

Chapter 13

I got to be thirteen right smack dab in the middle of Ponte Vedra. Ponte Vedra is this place outside Jacksonville, Florida. Rich northerners go there in the wintertime and rich Southerners in the summertime. That's the reason we can only stay one week. Most people stay two weeks and there're some that even stay three. ~~But~~, anyway, I had my birthday there and that night this orchestra they have in the Cactus Room played "Happy Birthday" and everybody stared. Afterwards, I went out on this sort of terrace and thought about how soon I would be able to wear lipstick and ride around waving at everybody. That's what Sue Pate and Mary Lou Fitts do. They're the most popular girls in Ashton, but they don't speak.

The stars were out and you could hear the ocean roar. I guess Ponte Vedra is my most favorite place in the world. I was glad we had five more days. That morning I saw these sad

people bring out their bags and pack up to go home. I felt extremely sorry for them but then I knew our time would come too. It's like dying, I guess. Everybody knows you've got to, but you never think about it. I do, though, sometimes. I don't talk about it; I just think and I think it's simply terrible the way they put you in those caskets and everything. When I die I've already decided what I want. I want thousands of violets growing around me and this very small black iron cross with just my first name on it. I don't know where they'll get the cross. Maybe in England somewhere or I guess Mother and Father will have to have it made. All they do for you in Ashton is put this huge cement piece of sidewalk on top of you. ~~It's horribly ugly. Do you ever think about dying?~~ ^{think about dying,} I suppose it is very peculiar to but when the stars are out and I'm alone I think of all sorts of peculiar things, as you've found out. 93

I didn't think about dying long, though, because Mother came out and told me it was time to go to bed. Arthur was still inside looking at this cheap movie they show after dinner sometimes. It was just as well he was by himself because Arthur had practically ruined our entire vacation. Almost every night we were having some kind of argument.

See, what happened was Arthur developed false pride. He developed it about eight miles out of Ponte Vedra ~~even before we got there.~~ We had been driving all day and it was terribly hot. It's a pretty long drive from Ashton to Ponte Vedra and I couldn't wait to get there because soon as you get to the ocean it is really quite cool. Sometimes at night you even have to put blankets over you. Anyway, Ponte Vedra is about eighteen miles from Jacksonville and you think you'll never get there. But right

in the middle of Route ~~AAA~~ ¹ ALA, Arthur had to go and develop false pride. It was about five o'clock and we were trying to hurry so we could swim before dinner. As usual Arthur was sitting up front with Father, and all of a sudden he said we had to stop.

"You just went an hour ago," Mother said. (You know what she was talking about.)

"No," Arthur said. "I just want to get my suitcase out, that's all."

"Why?" I said. "We'll be there in ten minutes!"

"I just want to," Arthur said. "I want to put on my other suit." He looked at Father who looked very hot and wrinkled. "I think we all should change."

"Really, now, Arthur," Mother said. "No one's going to notice us."

"Yes, they are," Arthur said. "They're always hanging around in the Inn, waiting to see a bunch of nicks walk in." He glanced at Father. "There's a hamburger place up here not too far and we can all just go in there and change."

"Nobody," Father said in this very pinched-mouth way. "No-¹body is going to stop this car now for anything!"

"D'ya want everybody to think we're a bunch of jerks?"

"I don't think anyone will," Mother said. "They know we've been traveling."

"Nobody knows it but us," Arthur said.

"Don't have such false pride, Arthur," Mother said. "It's what's inside a person that counts."

Arthur turned all the way around. "Nobody'll know what you've got inside, if you go around looking like a jerk all the time."

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"Don't speak to your mother that way," Father said. "Nobody's going to look at you anyway."

Arthur didn't say anything else until we got to the Inn and then we drove up under this porte-cochere sort of thing and there was old June, the nicest colored man you ever saw. He was smiling and welcoming us back. But the thing was, Arthur didn't even have to go inside. Only Father, just to register, because we had been put down at the lower patio, right on the ocean, where it's private and nobody has to see you.

"Whewhhhhh!" Arthur sighed, leaning back all relaxed on the car seat. "We didn't have to go in!"

"You're just being silly, Arthur," Mother said. "Now, see, you went to all that worry for nothing."

But then when we got to the patio, Arthur started up again. He refused to go swimming, which was the strangest thing in the world. Usually, Arthur is the first one into the ocean. But when we were all ready and everything he was just sitting in a chair in his room looking through this pamphlet they put in there for you.

"Aren't you coming, Arthur?" Mother asked him. We were all standing at his door with these striped robes we've got on.

Arthur glanced up from his pamphlet. "No, I don't think I will this time."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Hurry up, Arthur," Father said. "We don't have much time before dinner."

Arthur just went back to flipping through his pamphlet again.

Mother motioned for us to go on, and she went and sat down on the other twin bed.

Father and I went on down to the ocean. It was pretty cold, but not too rough. You know, every year whenever I first go in I keep thinking about crabs and sharks and things. It doesn't last long, though, and toward the last I never think about them at all. The time I like Father almost the best is when we're in the ocean. He's a lot of fun and he ~~takes my hand and~~ helps me over the biggest waves, even though I can swim better than anybody in Ashton. The only place I have to swim, though, is the Ewings swimming pool and Mother won't let me go until I'm invited because she thinks people are always taking advantage of the Ewings. I went practically every day last summer. The country club's going to build a swimming pool next year and I can hardly wait.

I thought Mother would positively never come, but she finally did.

"Well, I finally got it out of him," she said to Father.

"What's his trouble now?" Father asked.

"He says we're white."

"We're---whaaaaat?" Father said, frowning at her.

"White," Mother said.

I just looked at her.

"He says you can always tell new people because they're so much whiter than anybody else. He wants to wait until he gets tanner before he comes out."

"How's he going to do that?" I asked.

"It seems he bought some lotion at the drug store before he left. You put it on and you can tan---even without the sun." She glanced back at the patio. "He's up there now, putting it on."

Father just shook his head and then the three of us went

further out into the ocean and it was wonderful. Mother adores the ocean, too.

I can't tell you how good you feel after swimming. It makes you happy all over--so happy you almost feel like crying. I could have cried while we were walking back to the rooms, but I wasn't in the mood. It's just when things are boring that you feel like crying.

We all got dressed for dinner and while we were sitting around waiting for Mother and Father to finish their high ball, Arthur started getting orange. He kept getting oranger and oranger and the only thing white about him was these two white circles round his eyes. His neck looked funny too.

"Arthur!" I said. "Look at your face!"

He went over to the bureau mirror and stood looking at himself, turning his face from left to right. "Uh huh," he said. He actually sounded proud.

But then when it was time to go to dinner, Arthur said he wasn't hungry.

"Now, Arthur!" Mother said. "We're all getting just a little fixed of this! Felicia, you shouldn't have told him his face was orange. It isn't, really. He looks quite nice. Up you go now. It's late."

"It's not orange, Arthur," I said. I was starving.

"I'm just not hungry," he said and then I noticed him looking up and down at us. I wondered if he were ashamed of us or anything. I knew he couldn't be ashamed of Mother. She was wearing a black dress and she really looked pretty. Father looked nice too--for a man. He was wearing a dark-blue suit and he wasn't

as tired looking as he is in Ashton.

I started backing away, sort of. I guess it was me Arthur was ashamed of. As I ^{say} told you, I'm not pretty. I have these very long, thin legs that look like sticks and my hair is too blond and no eyebrows hardly. Also I inherited Grandfather Whitfield's nose. It's not too bad, I guess, but it doesn't turn up enough. Mother says I look alright. She says I have a fine twinkle in my eye and that my face has character. But who wants to have that! To be popular you have to be short and plump and have a turned-up nose. One whole month I kept putting adhesive tape on my nose, attaching it to one end and clamping the other to my forehead, so I'd have a turned up nose, kind of like Melissa Stewart's. But it kept coming off in bed and didn't do anything.

"Well, I'm pretty hungry," Father said. "Let's go!"

Mother looked at Arthur again. "Are you sure you don't want to come, Arthur?"

"Yep," was all he said and we left him there.

I didn't say anything all the way over to the Inn. I kept wishing I didn't look the way I did. Father said if Arthur got hungry enough, he'd come.

Dinner was wonderful and all these people kept coming up to our table. Mother and Father are these very well-liked people at Ponte Vedra and even though we do live in such a small town, some of the people we see there come from afar to visit us.

I had pompano and right in the middle of it, ARTHUR came walking all orange into the dining room. The only thing was he was wearing dark glasses like a blind man and he also had this cigarette holder dangling from his hand.

Right away I felt the blood rush to my face. "Do something, Mother," I said. "Tell him to go back."

"Heavens," Mother said and I knew everybody was staring. Arthur plopped down in a chair and didn't say anything.

"Arthur," Mother whispered in this almost rasping voice. "Put that away!"

"What?" he asked very innocently.

"You know what," Father said. "Give it to me!"

"My holder?"

"Give it to me!"

Arthur handed over the cigarette holder, and then our waiter came over. Arthur looked up into his face and I wondered if he could see anything. It was dark in the dining room anyway.

"The pompano is very good," Mother said. I guess she was trying to help him out. It was impossible for him to read the menu.

I declare, I can't understand why Arthur does these batty things all the time.

Anyway, when we got to the dessert, Arthur changed his dark glasses for his normal ones and in the soft light you could hardly tell he had those white circles round his eyes. The rest of dinner was great, except, later, when they served coffee in the lounge, we spotted the Woods from Richmond! I saw them first, because I saw Margaret and Jonathan. Margaret and Jonathan are the daughter and son of Mr. and Mrs. Woods. I despise them. Margaret is Arthur's age and Jonathan is in college now. They surely had changed---just in one year!

"How lovely," Mrs. Woods said when Mother went up to speak to her. They never come over and speak to us first. Margaret

and Jonathan were talking to some people their age, but Mrs. Woods went right on telling us about them anyway---without our even asking. Margaret was at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, this year, she said, and of course Jonathan was at Princeton. "We're quite proud of him. He made Henry's club, you know."

"What club were you, Henry?" Mother asked Mr. Woods.

"Ahvy," Mr. Woods said as if he were about to throw up. He has these very large nostrils. He meant "Ivy."

Mother invited them ALL over for cocktails the next night and I could have died. But she said the Woods were always having us over and she thought we should do something ^{for them} this time. I hate, HATE the Woods!