



Chapter 9: Phantom

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Done
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phantom

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a
CHAPTER TEN

"Bleak Thing"

(Material for)

on dresser.

tearing strips

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: I know.

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 hid. I believed for years she was doing it to devil me until I found out she was hoarding things so Huey Newton wouldn't find them.

C: She thought the Panthers were after her?

H: Maybe she just wanted to be ready.

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

H: They could do worse.

C: They do do worse.

C: 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 twelve 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.

Broken?
Spained?
...
We'll be
out in
the
morning.

→ Rubbing her Swollen Ankles - Ouch

C: I remember him. 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 broke 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, the police and the liquor man too.

C: So how did you manage for so long?

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

Heed smiles and Christine catches the look.

C: No. Papa?

H: Oh, yeah. Papa.

C: Who? Where?

H: ^{Who cares} ~~Celestial, who else?~~ And "where" was the bunk, the deck, the pilot's chair, anyplace and anything on board. Make you think twice about what a

fishing rod can catch.

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

~~Tr. TK~~ *Huh, " said Heed, remembering*
 Heed relives 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 doesn't know if it includes ^e 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 another envelope just like it used to be around here somewhere. But it was addressed to your mother ^{wife} care of the Harbor Journal. If I find it, should I give it to you or mail it? Want some iced tea.?"

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

H: I made that part up.

C: Hey, Celestial.

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, Celestial" 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 Celestial. May says "Stay as far away from her as you can.

- a fine scar like a pencil mark that an eraser could turn into a flawless face - until she winks at them, causing their toes to clench and end with happiness.

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 hesitate to do regardless of danger. They name their castle after her. Celestial Castle. And from then on, when one of them did a particularly bold, smart, risky thing, they mimic the male voice crying "Hey, Celestial,"

Except for
~~Even in the words they had invented for secrets:~~ "Hey, Celestial," and

IN a language they called "idigay."

was their most private code.

I thought you'd come back for L's funeral. Didn't May write you?

She did, but I was in a relationship ^{banging my head} fooling myself in some fancy ^{apartment} hotel

~~room~~ in X.

The doctor?

Kenny Rio. ^{him} The whoremaster ~~and~~ me the whore.

Bought?

^{Well, you know.}
Like a fifth of whiskey. At some point you have to buy more. I lasted
three years.

You were nobody's liquor.

Neither were you.

What then? ^{Fools?}

^{No,} Just women. Trying to find a place ^{when} and the streets don't go there.

Tk

everywhere.

^{Especially since} He was everywhere. ^{been doing something worthwhile} And nowhere, like a ghost. One we made up.

^{Everywhere}
We didn't make him up.

Hey, Celestial.

Even in their private language they had never been able to share a certain twin shame. Each one thought the rot was hers alone. Now, sitting on the floor playing jacks, with everything and nothing to lose, the phrase, the recollection of the moment of invention, loosened something. Took them back to a time when innocence did not exist because no one remembered hell.

It is 1940 and they are going by themselves to play at the beach. L has packed a picnic lunch for them and they 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. It contains a blanket, a driftwood table, two broken saucers and emergency food: canned peaches, sardines, a jar of apple jelly, peanut butter, soda crackers. 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. Their hair has been quartered into four braids so they have identical hair styles. Christine's braids are slippery, Heed's are not. 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, excited by ~~what's~~ ^{the picnic} to come and the flavor of her bubble gum. Music is coming from the hotel bar—something so sweet and urgent Heed shakes her 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. Whom nobody, even Christine, sasses. Heed stops, unable to move or say "Excuse me. Sorry."

He speaks. "Where's the fire?"

She doesn't answer. Her tongue is trying to shift the bubble gum.

He speaks again. "You Johnson's girl?"

The reference to her father helps and her tongue loosens. "Yes, sir."

He nods. "What they call you?"

"Heed, sir."

He smiles. "I might. I just might."

"Sir?"

"Nothing. Never mind."

He touches her chin, and then, casually, still smiling, her nipple or rather the place under her swim suit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes. Heed stands there for what seems an hour but is less than the time it takes to blow a perfect bubble. He watches the pink ease from her mouth then moves away still smiling. Heed bolts ^{back} 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 soiled bed linen through to the laundry. It takes only a minute or two, but May Cosey has things to tell her about public behavior. When she is finished telling Heed how happy they all are that she and Christine are friends and what that friendship can teach her, 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 ~~must have tasted their~~ ^{has thing} lemonade ~~because she~~ ^{looks like poke.} spilled some on her bathing suit, ~~but~~ [;] her face is hard, flat. She looks disgusted and doesn't meet Heed's eyes. Again, Heed

can't speak, can't tell her friend what happened. In silence they go on their picnic. And although they fall into the routine: taking other names, spreading the food, the game of jacks cannot be played because Heed doesn't have them. She tells Christine she could not find them. That first lie, of many to follow, is born because Heed thinks Christine ^{knows} ~~saw~~ what happened, ^{and it made her puke,} ~~or knows about 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. ^(over) Now Christine knows ~~it is there~~ [^] too, and can not look at her because the wrong thing shows.

She does not know that Christine has left the gazebo to meet her friend at the service entrance. No one is there. Christine looks up toward the window of her own bedroom where Heed would be looking for the jacks. The window is open, the pale curtains lift through it. She opens her mouth to call out, "Heed! Come on!" But she doesn't because her grandfather is standing there, in her bedroom window, his trousers open, his wrist moving with the same speed L used to beat egg whites into unbelievable creaminess. He doesn't see Christine because his eyes are

A thing
~~Something~~ That

And
But she had started it - not him
~~The wrong thing that made her~~
The ^{hip -} wiggle her hips came first. Then him.

closed. Christine covers her mouth to laugh, but takes it away immediately because her breakfast is flowing into her palm. She rushes to the rain barrel to rinse the sick from her yellow top, her hands and her bare feet.

When Heed finds her, Christine doesn't explain the ^{bathing why she is wiping it,} ~~wet~~ suit or why she can't look at Heed.

It wasn't the arousals, not altogether unpleasant, that the girls 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 especially for secrets.

Would the inside dirtiness leak?

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

(over)

TK

They took ^{all} my childhood away from me.
He took all of you ^{away} from me.

[Romen]

Even now, drifting toward permanent
sleep, they don't talk about it. ^{directly} But each
one knows what the other one knows.

When's where the first lie, the first silence between
them. began.

They try. Stifling groans, one speaks into
darkness.

"Hating you was the only thing my mother
liked about me."

"I heard it was ²⁰⁰ he gave my daddy. And
a pocket book for my Mama."

"~~Did you like~~ But you agreed. Like you wanted
it too."

"I wanted to be with you." Married to him I thought
I would be." ↑