



Chapter 12 (Material for final chapter)

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C: You know May wasn't much of a mother to me.

H: At least she didn't sell you.

C: Would have if she needed the money. But she didn't, so she gave me away.

H: Maple Valley?

C: Maple Valley.

H: I thought you wanted to go.

C: So what? I was thirteen. She was the mama. She wanted me gone because he did, and she wanted whatever he wanted. Except you. She was Papa's girl. Not you.

H: ?

C: I bet she made your life a real playground .

H: Her own too. She couldn't hurt or defy me in front of him, so she had to go weasel. I had to put the whole staff on notice to find all the things she

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hid. I believed for years she was doing it to devil me. But then I discovered tk. That's when I knew for sure she was hoarding thins so Huey Newton wouldn't find them.

C: Huey Newton?

H: Mmmm. I sat down and tracked it. She buried the deed box in 1955. That was when Rosa Parks got arrested. Then it got worse. By the time of the riots, she was burying salt. Sandler found her underwear stuffed in a tree hole when the Black Panthers were in the news. She was whispering, 'No, Huey' when she died. Wasn't until we opened up her room I figured out she wasn't talking to a duck. Panther articles and Huey Posters were crammed into a hat box.

C: She thought the Panthers were after her?

H: You tell me.

C: After her drawers?

H: Maybe she just wanted to be ready.

C: Yeah. For the real revolution: twenty year old boys fighting just to bed sixty year old women.

H: They could do worse.

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C: They do worse. Was he good to you, Heed? I mean really good?

H: At first. No, for a long time he was good to me. Mind you, at that age i thought candied popcorn was good treatment. He didn't get bad until he started losing money and Boss Silk was breathing down his neck. He had a good relationship with the Chief, but his son, Boss, was another breed of dog. Nothing like his father.

C: I knew him. Chief Buddy Silk. They fished together for as long as I can remember. Every week nearly.

H: Fished. I'll say. Papa forgot what every pickaninny knows. Whites don't throw pennies in your cup if you ain't dancing.

C: You saying Chief Silk broken him?

H; Not him; his son, Boss. He did better then break him. He let him break himself. A loan here, a mortgage there. Went along and went along. He had to pay insurance, you know, to keep the place open and selling liquor. It was tight but okay. Then the old Silk died and the new one upped the premium. Papa couldn't pay the bands and the liquor man too.

C: So how did you manage for so long?

H: Luck. I found some of Papa's fishing pictures.

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Heed smiles and Christine catches the look.

C: No. Papa?

H: Oh, yeah. Papa.

C: Who? Where?

H: Celestial, who else? And where was the bunk, the deck, the pilot's chair, anyplace and anything Julia II offered. Make you think twice about what a fishing rod can catch.

C: Men have the shortest memories. They always want pictures.

Heed remembering the moment she confronts Boss Silk. Standing there afraid, wavering from damp sweat to chill. Wondering if he wanted sex or just her humiliation; or maybe the money he'd come for accompanied by a proprietary feel. Shame, for sure, but she didn't know if it included her body. In any case, she had been sold once and that was enough.

"Here's something he wanted you to have." She turns around so he can open the envelope in private. He thinks its money. She wants him to think it. She turns around so he can open the envelope in private—to convey her own innocence about men's business. When she hears him remove the contents, she says, "There was was another envelope just like it used to be

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around here somewhere. But it was addressed to your mother care of the Harbor Journal. If I find it, should I give it to you or mail it? Want some iced tea.?

C: Did he? Have a set for the wife?

H: I made that part up.

C: Hey, Rochelle.

H: [laughing] When have I heard that?

Playing at the beach one day, when they were ten years old, they heard a man call out "Hey, Rochelle" to a young woman in a red sun-back dress. His voice has amused admiration in it, and a touch of envy. The woman doesn't look around to see who calls her; her profile is etched against the seascape; her head held high. She turns instead to look at them. Her face, the most beautiful they have ever seen, is cut from jaw to ear. Her eyes locking theirs are cold and scary. Later they ask May who she is, this Rochelle. May says "Stay as far away from her as you can. Cross the road when you see her coming your way." They ask why and May answers " Because there is nothing a sporting woman won't do."

Fascinated, they try to imagine her exploits, the things she does not

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hesitate to do regardless of danger. They name their castle after her.

Castle Rochelle. And from then on, when one of them did a particularly bold, smart, risky thing, they mimic the male voice crying "Hey, Rochelle,"

The phrase, the recollection of the moment freed something, loosened more than their childhood language of secrets. Took them back to that time of true love and real innocence before the shame each one thought was her alone.

It is 1940 and they are going alone to play at the beach. They have packed a picnic lunch and will eat it in the shade and privacy of their palace: a keeled over row boat long abandoned to sea grass. They have cleaned it, furnished it and named it. Castle Rochelle. It contains a blanket, a driftwood table, two broken saucers mtk. They are wearing bathing suits. Heed is wearing one of Christine's, blue with white piping. Christine's is a yellow two piece, midriff, it is called. They are walking across the hotel lawn when one remembers that they have forgotten the jacks. Heed volunteers to get them while Christine waits in the gazebo and guards the food.

Heed runs into the service entrance and up the back stairs. Music is coming from the hotel bar—something so sweet and urgent Heed shakes her

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hips to the beat as she moves down the hallway. She bumps into her friend's grandfather. He looks at her. Embarrassed—did he see her wiggle her hips?— and in awe—he is the big handsome giant who owns the hotel—Heed freezes, unable to move or say "Excuse me. Sorry." He speaks. "What they call you?" She doesn't answer because her tongue won't leave the roof of her mouth. He touches her chin, and then, smiling her nipple or rather the place under her swim suit where a nipple would be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes. Heed stands there. He moves away still smiling. Heed bolts down the stairs as the spot on her chest she didn't know she had is burning, tingling. When she reaches the door, she is panting as though she has run the length of the beach instead of a flight of stairs. May grabs her from behind and scolds her about running through the hotel. Orders Heed to help carry sacks of bed linen through to the laundry. It takes only a minute or two, but feels longer. When finished, Heed runs to tell Christine what happened, what her grandfather did. But Christine is not in the gazebo. Heed finds her behind the hotel. Christine's face is hard, flat. She doesn't meet her friend's eyes. Again, Heed can't speak, can't tell her friend what happened. In silence they go on their

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picnic. And although they fall into the routine: taking other names, spreading the food, the game of jacks cannot be played because Heed forgot them. The first lie, then, was that she could not find them. And the first secret is born because she thinks Christine saw what happened, or knows it without having seen it. So there is something wrong with Heed. The old man saw it right away so all he had to do was touch her and it moved as he knew it would because the wrong was already there, waiting for a finger to bring it to life. Now Christine knew it was there too, and could not look at her because the wrong thing showed.

What she does not know is that Christine left the gazebo to meet her friend at the service entrance. No one is there. Christine looks up into the window of her own bedroom where Heed would be looking for the jacks. She opens her mouth to call out, "Heed! Come on!" But she doesn't because her grandfather is there, his trousers open, his penis out, his wrist moving with the same speed L used to beat egg whites into magical, unbelievable creaminess. He doesn't see Christine because his eyes are closed. Christine covers her mouth to laugh, but takes it away immediately because her breakfast is flowing into her palm. After heaving, she rushes to

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the rain barrel to rinse the sick from her yellow top and her bare feet.

When Heed finds her, Christine doesn't explain the wet suit or why she can't look at Heed.

It wasn't the arousals, not altogether unpleasant, that they could not talk about. It was the other thing. The thing that made each believe, without knowing why, that this particular shame was different and could not bear speech—not even in the language they had invented just for secrets.

Would the inside dirtiness leak out?

When Christine went to bed that night, the old man's pleasure had booked the room. She did not have to glance at the window or see the curtain yield before a breeze to know that a man's solitary pleasure lurked there. A pleasure deeply private and separate but somehow connected to her like a guest with a long held reservation arriving in your room at last, a guest you knew would stay.

[ou-yidagay a ave-slidagay! e-hidegay oughtbidigay ou-yidagay ith-widagay a ears-yidigaday ent-ridigay an-didigay a ish-fidagay ing-didagay oat-bidigay! "You a slave. He bought you with a year's rent and a fishing boat!]