



## Chapter 8 [Originally SW Chap 9]

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CHAPTER EIGHT [ORIGINALLY SW CHAP 9]

The hiking shoes, purchased with Anna Krieg's instruction, are what she needs. Completely unlit, the road to the Hotel is treacherous for an hysterical pedestrian on a chilly night in tennis shoes and no socks. The gifted Anna Krieg would have been prepared: ruck sack, water, flashlight, brod, dried fish, nuts. Christine had learned how to cook from her while both, wives of American soldiers, were stationed in Germany. Barely twenty, Anna was already adept with fresh vegetables, varieties of potatoes, sea food but especially voluptuous desserts. Cooking lessons and beer made the evenings cheery and postponed the collapse of Christine's marriage into a desolation exactly like the quarters they lived in. In return for the friendship, Christine agreed to hike with Anna. She bought the good hiking boots and rucksack Anna recommended and early one morning they set out for. Halfway to the halfway point, Christine stopped and begged to

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cancel, to hitch back to the base. Anna's face registered extreme disappointment but understanding too. "Poor, soft American, no stamina, no will." They turned back in silence.

When Christine opened the door she found Ernie locked in the arms of the staff sergeant's wife.

She went through the motions of jealous anger, but she was actually just simply dumbfounded. Puzzled as to who Ernie Holder thought he was, other than a ragged-y PFC who had offered devotion, a uniform and escape to another country in exchange for her own gorgeous well-bred self. She left him the next day, taking ruck sack, cooking skills and hiking shoes with her. From the Boston air port ,she called her mother. May seemed relieved to hear from her and anxious to have her back. Her jumbled conversation held no curiosity about Christine's situation but was spiked instead with references to the "swamp wife"; a burned "freedom" bus.

Unwilling to re-enter the atmosphere May described, Christine lingered. After two nights not quite on the street (a bus station didn't count), Christine moved into the Phillis Wheatley House. She got a job in a restaurant waitressing until they discovered she could cook. It was a friendly, neighborhood place where she laughed at the ways customers



found to hustle free food, and where she spent years lying to May and looking for a husband. She found three, one her own, before (at twenty eight) she met Fruit. When she listened to him everything was suddenly so clear she spent nine years in his company. Her fears that she might disappoint such a man, fierce, un-corruptable, demanding, and that he might be forced to treat her like dirt were never realized because Fruit liked dirt. His view of soil, earth, crops was a romance shared with her. A farm, he said, if we had one it could be a base for us. Christine agreed, but events were too swift, money collected was needed for other emergencies. He was a little man, intense, with large beautiful hands and a mesmerizing voice. He clarified the world for her. Her grandfather (a bourgeois traitor); her mother (a handkerchief head); Heed ( a field hand wannabee); Ernie ( a sell out). And he outlined her own obligations. With apology for her light skin, gray eyes and hair threatening a lethal silkiness, Christine became a vigorous helpmate, focused and happy to serve. She changed her clothing to "motherland" and sharpened her language to activate slogans. She hid her inauthentic hair in exquisite gele's; hung cowrie shells from her ear lobes and never crossed her legs at the knees.

All over the country there were sleeping neighborhoods that needed

arousing, inattentive young people needing focus. The hiking boots were broken in at marches; her ruck sack simulated comfort at sit-ins. Fueled by seething exhilaration and purpose Christine's personal vanity became racial legitimacy and her flair for acting-out became courage.

The end, when it came, was unrecognizable as such. A small quite insignificant toilet flush. After a routine abortion, the last of seven, she rose, tapped the lever and turned to watch the swirl. There in blur of congealed red, she thought she saw eyes. For less than a second that completely impossible image surfaced. Christine bathed and went back to bed. She had always been unsentimental about abortions, considering them as one less link in the holding chain. So this seventh intervention did not trouble her at all. Although she realized she had conjured up the unborn eyes that had disappeared in a beet red cloud, still she wondered, on occasion, who it was who looked up at her with such quiet interest. At the oddest moments—cloistered in an emergency room with a weeping mother, dispensing bottled water and raisins to exhausted students—those non-committal eyes seemed to be watching her own.

~~They were long gone, those non-judgmental eyes, along with the~~



Nobody is watching now. They are long gone, those non-judgmental eyes, along with the rucksack and the hiking boots which she desperately needs now if she is going to stop the snake and her minion from destroying her life. The two of them, Heed and Junior, are nowhere in the house. The garage is empty, the driveway clear. Nothing could make Heed leave her room but devilment and at night? There is only one place she could be interested in—the Hotel—and there is no time to waste even if she has to run all the way