

Chapter 15

Winky's plane didn't get in until the next afternoon, so that gave me plenty of time to get myself together. Mother said Winky was going to stay in my room with me which, as you can imagine, was a fine pleasure for me. I got up quite early Saturday morning and put on stockings. This was quite a shock to everyone at breakfast. I came walking in the dining room and everyone was vastly surprised. All anybody else ever has on for breakfast are bermuda shorts and things, but I came walking in with my stockings and lovely dark blue dress on.

"What in the world, Felicia?" Mother asked.

"What?" I asked back.

"Why are you so dressed up?"

"I don't know. Just tired of going around looking so haggard, I guess."

"Why, I think you've looked very nice."

"Not really. I think everyone ought to look decent sometimes."

"All right, but, remember, that's your best dress."

"I know." Sometimes Mother doesn't even think I have a brain. I knew I had my best dress on.

~~Still, I must say,~~ it was rather boring sitting around all dressed up. After breakfast I went in the lounge and sat watching everybody. I watched until about ten-thirty. ~~All anybody did was just walk through and nobody spoke.~~ You would think that if you were the only person sitting in a huge room like the lounge, some body would speak to you, but nobody did. Most of the people just kind of smiled and I just kind of smiled back.

Finally, I decided I'd better go on back to the room and go swimming. That would kill a lot of time until Winky got there and, besides, I could dress up again after lunch.

I'm certainly glad I went back when I did. Because, you see, I got in on the beginning of this terrible thing Arthur did. I'm not so sure I really ought to tell about it. Mother made me promise I wouldn't say anything about it in Ashton. And I'm not---not the really bad part. Everybody at Ponte Vedra thought it was funny, but we didn't. Arthur wouldn't even come out of his room for the last two days we were there. ~~Oh, the trial of it all!~~

What happened was---see---Arthur didn't meet any girls his age. He met this one the Junior Hostess tried to push off on him. But she was this very tall, giggly girl that did nothing but walk around with her hand dangling in the air. They did play Bingo one night but she giggled all the way through the game and neither of them ever Bingoed. Arthur had to pay two dollars and fifty cents a card, too. Ponte Vedra gets quite expensive like that, in a thousand different ways.

Anyway, that morning at breakfast Arthur was glooming around

gal 53 because they were having the Saturday-night dance at the Surf Club. Mother said Arthur could go to it this year on account of he was getting so old.

"You can be with us," she said. "~~I think it would be lovely to have a dance with my son.~~"

Arthur didn't say anything, but the last thing in the world I knew he wanted was to sit up there with Mother and Father.

"Why don't you ask Peg Woods to go with you?" I asked.

"Heavens," Mother said. "I certainly wouldn't do that--- not after the way she treated you."

"She wasn't so bad," Arthur said. I knew he didn't want to act humiliated in front of us.

"Besides, I'm sure she already has an engagement," Mother said.

Arthur just mumbled something.

"Go on and call her," I said. It was exciting. I wanted to see what would happen. I could just see Arthur and Peg, ~~stirring away on the dance floor.~~

We didn't talk about it any more then, ~~though~~. But when I got back to the room to go swimming I heard him talking on the phone in his room: ~~ⓧ~~

"...You've gotta wash your hair?" he was saying. "What do you have to do that for? Yeah? Well, why don't you wash it now?" ---There was a long silence.---"Well, Peg, look! We can just stay for a half hour. Your mother wouldn't think that was too much... You came down here to rest?! Well, look, go ask her if you can't go for just a half hour?" Another long pause. "She did! By ten-thirty? Sure! We don't even have to stay that long

if you don't want to. Okay, look, I'll see you about eight o'clock. Eight-thirty? Okay. Bye."

Well, I was amazed. To tell the truth I didn't think Arthur had that much nerve, to call up somebody like Peg Woods. It's terrible for boys to have to call up girls, I think. But sometimes Arthur can surprise you. I think he inherited a lot of his nerve from Uncle Alex that is divorced. Uncle Alex was also a well-known spy during World War II.

I was glad for Arthur, ~~though~~. I thought it was quite interesting for him to partake of a good time, ~~You know~~, since his life has been so unfulfilled and everything. ~~But I didn't think too much about it then because I went on out swimming and after lunch I didn't have too much time to think about it.~~ ^{g?} ~~Because~~ ^{Seen}

~~Winky~~ came driving up with a one-eyed taxi driver.

Naturally we were overjoyed to see her and we showed a great deal of emotion on our part. She looked very nice in a seer-sucker suit. Winky's pretty tall and actually I guess when I get older I'll probably look something like her myself. She's blond ~~and~~ ^{and} all, but the only thing about her is she has these two teeth that kind of cross in the front. It doesn't look too bad but I'm glad I don't have them. Also she plays golf all the time.

~~g? can~~ She and Mother started embracing madly. Terrible! ~~As I've told you,~~ I despise beginnings with people.

"Awnt Seyruh!" she said to Mother. I forgot to tell you, that's how they talk in Charleston. They say "Seyruh" for "Sarah" and "bo-at" for "boat" and "pyehpuh" for "paper." I think they get it from refined colored people. Somebody told me that, I think.

"Felicia!" she said. "How gro-wan you are!"

"Thank you," I said, and started kind of hitting the sides of my legs. I guessed she noticed my stockings ~~and all.~~

"Where's Allison?" she asked all breathy and beaming.

"Play ^{or} golf," Mother said. "He'll be in later. I don't know where Arthur is."

"He's in the lounge reading that book again," I said.

"What book?" Mother asked.

"The one by that French girl---the one you said was well-written but trash."

"Oh dear," Mother said, and Winky laughed.

Mother put her arm around Winky. "Well, come, Winky. I hope you don't mind staying in the room with Felicia."

"Nooo. I hoped I would!"

Wasn't that nice of her to say that? That's the way she is, and she really meant it too. I know.

When we got in the room she ran to the window. "Oah, this wonderful ocean! Such a lovely breeze." She turned to Mother. "Let's take a walk, Awnt Seyruh, right now. Up the beach." Winky is absolutely harassed with energy. She's always ~~walking~~ ^{wanting} to take walks and things.

"Fine," Mother said. "But don't you want to unpack first?"

"I'll do that later. Come on, Felicia!"

Winky always starts up fun-things, right away.

"Would you like to take a walk, too, Felicia?" Mother asked.

"Just dying to," I said and started toward the door.

"I think you'd better change first, don't you?" Mother said.

"Felicia's started wearing stockings, you know, Winky."

Winky looked down at my pitiful thin legs. "I see," ^{was all} she said.

I wish Mother hadn't said that. It isn't nice to tell somebody that somebody else has started doing something new. It makes you feel stupid.

We all got dressed in shorts and then went strolling up the beach very slowly. I walked beside them, and not in back like I usually do. I love being with Winky and Mother. They treat me so elderly. I wished Winky had been with us for the whole time.

When we'd got a little ways from the patio, Mother said: "Now, Winky, tell me about this boy!"

I was thrilled. That's the kind of conversation I'm very partial to.

"Tom, you mean?" Winky asked. "I see Mother has been bothering you about it, too."

"She's mentioned him," Mother said.

~~Winky said.~~ "I suppose she told you he's a Yankee?"

"Yes, she told me that immediately."

Winky ^{laughed} ~~laughed~~. "You should hear Awnt Pett. She's absolutely beside herself. A Petrie marrying a damn Yankee! She's positive I'm going to marry him."

gal 54 "Well, are you?" Mother asked.

"I don't know," ~~Winky said.~~ But by the way she said it you knew she was teasing.

"He's rich, isn't he, Winky?" I said. "Cheap-rich?"

Both Mother and her laughed uproariously. I just wanted to know.

"I see Mother really has been talking," Winky said. "They've bought the old La Jeune Plantation, you know. You can imagine how

Aunt Pett feels about that. 'Yankee trash, living in that beautiful old place.' Really, you ought to hear her!"

"I can imagine," Mother said. "But, Winky, are you really interested in him?"

"Oh, I don't think so. Not really. He's just somebody to--- Everybody's married, you know. Literally everybody I- "

"Well, I think that's very nice for you, Winky," Mother said. "Why does Ann object to him so?"

"Family, I guess. They are a bit much and, too, Tom doesn't do anything and he's kind of fat."

"Fat?" Mother and I asked together.

"Not really---but you'll see him. Mother says you're coming over this Fall."

"I'd like to," Mother said. "Either this Fall or Spring. I want Felicia to see more of Charleston now that she's getting a little older."

Winky glanced at me. "Yes, since you're getting so grown." She kind of patted me on the shoulder.

"When are we going, Mother?" I asked. Frankly, it kind of scared me, the thought of going to a place as snobbish as Charleston. I mean I'd learned all about how snobs are and I knew they'd hate me! My Aunt Pett won't even speak to you unless you've got about one million ancestors. They all have to be Southerners too. I know all about Charleston.

Don't go there unless you really have nice ancestors. If you don't and go anyway people might be nice to you, but they'll think you're

just the same
common anyway. It's pretty terrible, and, ~~see~~, the worst thing about me is I'm bored to distraction over ancestors. I just have no inclination toward them at all. I might get over it, though.

Mother said she wasn't sure when we were going, that it depended on school and Arthur and many things.

"Well, I'll see to it you meet Tom," Winky said. "I think you'd like him. He's so fun-ny."

Poor Winky. She did want to be married so. Still, I just couldn't imagine her married to a cheap-rich northerner. I think, myself, I'd almost even rather be an old maid. But not in Charleston.

"Do you still hear from the one in New York?" Mother asked. "The one you were so interested in in college?"

"Oh yes," Winky said. "He says he may be coming down this Fall."

"He's the only one you've ever really been interested in. Isn't he?"

Winky started looking very serious. "Yes," she said, "unfortunately."

Mother let out this sigh. "It's all so trying, isn't it?"

"I don't think he ever really cared anything about me. He---"

"Well, why don't you just forget him then?"

"I'm trying," ~~she said.~~

We didn't say anything more for a long time. We just walked very slowly and tragically. I think it's terrible that somebody as nice as Winky has to go and suffer so much. She's always so cheerful about her plot, too. If I were twentyseven and still not married, I don't think I'd be cheerful at all. I probably won't be married then either. I'll probably go on until I'm fifty thous-

and and then marry somebody old like Velvet said I would. That is, if I marry at all.

"Oah," Winky said. "I forgot to tell you! I've got some friends down here. They have a house. The Tarletons. They're in the tobacco business from Greensboro. I called Alice at the airport and she wants me to go to some dance or something with them tonight. All right?"

"Why, lovely," Mother said. "The dance is down at the Surf Club."

"That's where Arthur's going to be, too," I said. "He's going to the dance, too."

"Arthur is?" Mother asked. "Does he have a date to go?"

"Uh huh, with Peg Woods."

"Peg Woods?" Mother asked.

"Uh huh. He asked her this morning and she first said she had to wash her hair. But she's going."

"Oh dear."

Winky looked at Mother. "Why, is something wrong with Peg Woods?"

"No. No," Mother said. "I just think she's a little more advanced than Arthur."

"They're the same age," I said.

"I know, but girls mature so much faster."

"I know," I said and looked at Winky. "We just don't think Arthur will ever mature."

Winky laughed. "I don't ^{smile} any of us will, frankly. But, really, Arthur going to a dance! I can't believe it!"

"He goes all the time up in New York," I said.

"Now, Felicia," Mother said. That's what she's always tell-

ing me when she thinks I'm exaggerating. She thinks I exaggerate all the time. Exaggerating means lying. To her, I mean. I thought of Mr. Hopper.

gal 55
"Time, time, time." Winky said. "It makes such a loud noise rushing by."

Beautiful saying! See, that's the way Winky is. She's always going around saying beautiful things like that. I like that.

~~Don't you?~~ Time, time, time. It's so poetic.

We walked for miles up the beach and talked deep the whole way. When we got back to the room, Arthur was already dressed up. Also Father. They were just sitting in the room, dressed up and staring at each other. It's very peculiar but when it's just Arthur and Father alone they can't ever think up much to say to each other. ~~When they do talk, they sound like strangers or something.~~

Winky kissed both of them on the cheek and they seemed exceedingly glad to see her.

"Where have you three been?" Father asked.

"For a walk," Mother said.

"Well, it's five-thirty. Arthur wants to have an early dinner tonight. Seems he has a date."

Arthur had on his dark blue suit---the one he had bought up in New York and his hair was all slicked down. He looked like he had been dressing for hours. How strange life is. We used to have terrible troubles with Arthur; he wouldn't even take a bath. That went on for simply years.

"We won't be a minute," Winky said. "Come on, Felicia. Let's get dressed."

"Okay," I said but I was thinking that now ^{might be} was the time I ~~might~~ could confess to her about Mr. Hopper, ~~and all~~. It's funny, but you ~~know~~ I'd never thought about the magazine coming out ^{and} ~~and~~ people in Charleston reading it, too. They'd all commit suicide. ~~Me~~ saying I didn't like anybody but Negroes and that I wanted to go to school with nothing but Negroes in the room. Aunt Pett and them would never speak to me again. Even Aunt Ann and Uncle Petrie wouldn't.

While Winky was combing her hair, I said "Winky, I've got something to tell you. It's the most terrible thing in the world. Really awful."

"What is it?" she asked, but didn't look around from the mirror or anything.

"Well, it's about this northern newspaperman. He came down to visit us and I---"

But the telephone rang. I answered it and it was for Winky.

"Scuse me, Felicia," she said. It was her friends from North Carolina. They were coming right away to get her. She banged down the receiver and kind of let out a yelp. "I've got to hurry!" she said.

I watched her flying around the room, getting junk together and putting them in her pocketbook. I guess she'd forgotten about me having something terrible to tell her. She didn't even ask me about it.

STAR "Are you going to be pretty late coming back, Winky?"

"I don't know, but you go on to sleep. I hope I won't distrub you coming in."

"Oh, you won't!"

I started to say I could tell her later, but she wasn't

in the mood to listen, I guess. I knew I wasn't going to get another chance to tell her because she'd be playing golf the next day and then after that we'd be going home. When Mother and I got to Charleston the article would be out and I'd already be a common disgrace.

Mother and Father and Arthur and I, all alone, had dinner together at the Surf Club---out in the open. It was a very beautiful night. You could hear the roar of the ocean and the stars were out so you could see the palm trees outlined against the sky. The stars are so close to you in Florida. [~~It's almost like you could reach up and touch them.~~] - 8?

Winky and her friends sat at another table and Winky was extremely happy looking. She was laughing and talking and I just sat there, watching her. She was the only person in the world I could have told what I'd done to. It would n't have worried her as much as somebody like Mother or Father and too I know she wouldn't have told Aunt Pett and them. What she could have done was stolen the magazine when it came out so nobody would see it. [~~The dinner was not very good to me. Frankly, I couldn't even hardly eat.~~] - 8?

Arthur made us hurry up and finish our dessert because I guess he wanted us to leave. Father asked Mother if she didn't want to stay for the dancing, but Arthur started getting very nervous so Mother said "no", that she was a little tired from so much walk^{ing} and believed she would just like to go back to the room. Mother and Father usually stay a while for the dancing, but I guess they didn't want to humiliate Arthur.

"Then it looks as if this is going to be your night, Arthur," Father said and scraped back his chair.

~~[Before we left Mother told Arthur again to "pu-leeeese" come in early.]~~

On the way back to our rooms, ~~I felt exceedingly sad and worried, but Mother and Father kept talking.~~ Mother said she would give anything to stay. "Just to see how Arthur is on the dance floor." But Father said he thought Arthur had started getting ashamed of us. He sort of laughed, ~~though~~, so I guess he wasn't hurt or anything. I was glad it wasn't just me Arthur was ashamed of. ~~I couldn't understand why he was ashamed of Mother and Father,~~ ^{through} ~~They are very, very nice. It's just too bad they had to go and raise up me, nothing but an exaggerator.~~

Cut all or most of this? Repetitive?

^{he} ~~Arthur~~ ^{Anyway} While ~~Arthur~~ was dancing we sat around in Mother and Father's room and talked about Uncle Alex. Uncle Alex owns a newspaper down in southern Georgia. I like him tremendously but, of course, he's the one that's divorced! Nobody else, on either side of the family, has ever been divorced before, and when Uncle Alex did it, you would have thought he had axed up somebody or something. He only married his wife because he was lonely. He went to school in England.

^{gals 56} I started yawning. It's depressing, I ~~said~~ ^{think}, to sit up and talk about somebody in your own family that's divorced. ~~I was already depressed-up enough.~~ But Mother said every family in the world has some trouble in it and she thinks we've been pretty lucky so far.

"I guess I'll go on to bed," I said.

"Yes," Father said. "I think we all should."

Mother looked at her watch. "Almost ten. Arthur should be in soon. I do want to hear ~~be~~ about it."

I got in bed and started reading a story in a magazine I'd found. It wasn't very good and I started to turn out the light but I heard this knocking on my door. "Missus Whitfield. Missus Whitfield." It was Peg!

I jumped out of bed and ran into Mother's room. "Peg Woods is outside," I said. "She's calling for you."

"For me?" Mother said. She went to the door. "Why, Peg dear, what is it?"

"Missus Whitfield," Peg said. "Arthur's drunk and something pretty awful has happened."

For a moment I thought Mother was going to faint, but she didn't. She just said, "Allison! Allison! Come here immediately!"

Father right away went down to the Surf Club to see what had happened, and Mother and I just sat there with our hearts thumping. Arthur drunk! It was like the stars dropping out of the sky--- one by one. ~~I had a vision of him swaying around all over the Surf Club and everybody staring and Arthur passing out---probably in the middle of the orchestra.~~

Mother didn't say much. She just sat there, her mouth one thin line and her fingers resting in her lap. We thought Father would positively never come back. He must have been gone over an hour at least. Mother told me to go to bed, but I said I couldn't sleep anyway. She said, "All right. All right. Why don't they come?"

Then---in they came! Arthur had a huge bandage over his nose and his glasses were all crooked. We just stood there, staring at him. Father didn't say anything; he led Arthur into his room and shut the door.

"He's hurt," I said, and Arthur had such a funny look in his eyes I wanted to cry.

"His nose- -" Mother said in this very pathetic voice. Then Father came out.

"What happened?" Mother asked.

"I don't know exactly," Father said. It seemed that Arthur had ordered a bottle of cherry wine, which he thought was Sherry wine. He had told the waiter it was for Father. But the waiter had bought Cherry ^{earing} Haren instead and Arthur had drunk too much. He got sick, practically crawled into the men's room and the toilet seat fell on his nose.

"Where was Winky?" Mother asked.

"Gone, I guess," Father said. "They weren't there when I got there."

"Heavens." Poor Mother looked so pale.

"We've been up and down the beach trying to find a doctor," Father said. "We finally found one."

"Is his nose broken?" Mother asked.

"It isn't a bad break."

Mother just sort of collapsed into a chair. "On a toilet seat," she said. "And he's the last of the Whitfields, too. The very last."

We all nearly died.