

CHAPTER 3

Nothing was said about Rosanna's bruised eye on the trip home. But Mrs. Shorter kept gazing at it, nervously turning her pocketbook over in her lap, a gesture she practised whenever she was inordinately interested. She also chewed the side of her tongue. That meant a conclusion had been reached.

Hadley said nothing about the eye either. But inwardly she felt a fine glow. Rosanna was in trouble. The black eye was one thing, but in addition Hadley was convinced Rosanna was pregnant. And if there was one thing Rosanna did not want to be just now

it was pregnant. A smile played across Hadley's lips. Rosanna and Julia with their little redneck babies.

Hadley turned away to hide the smile. It was an irony really. Even when they were children Rosanna had always said it was she who would marry well. Hadley, said Rosanna, would probably never marry.

"You're too mean. Meanness first and then the madness."

The remark had enraged Hadley. When they were growing up Hadley despised Rosanna. Even now she couldn't completely analyze her feelings. All she knew was that the black eye and the pregnancy pleased her. The thought of Rosanna saddled with a baby instead of doing her beloved writing was nice. Very nice.

Nothing had gone right for Rosanna in recent years. A product of the early seventies, she was left back there. She now had become "irrelevant" as she had so often accused everybody else. Even the word didn't work any more.

And now it's my time, Hadley was thinking. Mrs. Forrest Oliver Eubanks. Hadley Eubanks. She had written the name over and over. She liked the name: Oliver Eubanks. It rang, made sense. Besides,

the Eubanks, if not the most aristocratic, were one of the better known families in the South. And they were working on the former, "discovering" ancestors here and there, having their portraits painted and hung on their walls.

Senator Eubanks had been a long and powerful force in the United States Senate, year by year legislating for the South, bringing it from its knees in the thirties to semi-decency in the seventies. "The New South," as magazine writers referred to the section now, the nine hundred and ninety-ninth "New South." As far as Hadley was concerned, the South wasn't all that different from any other place now.

Last November Senator Eubanks had been defeated. He was unschooled in the wiles of television and handled a microphone like a megaphone, giving the impression of a mad, balding cheerleader. He was beaten by a thirty-four year old Republican whose black hair rose to a pompadour in front and whose smile glistened into the television sets. He had a Methodist minister's charm and often referred to his "Faw-thaw" above. The Senator, he declared, said "absuud" things. The Senator was beaten soundly.

Hadley had known Senator Eubanks all her life. He and Josh were close friends. As long as she could remember she had listened to them, two good friends discussing the ills of their region, how to remedy them. They sat in two large armchairs, the Senator with urine stains on his ancient seersucker suit dropping cigar ashes on the hepplewhite table while Josh listened, then gave his own views. Josh was happy in those times.

After the defeat the Eubanks returned to Greenleaf and the Senator was in and out of Josh's library weekly, still wearing, it appeared, the same suit and still dropping his ashes. Hadley listened to the two with avid interest, not because of what they said, but hoping for some word about Oliver Eubanks, the Senator's oldest son. Last December, Christmas day, Hadley had taken a good hard look at the man and made the most amazing decision of her life.

She had known, of course, there was an older Eubanks son, but she had never seen him. For the past years he had lived in Florence, never coming to Greenleaf. He was forty-one years old. He had been married and was divorced. Hadley learned all she could from Josh. He had been married to a "Montgomery girl, a lovely slender blond." There were problems, a drinking

problem, Josh thought. "It runs in that family."

"Still?" she asked. "Does he still drink?"

"I don't know. I've seen him take a drink or so."

Hadley first saw Oliver Eubanks at Josh's annual Christmas party. Which was another odd thing about Josh. He was essentially a loner but he went to parties. He said he went because he wanted to know what "people are thinking." Actually, he enjoyed going. The annual Christmas party was his way of returning engagements. The guests seemed to like the affairs. They all came, white Greenleaf, even though they did think he was a communist.

Both Rosanna and Hadley loathed the parties. Rosanna had her political reasons. It was wrong, she said, to waste all that money and time on a group of people who needed neither. Hadley on the other hand merely disliked the people, mainly because they disliked her or rather "disapproved." Together both Rosanna and Hadley laughed at the guests and arrogantly "pitied" them.

It was Rosanna who first met Oliver Eubanks. Across the room Hadley frankly stared at him. A thin, fairly tall blondish man, he had an odd mixture of

grace and cockiness. There was something about the way he stood, one hand fisted at his rib cage, the other holding a glass. There was a slight smile on his lips, a courtesy smile. It was a youthful face, but the complexion and eyes told another story. The eyes especially. They were both mischievous and melancholy, hazel with blond eyebrows. His bleached greying hair was carefully cut, a vanity the rest of him resisted. He was wearing an unpressed suit with a vest and he was perfectly at ease, even arrogant. He looked totally and absolutely a man who had come to terms with himself.

Hadley was entranced, and so was Rosanna. Rosanna was beaming and using her hands too much. She looked better than she ever had. Her blond hair fell from her face and she was wearing a red velvet dress which heightened her color. But she still had that high forehead and slightly gummy smile.

The latter reassured Hadley. She herself was not looking her best. Since Josh insisted she not look like a "tramp" (which meant the usual jeans), she had set out to look exactly that. She piled make-up all over her face, including false eyelashes and

white eye shadow. She found an ancient blue dress to which Mrs. Shorter had tackily attached lace hangings from the sleeves and down the neckline. "To cover up them big bosoms you're always trying to show everybody."

Even though Mrs. Shorter refused to say anything decent about Hadley's looks, she once said Hadley would be "all right" if she smiled more.

Hadley never smiled. She hated people who went around grinning at everybody. Instead she met people straight on, getting to the point immediately. She knew she was beautiful. Everybody at school said so. Possibly she was a bit too short and when she was thirteen she weighed too much. Now she was perfect. With the aid of Mrs. Shorter's measuring tape she had proclaimed herself so. She now weighed one hundred and one. Only one too many.

Hadley saw Rosanna laugh. She turned from the couple, furious, and left the room. She went into the library, slammed the door and flopped in the leather chair. If Rosanna was his type then she wanted no part of Oliver Eubanks. But he was attractive. He really was. He was the most attractive man she had ever seen

in Greenleaf. And if she hadn't gotten herself all dressed up like a clown she would have....

"...and a granddaughter of that say-unt Dr. Bickley."

Hadley heard the voices in the hall. Women's voices.

"I wonder if Josh knows."

"Lord knows."

"The child's just ba-yad. Really ba-yad."

"That ba-ad?"

"You heard about the swimming pool. She stripped in front of all those boys and Lawd knows what else."

"Poor Josh. At least he's got Rosanna, but that doesn't look too good right now either, does it?"

"Well, we better not talk. By the grace of God---"

"That's the truth. But I think if Lucy did anything like that I'd know."

"Josh should marry again. The other certainly wasn't very happy. I always thought Mahgret was manic...."

Hadley put her hands over her ears and stared wide-eyed into a void. She had never known her mother was "manic." No one had ever told her. She began to cry silently. She was terrified and hurt over what the women had said.

After awhile she looked up at Grandfather Bickley's portrait. He looked so sane there. His world was so sane. He could help her. She wished he were here so she could run to him and say: Help me. You're better than those women out there. You're good. And my mother was not manic.

She kept looking at the portrait. It was placed over a brass and glass cart holding vodka, scotch and Josh's favorite sour mash bourbon. Hadley often sat in the book-lined room, regarding the portrait, especially the eyes, which the artist, a bad one, saw as triangles. The face was vicissitudinous. One day it looked disapproving, which lately was most of the time, and other days there was much gentleness in the face as if he were trying to soothe, heal, speak from the picture. The eyes now were disapproving. He seemed to know the plans forming in her mind. He was warning her.

So what? she said to herself finally and rose from the chair. She went straight to the cart and poured two jiggers of bourbon into a glass. She stood holding the glass, gazing up at the man who was her grandfather.

The book he had written about his time in China was in the left bookcase. Hadley had read it. Once. It was a frightening book. The God in the book was frightening. The man in the book was frightening. How, she wondered, could a man, someone so close to her, give up everything, endure great loneliness, forsake two of his sons--all in the name of God?

Who was that God, she wondered. Who was the great He? He on High, Who left old people lonely, and sent mad mothers too soon to their graves, Who begot evil women who gossiped in halls about other peoples' progenies? Who?

She did not think He could ever be her God. And the emptiness was smothering. There was so much He about her. The town, the church, Grandfather Bickley. He. He. He. So she was merry when everyone else was sad and sad when everyone else was happy. His day, Christmas, put her in black despair.

There was a young rector who spoke to her class at school. He said true despair came only to those without belief. Was she in despair? Had her mother been in despair? Was she, Hadley, really bad?

She did not know the answers. Nor did she know why she did the things she did. Mainly to show off, she reasoned, and she liked the attention. The pranks were impulsive. She was wild as a deer, they said, and she liked the comparison. The very thought and the bourbon coursing through her now caused her to go about the room hitting at pieces of furniture. Then, glass in hand and laughing, she flopped back in the chair, placing an arched foot on the footstool in front of her. Her eyes filled with tears again. Damn those women!

But the bourbon was very good. She smiled up at Grandfather Bickley. You are my conscience-- and my guilt, she said to herself.

Guilt. Usually when she thought of it she put her hands to the side of her head and tried to force other thoughts. It was difficult to do sometimes. There was such a persistence, and then when she couldn't bring other thoughts panic came. She was unable to breathe and her heart pounded inside her and her throat closed so that she couldn't swallow and all of it was worse than the thoughts of madness, and God and guilt.

Sometimes she was able to laugh at it all. As now. But when the panic came there was only terror.

She remembered her New England grandfather, a terrible man. She and Rosanna had visited him once. She was seven and Rosanna eleven. It was shortly after her mother died. They boarded the plane in Atlanta. Josh saw them off, two young girls dressed alike in dark blue coats, and brass buttons. They were on their way to their grandmother's funeral. Grandmother Lyman. Josh could not leave the newspaper. He said he could not. So they went alone, frightened of what would meet them in the dark cavernous other side.

What met them was an old woman in a long brown coat. Around her neck was a fur piece that Rosanna remarked looked "chewed upon." The woman looked brown all over, brown-gray hair, brown eyes, sallow skin. She said little as an aged taxi driver made his way through the streets of Boston. She did say Hadley had the Lyman looks. Lyman was their mother's maiden name. All the Lymans had dark coloring, she said. She said nothing of Rosanna's Bickley fairness.

They arrived at a tall brick house. Inside an

elderly man, tall and slender, with carefully groomed white hair and nervous dark eyes, met them on the stairway. When he saw the girls he appeared to want to retreat, go back up the stairs. And Hadley held back, sensing the man's dilemma.

The woman in brown introduced her and Rosanna. They were his granddaughters, she said. He said: "How do you do?" and continued down the stairs. These were the only words he spoke during their entire stay in Boston. The woman in brown said he was "grieving." Hadley and Rosanna saw him at the funeral, standing tall in the almost empty Episcopal church. They never saw him again. From some place they learned he had never approved of his daughter's marriage to Josh. He left his money to his son's children, never mentioning Hadley or Rosanna. His legacy to them was one sentence written to his daughter years ago:

"Nothing good ever came out of a warm climate."

Thereafter New England was lost to Hadley. Rosanna had had her years at Vassar and, externally at least, she had escaped the South. She hated it. Even the so-called affluence had made the people worse.

"Faulkner characters," she said, "all dressed up in Brooks Brothers suits." She hated everything the South stood for, if it stood for anything anymore. Josh had written and he argued continuously with Rosanna that the South wasn't all that different from any other place nowadays. "It might as well be Indiana."

Hadley raised her eyes to Grandfather Bickley's portrait again. The face was blurred. You're saying I'm mad, aren't you? And drunk? She began to giggle. Yes, he was disapproving, angry like his God's wrath. Hadley lifted her glass.

"Here's to me. Here's to Indiana. Nothing good ever came out of a warm climate!" She lifted the glass higher. "Except me! Hooray."

"Why Indiana?"

Hadley jumped from the chair, the bourbon spilled on to her blue dress.

Oliver Eubanks was standing only three feet away. A ray of sun struck his face. He has long eyelashes, she observed, and he's laughing at me. She felt her face turn crimson with rage. Nobody laughed at

Hadley Bickley. He had caught her talking to herself.
And drinking.

He extended his hand. "I'm Oliver Eubanks,"
he said in a soft voice. Hadley stared at the hand.
He had long fingers. She marked the blue veins and
the bleached hair at the beginning of the fingers.
He was very tan. But the long fingers spoke of a
weakness, an artistic sense perhaps. With all his
arrogance the man was vulnerable.