

CHAPTER 5

There was no desk available in the newsroom. So Hadley was assigned a makeshift one, a table wedged in between a desk and a wall. An ancient high typewriter was placed on the table. And behind her were eight teletype machines methodically tapping out the evil rhymes of the day's events.

She was to write obituaries, said the managing editor, a greying ruddy-faced man whom all the reporters referred to as Zeb. Each morning, said Zeb, Hadley was to call the funeral homes for information about the day's dead.

"We're still a country newspaper," he explained. "Your father says there're only three times most people get their names in the paper, when they're born, when they marry and when they die. He wants something about every life you end here." Everybody has a fact in his life, he said. "Everybody."

Hadley instantly saw she was resented in the room. She was Josh's daughter. And Josh dominated. He was downstairs in a book-lined office writing daily and Sunday editorials. Rarely did he enter the newsroom. Instead reporters and editors went to his office, terrified. Even though Josh had never fired anybody in his entire life he was still a presence.

His temper was well known. Reporters were schooled in that before they ever arrived in Greenleaf. They did not know Josh had never fired anyone, that he wouldn't, and more accurately, couldn't. Eventually the reporters, if they stayed long enough, came to know him. He was respected and even liked. After a while.

But Hadley was not. And she saw it. She felt the eyes of the other reporters studying her.

eventually disliking her because one day this room, all the machinery, the building itself would be half hers. What they didn't know was she did not want any of it. Yet they stared and she tried to cover her face with her left hand as she wrote:

"Mrs. Maimie Ruth Jordan, 89, a life-long resident of Ocaloco, Route two, died last night following a lengthy...."

The newsroom was too small and there were no windows. Squeezed in as she was plus the sound of the teletypes, telephones, typewriters and talk, Hadley found herself unable to concentrate. She tried to study the form obituaries but her mind was a blur and soon she felt the claustrophobia. The feeling was like smothering. It began with a slight quickening of the heart and then a crescendo of beating until she was drenched in her own perspiration, wanting to scream yet afraid she would.

"John Dean Declares He Told President All..."
"Mrs. Ella Cordrey, 42, died last night." Eyes. Hatred. The black reporter, a summer "interne," talked like a radio announcer. He had buried his southern accent with the ascendance of street language.

But there was no hate in his eyes for her, not like the eyes of the white reporter from Chicago and the girl from California. They liked to kid around with the black reporter, showing how "liberal" they were. The black reporter kidded back but Hadley could see it was an act. Everything he did was structured, a strain.

Hadley ignored all of them. She had to. When she finished her deaths (with the single fact) she handed them to the city editor and left. She said nothing to anyone. She didn't want to be there. She hadn't asked to be there. She didn't like the people. And she didn't ask them to like her.

Besides, she had to think, scheme. She had to think up some way to see Oliver Eubanks again. She did take a few golf lessons, but she was bored by the game and eventually quit. She played tennis occasionally and she swam daily in hopes she might somehow run into him. But she never saw him, and she was enraged at Josh. How could she ever see him, stuck away as she was, in that windowless room, away from everybody except politicians and local women who conducted "drives"?

"Hey-lo, hon," the mortician's voice greeted her daily. It was as if he were beckoning her with his voice. She had seen him once. He had sallow skin, yellow teeth and a golden hair piece, which he wore sweeping into a wave about his ear. He wore blue serge suits with dandruff on the shoulders.

"Gotcha a goodie this time," he drawled over the phone. "Old lady Green out at Eulaville passed. Got one hunert and two living kin and she gone be cremated. Ashes gone be put in a pot and one of them daughter's gone put the pot up on the mantle. Hah. Hah. Hah. Hah."

"Do we have to list all of the survivors?" Hadley asked.

"Watcha do with yerself all day when you aint writing up the dead?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Betcha I could show you a thing or two." He roared obscenely. "Wanta see it?"

She said she did not.

Aunt Mary's daughter from Atlanta, Julia, had also come to live with them. Aunt Mary wrote Josh that their situation in Atlanta was "desperate."

Julia could find no work. Atlanta had been hit hard by the recession. Aunt Mary would appreciate it if Julia could live in the house for the summer. She herself would have to take care of the baby.

It was a sad household Hadley returned to each day. Pregnant Rosanna, the screeching television with its "news," which Rosanna listened to until early morning hours. Once Hadley, annoyed by the constant sound, said Rosanna's baby would probably crawl right into a television set as soon as it was born. "And sit there for the rest of its life."

"How come you wanta say a thang like that for?" asked Mrs. Shorter. "You oughtta be nice to your sister now. Isn't no fun having no baby."

Mrs. Shorter was worse than ever. She had taken a very dim view of Julia's living in the house.

"Don't hang up her clothes. Just puts em ever-which-away. And if you wanta know the truth she don't never wash her underclothes. Haven't seen nothing hanging up thar."

Julia was given a job in the advertising department of the newspaper. She and Hadley drove to work together. Hadley was silent most of the time on

these drives, but Julia apparently found it necessary to thank:

"I sure-ly do appreciate this," she said over and over, whether in reference to the job or the ride Hadley did not know. If she wasn't thanking, she was feeling sorry for somebody. She felt sorry for Richard Nixon, for all the burglars who were caught, the young men who had to go to jail, for their wives, children, for Rosanna. Julia pitied the whole world, and, Hadley suspected, mainly herself.

The girl did not fit in the house. Mrs. Shorter gave her the room on the third floor, a pine-panelled one-time playroom and now guest room. She sat in the one chair in the room, a rocking chair, and picked at her stockings, always in deep thought, consternation actually, as if she were amazed she was still alive. Rarely did she venture downstairs and she was forever having to be fetched, a duty that sent Mrs. Shorter into red rages.

"Look at my legs, just look at em," cried Mrs. Shorter. "Full of knots and her expecting me to go up three flights of stairs ever night, ever night the Lord put me here. Just feel them legs."

"She's shy," Hadley said. "She thinks she's supposed to stay up there, not interfere."

Mrs. Shorter studied that for a while.

"If you ask me I think she's crazy, plain right down crazy. That mama done ruint her that way. That's what."

"God this house." Hadley put her hands to her ears. It was the worst June she had ever spent. And she was missing people. Boys. She saw no one except the reporters in the newsroom and Julia. She refused to answer the telephone when anyone called. Her only thought was Oliver Eubanks. She subtracted her age from his. He was twenty-four years older than she. She didn't care. She liked older men. She liked older people. She always had. Her peers bored her. Because they didn't like her. Older people, older men especially, always liked her. But then so did the young ones for that matter.

She dreamed about Oliver Eubanks. Once she dreamed he was in bed beside her. He was saying, "Hadley, Hadley, Hadley," over and over. She liked the way he said her name. He spoke a lovely A.

"Say it again," she said in her sleep. But when

she awoke she was only clutching a pillow and the hurt was as real as the scarlet dawn. She tossed the pillow and lay there watching the world become red as wine.

She could hear the whippoorwill. "Death bird," they said. She had believed one only heard them at night. But she was hearing one now as the dawn faded from crimson to white. Another bright June day. Alone.

One Sunday she had four jiggers of bourbon and decided to talk to Rosanna. She had to talk to somebody. She didn't care if Rosanna laughed at her or not. Probably if she hadn't had the bourbon she wouldn't have said anything, especially to Rosanna.

"But you don't even know him, Hadley."

"Yes I do."

"Have you seen him? Have you?" Rosanna frowned at her, her skirt stretched incredibly tight against her risen belly. Even her breathing had grown louder. Her face was thinner and her mouth and eyes sensuously lush.

"No."

"You've been drinking. You've been drinking again."

"So?"

"My god, what are you? Sixteen, seventeen?"

"Eighteen next month."

"By the time you're twenty you'll be raving in a ward somewhere."

"Not from drinking." And she wanted to cry.

"I'm on a search," she said, not knowing herself what she meant. God, she was drunk.

"For what?"

"For me, my sanity." She fingered the arm of the chair. She had never noticed the ridges. She sighed heavily and her breath came in jerks. She refused to cry in front of Rosanna. "I want to know me. Oliver Eubanks knows those answers. I know he does. Isn't he divinely attractive?"

Rosanna stared at her.

"I knew the first time I saw him. He's--he's like me, like the night. If I can't have him, I don't want anyone. Ever."

"He's too damn old."

"No one's too old. Or too young. You know that?"

Rosanna heaved herself from the sofa and went to the cart of bottles. She poured herself a chaste glass

of sherry. Hadley watched her, envying her. She should be carrying a baby, not Rosanna. Rosanna was not the type. She looked foolish.

"He's---" Rosanna stood with her back to Hadley. "There's no place for the Oliver Eubanks--not in this world. Not now. What is he here for?"

"For me." Hadley giggled and she could see the giggle irritated Rosanna.

"He doesn't stand for anything. Contrary to the saying--" Rosanna turned-- "'The locusts do have a king.'" She smiled to herself. "He's a drone. Irrelevant."

"For Christsakes, Rosanna! What have you ever done? What do you stand for? Just a bunch of worn out theories. You're just jealous because you've made such a mess of everything." She hit the arm of the chair. "Go find your brooding self again and change the world! Who cares?"

Rosanna's face was crimson. "The total little cracker, aren't we?"

"I'm not the cracker." Hadley raised one eyebrow and pointedly looked at Rosanna's stomach.

Rosanna returned the gaze, then she slowly placed

a lock of hair behind her right ear. It was a battle gesture. But then she began smoothing the hair with her open palm as if her mind had been suddenly changed.

Hadley wanted another drink. She went to the cart and poured one.

"What are you trying to do--keep up with Oliver Eubanks? He's an alcoholic, you know."

Hadley did not look up. "Of course, he isn't." She wanted to turn then, go to Rosanna, beg her. Tell me, she wanted to say. Tell me. Tell me.

"Have you been seeing him?"

"No."

"My god, you mean you've seen him only once--that day here--and you're---" Rosanna tossed her hands in the air--- "'madly in love.'" She plopped back on the sofa, her stomach high and comic. "It's either madness or---"

Hadley looked at her, just stood looking. She felt naked, stupid. Rosanna was the meanest woman she had ever known. The whole town thought she, Hadley, was mean. But they hadn't met Rosanna yet, the real Rosanna.

"Do you hate me?" Hadley asked. Her voice was very soft.

Rosanna did not blink an eye. "I don't particularly like you. But I care. I care."

"Care," repeated Hadley and she laughed. The laugh went as soon as it had come. "The language of the young is unbecoming to you, Rosanna. You're too old. It doesn't go with your large stomach. Care. Love. Who gives a damn?" But she doesn't like me, she was thinking. My own sister. She doesn't like me.

"You give a damn," said Rosanna. "You're desperate for love, of any kind." She rose from the sofa and clumsily walked to the door. "Watch your step, sister mine. Cool it. Oliver Eubanks is a male and a middle-aged one. The worst kind." She moved her long fingers in the air. "Love is a woman's word. Remember that, too."

Hadley stood gazing at the closed door. You're jealous, she muttered to herself. But soon the television in the wicker room began to blare forth.

"President Nixon...."

Only then did she begin to cry.

Events happen when one least expects them. It was just another Tuesday, and as usual Hadley approached

the day with resignation. She hated her job and besides Julia had made her late. Hadley sat behind the wheel of the car sighing and staring at the sloping green lawns on either side of the driveway. Julia had lost her purse. Every day Julia lost something: her glasses, notebooks, pens. One day she lost her shoes. And Hadley finally lost her patience. She blew the horn and angrily called out:

"Let's go! Julia, for godsakes!"

Julia finally came with her big black purse. She was breathless. She was sorry. She was so sorry.

"And I sure-ly do appreciate your waiting. I sure-ly do."

When Hadley got to her desk there was a note on her typewriter. Frances Marion Eubanks had died in New Orleans. He was the Senator's brother. He had made a name of sorts for himself in medical circles. Because he was a native of Greenleaf the city editor planned a front page story. The Eubanks had requested a reporter to come to the Eubanks' house.

"To come to the house?" Even the arrogance made no difference. Who cared? Here in her hands, this torn piece of copy paper with typing on it was her passport, something she had waited for all these months, it seemed.

She was ecstatic. She told the city editor she would go immediately and then she ran to the ladies' room to look at herself. She wanted to reassure herself of something, wanted to know if it was really so. Her face would tell her. She often went to mirrors when she wanted to know the truth. It was as if she were looking at someone else.

What she saw pleased her. She was very tan and her dark hair shone from the light above her head. She was wearing a white knit dress that clung to her figure. Josh would not permit jeans or pants at work. She was so excited her hands were actually trembling and her legs felt weak. She put both hands to her cheeks and lightly pressed them. Her hands were cold. Let him be there, she said to herself. Please God. Just once. Give me something I want.

The Eubanks' house was a landmark in Coke County, though Hadley herself preferred her own house and grounds. Both were along the countryside and still unharmed by the county's seemingly endless developments, shopping centers, housing projects, hamburger "havens," most of which were slowly going to seed.

"Tomorrow's slums," Josh had said when the developments were new. He was correct.

Hadley turned into the Eubanks' driveway. In the distance was the house, an impressive structure, Georgian with dark green shutters. Yet there was something of the nouveaux about the place. It was Rosanna who had first divined this with her eye for such things. Just what it was that stated the fact was not easily defined. The house was respectably Georgian and the grounds were perfectly kept with acres of boxwoods, crepe myrtle, cedars and magnolias. There were formal gardens, mostly green. And hidden from sight were the cutting gardens.

Perhaps it was the very perfection that cried the new. The house was built in the late nineteen twenties. It shouted money and pretention: "Behold, how splendid we are," said it. "You see, we ride, we swim in our swimming pool, we stroll through our gardens. Our rooms are large and filled with many expensive things. They mirror ourselves. We have many servants to keep us this way. We are richer than you."

In sum, it was the "new South."

There were no Mrs. Shorters. Instead there were smart young black girls dressed in black uniforms and perky caps and aprons. There was also the black

butler, a far cry from Isaiah. The man here wore a black coat and when he drove a chauffeur's hat and uniform. He, too, was perfection: manners, bearing, voice. He was a cliché, an invention of the Southern white mind, a walking uniform with hands. His name was Moses.

Yes, the Eubanks were very splendid indeed. But inside the house there were too many plants, too much bad art. The rooms were formal and cold. The oriental rugs were thick and new, the furniture mainly reproduction, expensive but reproductions all the same. The portraits were done by name society artists. The walls were advertisements, to show their lineage and taste, not affection.

In Greenleaf the Eubanks were tolerated for their "good works." Mainly, though, they were envied because of their money, so consequently disliked. Senator Eubanks' father made his first money during World War I. Before the war he borrowed two thousand dollars from the Greenleaf National Bank and single-handedly started the Eubanks Machinery. He managed to survive the depression. But during World War II his assets tripled and his sons, the senator and the doctor, became rich.

Mrs. Eubanks was genteel poverty, as she liked to explain it. Those who knew her best remembered things differently. She had other qualities, first among them a raging ambition. It didn't matter that the Senator had lost most of his hair by the time he was thirty or that he was shorter than she or that he had a slight hill accent.

She saw the dollar signs and the makings of a politician. The accent could easily be taken care of. She sent him to elocution school--in secret. After five years of marriage "Horse" Eubanks, as he had been called at Auburn University, became Senator Eubanks and the name "Horse" was buried forever. Mrs. Eubanks became a Washington "hostess."

Now all that had vanished and there was only defeat and bitterness. She was "home to stay" and she loathed every single day the sun rose. Even so, the town of Greenleaf treated her as if she were royalty sprung up amongst them. After all, she had talked with kings and they had only talked to one another. Behind her back they said what they really felt: hatred.

There were only a few she smiled upon. The others merely aspired and fawned. Scarcely anyone in Greenleaf

had seen inside the Eubanks' house. Mainly she entertained for those from out of town, from Washington and New York. On these occasions she had no one from Greenleaf, not even Josh. She did not approve of Josh. He had no style, at least the style she sought in people.

"Lonely sits the head of England," said Rosanna quoting inaccurately as she always did. She was speaking of Mrs. Eubanks. They glimpsed her one day lunching alone beside her pool.

"Lobster for the few and stew for the crew," said Hadley. "And that is a correct quote." But that was before she met Oliver Eubanks. He was different, she told herself, different than his mother, different than the Senator and certainly different than anyone in Greenleaf. The fact he had escaped Greenleaf was one of his more endearing charms, as Hadley saw it. He had not only escaped Greenleaf, he had escaped the country. And escape of any kind had become an obsession with Hadley, more importantly the escape from Greenleaf. The broader country did not worry her at all.

Hadley continued the drive up the gravel driveway, noting the magnolias and crape myrtle lining the way. Only once had she been inside the house. That was a year ago when she went with Josh to call on the Senator. They entered through a breakfast room window low enough to step into. They were met by the Senator, so they could avoid Mrs. Eubanks. It was then Hadley noted the things in the house and absorbed its pretensions.

She parked the car and with her heart beating frenetically she pushed the brass door bell. It had a musical sound, two notes.