

Notes to Velma Demerson's *Incorrigible*

1939 she is 18 years old, sent to an institution as a result of her parents intervention.

Mother is from England, father is Greek, they met in New Brunswick during WWI when he owned an ice cream parlour and candy store, mother a farm girl working as a maid in the city, married him, worked in the store, then they bought a restaurant, mother's labour no longer needed, 21, she begins to live an active social life, father has an affair, marriage ends, mother is bitter and vengeful toward the father.

Her mother runs a boarding house where all kinds of characters live, including sex workers. Unstable. Her mother attracts many different admirers, lovers, etc. 26: "The only part of our house that looks nice is the tearoom." 26 can never get it clean, bedbugs.

When she lives with her father and his new wife, she is treated like the help, not permitted to have dinner with them 27-8

31 back in Toronto she goes to vaudeville shows on Queen St, seeks two Chinese men with women with French accents wearing fur coats.

32 They go to a restaurant on Yonge St [interview], Commodore Café (p 112) the Chinese waiter asks Velma out on a date, she agrees. She had been raped in New Brunswick 33, so virginity is not a big issue. "Now there is no status to uphold, no bonds to be severed as I embark on a culturally unpopular course. I know that going out with a Chinese man is socially unacceptable." Rather than taking her out, he takes her to his "quarters. I believe I'm completely safe because the Chinese are not generally considered aggressive." He puts his slippers on her feet, and they smoke cigarettes, drink vermouth, and talk (33). Harry Yip. Yip Kum Keuy is the name on his official document of entry. Arrived at 14 yrs of age. Mother and sister are in China. No mention of a father. He lives on Walton St a few blocks from Chinatown and just west of Yonge Street where the restaurants are located. Individual rooms with shared bathroom, 35. 37: he provides the food, meals. His clothes are cleaned at the laundry 37. p35 He buys her her own slippers. She begins to spend more and more time in his room, away from her mother, "the bedbugs, her alcoholic boyfriend, the chaos..."

38 "Our lovemaking is not lengthy but we love each other and are content."

38 He wears tinted glasses and a fedora at a slant. "He's my George Raft, my Humphrey Bogart... He takes me up the rickety steps of a restaurant in Chiantown. The place is utilitarian. Chinese men are eating at tables covered with white oilcloth but the food is good. There are no white people here. Harry exchanges greetings with the waiter in Chinese. Everyone can see how happy we are. Everyone wants a girlfriend."

38-9 She meets 16 year-old Ellen from Barrie who is dating Joe Wah, she dated a Chinese restaurant employee in Barrie, goes to stay with "Jimmy Chen, he's part owner of a restaurant." On Elm Street. "It's easy to recognize Chinese houses. Bachelor houses don't have polished windows and tidy curtains." Rooms upstairs are rented to farmers who come in on weekends. "A French-Canadian woman is visiting. The baby has Chinese features." She talks to the baby in Chinese. She does not want to marry the baby's father because a Chinese last name will make it harder to get a job, should she need one, and she would lose her citizenship. Segue here to Velma's citizenship status, and the implications for leaving the country.

41 she returns from NB with plans to marry Harry, but he has gambled all his money away. They leave for Hamilton where he can get better paid work, they return to TO and that is when she is picked up.

48 My fiancé and I are in similar situations. .. He's an outcast by virtue of his race. But I am also the object of discrimination. Because of my mother's divorce, I am, like her, excluded from the world of stable, conforming families. The Chinese have been singled out by government legislation as undesirable and their families in China can't join them in Canada, Most of the Chinese here are men without mates and friendship with Canadian women is discouraged.

Female Refuges Act incorrigible and idle and dissolute. P 125 "The act prevents a marriage of choice by a woman between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one without the permission of parents or guardians, even though the Marriage Act states that a woman can marry without restriction at eighteen years."

49 she believes that she is caught up in the power play between mother and father.

56 her mother's upper-class friend Linda has a Chinese boyfriend, Jack, who likely works in a kitchen as a cook bec he does not have waiters' clothes and his English is not as good as Harry's. Also, laundry men would live not on the ground floor, but on the upper floors. So, ground floors are for those who have the most money. 10 year long affair.

113 once released from the Mercer, she goes to Chinatown and is easily able to find out that Harry is now working in Barrie, Ontario. She boards a bus. **"My security is assured by the fact of his culture as well as our love. The legal isolation of the Chinese men from female companionship ensures that I will always be taken care of. He's attractive but I don't dream there's any competition."**

1940 Harry moves back to Toronto and rents them a room on Gerrard Street from a Chinese man and French-Canadian female couple. They are married by a Protestant Chinese minister.

Their child had a skin problem, she is convinced to allow a foster family to care for him. She does.

127 They bring Harry Jr home when he is two years old, still suffering fro a severe skin ailment; she gets money from her father for an abortion but he demands that she return to him; she puts harry in an Infants home and does. 127-8

They sell the furniture, she gives the money to harry, but he gambles it all away. 128

131 she decides that Harry will be French Canadain since the FC's don't seem to discriminate against those among them who have darker complexions. She returns to Toronto to collect Harry, and abandons her husband who has proved unable to provide for them. She refuses to live in poverty.

She loses Harry Junior when CAS takes him from her rooming house where she left him in the care of other female roomers. At the hearing the judge takes the baby from her and gives him to

Harry. Harry picks him up, but returns him to Mrs McTavish, the woman who first fostered him
Harry is now 5. Velma returns to Toronto.

138 attempts suicide.

138-9 Is denied a Canadian passport because she is considered by the Canadian government to be
a Chinese citizen.

When she returns from Hong Kong she stays at the Hazelwood Hotel which is run by a Chinese
man and his white wife.

She gets a job with a paper mill in Powell River and Harry Jr asks if he can live with Mrs Stanley.
Vera is devastated that Harry Sr has not taken care of Harry Jr, and that Jr does not want to be
with her any longer. Jr is 12 years old. They never again have any kind of meaningful relationship.
Demerson accuses the CAS of trickery and subterfuge to give Stanley custody.

1966 Harry Jr drowns, he is 23 years old.