

Chapter 8

Well, everybody in town found out Mr. Hopper was visiting us. I guess it was Mrs. Foster that went around telling it. Father says if you tell Mrs. Foster anything it's just like publishing it in The Reader's Digest. She must have gotten on the phone early because the next day at Sunday School Melissa Stewart (she's the one with four telephones in her house) said: "Hear you got a Nigger lover in your house! Everybody in town's talking about it."

That made me perfectly furious and we'd just got through renouncing the pomp and the devil too. The pomp and devil is part of the Episcopal catechism and we have to memorize the whole thing.

"You're not suppose to use that expression," I said. "It's common."

"What's common?"

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mind up on something, like saving your brother or something, you can pretty well do it. Besides, as I ^{said} told you, I have a tremendous faculty for being untruthful. ~~I think even if I got caught by the police I could get out of it, just simply by being untruthful. It's a very disgusting virtue, I guess.~~

Anyway, I came dragging on up the driveway to our house and right away I saw Mother and Mr. Hopper out in the garden. Mother wasn't going to church. When we have unspiritual guests in the house she doesn't usually go. She gets furious, not going, but I guess it's nicer being considerate of the guest.

Mother and Mr. Hopper were bending over looking at the Christmas roses. Mother simply adores the Christmas rose. She planted them about three years ago and they've bloomed every year just at the right time.

"Yeaaaa," said Mr. Hopper. "Stunning." He straightened up. "Oh hello, Felicia."

"Hello, Mr. Hopper." Right away my heart started pounding away. I was wondering if I really dared to discuss anything with him or not. I knew I couldn't with Mother there, of course.

He walked over to our largest camellia bush. "I never realized they bloomed this time of year," he said. "Wait until I tell my friends in New York." He kind of waved his hand. "Camellias instead of snow."

It was a very nice day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and it was almost like Spring. I guess up in New York it was storming with snow.

"I love the camellias too," Mother said, "but my favorite, of course, are the jonquils. We don't see them until March. Let me show you." We walked over to the side of the hill. ^{By March} The

entire hillside is covered with jonquils."

"Stunning," Mr. Hopper said.

"Yes, it means Spring to me," Mother said. "I love to see them when they're first pushing through the ground." She smiled at Mr. Hopper. "There's a poem I love, by Sarah Henderson Hay, the poet. It's so lovely."

"Oh?" said Mr. Hopper.

"If I can remember--- There're two lines I especially love:

And bladed jonquils, pricking through,
Can split my very soul in two.

"Yessssss, beautiful!" said Mr. Hopper.

Mother pushed back a strand of hair and sort of laughed into the breeze. "It reminds me of my two youngsters---just now at the age they are now. They're kind of pricking through."

They both looked at me. EMBARRASSING! I'm not like any bladed jonquil. I wish Mother wouldn't say things like that. I kind of started whistling off around the holly tree. I didn't want them to stand there smiling at me like I was a weed or something.

"It's a beau-ti-ful, beau-ti-ful garden," Mr. Hopper said.

"Thank you. Both Allison and I enjoy gardening." She turned to him. "I wish you had time to see the farm."

"That would be----"

But then Velvet called for Mother; somebody wanted her on the telephone. I could have cried with joy.

She hurried toward the house and Mr. Hopper and I were alone. Now was the time, I thought. My heart really started

*poetry
center
longest line*

1/2 l 7

1/2 l 8

1

~~started~~ banging away.

Mr. Hopper was looking up into the holly tree. "This tree must be fifty-years-old, at least," ~~he said.~~

"Uh huh," I said and started yawning. "Ohhhh me."

"Sleepy?"

"Me? Oh, no. I just do wish my Neeeeegro friends were coming over this afternoon."

I yawned very loudly again and Mr. Hopper looked at me pretty sharply. "Do you have Neeeeegro friends?"

"Of course, most of my friends are Neeeeegro." I tried to look exceedingly bored. "I've got hundreds of them."

"Do they come here?" he asked. "To your home?"

"Occasionally. Not very often. Mother and Father seem more partial to my white friends. I have one Neeeeegro friend, Melissa Stewart (She'd die!) "She ^{used to} comes quite frequently, but Mother and Father put a stop to it."

"Why did they do that?"

I wished he'd stop staring at me. I didn't dare look at him, so I just kind of casually started pulling a few berries off the tree. "I don't know why they don't like them to come. I guess it's because of Mr. and Mrs. Ewing and them."

"What ~~did~~ they have to do about it?"

"Oh, I guess they didn't think I should be seen with just colored people all the time. I think they spoke to Mother or something." Gosh, my heart was about to pop right out of me. I looked up at him. "But, I forgot, you met the Ewings last night. Didn't you?"

"Yessss, I met them all right." He had this kind of peculiar frown on his face and started looking at his fingernails.

"Wouldn't you like it, actually, wouldn't you, if your Neeegro friends could go to school with you?"

I remembered he'd asked me that before, when he first came. "Yes," I said, "now that I think about it. I'd adore it if Melissa Stewart could go to school with me. ~~She's a down-trodden and pitiful.~~ People in the north go to school with Neeeee-groes all the time, don't they?"

"Some do."

"How I do wish it were the same here! You know, I don't think I'd mind it even if I were the only white person in the room."

He didn't seem to be listening. "Perhaps your generation-- you and your friends can do something about all this. The Neeegro just isn't treated right down here. Is he?"

gal 30 "No, he's not," I started digging my heel in the ground. "And poor Velvet! She suffers so. So does Isaiah. They've told me so many things."

"What have they told you?"

"Ohhhh-" I started yawning again---"Velvet says she goes home lots of times and just crieeeees because she's Neeeee-gro."

"She shouldn't do that."

"No, she shouldn't. I usually try to cheer her up about it---also Isaiah. It's very pathetic."

"You're a nice girl, Felicia."

I kind of turned the corners of my mouth down. "Thank you," I said. "Thank you."

There was this kind of silence, but then Mr. Hopper started beaming around all over the place. "How would ^{you} like for me to

take your picture, Felicia?"

I nearly collapsed. "Me!? For your magazine?"

"Maybe," he said. "We'll see how it turns out."

I started kind of smoothing my hair back. I knew I looked a wreck, but I had on my black and white plaid dress. "Well, sure!" I said.

"Good then. Let's see---"

"Are you going to put what I said in the magazine?"

"What you said?" His eyes kind of bulged.

"Uh huh. You know, about me and colored people and all?"

"I might. Yes, I might!"

"Well, surely you can take my picture!" I nearly floated away with delight.

"I'd like to show the Northern girls what a fine Southern girl looks like."

I couldn't help smiling, but then I had this other thought:

"Do you think that- -uh---" I kind of looked away for a second---

"Uh---don't tell Mother or anything. She's quite peculiar. She--uh---"

"Oh, do you think she would mind?"

"Oh, no! She---uh---sometimes she thinks it's kind of vulgar being in newspapers and magazines and things. It's really quite peculiar."

"Haven't you ever had your picture in the newspaper?"

I started rolling my eyes upward. "Oh, I've had chances! But, you know, Mr. Hopper?" I kind of laughed. "I've been so silly. I used to think it was vulgar too, being in newspapers and things. I got over it, though."

"Most young girls in the north like to have their pictures in the paper."

"So do I! Now, I mean. I'd just as soon have my picture plastered all over the place. It's nice to be public like that, I think."

"Well, let's see." He started looking around. "Where would a good place be? What about on the front veranda? By one of the pillars."

"All right. You don't have your camera, though!"

"I'll get it."

"Don't let mother or anybody see you," I called after him. I was so excited I could scarcely talk.

Well, Mr. Hopper took a stunning picture. I was smiling extremely broadly and sort of had my hand touching one of the pillars. The only thing was I kept thinking about my legs. See, I'd started growing pretty fiercely and my legs are very, very thin. They don't touch in the middle where they're supposed to. I did everything to try to make them touch but I don't think they did.

Mr. Hopper said he thought he'd gotten a "fine shot." He liked the front of our house and he was sure I'd added great measures to it. He didn't know exactly when his article would appear. Probably not until ~~August~~ ^{late Summer} ~~or something~~ ^{Fall}. But when we were going in the house he told me he was certainly glad he'd come to Ashton. "It's been a gold mine. Those people last night and now my little talk with you." He smiled down at me very nicely. "Amazing," he said. "Simply a-mazing!"

[During lunch I think I st thought I'd gone insane. Every-

During lunch I didn't say much while we were eating. I was thinking too hard about ~~all~~ all the lies I'd told. Still, what I told Mr. Hopper wasn't all lies. I really do love many colored people. If, say, I saw Velvet somewhere and she was writhing away in a gutter or something, I'd just about die myself. Velvet can make me terribly mad, like out at the farm that time when she told on me, but I'd do anything for her. I really would, and if she died I'd never get over it. I'd go and put violets on her grave every Sunday. I might even do it if Freedonia died.

You don't know Freedonia, but she's Velvet's niece. She's my age and she used to wear red ribbons in her hair all the time. When we were children Velvet used to bring her by the house. We'd play, but the only thing is Freedonia and I are different. What she wanted to do was play Swinging Hips all the time. What you do is you stand by the Elm tree, put your hands on your hips and then walk real crazy and fast with your hips swinging all over the place. I thought that was very boring, but Freedonia

chapter continues---

nearly killed herself laughing over it. What I wanted to do was jump the boxwoods. Do you know that ~~to~~ this day I can clear a five-foot boxwood without even touching it. ~~X~~ Freedomia couldn't stand to do that. She'd try, but almost every time she'd land smack in the middle. Mother got kind of furious because Freedomia had broken about six of her best boxwoods. I don't know what ever happened to Freedomia. She moved to Detroit when we were six. Sometimes I wonder what became of her.

The only thing is I don't like mean Niggers and that isn't bad to say. Velvet says it herself. I told her it wasn't cultivated to say "nigger", but she said it was all right if they were mean. "Aint no other word for 'em," she said. "That's what they is-- 'mean niggers!'" You'd die over them and I don't think even Mr. Hopper would like them. They hate white people, mean niggers do. Velvet said so.

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Anyway, after lunch Mr. Hopper said he wanted to go around and see something of the people of Ashton. He wanted to make a call on the head of the N.A.A.A.C.P. and he wanted to visit with Velvet's preacher. Velvet's preacher is widely-known in Ashton and just about everybody in town has contributed money for this new church he wants to build. People have contributed for centuries. You'd think it ought to be built by now.

"Why don't you let Isaiah drive you?" Mother said.

"That would be nice. Thank you," Mr. Hopper said.

I knew Isaiah would flip over that. Sunday is his day off. One thing, though, I knew ^{Isaiah} ~~Isaiah~~ was counting on a pretty big tip from Mr. Hopper. Tips are the only thing Isaiah likes about guests. He can always tell whether somebody's gonna tip

pretty good or not.

"He aint no count," he says about some people. "He jes a one-dollah man." What Isaiah likes is a "fi-dollah" man. I kind of think he thought Mr. Hopper was a "fi-dollah" man; he was being so nice to Isaiah and everything.

Mother went into the kitchen to tell Velvet about Mr. Hopper wanting to go to her church that afternoon.

"What for?" she asked in this down-in-the-mouth look she gets sometimes.

"Because he wants to meet your minister and because he's interested in all things American," Mother said.

"Why don't he write up something about his own church," Velvet mumbled to me after Mother had gone.

"Maybe he doesn't have one," I said. "He's divorced." My uncle that is divorced has simply left the church. He never goes. It worries the family no end.

"Shaw," Velvet said. That's what she always says when she's thinking somebody's white trash.

"Will you be there, Velvet, in church?"

"If I kin ever get outta here, I will."

"You've got time," I said. Velvet's church doesn't begin until two in the afternoon. "Be sure and tell me about it!" I ~~wanted to know all about it.~~

Mr. Hopper had his camera slung around his neck which was a very unspiritual way to go to church, I thought. Isaiah had on his driver's cap too, the one Mother gave him for Christmas. He's only supposed to wear it when he's driving, but he wears it practically all the time. He's simply wild about it.

"I won't be gone very long," Mr. Hopper said. "I just want to have a chat with a few of these people."

"Fine," Mother said.

"See you later," Arthur said, and he followed Mr. Hopper out the back door!

I nearly fainted. I didn't know he was going with Mr. Hopper.

"Ar-thur!" Mother called to him. "Where are you going?"

"I'm just going with Mr. Hopper."

"It's all right," Mr. Hopper said.

"No, I don't believe so," Mother said.

"No, Arthur," Father said. "Not this time."

Arthur came dragging on back to the house. "Goooo-ud night, you act like I'm a child or something. You can't do anything around here."

"Mr. Hopper would rather be alone, I'm sure," Mother said. "He can speak more freely to the people."

"He asked me to go," Arthur said. "~~Gooo-ud night.~~"

~~"Well, we said you couldn't go,"~~ Father said. "I don't want us to have any ^{Part} ~~part~~ in any of Mr. Hopper's investigations,"
Father said.

My face started getting red. I wonder what he'd say if he knew Mr. Hopper had taken my picture and was also going to quote my intellect in his article. I decided then and there I wouldn't tell anybody about it, not even Velvet or Isaiah. After it came out, they'd all collapse with surprise.

"What time does his bus leave?" Mother asked. She looked very exhausted.

"Five," Father said. "He has an eight o'clock plane out of Atlanta."

"Is he going back to New York?" I asked.

"No, Florida, I think."

Northerners are always going to Florida in the wintertime. We're always having visitors come by to see us on their way to Florida. Most Southerners wouldn't think of going there then because of all the cheap rich people there then. Besides, Southerners know the weather down there, and they laugh at all the Northerners that think they're going to swim and stuff when all they do is freeze to death and sit around looking cheap and brassy. Not all Northerners are like that, I guess, just most of them. They're very loud, as you know.

"Pretty difficult man, wouldn't you say?" Father asked.

Mother just flipped her hand. "Now, Allison, this is the last. I'm just tired to death of having people here like that--- people we'll never see again."

Father just kind of laughed.

Mr. Hopper and Isaiah didn't come back until just about bus time. Both of them were bustling around, trying to get all his junk together.

"Fascinating. Ab-so-lute-ly fascinating," Mr. Hopper said about Velvet's preacher. "He gave me some excellent quotes and I took a charming picture---of his entire family, in their home. All of them were sitting around their table with their heads bowed."

I almost died. Me and Velvet's preacher would be in the magazine together! Just us. I kept thinking what everybody in

Ashton would say. Mother would collapse. ~~W~~ face started getting scarlet. I shouldn't have let him take my picture. I know I shouldn't've.

"You've been simply charming," Mr. Hopper said to Mother. "Don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much. Bless you. Come to New York sometime."

"We will!" Arthur said, and I couldn't even open my mouth.

Isaiah was ~~struggling~~ through the door with Mr. Hopper's typewriter and stuff.

Mr. Hopper shook hands with Father. "I'll remember the quails," he said. "You'll hear from me next year."

"Good!" Father said.

"Have a good trip," Mother called after him.

Mr. Hopper grinned back at her and hustled on out to the car and Isaiah.

"Well," Mother said after he was gone. She gave out a huge sigh. "That is that!"

"I wonder what sort of information he got this afternoon," Father said.

"The Lord only knows," Mother said. "But, Allison, I certainly hope he doesn't include us in anything."

"He won't. At least he won't use our names. He assured me of that."

But the picture, I thought. I shouldn't have done it! I shouldn't have. I know I shouldn't've. And I had all the way to ~~August~~ ^{the fall} to worry about it.

At six Isaiah came back with the car. The bus had been

late. He came dragging on in and I knew he was in a horrible mood because of working on Sunday. I don't blame him much; Sunday's a day of rest.

START He came on in the living room to give the keys to Father. He really looked beat up. I decided to try to cheer him up.

"How much tip did he **give** you, Isaiah? Was he a fi-dollah man?"

"Nothin'," was all he said.

"Whaaaat?" Mother said. "You mean he didn't even tip you? Did he leave anything for Velvet?"

"No'm."

Mother looked at Father. "Well, now, really, Allison. That makes me pretty sore. After all his high-sounding talk too!"

Father didn't say anything. He just got up and gave Isaiah three dollars. "Give this to Velvet when you go home," he said. He gave ~~Velvet~~ ^{Arthur} another three dollars.

"Goooo-ud night!" Arthur said. Even Arthur knows how to tip.

Mother asked Isaiah if he liked Mr. Hopper.

"No'm," he said.

"Why not?" Arthur asked him.

"He's hankty."

"I suppose," was all Mother said.

But I didn't say anything. I was wondering if Mother and Father could actually kill me. They could try, I know. And they would probably would when the picture and article came out. ~~I felt like throwing up. Really, I can be so dreadfully immature~~

~~sometimes. I was almost worried to my grave over what I'd~~
~~done. I should have been a share-cropper. I think I should~~
~~have been.~~