



"the door and asked her if she could take Romen on as after school help..."

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the door and asked her if she could take Romen on as after school help.

She was civil. Neat as a pin, as always. Offered him iced tea, probably to

let him see Christine's status in the house. Sandler had always found her

less of a pain than others had. Because of his friendship with her husband,

he guessed. ^{*} Still she was not easy to be around. [✂] He couldn't say whether

she was good looking or not because "false", "touchy" were the words that

came to his mind about her. False the way anybody would be who had

jumped from a log to a castle overnight. Touchy the way anybody would be

who had envy plus May on her back. But what Sandler saw was nothing

like what Bill Cosey saw. For him it was as though twenty-five years hadn't

happened. The Heed that Cosey reminisced about in his cups on the

boat—as thought [✂] she were dead—was not a frowning woman always on the

look-out for a slight, a chance to find fault, but a long legged angel with

candle eyes and a smile he couldn't help but join. (Hips narrow, chest

smooth as a plank, skin soft and damp like a lip. Cosey never explained

the attraction any other way, except to say he couldn't wait to watch her

grow. That the steady, up close observation most men never have and

don't know the pleasure in, kept him young. } Kept him faithful.

* ~~She~~ Her edges were softened by his recollection of Bill Cosey telling him he had not touched her — until her period came. ^{waited for it a} ~~And even then,~~ year & only then took her on a honeymoon for the initiation.

Uneasy with other men's sexual confidences (he certainly wasn't providing any of his own) Sandler always made it his business to change the subject. But he remembered Cosey's expression as he rambled on about his first sight of Heed. ^{insist} Although by then he was fully involved with grown women, the dream of his child bride still stirred him. Vida had nothing to say about that, and Sandler didn't want the ^{miserly} grief of bringing it up, of tilting his wife's idol with a crack of insight.

mtk (over)

So he planned a reason to be alone with his grandson. To his surprise the boy was as eager as he was. Did he want to talk too?

mtk (1)

~~Sandler jumped right in. "She pregnant?"~~

~~Romen was startled but not angry or sulky.~~

"No!" ~~Why you Ask me that?"~~

Mtk You spend a awful lot of time with her. Doing what?"

* "said Romen"

"Just stuff." Ride around. Went to that old hotel last Saturday, you

know? Just looking around."

For a floor, a pallet, anything would do as long as it was in a strange place. His palms were wet with excitement because she insisted he drive.

* Better, thought Sandler. Direct like his father, but without the latent threat.

Ah, well. This is what I'm for, he thought.
The day Roman came to stay, he
wanted to protect him. From bad cops,
street slaughter, dope death, prison shivs and
friendly fire in ~~the~~ whitefolks' wars. He
never would have believed a female
could ^{be a} ~~be~~ endanger.

Not just because he didn't know how, but also because she liked to nuzzle and distract him while he struggled to control the wheel for the thrill of almost hitting a tree or skidding into a ditch while fingering each other.

"You got in?"

"Yeah, it was open."

The padlocked doors, the windows tight as iron so angered Romen he rammed his fist into a pane, matching the determination of Junior's hand in his jeans. They had thought the place would be scary: cobwebs and garbage-y corners. Instead the kitchen, glowing in noon light, welcomed them to its table as well as underneath. Other rooms were dim, but no less promising. Junior counts each one as they explore themselves in every one, all the way from the lobby floor to the top.

"I don't believe anybody's been in there for years. Must be rat heaven."

"Sorta."

if they didn't get in your way
 "I take ~~you all~~ had other things on your mind?"

I mean
 "No. We were just looking, fooling around, you know?"

"Who you think you talking to?"

Birds, mostly.

"No, like, I mean..."

"Romen, we men or not?"

Romen looked at his high tops. Black canvas with a cool white circle.

"Okay, then. Get off it. Straight, now."

"Okay. Well. She likes, she likes..." Romen rubbed his knees.

"And you don't?"

"Aw, you know how it is."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. I mean, yeah. We made out and, like, explored everywhere. No big deal."

Except for the attic. Getting up there required hoisting himself on a chair to get to the chain to pull down the folded stairs ~~to climb in there~~ without light. "We need matches," he told her, "or a flashlight." "No we don't," she whispered. "I like it dark." ^(over) Losing then finding one another in a pitch black room; stumbling, bumping heads, tripping, falling grabbing a foot, a neck, then the whole person, they dared darkness with loud laughter and moans of pleasure and pain. Floor boards creaked then split beneath them, raking their nakedness and sharpening their play, lending it an adult

A Rustle of wings and faint twitter as they
entered. "Bats?" he wondered, but
the wings that flew past his head
were yellow and he was about to say
"Canaries," when she pulled him to her.
Hide and seek, then.

seriousness he could not have imagined.

"No big deal?"

"Well, it did get, I ^{don't} know. Rough, I guess you'd say."

He pushed, no, slammed her against the wall—after she squeezed his
privates—and she had laughed ^{instead of crying out.} and laughed. It shifted then. From

black to red. ^{It} was as though outside, looking on he could see
himself clearly in the dark—his bruised sweaty skin, his glittering teeth
and half-closed eyes.

"What did you do, Romen. Out with it."

"Not me. Her."

"Say it. "
^{boy}
[^]

"She plays hard, that's all. I mean she likes being hurt."

^{→ (over)}
"What do you think about that?"

"Weird. Whack."

She did like it. Even preferred it. But the rush was in him as well.

Standing outside himself—smiling, impressed—watching himself inflict and
suffer pain above scream level where a kind of joy lay, the Romen who
could not bear mittens laced to a bed post, purple polish on bitten nails, the

adjust
margin

Sandler ~~st~~ braked at ^{an intersection, though the} ~~a green light was green.~~
It was a moment before he realized he had
stopped at a green light. Ramea was ^{looking} ~~staring~~
through the passenger window. Waiting. For some
response, some grown man observation
worthy of his trust, his confidence, ^{An answer to} ~~and the~~
the question coiled in his confession. A Chuckle
from his grandfather would mean one thing.
^{Reproach.} ~~Another.~~ Sandler tried for time

wine and vegetable smell of pulling bodies—that Romen disappeared. Never to be seen again, he was certain. Not in full, anyway. Just a faded version who, afterwards, felt annoyance instead of shame. Driving away ^{from the Hotel} he complained ("Hey, girl. Stop it. You going to make me have a wreck.") about her leg banging his, the tip of her tongue on his neck, nipples pushed into his ear. Then there was the other thing. For the first time Junior had taken off her boots and her socks. When they undressed back in the kitchen, as usual she kept her socks on. In the attic she removed them, tying one tightly around his neck. He was half way down the attic ladder when he looked up. Junior, sitting in the opening, had one on, one off. He couldn't be sure—light in the hall was scarce—but he thought he saw her slip a hoof into the sock.

^{"said Sandler"}
 "Let me tell you something. Free will ain't much if there is nothing you can control. But of the few things you do have some say over, who you choose to hang out with is one. Now you hooked yourself up with somebody who ~~bothers you~~, makes you feel uneasy. That feeling is information, information you can count on. If you can't pay attention to what I say, pay attention to that. Don't worry about whether backing off

means you a wimp. It can save your life. Besides keeping the relationship going may be the easy way. ^{*} Some friends you know better than to bring home. There's a good reason for that."

* You not helpless. Sometimes it ^{takes more} guts to quit than to keep on. Pay attention to what bothers you. You may be called on to do something important one day.

Huh? oh. **
 "YES sir," said Roman, already arching at the thought of Junior's mouth. ^{tr.}

TK (2)

** "Listen to me. A good strong man is a good thing but there is nothing in the world better than a good woman. She can be your mother, your wife, sister or somebody you work next to. Don't matter. You find one? Stay there."