



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 devoted to the American's PX twenty, Anna was already adept with fresh vegetables, varieties of potatoes, sea food but especially voluptuous desserts. [tk recipes] 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. She bought the good ^ghiking boots and rucksack 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 ^{lungs making hyphens.} ~~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 hurled in rapid succession at his head.

For the ^{morale} ~~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 ^{voice} ~~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^e 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 swift and 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, with him she was not in the way; she was in. Not the disrupting wife, the surplus mistress, the unwanted nuisance daughter, the ignored granddaughter, the disposable 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 ^a 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 to be a mother—ever. So this seventh intervention did not trouble her in the least. 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 there, at home in the chaos of cops and tears. 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~~ ^{political MORONS.} 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, 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.

(over) ^{he} Of course ~~Fruit~~ pleased himself with other women. That was the beauty, the honesty of their relationship. She of all people, queen of

~~Besides she was seven~~
~~years younger than~~
~~she~~

No one could have guessed
but Fruit was seven years
younger than she was so

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 of one female guest's aimed at another had been everyday stuff. Hadn't she heard 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," 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 men meant sharing them. Get used to it and do it with grace, *And other women's beds* 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.

The candy bar ^{didn't} crumbled. *until*

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 Good Father mustn't know.

Christine ^{Yes} ignored her, told everyone and was satisfied by Fruit's response, especially. They 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 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. ^{Yes} ~~If~~ Fruit thought the Comrade a menace, ^{but} he could not tell him so. ^{Yes} ~~If~~ he believed the Comrade jeopardized their principled cause, ^{but} he could not confront him. 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 girl of seventeen was not ~~written~~ on his list of Unacceptable Behavior. It would have helped if the other girls' moans of

sympathy for the raped one had not been laced with disturbing questions: what did she do? Why didn't she...?

Eventually Christine shut up about it and the good work of *civil* *and personal obedience* 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 was how comfortable the suite. In 1973 Tremaine Avenue, with its high level of comfort was mighty attractive. Besides, the good work of disobedience was becoming indistinguishable from disguised acquiescence. [Then too, the *** disinterested eye, carefully studied by the Supreme Court, had closed.] The issues had changed, spread, moved 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 crowd; not loud enough for television. *** Fruit sensed her despair and they parted ^{as} like friends.

He was, she thinks, the last true friend she had. He would have, ^{mumograph} mourned again if he knew what she settled for: kept woman to a ^{photo} copy of her bourgeois grandfather. And rightly, for after Dr. Rio ^{threw her out} there was ^{and no place but} no place like home. Hers. To hang on to and keep an insane bitch from ^{evicting} throwing her out ~~of~~.

Christine was in a car the last time she traveled this road. Up front too, because her wide skirts ^{needed room.} A powder blue heap of chiffon, ^{rhinestones sprinkling the strapless top.} Her mother is sitting in the back seat; her grandfather ^{is} driving the 1939 tk, which irritates him because it was already 1947 and post war cars are still unavailable to most civilians. That is what he is saying, explaining his dark mood at a time of ^{giddy} celebration: Christine's sixteenth birthday and (delayed) graduation. ^{reason} The real reason he is irritable is the same one May and Christine are jubilant. At the family-only dinner preceding the Hotel party they have managed to eliminate Heed and had the pleasure of watching her disciplined by her husband. At last, just the three of them. No ignorant, clinging wife-let to sully this magnificent homecoming display.

Christine, led from the car on her grandfather's arm, makes a

glamorous

sparkling entrance, an Oh, so pretty girl in perfectly beautiful gown proof¹¹ of

and consequence

racial up lift and proper dreams. The band plays Happy Birthday over the crowd's applause then segues into "Harbor Lights." May beams. Christine

glows. The Hotel is packed with uniformed veterans and vacationing

sweethearts. The musicians ^{switch to} are playing "How High the Moon" since the future

is not just bright, it is there, visible in paychecks, tangible in G.I. Bill

applications, audible in the scat vocalist's range. Just look through the

^{wide} open doors beyond the ^{open air} outside dance floor and see the way the stars go.

Hear the waves roll; smell the ocean's cologne, how sweet and male it is.

Then a ripple, out of step, going the wrong way [fx]. A flutter, a murmur of disbelief. ^{Heads turn.} Heed is in the center of the ^{room} floor. She is dancing with a man in a green zoot suit. He lifts her over his head, b rings her down between his legs, casts her aside, splits and rises on angled legs in time to meet her hips shimmying toward his clenched pelvis. The band blasts. The crowd parts. Bill Cosey places his napkin on the table and stands. The guests look sideways at his approach. Zoot suit halts mid-step, his pocket chain swings ^{ing} low. Heed's dress looks like a red slip; the shoulder strap falls to her elbow. Bill Cosey doesn't hiss or shout, and he does not command

or take her away. In fact he does not touch her. The musicians, alert to every nuance of crowd drama, grow silent, so everybody hears Bill Cosey's dismissal and his remedy.

The crash of the sea is sounding in ^{Christine's} ~~her~~ ears. She is not close enough ^{to the shore} to hear it so this must be 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 spider to help her. → over)

The Hotel is darker than the night. No lights, but the car is parked in the driveway. No voices either. The ocean is whispering underneath the blood roaring in her ears. Maybe this is a lure. Maybe 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 no Swiss Army knife.

Christine gazes into the darkness huddled ^{above} ~~under~~ the porch. ^{steps where} ~~In that~~ ^{child} ~~place~~ a sunlit girl stands, rigid. ^{with fear or grief of abandonment} Only her bows are as limp as her hand ^{to insert} waving toward the automobile, idling, groaning in the driveway. The face

And listening. To complaints, jokes, stories, justifications

And she never accusing, ~~or taking~~ judging;
Just interested. In that silent
house talking was like music.

* Hang on
Hang out
Hang ups
Hang loose

She should have known. She did know.
The minute Junior sat down in her kitchen
facing her with yes, mam's, ^{exuding} ~~carrying~~
~~the street~~ ^{alley} odors like a blooming, she
knew: This girl will do anything. Yet
that ^{was precisely} ~~what~~ ~~she~~ was ~~attracting~~ so appealing.
The bold eyes, the mischievous smile
Her willingness to ~~tackle~~ do any
brand, tackle any ~~problem~~ difficulty
was a blessing for Christine: shopping,
paying bills, ^{even} washing dishes.
Who cared if she sneaked around
~~with~~ Veda's grandson from time to
time? Good for him. Fun for her - a
^{happy} ~~sex~~ girl would be more likely to stay on.
What Christine had forgotten was the
~~Creed~~ ^{Creed} of run aways. ~~No loyalty~~
~~Hang out yes Hang on no~~ ^{no} ^{↑*}
which is Friendship yes. Loyalty no.

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