can I have one?"

"Buy your own. You get paid. I don't."

"How come?"

"Because your boss lady is crazy as well as evil and needs help."

"I help her."

"Not that kind of help. You don't notice anything strange?"

"A little. Maybe."

"A little? Who don't leave a room for years but a crazy? What you all talk about up there, anyway?"

"Stuff. Her life."

"God."

"She showed me pictures. Wedding pictures. I saw a beautiful picture of you at her wedding. You were hot, Christine, really hot. <sup>(over) But</sup> You've known her a long time, right? You cousins or something?"

"Cousins?" Christine lips curled.

"Whatever. You're not related? Just friends?"

"She <sup>is</sup> not my friend. She's my grandmother."

"Say what?"

"You heard me. Grandmother. Get it?"

"But you're the same age."

"I'm older. Eight months older."

"Wait a minute. She said she was married for forty years and he died twenty five years ago. <sup>Damn.</sup> So she must have been...a baby."

"Mention was made."

"And you were...how old?"



Don't I know it?

You had all the boyfriends, I bet  
A few.

Ms. Casey, was she hot too?

Please TK. I don't know what she  
was.

"Twelve. My grandfather married her when she was eleven. We were best friends. One day we built castles on the beach; next day he sat her in his lap. One day we were playing house under a quilt; next day she slept in his bed. One day we played jacks; the next she was fucking my grandfather." Christine surveyed her diamonds, waved her fingers like a hula dancer. "One day this house was mine; next day she owned it."

She put her cigarettes away and stood up. "It did something to her mind, marrying that young. She needs professional help, don't you think?"

Back in the kitchen Christine began to perspire. She put her forehead against the refrigerator door, then opened it for its cool air. The wave of heat receded but left her trembling. It had been a while since the veil parted to expose a wide plateau of lifeless stone and she wondered if it was she, not Heed, who needed care. Extracting some ice cubes, she wrapped them in a towel, touching her throat, temples, wrists until she felt steady. Yet the bleakness remained. A clear sight of the world as it was—barren, ~~dark~~ ugly without remorse. What was she doing here? her mind scurried; her motives pointless. She knew she was playing busy, but how else to ~~set it~~ <sup>avoid it</sup> ~~aside~~—the bleak rock stripped of green. Closing her eyes, the cold towel

— Junior  
TLC



pressed against her lids, she whispered No! and straightened her spine. This was important. Her struggle with Heed was neither mindless nor wasted. She would never forget how she had fought for her, defied her own mother to protect her, to give her clothes: dresses, shorts, a bathing suit, sandals; to picnic <sup>together</sup> alone on the beach. They shared stomach ache laughter, a secret language and knew as they slept together one's dreaming was the same as the other one's. Then to have your best and only friend leave the squealing splash in your bath tub, trade the stories made up and whispered beneath sheets in your bed for a dark room at the end of the hall reeking of liquor and an old man's business, doing things no one would describe but were so <sup>awful</sup> no one could ignore. She would not forget that. Why should she? It changed May for life. Even L's jaw dropped.

After the wedding, they tried to play together occasionally, but with each one lying in wait for the other's insult, the efforts ended in quarrel. Then tears, May's hand gripping ; words hissed lest Grandpa Cosey hear you mocking his bride.

There was a heap of blame to spread. He was the Big Man who, with no one to stop him, could get away with it and anything else he wanted.

Then there was who

she was  
too; 12

Her mother chose to send her away rather than confront him. And L, the

but she would take

only peacemaker around, whether glaring or shaking her head, took no

one's side. ~~But~~ the ~~real~~ betrayal lay at the feet of the friend who grinned

however

happily as she was led down the hall to darkness, liquor smell and old man

business. So who had to go? Who had to leave her ~~doll house~~, her

bedroom

playhouse, the sea? The only innocent one in the place, that's who. When

Even

she returned, a sixteen year old, poised and ready to take her place in the

family, ~~They~~ ~~threw~~ her away because, by then, Heed had become grown-up-cruel. Mean enough to set her on fire.

^



put her in  
to a far away school  
and discouraged summer  
vacations at home. \*

12

And

Her mother chose to send her away rather than confront him. And L, the

only peacemaker around, whether glaring or shaking her head, took no

one's side. But the real betrayal lay at the feet of the friend who grinned

happily as she was led down the hall to darkness, liquor smell and old man

business. <sup>the friend got to stay but</sup> So who had to go? Who had to leave her doll house, her

playhouse, the sea? The only innocent one in the place, that's who. When

she returned, a sixteen year old, <sup>graduate of Maple Valley</sup> poised and <sup>weighing options (Dillard?)</sup> ready to take her place in the

<sup>Fisk? or taking</sup> family) Heed had become grown-up-cruel. Mean enough to set her on fire.

\* For her own good, she said, arranging Church

Camps <sup>and</sup> Summers with Classmates. Once

May enrolled her <sup>as a counselor</sup> in a Settlement House for <sup>run away</sup> Negro

Newsmin<sup>ist</sup> Christmas packages in the mail, <sup>the</sup> girls

Expensive wrong size shoes in September

In spite of envelopes <sup>with</sup> letters <sup>fat</sup> of lies and money,  
<sup>the expulsion</sup> ~~it~~ was clear.

had  
who ~~have~~  
escaped rather  
than  
be evicted  
from  
home.