

Chapter 6

Ohhhhhh me. You don't know what it's like around our house when we're getting ready to have guests. We're positively the most peculiar family you ever saw. Velvet's in a bad mood, Mother's in a bad mood and I just try to stay out of the way. Velvet doesn't like to have guests because of all the extra work and Mother thinks everything ought to be decent. Everything in the guest room has to be cleaned, and she even puts flowers by the bedside. It was camellia time, so who do you guess had to go out and pick one million camellias? Me! Mother told me to be sure and get the stems long enough because she likes to put them in my grandmother's old crystal bowl.

Arthur wasn't doing one thing but fixing himself a coca-cola. "You oughtta be doing this," I said, as I came into the kitchen.

"Do what? Fix flow-ers?"

"Yes, it's developing. You oughtta know how in case you

ever get a home of your own."

"When I get ~~a home~~ ^{one} I'm not gonna have any flowers. To me, they're revolting." He started rattling the ice in his glass.

I jerked off one of the leaves. "Arthur, you have absolutely no spiritual sense. None a-tall."

"Stop trying to talk like Mother," he said. "You're always trying to talk like her and it sounds stupid."

"No, I'm not," ~~I said~~. Arthur's always saying that which is the most insane thing in the world. ~~I'm just quite articulated for my age, as I told you.~~

He went on back into the living room to finish his coca-cola and, I guess, to stare. Finally, I got the flowers fixed and went dragging on upstairs with them. The guest room looked all right when Mother and Velvet got through. The curtains were fluffy and white and Velvet had just got through washing the canopies on the beds. If you ask me, I think camellias and canopy beds look silly for a man, especially a northern newspaperman that writes novels. I told Mother so, but she said for me just to "run along now."

gal 18 There wasn't much of any place for me to run to, though. Isaiah was in the kitchen polishing all the silver, and with the place smelling like polish and the quails unfreezing and junk all over the place, it was the most depressing place you ever saw. Isaiah never has a clean white coat and that always brings up another fuss. Mother has told him time and time again he ought to have one in readiness, but he doesn't wear one much, just when he's waiting on the table at night and most of the time his sleeves are too short. Velvet had to stop what she was doing and wash Isaiah a coat and let the sleeves down.

Mother started walking around clicking garden scissors and giving out orders. Sometimes, especially guest time, Mother can be almost like an officer in the army.

About an hour before the person gets there, though, ~~Mother's~~^{she's} all dressed and calmed down and talking cheerily about how really, actually good it is to have guests because you get so much general cleaning done. You never have seen anybody that has as much energy as my mother. By the end of the day we're all dragging around---Velvet, Isaiah, Arthur and me --but she's all ready to go and is delighted someone is coming.

"What's the man's name?" I asked her.

"Mr. Hopper," she said. "Mr. Hopper. Felicia, don't put your feet on the coffee table that way. Go get dressed. You look like a ragamuffin."

"He's not coming 'till five-thirty."

"Well, it's four-thirty now. Up!" She started clapping her hands. "Where's Arthur?"

"Upstairs, in his room. He hasn't done one thing all day."

"Well, he's got to look decent now." She started out the room but glanced around. "Up now!"

I was exhausted and started staring with my eyes bulged open. ~~Have you ever done that? I mean stared and you can't move your eyes? It doesn't last long but you really can't move your eyes!~~

"Stop being silly!" Mother said.

My eyes finally banged shut. "Ohhhhh me." I dragged myself off the sofa and went up and out on my black and white plaid dress. It's the only one that makes me look fatter be-

cause it has a pretty wide skirt. I also brushed my poor sad hair again and stared at myself in the mirror for about a half hour. I do that a lot---when nobody's looking. When somebody's looking I hardly even glance. Mother says just very selfish people stare at themselves in the mirror. As I told you, I'm rather selfish at times, but I speak to everybody.

When I went back downstairs I heard Mother tell Isaiah to go to the bus station now and pick up Mr. Hopper.

"To de bus station?" Isaiah asked. "He must be mighty po."

"Why?" Mother asked him.

"No rich folks ever rides on de bus."

Mother smiled. "He probably couldn't get connections---train connections," was all she said.

"He's famous," I said. "He writes books and everything."

Isiah's eyes started getting very wide. I knew he was scared to death because I knew I was. I've never met any really famous people. ~~The only thing was we tried to find Mr. Hopper's novels at the library so we could mention them to him, but Miss Cramer, the librarian, said she didn't buy just every bit of trash that came out. Miss Cramer thinks most new books are trash, but she has gall-bladder ^{trouble} and gets mad at literally everybody!~~

After Isaiah had gone, Mother said: "I wonder how long he plans to stay?"

"I don't know. Velvet wanted to know too."

"People should let you know how long they plan to stay," she said. "Now, Felicia, you remember that. If you ever visit anybody, let them know exactly when you're arriving and exactly when you're leaving. It's thoughtless not to."

"I probably won't ever visit anybody," I said, "except Winky or somebody in Charleston."

"Well, you might some day. Someone might ask you."

"I doubt it," I said and started thinking about my tragic life ahead. I have this feeling my life is going to be terribly tragic. I'll probably die writhing in a gutter somewhere. Somebody'll find me and they'll say: "Why, it's Felicia Whitfield. What a pity!"

I plopped down in a chair.

"Why do you have to sit like that, Felicia---with your legs all sprawled that way?"

"I don't know. It's uncomfortable to sit all straight all the time."

"Well, don't do that when the guest comes. Some day we'll have to practise sitting."

I straightened up. "How are you supposed to sit?"

She sat down. "Like this," she said. "Slightly forward in the chair--shoulders straight---and your ankles crossed."

She looked very pretty. She had on a grey tweed dress and the color made her eyes seem sort of grey, too.

"Not like this," she said and she started imitating me, slinking down in the chair with her legs stretched out in front of her.

I died laughing and so did she. Mother and I have worlds of fun sometimes. A lot of the time she's like an army officer. But sometimes she's more fun than anybody I know. She has a tremendous sense of humor when she wants to.

But then we heard the car coming down the driveway in front.

Mother stood up. "Well, here he is."

I got up, too. Frankly, my heart was pounding away inside. "Arthur's not down yet!" I said.

She must not have heard me, ~~because~~, because she went on out onto the veranda. Mother always does that and I think it's nice because she really welcomes people. Besides, it's stupid, I think, just to wait in the living room and pretend you're lazily sitting around when everybody knows you're not.

gal 19 I didn't go out with her, but the door was open so I could see. Gosh, I was scared! I thought my heart was going to pop right out of me. Never in our entire existence have we ever had somebody like a northern newspaperman visiting in our house. ~~I mean we've had cousin Hugo but he's just a cousin, and doesn't count.~~

Well, I nearly dropped dead when the man got out of the car. He had this iron-grey hair and it was CREW CUT! Also he was wearing tennis shoes! Really, he was. He had on this ancient green jacket and a camera hanging off his shoulder. I guess maybe he'd worn all that, just because he was riding on the bus.

Right away he started looking up at the house and then when he saw Mother he sort of waved and came galloping up the steps to her.

"Mrs. Whit-full?" he said, grabbing Mother's hand and then he let out this kind of scratching laugh. "Heavens," he said, looking down at his jacket, "I'm a wreck! A complete wreck. Pardon the way I look. I didn't have a second to change."

"I think you look very comfortable," Mother said.

"The bus was a night-mare! A complete night-mare! Women with sacks of food, crying babies"---he glanced back at the car where Isaiah was---"and the "eeeeegroes jammed in the back."

"Well, come in and relax," Mother said. "Maybe an Old Fashioned will bring you back again."

"You're a darling," he said, scratching his laugh. "A complete darling!"

Nobody's ever called Mother a "darling" before. I don't think even Father has.

But then there I was, standing in the hall, grinning. I hate times like that. ~~Darling?~~ You never know what to do until you're introduced. Mother says if I'm not introduced I'm supposed to go up to the person, CURTSEY, and say "I'm the daughter of the house." I've only done it once, though, and I think the person thought I was insane. I could have killed Arthur for not being down. I always have to do everything first.

~~St~~ "And who may I ask is this?" he said, smiling down at me. He had the reddest face I'd ever seen---sort of purple. But he was still kind of handsome, I thought. His nose wasn't broken or anything.

"I'm---" I started to say, and I was wondering if he thought I would take a pretty good picture.

"This is Felicia," Mother said, "Our daughter."

Down I went, but I just kind of jerked a curtsy and stretched out my hand. I was really beaming, though.

"Charming," he said. "Absolutely charming." His hand was pretty wet. He wanted to know if I was the only one, but Mother said, no, we had a son and he'd be down in a few

minutes.

That was the end of me. Right away ^{Hopper} Mr. Started looking around the hall. We still had our Christmas decorations up. We never take them down until the day before New Years. ^H The smilax going up the stairway was sort of dry, ~~though.~~

"Lovely. Perfectly lovely home," Mr. Hopper said and he kind of bent backward and glanced into the living room. "And ^H that," he said, pointing, "just a-bout there is a Sully. Lovely. Ab-so-lute-ly lovely. I knew Sully did mostly Southerners."

"Then you're interested in art, Mr. Hopper?" Mother asked.

"Bob," he said. "Please, just Bob." He let out his scratching laugh. "Yes, actually ^H I am. Especially the old. The contemporary unglues me." Scratch. Scratch.

I decided I was going to remember that, "unglues me." I was going to say it Monday at school. ~~Everybody~~

"Well, come now," Mother said. "Isaiah---" Isaiah was coming through the door, struggling with Mr. Hopper's luggage. "Isaiah, would you bring us two Old Fashioneds, please?"

Mr. Hopper just stood there, smiling at Isaiah and all his struggling. "Isaiah was lovely to meet me at the bus. We had a very nice chat coming to the house. Didn't we, Isaiah?"

Isaiah came through the door. "Yes sir," he said, but then on his way up the stairs he turned and glanced at Mr. Hopper with these tremendous white eyes. I guess Isaiah'd ~~really~~ never seen anybody like Mr. Hopper before. ^{either}

Mr. Hopper took off his camera. "Goodness," he said, looking down at his jacket again. "I am a ^{wreck} ~~mess~~. It's been

hectic, absolutely hectic."

"Well, come in and be seated, Bob," Mother said. It sounded funny, her calling him Bob. "Or would you rather go up and freshen up a bit?"

"No, I'm all right, really." Scratch. Scratch. I guess he was sort of embarrassed Mother's mentioning going upstairs to freshen up, because you know what that means. ~~Scratch. Scratch.~~

We went on into the living room. "White walls," he said. "High ceilings and---and---the molding! Charming! I adore these old Georgian homes."

"The house is quite old," Mother said. "It has quite a history. If you're interested, I'm sure Mr. Whitfield would like to tell you about it."

"My grandmother burned our other house down," I said.

Both of them looked at me. I guess I shouldn't have said that. It does sound kind of strange if you don't explain.

Mr. Hopper didn't say anything, but I saw this twinkle in Mother's eye. I kept wondering where in the world Arthur was.

"Beautiful rugs," Mr. Hopper said. "Old, worn Persians."

I thought that was kind of rude of him, saying our rugs were worn.

"Yes, the older Persians are nice, aren't they?" was all Mother said.

"Bless you," Mr. Hopper said, almost touching Mother's shoulder with his open palm. "Bless you for not having wall-to-wall. I loathe wall-t-wall."

gal 20 Mother just smiled at him. Mr. Hopper wasn't conceited at all, being from New York and ~~everything~~ ^{everything}

Then he started weaving around looking at everything--- the portraits, tables, silver, chairs. I think Mother sort of enjoyed it, though. She's mad about all the junk in our house. A lot of the stuff is from her family in Charleston and the rest is Whitfield. Some of the things, though, aren't so hot. I mean there's one table she had this man out in the country make and Mr. Hopper started yelling around about it. I guess he thought that was a "gem" too. Everything else was a "gem", he said. He thought our whole house was a "gem." That's the way famous novelists and people talk. They kind of scare you because every time they look at you, you think they're thinking about ~~how~~ how to write you up.

Anyway, I thought Mr. Hopper was very nice saying such lovely things about our house. I wondered if he really meant it because you know up in New York where everybody's so rich their things are one million times better than our old stuff. We can't afford to even build a new bathroom.

When we sat down Mother said, "Well, now, tell me how is Hugo?" She had her hands pressed together as if she really ^{ed}want to know, but I knew she didn't care much because she definitely is not very partial to our cousin Hugo. He's from South Carolina, too, but he had to go up to New York before he could get a job on a magazine. He wrote one write-up about Georgia that was simply terrible. It was when all those people started throwing rocks at the University of Georgia. Of course, it was terrible to throw rocks but that didn't mean the whole state of Georgia and everybody in it was terrible. Hugo even made fun of the way we talk in the South and Mother says Hugo used to talk exactly the same way. Everybody that knows him calls

him a renegade, even in Charleston. He ought to be ashamed, but he isn't. Father says he's trying to win a prize because the only way you can win a prize nowadays is by having courage and telling how glorious Negroes are and how horrible Southern white people are---even nice ones. I was wondering if Mr. Hopper was trying to win a prize, too.

He leaned back in the winged-back chair. "Hugo is fine!" he said. "Doing a remarkable job. Really remarkable. You know he's going to Africa on this Congo thing."

"I don't particularly envy him that," Mother said. "Such a rightful situation."

"Yesssssss," said Mr. Hopper. He suddenly looked one million years older. All these lines round his mouth and eyes started popping out. He surely did sit funny, too. He ~~rested his feet practically on his toes.~~ But I guess it was because of the tennis shoes. When you wear tennis shoes you do all sorts of strange things you don't do when you have on just plain shoes.

"Which paper are you with, Bob?" Mother asked.

"No paper. I free-lance. The piece I'm doing now is for The News Review."

"Oh, fine," Mother said. "We take the magazine. We'll look forward to your article."

"Yes, well, these pieces keep me in money so I can write books."

"Do you feel as if you've been successful---so far?"

Mr. Hopper hit his head with his palm. "Lordy, yes! The South is absolutely exploding! Had an hour's talk with Fascinating. McGill's Ralph McGill on The Constitution. in an envious position. Also talked to Luther King. Clear as enviable?

a bell and^m----he sat up straighter, practically knocking himself out with delight over what he was going to say next-- "and this adorable old Neeeeegress. Her father had been a slave! Imagine. She must have been ninety, at least. She told me some things---" he frowned and shook his head. "It shouldn't be, Mrs. Whit-full. Negroes are human beings, too. It shouldn't be. No."

Boy, I'll bet Mother was mad about that. That's one expression that can really make her mad---people that try to tell her colored people are human beings, as if she doesn't know it. She didn't show she was mad, though.

"Do call me Sarah," Mother said. She took a handkerchief from her pocket. "Tell me---what can we do for you here in Ashton?"

Mr. Hopper crossed one leg over the other^x but ~~his left foot was still up on its toes.~~ ^{kind of} "Ohhhh, I don't know really. Atmosphere more than anything else, I guess. You see, I haven't had a chance to talk to---" he smiled-- "someone in your, well, someone who enjoys the social advantages you do."

"Social?" Mother said and she gave a short laugh. "We are the last people on earth who are social."

"Well, class then. Let me put it that way." Scratch. Scratch. "I was thrilled when Hugo suggested I might come here. You see, Hugo and I were in Italy together. He was writing a piece on Russia---" he looked around as if somebody was lurking in a corner trying to hear him-- "Don't tell him but the bird never left his hotel room in Rome. I don't think he even saw Russia." Mr. Hopper thought that was hilariously funny. "Damn guy nearly won a prize for it too."

"I remember the article," Mother said.

"Yessssass," Mr. Hopper said, still grinning over cousin Hugo.

Then this great huge silence came down. It was embarrassing and we were all straining our brains, trying to think of something else to say.

"Are you going to write us up?" I asked. It just came out and I don't know how I got up the nerve to just come right out and ask it.

Mr. Hopper looked at me as if I'd just popped into the room, then he looked right away at Mother again. "I do hope---"

gal 21 But then Isaiah came in with the Old Fashioneds. Right away I saw my old kitchen glass standing up there on the tray by a coke bottle. The old coke bottle looked stupid on a silver tray. I'm going to die of joy when I can start drinking Old Fashioneds. To me, they're the best drinks in the world. I've tasted them thousands of times.

"Lovely," said Mr. Hopper as he took his glass. "Just what I've been waiting for." Scratch. Scratch.

Mother took hers and told Isaiah to bring us some napkins. Isaiah never remembers napkins.

"But back to your question," Mr. Hopper said, stirring the drink with one of the tiny silver spoons Mother always uses. He looked at her as if it had been her that had asked the question. "But let me ask you first---would you mind if I referred to you as a family- -you know---typical Southern family, good connections, that sort of thing?" He looked older again.

Mother sat up straighter. I couldn't wait to hear what she had to say.

"I don't think so, Mr. Hopper." She didn't call him Bob. "You see, some of us here in the South are very conservative people. We really don't like publicity."

Mr. Hopper started getting all nervous. "Of course. Of course," he said. "You wouldn't believe it, but I'm a pretty conservative bird myself. I certainly understand your fears."

"There aren't any fears actually," ~~Mother said~~.

"Well, I know---" he was smiling at Mother as if she had said something extremely pathetic---"Mr. Whitfield, a banker--- bad for business---things like that. I understand some Southerners have been almost ruined by some of their views."

"No, it isn't that at all," Mother said. "Whatever we believe we don't mind saying. We're just not partial to publicity of any sort, that's all." She touched the handkerchief to her nose again.

I wish Mother hadn't said that. It sounded kind of rude to me. Besides, I knew Mr. Hopper was sitting there thinking we were hicks. I was glad Mother was having the Ewings and them over after dinner. The Ewings know how things are up in New York, ~~and all~~.

"I like 'egroes," I said. But both Mother and Mr. Hopper laughed.

"Heh, heh, heh," laughed Mr. Hopper in this new laugh. Heh, heh, heh, I thought. He doesn't know, but I think I know some things he doesn't know. Velvet's told me more things than she'd ever tell Mother and Father.

"Fascinating. Ab-so-lute-ly..." But then I nearly passed out through the sofa. ARTHUR came into the room! He had a pencil stuck behind his ear and he was wearing tennis shoes! White ones! They looked TREMENDOUS!

I just stared at him and Mr. Hopper got up from his chair.

"This is our son, Bob," Mother said in this very pale voice. "Arthur---Mr. Hopper."

Arthur kind of stood up very straight and lunged his hand into Mr. Hopper's. "Hopper! How ya, man?"

HORRIBLE! I have never, NEVER, in all my entire life seen Arthur act or talk like that.

Mr. Hopper started rubbing his hand. ~~I guess Arthur had hurt it or something.~~

"Arthur's home for the holidays," Mother said. "He's at a little school in Connecticut this year."

"Is that soooo?" Mr. Hopper said, looking very curiously at Arthur. "DO you like Connecticut, Arthur?"

"I like being in town better," Arthur said.

"In town?"

"Yep!"

"Oh, in New York! Well, that's fine."

"Come and sit with us, Arthur," Mother said. "We were just telling Mr. Hopper something about Ashton."

"Yeh?" Arthur said and kind of touched his pencil behind his ear. "It's kind of a hick town, this town."

I could have killed Arthur for saying that. I knew exactly what he was doing. He was trying to make Mr. Hopper think he was this ancient somebody that knew all about New York and all that. What he'd done, I bet, was look out the upstairs

window when Mr. Hopper came in. That's the only time he could have seen the tennis shoes. I knew Mother was about to die.

Mr. Hopper sat back down and Arthur kind of swaggered over to the sofa where I was. When he sat down he threw one leg over the other like Mr. Ewing does sometimes.

Mr. Hopper sipped his drink again, then looked at Mother. "Yes, well, as I was saying, I would like to include some of your views in this piece. I want to be as fair as possible, get both sides. Of course I wouldn't use your name."

"Why don't you ask Allison about that," Mother said and she smiled very prettily.

"You want to know about colored people and stuff?" Arthur asked.

I didn't even look at him. Arthur knows as well as I do that it's terrible to butt in.

"That's the general idea, Arthur." But then Mr. Hopper looked at me. "Felicia," he said in this extremely childish voice, "would you mind going to school with little "eeseegro children?" He asked it as if I were this dumb idiot that didn't know about things.

"I dunno," I said, jerking my shoulders up and down. "I haven't thought much about it," which was a lie! Just the other day I was thinking that it might be kind of fun, marching into school with a bayonet in my back and soldiers and tanks wandering all over the place. I had this image of myself on LIFE magazine with this helmeted soldier pointing his bayonet at me. All these big city newspapermen and everybody would be hanging around watching and Mother and Velvet would be dying because they'd be afraid I'd get hurt and Arthur up in Connecticut

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would see my picture on LIFE and show it to everybody.

"I'm gonna have to go to school with 'em," Arthur said.

Mother looked at him sharply. "Why, Arthur, what are you talking about?"

"Yeah, really," Arthur said, grinning this tremendous grin. "Mr. Sykes--" he looked at Mr. Hopper---"he's the headmaster at this school I go to. "He can't wait to get a whole bunch of colored boys in. I may turn out rooming with one."

Mr. Hopper kind of nodded his head. "I understand that's so. A great many of the eastern prep schools are admitting Neeeeegroes now."

"Yeh," Arthur said. "We haven't gotten on^e yet, but old Sykes he's thinking about bringing a whole tribe over from Africa."

"Now, Arthur, stop exaggerating," Mother said. "Mr. Hopper is very serious about all this."

Arthur popped his eyes open at Mother. "So am I! I'm not kidding. Really. Old Jimerson--he teaches history---and he told me at dinner before I left they were going to bring all these Africans over. "He said the school had to on account of the world seeing how bad the South treats 'em and everything. Everybody up there---Mr. Sykes and all of 'em--hate the South."

"Well, I think you're just a bit confused," Mother said.

9 [Scratch. Scratch.] Mr. Hopper let out his laugh again. "It all seems so impossible, sitting here," he said. "All the t/bvgs/4pi/10pw/11AT/

things you know that really exist, the underlying treachery in these sleepy old Southern towns."

Mother laughed her forced laugh. "I don't seem to see the treachery," she said. "There have been incidents, of course, but I imagine these are everywhere. Where is your home, Bob? I mean, originally."

"Plainfield. New Jersey." He flicked a large speck off his trouser leg. "Yes, sir, I'm a New Jersey boy."

"Plainfield must be a lovely town," Mother said. "I've never been there."

"It's all right, I guess. Nothing much to do. ~~Probably~~ industrial, ^{at people mostly} I got out quite young." He lit this long cigarette and blew the smoke straight up in the air. "But what do you find to do here?" ~~he asked.~~

I told you. I knew he thought we were hicks. I was so embarrassed I could have thrown up.

"Oh, I'm frightfully busy," Mother said. "I do a great deal of church work and entertaining is mostly in the home, you know. Of course I like to garden and there's the children."

They both looked at Arthur and ~~me~~ ^I and I felt like a great huge white rabbit sitting there.

"You're not married, Mr. Hopper?" Mother asked.

"I was." He started moving around in his chair. "Divorced."

~~I felt sort of sorry for him.~~ ^{p. 41} I knew he didn't want to tell us that. "My uncle's divorced too," I said in this loud voice. I wanted him to feel better.

"Yes, well," Mother said and glanced at me. I guess she was furious I'd said that. It's father's brother that's divorced

and he's the biggest scandal in the whole family.

Mr. Hopper was smirking and he took another long drag on his cigarette and started rattling the ice in his glass. "Well," he said finally, "I guess I'm just going to have to come right out and ask you." He was smiling at Mother. "Let me ask you: Are you ~~for~~ ^{opposed to} (integration of the races)?" He leaned forward and looked like he was studying Mother's face. "I mean truthfully, just for my own curiosity. Are you?"

The way he asked it scared me to death. It was like a dare.

But then the back door slammed. Father had come home.