

Chapter 16

I never did get a chance to talk to Winky. Just as I knew she would, she played golf all the next day and she never asked me what it was I had to tell her. I guess she was too interested in Arthur and his huge bandage on his nose. She kept telling him he ought not to be embarrassed, but he was. He wouldn't even go in the dining room so we had to send trays and things over to him. False pride, ~~of course~~. We do hope he will triumph over that.

Poor old Arthur, ~~though~~. I don't think his vacation had been a very enjoyable one. But mine sure had. It was the saddest thing in the world saying goodbye to Ponte Vedra. Also to Winky, but Mother kept telling her we'd see her soon. "Yes," I thought, "after I'm exposed as the most tremendous liar in the entire universe." I started up worrying again, terribly this time.

So that's the way we returned from vacation---me, half worried to death and Arthur with his bandage. Thank goodness, though, Ar-

thur got only a slight hump on his nose. We were worried he would have to go back to school with a large one, but he didn't. It was pretty sad, seeing him go again. The night before he left we had a kind of celebration dinner and we all gave him presents. I gave him a tie Mother had got in Atlanta. Father was kind of mad about our going to Atlanta to shop. He still wanted us to be "loyal" and go to Morris's store in Ashton because Mr. Morris was in the Rotary Club with him. ~~But Arthur said Atlanta was the only place that had clothes like he wanted--northern clothes.~~ Anyway, Mother gave him a sweater, dark grey. But Father did this very peculiar thing. He gave Arthur a New Testament, with his name on it. I don't know what Arthur thought because he didn't say very much. Inside, Father had written: "To Arthur Whitfield from his father: September 20, 1960." And underneath was written: "Remember Now Thy Creator In The Days Of Thy Youth." I read it and felt a huge sorrow---worse than when we left Ponte Vedra. I don't know why I felt that way, but when somebody's leaving and then your father does something like that, it just sort of makes you really want to cry. I kept thinking: "What if we don't ever see Arthur again?" Connecticut is so far away and everybody's so different and you can't ever tell what might happen when someone's away. That's what Mother always says.

"That's lovely, Allison," Mother said when she finished examining the New Testament.

"Now that's the most important thing you have, Arthur," Father said.

"Yes, sir," Arthur mumbled and he just sat there with his head hanging down, looking at his gold name on the outside.

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The next day we all went down to the station to see him off again---even Isaiah and Velvet. Sometimes when I think about it, it seems I've spent my entire life in the train station. We're always going down there meeting somebody or seeing somebody off. Across the tracks from the station there's this colored house and these colored children are always racing around drinking great big bottles of orange. Everytime you go down there, one or other of the children has grown some more. I watch them all the time and think about everybody growing old---us and they.

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and these colored children are always racing around drinking great big bottles of orange. Everytime you go down there, one or other of the children has grown some more. I watch them all the time and think about everybody growing old---us and they.

But there was Arthur. It's terrible to always be the one going. I mean we could all be safe together at home, but not Arthur. I guess it's sort of like going into the army. There you are, getting on the train to have your brains blown out and everybody else is just standing there, forcing this terrible cheerfulness.

"Now you won't get lost this time," Mother said. "You know how to go through the station in New York, don't you, Arthur?"

"Certainly!" Arthur said and I thought I heard a tinge of his sophisticated accent again. I guess he was getting ready for up there.

And then the train came in. ~~I just can't tell you what trains do to me. They're the saddest things in the world. The wheels always seem to be shouting "good-bye" and you know that the cities where they take you are so huge and different---especially in the Fall.~~

Mother and Velvet hugged Arthur good-bye and Isaiah and Father only shook hands with him.

"Now study hard," Father said. "Let's see some A's this year---including Algebra.

"Okay," Arthur said, grinning, a little too much, I thought. He just glanced at me. "Bye, Felicia."

"Bye," I said.

He looked very nice this time. He had on his dark-grey

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suit, and even though he was a little too chubby from the summer, I bet he looked just as nice as anybody else on the train. The only thing was I like Arthur's hair better when he doesn't put too much water on it. When it gets dry, he looks better.

Velvet started waving her apron and cutting up like she does sometimes. Arthur was laughing, but I knew he didn't feel much like it. I know I didn't. It's pitiful when a member of your own family goes away and you know they're going to stay for months and months.

The train jerked and the porter hopped on the platform and slammed the door shut. There was another jerk and the train began to go. Arthur was leaning out the door, still waving. You could tell what he was saying but you couldn't hear. He was saying: "Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye." You would have died.

When the train disappeared we were all still standing there, grinning. "Oh, I do hope something grand happens to him," Mother said. "I just pray it will."

"A-men," Velvet said, and we all walked back to the car with our heads hanging down.

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 But I walked back into stark-raving tragedy. I don't much like to talk about it, but since it's part of last year I guess I'd better put it in. For the life of me I don't know how it all happened, but what happened was I grew one million feet tall. Just over night, almost. It must have happened in the Summer or something. Nobody else much had grown and Mother had a fit because I had to have all these new clothes and things. It was a dreadful entrance into the Ashton Junior High School. See, Junior High School is attached to high school and there're all these boys---

older ones and everything.

Literally everything about me started getting long---arms, neck, legs---even my fingers. + got to be even taller than Mother. At gym one day we all had to measure and weigh and this teacher that has cross-eyes and goes around bouncing the basketball all over the place looked at me when my time came and said "whoops!" and stretched the measuring part of the scales so high I could have cried. I was five feet seven and a half inches tall!

I don't know why that had to go and happen to me. Everybody else got extremely beautiful and popular. Mother said that when I get older I'll be thankful to be tall but she doesn't know anything. Sometimes I'd lie in the bath tub and think if I could only cut off about five inches off my legs, then attach my feet back on again I'd be all right. You don't know what it's like walking down the hall with somebody like Melissa Stewart who is short and exceedingly ^{beautiful} ~~cute~~ and there you are this huge thin giant of a human being.

— It was so terrible I couldn't even listen to any of Arthur's letters. I remember he did write something about not rooming with Knox Campbell this year because both of them had forgotten to sign up. [Knox had to room with Bob Leyden who was back and cured, and Arthur was rooming with a thin, excruciatingly intelligent human being from Lake Forest, Illinois that never took baths.

Mother and Father were always trying to get me to join in in reading Arthur's letters, but all I could think about was slam books and dances. See, that's what started up that Fall. [I guess you don't know what] slam books are. They're these notebooks and you put everybody's name at the top, then everybody flips through and writes down what they really think of you. It's strange, but if

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it's your book everybody writes "cute", "pretty hair" and "nice clothes" all over your name, but if it's somebody else's they write what they really think of you. In Marilyn Sumner's book somebody wrote under my name "too tall, bean pole." There wasn't one single "cute" and only four "nices."

In my diary I made a list:

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Popular:

- Melissa Stewart
- Marilyn Summers
- Margaret Ann Akers
- Eloise Adams
- Virginia Sue Markham
- Betty Rice

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Unpopular:

- Felicia Whitfield!!!
- Jane Farris
- Katharine Armstrong
- Charlotte Harrison
- Sally Ann Greer
- Mary Elizabeth Harmon

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These meant boys, not girls! I still had hundred of friends, but no boys. Girls were always bounding around all over the house. Melissa said that if I started eating---eating everything in sight--- I'd start getting fatter and then I wouldn't look so tall. I tried it, but it didn't work. Nothing worked. This new girl moved to Ashton---Carolyn Dunwoody. She was a half a grade above all of us, but she immediately became the most popular person you

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ever saw. She had green eyes and long, straight brown hair that she wore with a silver clip. Boys were always going to her house--- even on Sunday afternoons.

Every one of us bought silver clips for our hair, too, but it didn't work with me. I started letting my hair grow frantically long, but Mother made me have it cut. Mother kept saying: "Feliccia, you're going to be all right. You have a lovely complexion and your hair is a fine color of blond."

"But that doesn't help," I said. "You've got to be short and have brown hair and a turned-up nose."

"Ohhhhh me," she kept groaning. I heard her telling Mrs. Ewing that I was at the difficult age which is strange because once I heard Mrs. Ewing say that Mr. Ewing was at the difficult age. ~~Wonder which one is the most difficult, sure nuff.~~

Actually, I didn't like to talk very much to Mother about my tragedy. I don't know why exactly. I guess I didn't want her to know how pitiful I was. As you know, no mother wants ~~to~~ know they've brought some goon into the world. It's just too humiliating for them. Besides, Mother was always exceedingly popular when she was my age.

[One day we went into the shoe store. Mother had on this dark blue suit and looked very beautiful. But there I was--taller than her and looking like I was walking on stilts.

"We want something that fits," Mother said, talking to this man about some shoes for me. "I don't want her feet harmed."

"Of course, Mrs. Whitfield," the man said, rubbing his hands together. "Let's see what size."

Suggest cutting this incident - Mrs. Ewing's clothes follow in next chapter

I put my foot up on the little bench thing and it looked like it was going up for miles and miles---like a great long ship. I could have cried. And then the man went back into the back and YELLED back at us---"There's nothing in her size, Mrs. Whitfield--not in just the oxford." Then he came running back. "But we have these." He was dangling two hideous brown things that looked like something Miss Esther would have worn.

"No, I don't think so," Mother said and we dragged on out of the store. Finally, we found something that was all right and sensible.

So you see, that's pretty much the way it was. Except for dances. They started up because this dancing teacher started them. But then later Melissa and all of them started giving dances. Mother at first didn't think I ought to go. She said she thought thirteen was too young. "It's ridiculous, Allison," she said. "They just start things too early in Ashton,"

"Everybody else is going," I said.

"I know, I know," Mother said.

"Well, why did you let me take from the dancing teacher then if I'm not ever going to dance."

"I think it's a good idea to know how," Mother said. "But there's plenty of time for that yet."

I stood up. "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

Mother and Father looked at me as if they had been shot. I don't know why I said that. Mother was just getting on my nervous system, that's all. ~~I was sick to death of her always telling me what she thought was right, what she thought was wrong.~~

"Felicia, what has come over you this year?" she said.

"You've always been such a pleasant child."

"I'm just tired of always being different, that's all. Everybody else buys their clothes and I still have to go up there to Miss Hodges. She sticks pins in you on purpose. Everything's different. All the time!"

"Well, your father and I are doing the best we can for you. Now, you just get some control!"

"And stop that whining," Father said. "I don't want to hear any more of it."

I just went on up in my room and thought about dying. When I was dead they'd be sorry. Everybody would come to my funeral--- even boys ~~because they'd have to be palibearers-~~ --and people would never forget it because of all the violets and everything. I cried for hours it was so pathetically sad.

See, it was Melissa Stewart ^{that} ~~who~~ was giving the dance. It was the first private one any of us had ever given. Literally everybody was invited, older ones too. It was going to be in the basement of the coca cola plant. When we get older I guess we'll start having them at the country club so we can get drunk. But the basement of the coca cola plant is pretty good too. There're cokes all over the place and Mr. Stewart, who owns a fleet of restaurants in Ashton, knows how to buy records that are really good. Marilyn told me.

Well, anyway, there I was up in my room crying away about being dead and in Mother came. She said she and Father had been talking it over and they guessed I could go to the dance. She didn't really approve of it because it was "just silly, that's all--- at your age."

gal 59 "But I can go?"

"I suppose so." She didn't share my joy at all.

"Hot spit!" I said and started bouncing up and down on the

bed.

But, later, after Mother left, I got to really thinking about it. The dance. I was scared out of my mind. ~~_____~~