

Chapter #2

I'm not going to tell you all the unfortunate things Arthur underwent his first months in Connecticut. We're pretty much a loyal family and don't particularly like exposing all our tragedies. Besides, I was only able to obtain a few of Arthur's letters because I didn't want anyone to know I was obtaining them. They're pretty important ones, but they don't explain some of the torture we suffered on his behalf. You know. If you had a brother you wouldn't want to be going around telling everybody some of the things that, secretly, you'd feel like dying over. It's just something that's nicer to keep quiet.

Anyway, it was very peculiar not having Arthur in the house. To me it was as if somebody had died and there were pathetic reminders of the person everywhere- a shoe, Arthur's cub scout uniform, an old rope. Mother, I think, missed him

more than anyone else. And after the third day she began waiting for the mailman to hear some "word." But it wasn't until the end of the week that the word finally arrived. It was written in pencil and on slick theme paper and since it was the first time Arthur had ever written a letter home, there was something sad to me about the "Dear Mother and Dad." But it was the rest of the letter that caused us worry. In a jerky scrawl he had written:

...I got hear alright. Mr. Sykes said he called you all. That policeman was real nice and said he'd call too. Did he? I had five cheese sandwiches on the train. My roommate whets the bed every night. Hes name is Bob Leyden and he comes from a place called Marble Head, Massichusits. Mr. Woodford, he's my English teacher, comes in at nights and tries to wake up Bob, but he just goes on and whets anyway. It's real hard hear and we have to wash windows on Saturday-- everybody does. Mr. Sykes said window washing can be fun, but it isn't. I've gotten to know a lot of the other boys but nobody likes my roommate. And you know why! Wish I was home and there only 84 days until Christmas. Well, I gotta go.

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Sincerely,
Arthur

P.S. They think I talk funny up hear.

It was the spelling of the word, "whets", that seemed to excite Mother more than anything else. "Certainly, he knows better than that," she said. But the next morning I heard her telling Mrs. Johnston over the phone that she had heard from Arthur and that it was too bad Arthur had to get a roommate who was suffering from--and she whispered the word, pronouncing each syllable, "en-u-re-sis." I supposed she was talking about wetting the bed, but I was too embarrassed to ask. That night, though, we all sat in the library because Mother said she wanted

us to hear what she had written Arthur. And in the letter she told Arthur to be nice to his poor roommate, that he was probably just nervous being away from home for the first time and she was sure young Bob Leyden hated his "Difficulty" just as much as anyone else and probably more.

The only thing about it was, everybody in town started asking me if we'd heard from Arthur. See, nobody else in Ashton hardly has ever gone up north to school before. We heard what Mrs. Findlay said. She said she thought it was terrible to send a boy that young to school and she wouldn't send a son of hers that far away from her for anything. Her son is Jack Findlay and he's got the biggest Adams Apple in Ashton. He got it two years ago when it just sort of came rising up. Anyway, I saw Jack going into the drug store and he spoke. Usually he doesn't. "What's old Arthur doing up there?" he asked me and I guess he thought I was insane or ~~something~~ because I started blushing and practically fell over the weighing scales trying to get away. I mean I didn't want to stand there and tell Jack Findlay about Arthur's letter and about that boy wetting the bed. Mother said for me just to say: "Why, yes. We had a lovely letter from Arthur and he's doing just fine." But people, especially boys, can read your mind sometimes and I don't care whether Mother feels sorry for Arthur's roommate or or not. I think he's HORRIBLE!

Then, to make things worse, we got another letter from Arthur--right away. It worried us no end and I didn't exactly understand all of it. Mother said she didn't either, but Father said he did and not to worry about it. It also was written in

pencil and the envelope was dirty round the edges. It looked like one of those letters Velvet gets from her husband that's in jail. Mother started reading it out loud:

...Well, I guess you better send me the money to come home. There's one boy that's already left and his Mother came and got him. This is a terrible place and I hate, HATE my roommate. He says nobody in Georgia wears shoes and he bets all you all do is pick cotton all the time. I hate him and I have to keep the windows open all the time.

They put Saul and Peter in all the food and the spinach has got sand in it. Also they're making me take reading lessons in the afternoon because they say I never did learn to read properly. This one teacher said right out in front of everybody that hardly anybody in the South ever learns to read properly. I can pack up and be gone from here soon as the money comes.

I gotta go.

Sincerely,
Arthur

When Mother finished reading she looked up at us.

Father was smiling with his horn-rimmed glasses on and he didn't look up. He just kept tapping his fingers on the arm of the red leather chair.

"Well, what do you think?" Mother asked.

"What's Saul and Peter?" I asked. "What's he talking about?" I really wanted to know.

Mother glanced at me. "I don't know. Allison, what is he talking about?"

"Oh, nothing," Father said. "Boy's talk." He still didn't look up.

But I kept looking at ^{father} ~~him~~ because even though ~~father is~~ ^{he is} fifty-two he happens to know a great deal about boys talk. He went to Sewanee Military Academy and also the University of

Virginia. He was a holy terror at the University of Virginia which, as you can imagine, is a thing we don't particularly like to speak of now. ~~Father was rather late reaching the Age of Transgression~~ also.

"He does seem unhappy, Allison," Mother said.

Father looked up then. "Oh, he'll get over it."

"I don't blame him," I said. I looked down at my shoes.

"They don't think we even wear shoes down here."

"I'll have to write him tonight," Mother said. "Of course he can't come home! How silly!"

"It's pitiful, I think," I said, but nobody heard me.

Mother should have written Arthur a nicer letter than she did. She wrote him to remember he was a Whitfield and that all Whitfields "stuck things out." She said as far back as she knew every member of the family---on both sides---had "stuck things out." She said for Arthur "to get some courage now" and say his prayers and study hard. "Whining is never attractive in a young man." She also said that Father had said to pay no attention whatsoever about what the boys said about Georgia. "It's a fine state and, of course, you know that as well as anyone." She said for Arthur also to eat what was before him as he had always been taught to do. At the end she was pretty nice. She said all three of us were counting on him and that it wouldn't be too long until Christmas.

But then this kindly tone from her didn't last very long. Arthur hadn't been in school more than a month when we started receiving sleek little envelopes from the headmaster, Mr. Sykes. Mr. Sykes never used the word, "I"; but always "We." And it seemed

every letter began either "we fear" or "we are sorry" or "we believe." Anyway, Mr. Sykes and "they" quite soon decided Arthur had to go back a grade. "Arthur just doesn't seem to have had the fundamental training some of the other boys have had," wrote Mr. Sykes. We were astonished and, naturally, this caused no end of talk. We were always having to sit down in the living room and discuss it. "He just can't keep up, that's all," Mother said. "He's just not trying. He never has tried." And she kept saying this over and over as other letters from the headmaster arrived those first few months Arthur was at school. Boring. Boring. That's all we ever talked about---Arthur and school. Arthur and school. Even so, I knew how exceedingly horrible it was for Arthur, being put back and being humiliated in front of all those northerners. I decided I would never go to school in Connecticut, even if they beat me over the head and tried to drag me there.

Arthur, though, never wrote us about being put back a grade. He didn't write too much at all, and when he did it was mostly about his roommate. Bob Leyden's mother had been to school to visit and she was very rich and talked like an Englishman:

□ ...I wanted to discuss with her about you know what. But she went poking around the room like I wasn't there. I just sat there on the bed and she never said one thing to me except "how-do-you-do." Then she and Bob kept talking about his bed, his desk and his clothes. She wanted to know if the other boys were still wearing his clothes. Nobody has ever worn anything of his except this one boy and you would've thought he'd killed somebody or something the way Bob kept shouting around about it. □

Every afternoon we have to go down in the basement and sing "Yayzoo! Joy of Man's Desires." It's this very hard song by Bock and it's for the Christmas concert we're giving. People come from all over the north to here it. I nearly passed out because the music teacher made everyone of us sing something by ourselves to

test us. He made me stand up and face the wall and sing Onward Christian Soldiers. I'm base. I gotta go.

Sincerely,
Arthur

P.S. It snowed today. Algebra is terrible.

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Mother felt quite pleased about this letter. "I think he's adjusting better now. Don't you Allison? It really makes me feel so much happier."

START

Father started to say something, but I said, "Let's not talk about it any more." ~~You know how I felt, don't you?~~ ^{Frankly,} (I was getting very bored talking about nothing but Arthur all the time. I mean I like Arthur ~~and all~~, but I also had my own down-trodden life to think about, especially my relationships in connection with Mother and Father. This was an exceedingly trying period in my life. With Arthur gone, ~~and all~~ I was the only one left to be chastened. I hate ~~8?~~ -times like that. ~~Don't you?~~ There you are, like some slave! And there they are, two of them! I think I'm adopted.

Well, practically the only thing I did in November was to sit around with Mother and Father and their friends all the time. Everybody at school had gotten up this new thing in which they were forced to go home as soon as school was over to get their homework done. It was also cold in Georgia, too. No snow, just sunny cold with all the branches bare. Very depressing. Thanksgiving came on and we didn't have anybody over to take Arthur's place. Boring. I threw up afterwards.

The only good thing that happened was Miss ^{white} ~~Price~~, my teacher

I wrote Arthur about, got through with her operation and made us write this theme. We had to write it in class and we could write it on anything we wanted to. I wrote it on Arthur's joint. You see, Arthur is inflicted with just one joint in his little finger. He inherited it from my Grandfather Whitfield. Father is the same way, too. Miss ^{white} Price said it was a fine example of inheritance and showed it to all these other teachers. It was very immature, but I received many compliments---not from anybody that mattered, only teachers. Miss ^{white} Price said maybe I was going to be a newspaperman like my uncle. ~~Maybe.~~ } 8?

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Mother, ~~though~~, was more interested in having these people out to the farm for a high ball than she was in Arthur's joint. As I said, it was an exceedingly trying time. Mother and Father are always inviting people to come out to the farm and all I do is sit and pass the olives and nuts. I suppose I have turned out a tremendous disappointment to my father because I'm really not very partial to the farm. Even as a child I thought it was most boring just to stand there and stare at the cows. I don't think Father knows exactly how I feel and I wouldn't say it out loud for anything because as I've told you Father has always enjoyed a love of the land. Also my grandfather Whitfield---he's dead.

Really, I think Father is more pleased with being a farmer than he is a banker. He's president of the Ashton National Bank but he doesn't own it or anything. The Ewings own it. They even own the Episcopal Church. But all Father does is sit behind this desk that has nothing on it and then at three

o'clock he beats it out to the farm. They've started selling pine trees for lumber and rearing Black Angus cows, the main thing Father likes, though, is quail hunting. He goes tromping all over the place shooting up stuff. It's pitiful.

But the reason we're able to have the farm at all is, see, my great-grandfather Whitfield, which is way back, used to have his plantation out there. The chimney from it is still there. The northerners came down and pretty much raped it up during the War Between the States. They raped up the whole South, as you know. It was the tragic decade and we aren't very partial to the north to this day. They didn't burn our house, though, and the only reason they didn't was because my great-grandmother Whitfield defied them. We get a great deal of our courage from Great-Grandmother Whitfield. It was my Grandmother Whitfield that burned the house down. She and this colored boy were cleaning out the chimneys and the roof caught on fire. It was a tragedy, but that's how we got our house in town, thank goodness. After the plantation house burned, Grandmother and Grandfather moved into the house we're living in now. It's old, too, and this man from Charleston wrote it up in a book he wrote. We were exceedingly poor in those days. Carpetbaggers and the north wouldn't give us any money to recover. They still hate us, the north. I know.

Anyway, Mother and Father built this kind of cabin out on the farm and they're always going out there and having people in for a high ball. The only time I ever liked the farm was when Arthur and I used to play War Between the States with the Miller children. Mr. Miller oversees the farm and he has five children---Herman, Nadine, Bertha, Roy and Oscar. Everyone

of them has white hair and white eyelashes.

If you knew the Millers you'd never feel as sorry for anyone in all your life. Velvet calls them "white trash." They live in this house with linoleum on the floor and there's only one picture on the wall. It's of Nadine's and them's little brother that died. They took a picture of him in the casket with all the flowers ~~and all~~ and that's the only picture they have on the wall. I guess it isn't very nice to stare at it, but the Millers never seem to mind too much.

One time when I was a child Nadine Miller asked me to come to their house for dinner. ~~I was overjoyed because~~ only I was invited. Arthur was having difficulties learning his Cub Scout pledge and had to stay locked up in this room until he learned it. So just I was able to go. Velvet was out with us helping Mother and she got simply furious because I didn't want to wear shoes or a belt to the Miller's house. See, none of them ever wore shoes or belts and I didn't think it was very nice of me to go walking in with them on either, so I left them in my room.

I went walking out of the house and I hadn't gotten to the porch before Velvet started yelling: "Felicia! Where you thank you goin' without yo shoes?" She was very angry.

"I don't want to wear any," I told her.

"And yo belt! You looks wore'n them Miller trash!"

"They aren't trash, Velvet," I said.

"You go on and put yo clothes on," she told me. "If you don't I'm gwina tell yo mama!"

I went on back and put on my shoes and Velvet tied my belt

so tight I thought she was ~~going to choke me.~~ *trying to kill me!*

"Don't see how come you mama letchu go down there no how."

"Because they want me to know all kinds of people," I said. I was mad at Velvet and what I said was true. My father is very partial to Arthur and knowing all kinds of people. He said he didn't ever want us to grow up being hankty. Father knows all kinds of people and he's exceedingly nice to everyone, even white trash. You'd like my father. People are all the time liking him. ~~I told you about his award and everything, didn't I?~~ *8?*

Anyway, I wore my shoes and belt until I got half way down this red-clay road, and then I hid them on the edge of the cotton field. When I got to the Millers I was just like they were. My toenails were filthy with red clay and I even put some dirt on my forehead. We went to the gasoline station and bought these huge great bottles of orange and then we played SPIT.

What you do is, you sit up on this little hill on the highway and try to spit on all the cars that passes by. The one that hits the most--wins. Herman always won. That was the most enjoyable thing almost I've ever done. But then later we had an experience with some colored children. They kept calling Herman names. I don't know where they came from; they just sort of came out of the woods.

We went back and told Mrs. Miller about it. Mrs. Miller is this sandy-haired, tired-looking lady and she asked Herman what the colored children had called him.

"White biscuit," Herman said. You see, in Georgia we have white biscuits and graham biscuits and when you think about it a white biscuit is not a very pretty thing to look like.

Mrs. Miller, though, didn't seem to think it was so bad. "Whar your brains, Herman?" she asked him. "You know better'n to keep up fuss with Niggers." That last word is a word my mother and father will not permit Arthur and I to say. The only reason I even put it in is to show you how the Millers talk. They say things like "Whar" for "Where" and they're always putting ^{R's} in words where there aren't supposed to be any. I don't know where they get that kind of talk. ~~It's~~ quite peculiar.

Well, then this horrifyingly embarrassing thing happened. Mrs. Miller was just standing there on the porch with her arms crossed and then without smiling or anything she said, "Zip yerself up, Herman. Yer privates is showing!"

Nadine started giggling and I nearly dropped dead. Herman started getting red all over and then kind of turned and zipped. Mrs. Miller didn't say anything else. She just went on back in the house and Herman went whistling off down the road somewhere.

For dinner we had turnip greens, side meat and "chittlings." I'm not very partial to that kind of dinner and I had hoped we were going to have a kind of picnic with sandwiches and everything. We didn't, we just sat at this table by the stove. Nadine told me that the green plates we were using came from the gasoline station, ~~where Mr. Miller buys gas.~~ I said they certainly were pretty, and they were, in a way. Nadine was

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terribly proud of them.

But before we ate, Mr. Miller said we all had to thank the "Lard." Mr. Miller is this silent man most of the time, but I noticed he talked just like Mrs. Miller. I bowed my head and kind of glanced one^{er} to see if anybody else was. They all were, except Mr. Miller. He just sat there with his eyes closed. He has a quite thin face and a very large nose that is red.

"Lard---" he said, "yer been good to us. You done put food in front of us agin. We aint ~~dearvin~~^{desarvin'} Lard. Oscar here done broke a urange bottle on the highway and Nadine sassed her Mama this mornin'. But, Lard, we're gonna try. We're gonna be better folks come dark. Thank ye, Lard. Amen."

I don't know why I thought that was kind of pitiful. The Millers are not Episcopalians. They go to a church down the road, but I thought there was something quite sorrowful about all of them sitting around thanking the Lord when they didn't even have everyday shoes to wear. ~~Nadine says she's got a pair, but she only likes to wear them on Sunday. Nadine is about my age, so I told her she could have mine because I wasn't very partial to wearing shoes anyway. I was going to give them to her but our feet didn't fit. Anyway, don't you think that was kind of sorrowful of them to be thanking the Lord and everything?~~ I told Mother about it and she said she didn't think there was anything sorrowful about it at all. She said she thought ~~it~~ was "lovely and decent."

But, as I said, all this happened when I was a child. Now the Millers---I mean Nadine and Herman---won't hardly have a thing to do with me. Herman's Arthur's age and he helps his father out. They talk sometimes, but Nadine, ^{who is my age,} started getting this very bad skin and all she does is sit around and pout with lipstick on. I always wave to her, but she just flips her hand and goes on frowning. I think people are much more fun when they're children. ~~[Don't you?]~~ - 8?

^{Anyway}
~~Well,~~ I just put all that in to kind of show you what it's like at the farm. There's nothing much for me to do out there now except either go in the kitchen and talk to Velvet or sit around and watch Mother and them drink their high ball. She simply adores ^{to} have me there to pass the nuts. But I get bored to distraction, so that Saturday after Thanksgiving when she said she was having the Ewings (richest people in town) and the Fosters out for drinks we sort of had an argument. I said I had much rather stay in town with some of my friends. "I never have a good time," I said. "I'm always sitting around like an idiot listening to all your friends."

"That's all you ever do, is have a good time," she said. "Besides, you should learn to appreciate older people. It's developing being with older people."

I don't see why. All I can do is listen and, besides, I can't stand Mrs. Foster. Once she gets to the farm she starts acting like she'd flipped. She starts acting like she's this very young person that is madly in love with everyone on earth. She isn't, she really hates everybody! Also, I did the most immature thing you've ever heard of. ~~[I guess I was just bored. I wished Arthur hadn't gone and got sent away. Most trying time.]~~ - 8?