



"no one to stop him..."

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no one to stop him, could get away with it and anything else he wanted. Then there was her mother who chose to send her away rather than confront him. L too; she was the only peacemaker around, whether glaring or shaking her head, but she would take no one's side. The real betrayal, however, 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. So who had to go? Who had to leave her bedroom, her playhouse, the sea? The only innocent one in the place, that's who. Even when 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.

Christine sat down in the worn recliner she preferred to the scratchy sofa. The perspiration was on hold; the dizziness receding. The melancholy persisted. "I must have been the one who dreamed up this world," she thought. "No nice person could have."

It should have been different. She meant it to be different. On the train, heading home from Maple Valley, she had carefully planned her attitude, her behavior. Everything would come off nicely since her return

began with a celebration celebrating everything: her birthday, graduation, the War's end, the new house. She was determined to be civil to Heed, in control, but nicely so the way they were taught to behave at Maple Valley. How or why she got lured into showing off about grammar, she couldn't recall. What she most remembered was her grandfather spanking Heed, and the rush of pleasure that came when he took his granddaughter's side against his wife's—for a change, taking steps to show the kind of behavior he prized. Christine's delight was deep and rampant as the three of them—the real Cosey's—left together, drove off in the big automobile, the unworthy one no where to be seen.

When she and May returned smoke was billowing from her bedroom window. Racing, screaming into the house and up the stairs they found L smothering the blackened sheets with a twenty pound sack of sugar, carmelizing evil.

Again, it was Christine, not Heed, who had to leave. Bill Cosey, had left the hotel party abruptly to go nobody knew where to. Afraid and angry, mother and daughter stayed awake seething until 3:00 am when he came back, barefoot as a yard dog, holding his shoes in his hand. Instead of

fury, instead of locating Heed to throw her back where she came from, he laughed.

"She's going to kill us," May hissed.

"The bed was empty," he said, still chuckling.

"Tonight! What about tomorrow?"

"I'll speak to her."

"Speak? Speak? Mr. Cosey, please!" May was begging.

"Calm down, May. I said I'd take care of it." He moved, as though the conversation was over and he needed rest. May touched his elbow.

"What about Christine? She can't live here like this. It's dangerous."

"It won't happen again," he said, hitting the word 'won't.' "

"She's dangerous, Mr. Cosey. You know she is."

He looked at May then, for what seemed an age and nodded. "You may be right." Then, touching his moustache, "Is there somewhere she can go for a week or two?"

"Heed?"

"No," he said, surprised at the suggestion, then frowning. "Christine."

"Mr. Cosey, Heed started the fire. Why should Christine leave?"

"I'm not married to Christine. I married Heed. Besides it will be for just a little while. Til things get settled around here."

Just like that, Christine is to be packed off, sent away to the house of a classmate. For a week or two. A "vacation," they will tell people whether anyone believed it or not. Christine will call and May will get on the line, make arrangements.

Standing there in a movie star's gown, rhinestones glittering its top, Christine made up her own mind. He had laughed. The cheap little bitch had tried to kill her—sort of—and might succeed one day would he laugh then too would he look at the charred flesh of his own flesh and settle that also as though it were a guest's bounced check or a now-show musician or a quarrel with a salesman who had short changed an order of Scotch whiskey. Later for a visit with a classmate. Later, crazies. Put on your shoes, old man and look at me good now, because you will never see me again.