



Chapter 8: Father

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CHAPTER EIGHT

FATHER

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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 ^{AND devoted to the PX} twenty, Anna was ^{already} adept with fresh vegetables, varieties of potatoes, sea food but especially voluptuous desserts. ^{TK recipe} 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 one day to hike with Anna. ^{In the PX} She bought the good hiking boots and rucksack ^{that} Anna recommended and early one morning they set out. Halfway to the halfway point, Christine stopped and

begged to cancel, to hitch back to the base. Her feet were on fire; her breath gasping. 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 wanted to kick him but her feet hurt so she settled for six bottles of ^{SpateN} ~~the~~ hurled in rapid succession at his head.

For the good of the other wives, she felt obliged to go through the motions of jealous anger, but she was actually just and 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" and a burned "freedom" bus.

Unwilling to re-enter the poisonous 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. On looks alone 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, none her own, before (at thirty one) she met Fruit. When she listened to him everything was suddenly so clear she spent nine years in his company. He was a fine-boned 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 dedicated helpmate, coherent and happy to serve. She changed her clothing to "motherland", sharpened her language to activate slogans, carried a knife for defense, hid her inauthentic hair in exquisite gele's; hung cowrie shells from her ear lobes and never crossed her legs at the knees.

Her fears that she might disappoint such a man, fierce, uncorruptible, demanding, or 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 he shared with her. A farm, he said, if we had one, it could be a base for us. Christine agreed, but events were ^{SO} ^{AND} swift [^] money, (collected, wheedled, extorted) was needed for other emergencies.

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. She hardly remembered the quarrels now: informants galore, tainted money, random acts vs. long range plans, underground vs. dance with the media. What she relished was the work; who she loved was Fruit. ^{There} Here, with him, ^{she was in} ~~in~~, ^{inconvenient} not in the way. Not the ^{surplus} interrupting wife, the ^{nuisance} [^] troublesome mistress, the ^{unwanted} ^{disposable} daughter, the ^{nuisance} granddaughter, the ^{surplus} friend. There was no reason why it could not last.

The beginning of 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 a profile. 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, and she did not want ^{in the least} ever to be a mother. So this seventh intervention did not trouble her ~~at all.~~

Although she realized she had conjured up the unborn eye 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 a hospital waiting room with a weeping mother, dispensing bottled water and raisins to exhausted students—that non-committal eye seemed to be ^{in the chaos of cops and tears.} at home there. Had she paid close attention, perhaps she could have stalled, even prevented, the real end. Her grandfather died. Fruit encouraged her to attend the funeral (Family is family, he said, smiling, even if they are incorrigible Toms.) Christine hesitated. She would have to be in Heed's murderous company; her mother and she would continue to argue politics as they did on intermittent phone calls full of ~~tears, rage,~~ screaming accusations.

He was dead. The dirty one who introduced her to nasty and blamed

it on her.

He was dead. The powerful one who abandoned his own kin and transferred love and rule to her playmate.

He was dead. Well, good. She would go and view the ruin he left behind.

Nothing is watching now. It is long gone, that non-judgmental eye, 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.

Of course Fruit pleased himself with other women. That was the beauty, the honesty of their relationship. She, of all people, queen of seduced husbands, understood, having grown up in a Hotel where the tippy toe of bare feet, the rustle behind the equipment shed, the ^{eye-blaze} glare of one female guest's ^{toward} into another's had been everyday stuff. Hadn't she heard

aimed at

her grandfather tell his wife in front of everybody, "Don't trouble your tail.

I don't want it and I sure don't need it-
~~You don't have anything I need,~~" and leave that wife dancing alone at the

birthday party while he raced off to meet whoever it was he did need?

Notwithstanding Ernie Holder and the Spaten soaring toward his head,

loving
~~accommodating~~ men meant sharing them. Get used to it and do it with

grace, right? Fruit's outside encounters were not the problem. Anyway,

with all the work to be done, who had time to monitor every stray coupling?

She was the designated woman, the one everybody acknowledged as such.

Their names spoken in a planning meeting sounded like a candy bar: Fruit

n Chris. Chris n Fruit.

(But The candy bar crumbled.)?

Somebody raped one of the student volunteers. A comrade had done
 it. The girl, too ashamed to be angry *begged* Christine not to tell her father,
 please, please don't. What about your mother? Oh no! She'll tell him!

Christine bristled. Like a Doberman puppy in training, the girl had gone

into protection mode. *Big Daddy*
~~The~~ Good-Father mustn't know. Christine told

everyone and was satisfied by Fruit's response, especially. The *y/all* took care of
 the girl, cursed and fumed at what the Comrade had done; promised to

speak to, punish, expel him. But didn't. The next time he showed up, it was

"Hey man, how's it going?" When Christine ^{cornered} ~~confronted~~ Fruit he described what the Comrade had said: it wasn't his fault the girl was all over him bra-less sitting sloppy he'd even patted her behind to alert her to his interest she giggled instead of breaking his jaw and asked him if he wanted a beer. Fruit shook his head, mourning human stupidity and retrograde politics. Yet mourn was all he did. Regardless of her urging, "speaking to"—not to mention "punish" or "expel"—he never got around to. ^{if} ~~Whatever~~ Fruit ^{the Comrade a menace} ~~thought~~, he could not ^{if he believed the Comrade jeopardized their principled cause, he could not confront him.} say it to his friend. The girl's violation carried no weight against the sturdier violation of male friendship. Fruit could upbraid, expel, beat up a traitor, a coward or any jive turkey over the slightest offense. But not this one—this assault against a ^{did not appear} ~~young~~ girl of seventeen was ^{was not on the list. (over)} ~~secondary~~. ^{secondary}

Eventually Christine shut up about it and the good work of disobedience went on interrupted only occasionally by the profile, turning, offering its uncritical eye. When she got back from her Grandfather's funeral, she opened her ruck sack and shook out the paper bag of engagement rings. Solitaires of all sizes. Enough to get sixteen women to sign the guest book at Hotel Love. The question ^{apparently} ~~then~~ was how comfortable

It would have helped if the
other girls/women's ~~insisted~~
~~but their~~ moans ~~and of~~ ^{sympathy} ~~comfort~~
^{for the} ~~were~~ ^{had not been} faced with disturbing
girl questions - what did she do? why
didn't she... >

the suite. In 1973 Tremaine Avenue had the highest level because the good
work of disobedience was indistinguishable from tk. and the disinterested
eye, carefully studied by the Supreme Court, had closed. The issues had
changed from streets and doorways to offices and Conferences in elegant
hotels. Nobody needed a street worker-baby sitter-Xerox copyist-marching
nut-and-raisin-carrying woman who was too old anyway for the hip new
students with complex strategies; a woman not educated enough for the
college folk. Fruit sensed her despair and they parted like friends.

He was, she thinks, the last true friend she had. He would have
mourned again what she settled for: kept woman to a duplicate of her
bourgeois grandfather. And rightly. After Dr. Rio there was no place but
home. Hers. To hang on to and keep the tk from throwing her out of.

The crash of the sea is sounding in her ears. She is not close enough
to hear it so this is heightened blood pressure. Next will come the dizziness
and zig zags of light before her eyes. She needs to rest a moment, but
Heed is not resting. Heed is doing something secret with an able bodied tk
to help her.

The Hotel is darker than the night. No lights, but the car is parked in

from

the driveway. No voices either. The ^{ocean}water is whispering underneath the
blood roaring in her ears. ^{Maybe}Maybe this is a lure. She will open the door and
they will kill her, as they would not Anna Kreig who would have had the
sense not to rush out of a house in tennis shoes ^{and}with no Swiss Army knife.

Christine opens the door