

Chapter three

2? You know what, though? Even if Arthur had been there, he wouldn't have had to do anything. He can be so careless at times. When he comes out to the farm, even if there're guests there, all he does is go back to the kitchen, tilt his chair up against the wall and flip through worthless magazines until it's time to go home. Mother doesn't even make him pass. I don't know why I always have to sit and listen. ~~Adopted,~~ I guess.

~~Anyway,~~ the main reason I want to tell you about the Fosters and the Ewings is because of something that happened later on. It concerns this northern newspaperman that came down looking around after our race relations. It was simply a disgrace---what he wrote ~~and all~~---and the maddest people of all were the Ewings and the Fosters. Mr. Ewing was exceedingly anxious that Father sue, but we just went on and

turned the other cheek because of Arthur. He was home too and it affected him greatly. I declare, the north just beats all.

~~Doesn't it?~~ 9?

First, though, let me tell you about Mrs. Foster. Do you like women that go around talking to animals like they were people? I mean, asking them things and then standing there waiting for an answer? I think that's one of the most stupid things anybody can do. Well, that's what Mrs. Foster does. She talks baby talk to them and nobody else can say a word because she talks so loud all you can do is keep quiet and watch her carrying on like a large idiot. I don't think she cares a thing for cows and farms, not as much as I even.

One thing I know is that Mother and Father aren't particularly partial to Mrs. Foster. The only reason they have her is because she's always inviting them, and Mother says Ashton is too small a place to have hard feelings in. Sometimes I think Mother would like to move back to Charleston--- with Father, of course. She never says anything about it, but there aren't too many congenial brains in Ashton. Father says practically nobody in Ashton ever reads a book. He doesn't just like people that read books, but of course older people, some of them, like to sit around talking about books. I guess when you get older there isn't much else to talk about except books, the price of cotton and colored people. People in Georgia talk about colored people all the time.

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Well, there we all were, sitting around this stone fireplace in the cabin. The fosters hadn't come yet, but Mr. and Mrs. Ewing were there. As I told you, the Ewings are the richest people in Ashton. They're always going to New York and in the

summer they even go to Maine. The Ewings aren't like Mother and Father, though; they really don't have any friends in Ashton. And the reason they don't is because Mr. Ewing went to Harvard. He doesn't know what to do with himself when everybody starts talking about the University of Georgia football team. That's what most men in Ashton talk about - football and golf and how the Democratic Party better get up on its haunches about the South.

Poor Mr. Ewing. Father says Bill Ewing isn't really conceited, he's just lonely. He gets all his clothes in New York and he's the only one in the entire Episcopal Church that looks like he comes from the north. I heard Mother say one time that when Bill Ewing goes north, he's a Southerner, but when he's home, in Ashton, he thinks he's from <sup>the East</sup> ~~the East~~. She didn't mean to be ugly or anything. She likes Mr. Ewing, but somehow you get the feeling that Mr. and Mrs. Ewing are just visiting in Ashton. ~~They aren't. They've lived here for centuries.~~ ??

The one thing about Mr. Ewing is he's the only Republican in town and he's always saying "damn." One time he called the Democrats a bunch of "damn rats." He really did, right in front of Mother and everybody. Nobody said anything, though, because he practically owns the town. He owns the bank and the Ewing Textile Mills are known all over the world. I told you, didn't I, they have a swimming pool?!

Mrs. Ewing is very nice. The only thing about her is she knits all the time. Even out at the farm she brings this long bag along and almost as soon as she gets there the needles start

clicking. Mrs. Ewing isn't very pretty. Her face is awfully bony and she has this drab blond hair that's got too much permanent in it. Sometimes you wonder why Mr. Ewing married her because everybody thinks he's extremely handsome. I don't, because he has these tremendous shoulders and his black eyebrows go up in triangles so that you think he's laughing at everything.

What I like is a man that looks more like my father. But I never told you what Father looks like, or Mother either. The funny thing is they both sort of look alike. Father is very tall and thin and has this sandy hair with a lot of grey in it. A lot of people are scared when they first meet him because he never does say very much (except at home) and too because of his nose and eyes. He has these very piercing blue eyes and his nose has been broken twice, once when he was playing football at Sewanee and the next time when he was a holy terror at the University of Virginia. I suppose I shouldn't have put that in again about him being a holy terror, but he was. He was always riding around in these very fast cars and drinking whiskey. He stopped, though, when Mother finally decided she would marry him. I mean he still has his high ball and everything, but back when he was at the University he even drank white lightning. I heard him tell it once. It's amazing Mother ever did marry Father. She was getting ready to marry this other man, a man from Charleston, because her mother thought it was more suitable. My Charleston grandmother---she's dead too---was never very partial to people from Georgia. She liked South Carolina and Virginia better.

Mother and Father don't really look alike; there's just

something about the look in their eyes or something. In the first place Mother has this long, almost auburn hair and she can sit on it. She braids it and then pins the braids on the back of her head. Her eyes, though, are blue and they slant up. They do. Everybody in Ashton thinks Mother is beautiful. She is. Her nose has never been broken and even at forty-two she's not fat or anything. As I told you, my father is quite elderly---fifty-two. That was another reason my grandmother in Charleston didn't want Mother to marry Father---because he was so much older and everything. Later, though, she got quite partial to him. Charleston is just a very peculiar place. ~~But~~ <sup>??</sup> you'd like it, even if it is pretty snobbish. Mother and I are always going there on trips and things.

Anyway, ~~(I don't know why I went into all that)~~, as I was saying, we were all sitting by the fire and as usual talking about the South! That's all anybody ever talks about nowadays. If they're not talking about colored people, they're talking about Southern potential and northern potential and how the South's got more than the north. We are exceedingly anxious to have any industry that wants to <sup>to</sup> come and make their junk in the South. That's the sort of things they talk about. Mr. Ewing think the South would get somewhere quicker if we had two parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. But Father says we're not ready for that yet because we need Southern Democrats to stay in Washington to battle for us. We're in violent need for somebody to battle for us because the north does nothing but write about our bad points all the time. We're of the opinion that the South is going to be the hope of the nation some day.

Boring. I <sup>had</sup> to sit there on this wooden bench without  
a back and listen to all that. [~~I had my olives and nuts by me  
and everytime I'd see somebody that didn't have any, I'd go  
flying around with them again. It was a very trying task.~~] I  
kept watching Mrs. Ewing's knitting needles and I watched them  
so hard I started getting dizzy and sort of sick in my stomach.

I went on back in the kitchen to talk to Velvet. Velvet  
doesn't much like to come out to the farm either. I don't blame  
her much. All she does is sit in there by the stove with her  
face in her hands and think about her high blood. I always  
try to cheer her up. [~~But I didn't think I could right then  
because~~] she'd gotten another letter from her husband in jail.  
He's always writing Velvet to ask Father to get him off the  
road gang. He <sup>is</sup> more partial to working on the prison farm.  
I don't blame him because you have no idea how hot it gets  
working on a Georgia highway in summer. They also have these  
men with guns watching you and everything. But, see, the thing  
is Booker---that's Velvet's husband's name---killed a man. He  
killed Checkerboard Hudson because Checkerboard was all the  
time messing with Booker's money. I don't know everything about  
it and I don't think Velvet does either, but one day Booker  
just upped and shot Checkerboard dead. Velvet had prostrations  
and Father got this lawyer and everything to defend him. I'm  
overjoyed he didn't get the chair.

Velvet, though, says most men folks are sorry. She said  
she wouldn't marry "no man agin for nothin!" She says all men  
want out of you anyway is a work horse. "Washin' and ironin'  
and cookin' all day and in the end all they do is get up on  
their hinds and go off with some other woman."

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That's what we started talking about in the kitchen. She needed cheering up and she simply adores to talk about what a mess it is being married to somebody sorry. I asked her if she thought I would ever marry and she started giggling all over the place. She made me furious because she said if I ever did marry I'd probably marry some "old man."

"Why?" I asked her.

She thought she'd said the funniest thing in the world. "Cause you just puts me in mind of somebody old sometimes."

I frowned at her. "You mean really old, Velvet?"

"Sometimes you acts just like an old, old woman."

"I don't think I do."

"Sometimes you do."

"I can run faster than anybody at school," I said.

"If you're old, you can't do that. I'm going to marry somebody rich. You just wait and see."

"I'm waitin'," she said and started giggling again.

~~I popped the cork off one of the whiskey bottles and stuck my finger in it and licked it.~~

~~"Fe-licia!" she said. "You stop that. Yo Papa gonna whup you good."~~

~~"You do it," I said.~~

~~"Velvet aint never touched no whiskey."~~

~~"I've seen you," I said and started laughing.~~

~~"Naw you aint."~~

I started to say something else but then I heard Mrs. Foster. At least I thought it was her because of the horn blowing. That's the way she does. They have this station wagon

close up

and she always drives. I don't know why because I'm always seeing Mr. Foster driving around town. But you always know when she's driving because she starts honking the horn about a mile away from the cabin. That's the kind of person she is. Mother says that Mrs. Foster used to be a real belle, that she was known all over the South for being one. But she went on until she was twenty-seven before she married and ended up with Harry Foster who sells insurance and is timid. Harry Foster's father died last year and now they have pretty much money. I guess the Foster boys---that's their twin sons that are holy terrors in high school---will end up in shirt-sleeves, because Mrs. Foster is always spending all this money on clothes. She even goes to Atlanta to buy.

I don't know why Mother wanted to have Mrs. Foster with Mr. and Mrs. E.ing. They're not at all alike, except everybody likes Mr. Foster because he's so timid and pitiful. He just sort of stand there but you know he's nice. I know I think he is because he's the only one that says very much to me. Everybody else can be talking away about the South and colored people and he'll always come over and say something to me, right in the middle of it all. Not many older people'll do that. I like Mr. Foster.

"Jeeeeeezus," Velvet said when Mrs. Foster kept honking. "She gonna gimme the sick headache with all that fuss."

I just sighed and took my nut plate and went on back into the living room. I wanted to be there when Mrs. Foster started springing around the way she does. She's exceedingly "agrarian."