

Chapter 4, 1983

“Come on, Charlie. It’s closing time,” Jack said. “Those beers at O’Neil’s aren’t going to drink themselves. I have a ~~sixteen~~⁴⁶ ounce tip-cup filled with quarters. There must be \$30 in here. Let’s go.”

“~~Ok~~^{Okay}, Jack. Be cool. We going. I don’t understand you anyway, boy. What you doin’ drinking with a bunch of old black men every night, anyway? You should be out chasing high school girls, boy. Should be hanging out with kids your own age. Not that I mind you comin with us.”

“It’s kind of hard to chase high school girls when you don’t know any of them and smell like a car wash. Besides, Charlie, did you ever notice that I ~~don’t go to high school?~~”

“Oh man! Jack, I’m from Biloxi, Mississippi. I don’t go past ~~ninth~~^{9th}-grade. Don’t stop me. Your age? Oh boy! Shit! I think I had two kids~~,~~ by your age. Look man! I know why I go drinking every night. What about you?”

“What about me? Why do you go drinking every night?”

“Do you know where I live, Jack? I live in the Cabrini–Green project. I gotta be drunk to deal with all that shit. Damn police won’t even go in ~~on a~~ dare. Shit! You live in an all-white Polish neighborhood. The only crime in this hood is if Olga overcooks Stash’s pierogi.... Dem Pollack~~s~~ take that pierogi shit serious.”

Jack knew Charlie was serious, but he couldn’t hold back a laugh. “Oh come on, Charlie, that’s funny. Have you ever even had a pierogi?”

“~~Ok~~^{ay}. Let’s go, Jack. I’m thirsty,” Charlie said. He looked mad, but by the time he said ~~thirsty~~^{thirsty?} he smiled, showing off all ~~twenty~~²⁰ of his ever-bright white teeth.

Charlie, Jack, and the crew drank for the next ~~three~~³ hours, just like they did every other sunny day.

“~~Ok~~^{Okay}. I’m outta here, Jack. It’s ~~nine o’clock~~^{9:00} and I need to get some shut-eye, and so do you,” Charlie said.

Commented [HS1]: Mississippi passed a compulsory education law in 1982 that said all children under 16 must attend school. Now, his foster family could ignore this, but I just thought I should make note of it.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

"I'm good. I'm more like an ~~eleven~~ o'clock guy ~~Charlie~~."

"Why? Why do you stay out so late, white boy?"

"I told you, Charlie. I'm not a white boy. I'm a pocho."

"Pocho? What the hell is that?"

"I don't know.... It's like an Americanized Mexican or a half-white, half-Mexican dude. Something like that. I'm not really sure."

~~Ok~~Okay, pocho, why do you stay out so late?"

Jack looked down. "I don't know, Charlie."

"What you mean ~~Jack~~? You smartest kid I ever met. Don't tell me you don't know. Shit. And I see the way you can read people. You always know which ones are the tippers and which ones are the cheap asses. You smart, Jack."

After a long pause, Jack replied, "Because Kwasny doesn't want me to come home before ~~eleven~~ o'clock. God only knows what he does in there."

"I wish I could take ya in myself," Charlie said. "Shit! You never make it! Cabrini-Green! Shit! The only thing they hate more than spics is white people. They'd eat your lunch, steal your shoes before killin' you. Shit! You take care, Jack, and we see ya tomorrow."

Jack wished he'd seen Charlie the next day. He didn't.

Commented [HS2]: They don't really need to say each other's names in every sentence. It's a little unnatural.

Chapter 5

As usual, Jack showed up on time the next day, expecting to hear Charlie singing “Mannish Boy” in honor of Muddy Waters who had died the month before. Charlie had a raspy blues voice, the kind exclusive to older black men, particularly Southern black men. Charlie was always playing some sort of Mississippi blues on the old CD player one of the regulars had givengave him. Jack thought it sounded like chain-gang music, and he loved it.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Commented [HS3]: Song titles are in quotes. Album names are italicized.

But today “Purple Rain” was blasting from the CD player.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

A thirty-year-old man swinging two towels like an imaginary jump rope approached Jack. “Hey, you must be Jack. I’m Johnny Kwas. My uncle told me about you. I’m Johnny Kwas.” He repeated. “Nice to meet you, Jack. Are you ready to hit it?” The logo on Johnny’s T-tee-shirt told you everything you needed to know about Johnny — Do unto others, then split.

Commented [HS4]: Does Johnny just choose to shorten Kwasny or is this a typo?

Commented [HS5]: T-shirt is the most common spelling nowadays (I don’t know who decides these things, but there you have it). If you do want to use tee-shirt, you need the hyphen for it to be correct.

“I’m sorry, do you work here?” Jack asked.

Commented [HS6]: I laughed

Johnny pulled on his handlebar mustache, “Oh! I thought Kwasny would have told you. I’m the new crew manager. I’m your new boss, Jack! You’re gonna love me!”

Commented [HS7]: He calls his uncle by his last name?

“Does Charlie know about this?”

“Hmm. Well, my first management decision was to let Charlie go. We don’t need two crew managers. Do we Jack? Go ahead and open this rotten ass wooden door. These crazy customers are already starting to fuckin’ line up.”

“What a mother-fucking prick,” Jack whispered under his breath.

Commented [HS8]: I smiled

“Did you say something, boy?”

Jack did not respond, pretending he didn’t hear Johnny, as he struggled to open the dilapidated back door.