

Chapter 9

Two days later we saw Arthur off to Connecticut again. He had on his old coat, the one that had been sent to the cleaners too much, and I looked at him standing up there on the platform by the porter and I felt something of the sorrow I'd known the first time he'd left. The house always seemed so silent after he had gone.

This time, though, the silence didn't last very long. Arthur hadn't got lost in the station but he had been a day late returning to school. Mr. Sykes wrote: "Arthur says this was an oversight on his part. Nevertheless, we find it necessary to inflict a penalty; Arthur will be restricted to the school ground for a period of one month."

Mother was furious. "I can't let him do one single thing on his own. Not one thing!" She added, however, that she supposed she should have looked at the school calendar (and Father agreed) but she did think she could trust a fourteen-

~~year-old to do something! She'd been so busy with Mr. Hopper~~
~~and ^{And} ~~me~~. She had been too.~~

~~But~~ poor Arthur. It was bad enough just being up there but being locked up made it really terrible. Home, though, was pretty much without joy too---at least for me. Every time I saw a colored person I felt like crying. They kept reminding me ^{of} Mr. Hopper and the pictures--mine and Velvet's preacher---and I was terrified over what everybody in town would say. If they thought it was bad Mr. Hopper just visiting us (and they did!) I couldn't imagine what they'd say when the article came out. If I just hadn't said what all I did--if I just hadn't lied! And, gosh, if Mr. Hopper put in there what I said about Melissa Stewart she'd kill me. I just hoped and prayed he didn't remember her name. If Mr. Stewart read where I'd called Melissa a Negro, that would be the end of me. He'd probably come over with a shot gun and slay us all. Mr. Stewart is widely-known for his temper. Once he knocked a man out on main street just because the man called his mother a dog. The thought even made me sick in my stomach.

Finally, though, I decided that if I didn't quit thinking and worrying so much about it, I'd go insane. The article wouldn't be out until ~~August~~ ^{Jan} and if I worried up until then they'd have to bury me sure nuff. One thing that helped get my mind off ^{the article} it some was this letter from Arthur. Naturally, as you can imagine, I thought Arthur's first letter home after his penalty would have been a poem of gloom. But it wasn't at all. ^{him} It was almost jubilant, for Arthur. His roommate, Bob Leyden, had not returned to school:

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...He can't come back till he gets cured. And I'm glad. Now I got this new roommate. His name is ~~Bob~~ Campbell and he's from New York City and goes to night clubs all the time. I think his folks are real rich because he's got this picture of his house and it looks like a castle. He says his father makes those things---those kind of dummy things women fit clothes on when they so. He's in all my classes and we go around together all the time. He doesn't like Mr. Sykes either.

Well, I gotta go...

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He signed his name "A." And Father wanted to know why he'd signed his name like that, but Mother said it was just probably something he had learned.

It was that about night clubs that enthralled me. Ashton doesn't have any night clubs; the only one we've got is this one room in the basement of the country club. Older people stay in there literally all the time. Junior members aren't allowed, but if you're twenty-one or something you can go in there and get as madly drunk as you want to. It's a nice way to spend an evening if you're twenty-one.

I don't know why night clubs enchant me so. I've never been to one or anything, but I've seen them in the movies and I'd certainly like to go to one sometimes. That's why Arthur's letter interested me so much. I was think^{ing} Arthur'd probably start going to them up in Connecticut. People in the north are just thrilled to have their sons go to night clubs. Southerners are just stupid that way.

Anyway, thinking about night clubs and stuff sort of took my mind off Mr. Hopper. Not for long, though, because every-time I thought I'd completely forgotten, something strange would pop up about colored people again, and I'd have to think again. For instance, one afternoon Melissa and I were at the country

club. All afternoon we'd been in the ladies' room acting like we were at a night club. It was very immature, of course, but we'd also been smoking. Melissa can be worlds of fun when she wants to.

She'd brought some cigarettes and I'd brought three of Father's. We were sitting back there where the dressing table is, just smoking away, and I started up this conversation. I was really forgetting all about Mr. Hopper, and it was a lot of fun. I started off, said: "Oh, I'm so bored with all these Old Fashioneds all the time. Aren't you?" I was pretending I was this very rich lady in New York City. "Aren't you bored with just one night club after another?"

"I'm so bored I could die," Melissa said. "Hey waiter, bring me another Old Fashion."

I blew out this tremendous wad of smoke. "Melissa, deah, do you suppose we will get drunk?"

"Probably deah, but I need to. I've smoked so much my lungs are literally flapping around."

"Of course," I said. "Hey waiter, I wanted three Old Fashions, not just one. Aren't the waiters dumb here, though?"

"Dreadfully!" She kind of raised up one eyebrow and she really did look like somebody in a night club. Melissa's got naturally curly blond hair that she wears very short and her eyes are brown. When she gets older she'll fit in very nicely with night clubs, I think.

"Your hair is chahming today, my deah," I said.

"Thank you. So is yours, but I do think you could have a permanent wave."

That did it! That messed up everything. I started talking my natural way again. "I wish I could have one," I said. "I really do." I put my hands on the side of my face and made this folorn expression in my eyes. "This is the way I look all the time," I said. "I go around looking like a pathetic hound dog or something."

Melissa started laughing. "Why doncha just go and get a permanent. It'd be cute on---" But then she started waving her hands in the air. "Oh, oh! Somebody's coming."

I lunged toward the ash tray but it fell on the floor.

It was Mother's friend, Mrs. Meredith. I guess she'd been playing golf because she had on socks and this small yellow hat with a visor. I plopped back in the seat and pretended I'd just been sort of lounging around.

"Oh, hello, Felicia," she said.

I stood up. "How-do-you-do, Mrs. Meredith?" You could hardly see her for all the smoke.

She spoke to Melissa. "You girls just sitting in here?"

"Yes," Melissa said, "we just this minute came in."

Mrs. Meredith sat down in front of the mirror. "Whewh, it's so stu-ffy in here."

"I know," I said. "It was so stuffy we just couldn't sit any longer. Would you like for me to open a window, Mrs. Meredith?"

"Yes, thank you, Felicia." She sort of glanced at me. "Played golf with your sweet mother today---She's out on the porch now."

"She is?" I said. "Oh, good!" But I was about to die.

I ran and slammed the window open and Melissa and I beat it down the stairs to the golf shop.

On the bottom step we both collapsed against the wall.

"D'you think she knew?" Melissa asked with this simply terrified face. Boy, if her mother knew she'd been smoking, she'd probably be chained to the bed. ^{Mrs. Stewart is} ~~Mrs. Stewart~~ ^{violently religious &} practically lives inside the Baptist Church.

"I don't think she did," I said. "But what if it'd been Mo-ther!"

We just leaned there against the wall, panting. I'd practically lost my breath out of just pure horror. If I'd got caught smoking too---PLUS what I'd done when Mr. Hopper was there, I might as well've just gone on home and committed suicide.

After a while Melissa said: "Hey, look at that!" She was pointing to the bulletin board over my head.

"What?"

"Read it," she said, and started smirking.

I read it, but I didn't see anything so smirky about it.

All it said was:

^{1/2 x} ATTENTION: ALL LADY GOLFERS:

Beginning January all lady golfers are requested to wear skirts while playing golf on the Ashton Country Club greens. No lady member wearing bermuda shorts or any attire other than the proper-length skirt will be permitted on the greens.

Respectfully,
Marvin T. Lane, president

^{1/2 x} "So what?" I asked.

Melissa looked at me. "Don't you know why?"

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"Uh uh. Why?"

"Because of the Negrah caddies."

"What about them?" I'd seen most of the caddies all my life. Most of them were ~~pretty nice~~ ^{all night} except that Father said they gambled all the time.

"They don't want them looking at the lady golfers all the time. Daddy says it's horrible the way the caddies giggle and stuff at the ladies' behinds."

"Ohhhh," I said. But frankly I didn't believe it. I still don't, not really. Colored people just don't pay any attention to white people and certainly not lady golfers. That was kind of stupid of Melissa, but I didn't say so.

That night, though, Mother started talking about how she and Mrs. Meredith practically had to sit in the dark while they were having their little after-golf drink. They were just sitting there by the window in the night club, she said, and Mr. Lane came over and closed the curtain. See, they have this very large picture window down there and it overlooks the patio. If you're sitting on the patio you can look in and see everything that's going on.

"Why did Lane do that?" Father asked.

"Because of the caddies again, I guess. He didn't want them to see us being served drinks."

"How stupid," I said. I thought I'd better stay on this conversation. I was pretty worried Mrs. Meredith might have told her about us smoking.

"No, it's not stupid," Father said. "It's illegal to serve drinks in Ashton. We're certainly not setting a very

good example for anyone."

"Colored people do it, too," I said.

"Where?" Father asked.

"At the Elks Club," I said. "At the colored Elks Club. Isaiah told me."

"Well, they shouldn't do it either," Father said.

Mother sort of sighed. "Honestly, this situation is getting so we don't have any freedom at all any more." She looked at Father. "Wasn't that simply a terrible thing in the paper tonight?"

"Yes," Father said. "Now, Sarah, I want you to keep the doors to the house locked. All the time. Even during the day. Do you understand?"

"Oh, we do, now. Velvet sees to that. But, really, things are just getting out of hand."

"What happened in the paper?" I asked.

But they didn't have to tell me. The telephone rang. It was Melissa.

"Hey, it's me," she said. "You know what we were talking about this afternoon? About the caddies and all?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, did you read the paper?"

I got pretty interested. "Not yet! What was it?"

"You oughtta read it. Mrs. Tate got rapped!"

"Rapped?"

"Yeah, by this Negrer. He just walked in her house in the morning and rapped her."

"Mrs. Tate?"

"Yeah, you know. The one that does hair down at Miss Roper's Beauty shop. The blond one. The Negrah just knocked on her door and asked if her husband was there. She said he wasn't and he just came in and RAPPED her. You know what that is, don't you?"

"I'm not real sure. What is it?"

"Nasty," she said. "The nastiest thing that---"

"You mean?"

"Uh huh."

"Gosh," I said. I was terrified out of ^{my} mind. I could just picture that colored man.

"They didn't put her name in the paper or anything, but everybody knows who it was and all."

"Did they catch the colored man?"

"Not yet. But they've got all these police and dogs and everything looking for him. Isn't it the most horrible thing you ever heard of? Wouldn't you just die? What would you do if some Negrah tried to rapp you?"

"Pass out of the picture, I guess."

"See, that's why they don't want you wearing shorts or anything at the club. And just think we're going to have to go to school with them."

Right away Mr. Hopper popped into my mind again. "I don't think we'll have to yet," I said. "Not in Ashton."

"Yeah, we are too. Next year. They're gonna start integratin' next year. We'll probably all get rapped. This girl up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania did. It was horrible. Three of them."

"But they don't care up there," I said.

"I guess not. But isn't it horrible?"

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I didn't say anything and I could hear "Melissa breathing on the other end of the phone. I never had thought of all that before. ~~I just thought people didn't want us to go to school with them because some of them were mean like Velvet said.~~ I mean about colored people.

"Mrs. Tate's in the hospital," Melissa said. "She's all hi-storical and everything."

"I don't blame her," I said.

"Yeah. Could you do the third problem?"

"Rithmetic? I haven't tried them yet."

"Well, call me if you get it."

"Okay."

"Bye."

"Bye."

I just sat there, staring at the phone. I sure was glad Mother and Father hadn't told me what was in the paper. Wouldn't that ^{have} be embarrassing? Mother and Father sitting up there telling me about all that? After awhile I went down and looked at the paper. It's only a weekly paper but the headlines were so big it took up practically the whole front page:

WHITE WOMAN HERE RAPED BY NEGRO

I didn't want to get caught reading about it, so I went on in the library. Father was sitting in his red leather chair, reading the old boring Sewanee Review. He doesn't much like to be disturbed after dinner when he's reading, but I just thought I would. I wanted to ask him some things, but I didn't want him to know I'd read about Mrs. Tate. Mother and Father don't

know I know about things, but I've known ever since I was nine. Melissa's mother told her about it. Melissa said it was the most embarrassing thing she's ever gone through. They went upstairs in Mrs. Stewart's bedroom and Mrs. Stewart started talking very sad and solemn. Afterwards she showed Melissa this stupid book that Melissa had already looked through one thousand times. If Mother ever starts trying to tell me about it, I'm just going to yawn and pretend like I'm bored.

"Melissa says we're gonna get integrated next year," I said.

Father didn't even look up. "She does, does she?"

"Uh huh. Are we?"

He looked at me over the magazine. (I think he kind of knew I'd read the paper.) "I don't think you will, not at your level."

"I'll be in the seventh next year, Junior High School. It's pretty near colored town."

"Yes, well, I think you've missed all that." He went back to reading again.

"Good-night," I tried to sound just like Arthur and plopped myself down on the sofa. "Why did they have to go and start up all this integration stuff for? It's just a big mess--- everybody mad with everybody else and us having to keep our doors locked all the time. Velvet says she's not gonna let them integrate her grandchildren. And they're gonna start school next year!"

"I'm afraid Velvet doesn't have anything to say about it." He was still reading. Father can be as infuriating as Arthur sometimes.

"You mean if she doesn't want her grandchildren to go to school with white children, she can't even get out of it?"

"Afraid not." He looked up then.

"Well, I don't think that's right. Why can't they have three schools. Colored and white and one that's mixed-up. Then, if people want to mix and all, they can. Looks like to me you oughtta be able to do what you wanta do."

"Who would pay for so many schools?"

"I don't know. Same people that pay for them now, I guess. Seems to me you oughtta have some kind of choice and not just be made to go to school with people you don't want to."

He rested the magazine in his lap. "It builds character to do things you don't want to do."

"I don't see why," I said and slapped one of the sofa pillows in my lap. Father's always saying that about building character. I'm kind of tired of that saying. "Do you guess I'll ever go to school with colored people?"

"No."

"Why not?"

He started looking very bored. "For one thing you'll be in boarding school and unless the colleges are thoroughly integrated by the time you get there, you'll probably have missed that experience."

My heart started pumping away. "Are you gonna send me away too?"

"In time."

"To Connecticut?" I felt like crying.

"No, I think your mother wants you to go to a Southern school."

It was the first time I'd ever heard I was going to get sent away too. It was extremely sad. Me, being put away somewhere like Arthur. At least, though, it wasn't Connecticut. "I don't believe I'd much like it up in Connecticut," I said in this very pale voice.

"Why not?"

"I just don't, that's all." I didn't want to tell him about what Arthur said, about everybody being different and rich and all. I just didn't want to worry him any more. "Did you know Arthur's school is integrated?" I said.

"No, I didn't," he said and kind of raised an eyebrow.

"Uh huh. Next year they're gonna bring a whole bunch of Africans over."

"Who says so?"

"Arthur."

"Oh."

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He glanced back down at his magazine and I guess he wanted me to stop talking. But I was thinking that maybe--- just MAYBE---if I saw he was in a good enough mood and all, I might could tell him about me and Mr. Hopper. "Father," I said extremely sweetly. "Are you partial to colored people?"

"Some of them, yes. You know we all love Velvet and her family."

"I know, but would you ever invite them to a party you were giving or something?"

"I don't think so. In the first place I don't think they would enjoy our parties very much."

"Wouldn't some of them? I mean like the real educated ones? Like over in the Congo and all?"

"I couldn't say." He put his feet up on the foot stool. "It's rather obvious, though, isn't it, that the white man isn't particularly welcome in the Congo? They would rather be with themselves." He must've been getting unboxed because he lighted a cigarette. "But---it's always been the same. The good white man and the good colored man have always had nice relationships." He let out this huge cloud of smoke. "I'm sure, though, each of us feels easier with his own color."

"Yeah," I said, but I was thinking about smoking. I'd sort of like to have been smoking, too. It's enjoyable talking deep with Father. He's never treated me like a moron, even when I was a child. But I really did agree with ^{what} he was saying. When I get to thinking about it, I think I'd feel pretty funny if I was all the time with just colored people. I mean if I was the only white one. One time Mother and I went to Velvet's church. Velvet's father had died and we were the only white people that went. It was terribly pitiful and everybody in the church started yelling and throwing their arms up in the air. We don't do that at funerals in the Episcopal Church. When Grandfather Whitfield died, they just read out of the Prayer Book and in fifteen minutes almost it was over. Colored people came to his funeral but they didn't yell or anything. It kind of scared me, frankly, all the yelling and being the only white person in there. I don't know why, it was just different, that's all. I sure did feel sorry for Velvet, though. ~~She was pres-~~
~~tate.~~

"But why are you worrying so about all this?" Father asked.

"I don't know. Everything's getting so sort of changed and spooky. We never have had to lock our doors in the day time before." (I shouldn't have said that because he'd know I'd read the paper.)

"Well, I wouldn't be too worried about it."

"But, why has everything started getting so sort of dangerous and everything?"

He kind of frowned. "It isn't really dangerous, but so much emphasis has been put on this racial situation, ^{I guess} (You know when a person is suddenly given praise---and privileges he's never been quite accustomed to---he sometimes abuses those privileges.) I think that's what's happening in the South. It's certainly happening in some of our northern cities."

"You mean with colored people? Mean ones?"

"Some of them, yes. It was the same after the War Between the States. There were many colored people who abused the privilege of freedom. Still, there were many fine ones too."

"Like Velvet," I said. "And like that Opera singer up in New York? The one from Mississippi?"

"Yes, exactly."

"It sure is spooky, though."

"Surely, Felicia. Not sure. Don't say that."

"Surely, I mean."

"Well, don't worry about it," he said. "And remember one thing. Just because a man is a Negro or different in any way from you, gives you no right to feel superior or be unkind."

"Oh, I know that," I said. "But sometimes don't you think it's unkind to make somebody ride on the back of the bus

and all that?"

"As far as I'm concerned, they can ride anywhere they like. As long as a man is courteous and a gentleman, white or colored, it makes no difference to me where he rides."

"Me either," I said. "But, just for instance, say, what if you were having a hot dog or something at the dime store and this Negro man sat down right beside you? What would you do?"

He kind of laughed. "I don't think I'd be sitting there in the first place. I don't like hot dogs."

"But I mean if you did like them?"

"I suppose I'd just go on eating my ~~dog~~ ^{hot} dog."

"You would?"

"Yes."

"But you're not for going to school with colored people?"

"No. No, I'm not. But I do want the colored schools to be better than they are. For that matter I want our white schools to be better."

"Yeah, like Nadine Miller's and them's school out in the country. Her school's the most run-down-looking thing you ever saw. They even teach three classes ~~in~~ ^{on} one room."

"I know," he said and put out his cigarette. "But speaking of school, don't you have some homework to do?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Well then?" He picked up his magazine again. When he picks up a magazine, it means he's through talking.

I just sat there staring at him. I wish I'd had the courage to tell him about Mr. Hopper. I really wanted to. It would have been such a relief. But I'm such a coward at times. It's funny, but everybody in our family for simply centuries

has had courage. I don't know what happened to me.

gal 37 "Well, good-night," I said.

"Good-night."

All I could do was drag on up to my room and try to do my arithmetic. I couldn't do it, though. I couldn't even do the first problem. I guess I was worrying too much. I kept thinking about Mrs. Tate hysterical in the hospital and about Mr. Hopper and ^{his fall} August and ladies not being able to wear bermuda shorts and I guess I was just confounded out of my mind.

Thank goodness, we started hearing from Arthur again. We had a letter the very next day. It hurt us pretty bad, that one. But his next ones were quite stimulating. I practically hardly didn't even think about Mr. Hopper at all. Mother said she thought Arthur was developing.