

Chapter 22

Well, ~~guess what happened?~~ Winky's beau came to the cocktail party! He didn't come until near the last, but all of a sudden he came barging into the room and I nearly collapsed. First, ~~though~~, let me tell you what happened to me. You'll die.

See, I decided if I was going to a cocktail party in a place like Charleston, I'd better kind of try to look like somebody from well, say, Atlanta or Savannah or somewhere. If you went in looking like somebody from a tiny town like Ashton, everybody'd think you were this pathetic hick and nobody'd speak to you. So what I did, I waited until Mother and them had already gone into the drawing room and when they were gone I started dressing. There wasn't anything I could do about my dress because the only one I had was my green linen one. It's not too bad, but it isn't what you're supposed to wear to cocktail party.

It has sleeves even. But Mother said my "little linen" was exactly what you're supposed to wear to a "little gathering" on Sunday noon. She had made me wear my two-piece, dark blue dress to church, but since the party was in our honor she thought it was better to wear the "little linen" for that.

But it doesn't make me look fat, and also I couldn't do anything about my low-heeled shoes. I thought of breaking off one of the heels and asking Winky if she had any I could borrow, but I was afraid hers wouldn't fit and there I'd be without anything. What I did, I decided I'd do something about my face! I got out all Mother's junk---lipstick, powder and even some rouge which she wears sometimes at night. I really packed it on and, though I hate to mention it, I looked gorgeous! I know I shouldn't say I did---I know that's very conceited and everything---but you have no idea what lipstick and rouge do to me, especially a lot of it. I look like an entirely different person. The only thing was, see, I told you, I don't have hard any eyebrows because they're so light. But there was nothing I could do about that. So I just pulled my hair slick back from my face and with just the bangs kind of brushed back I looked like I was about twenty-seven-years-old. If only I'd had some shoes with high heels! But people don't look at your feet too much, just your face, so it was all right.

When I got through, I stared at myself for hours in the mirror. I got to thinking that maybe I wasn't going to be an old maid after all. The trouble with someone like Winky is, she doesn't wear enough lipstick. You've got to really pack it on if you don't want to be an old maid. You look at old maids. Everyone of them, not one, wears enough lipstick and stuff.

I could hardly take myself away from the mirror, but I did, finally, and went on out into the hall. This older man was coming up the stairway and when he saw me he said "how-do-you-do." I said "how-do-you-do" back and kind of followed him on into the drawing room. Even he thought I was older.

STAR
There ~~wasn't~~ ^{were} too many people there yet, but the colored butler, that serves literally everybody's parties in Charleston, was already passing drinks around ~~on this~~ ^{with his} tray. I didn't much want Mother to see me and I don't think she did because she was surrounded by all these smiling people. The butler came up to me and I could have shot him. He asked me if I wanted a coca-cola! I said, "Nooooo," in that accent Arthur had when he came back sophisticated from Connecticut, "just an Old Fashion, puleeese."

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"Oh, yes ma'm!" he said and had this silly kind of glad-surprised look on his face.

I was delighted! But if Mother or any of them saw me drinking it, I was going to say it was orange juice. But then I got to thinking what if I got drunk like Arthur did down in Ponte Vedra. I'd go reeling around the room, slurping at everybody and then probably pass out on the harp or something. Mother would cave in with insanity. So I decided if I started feeling that way, even in the slightest, I wouldn't drink any more of it.

I was just standing there, tapping my fingers on this table, waiting for the butler to come back with my Old Fashion when Aunt Ann came up to me!

"Felicia," she said, "would you mind passing a few--- Felicia! What have you done to yourself?"

She didn't have to act like that! "Whatdoya mean, Aunt

Ann?"

"Your face!" She put her fingertips to her lips. "Seyr---" She looked across the room and didn't say anything else to me. She just went over and whispered something to Mother.

Right away I turned around so Mother wouldn't see me.

"Heah you is, Miss," I heard the butler at my back.

I half-way turned and both of them were^{there}---Mother and the butler.

"What is that?" Mother asked the butler.

"An Old Fashioned, Miss Seyruh. Would you like one?"

"No, no. Thank you. Felicia?"

"Huh?"

"Look here."

I turned and looked her straight in the eye. "What?" I said in this very angry voice.

She led me out into the hall. More people were coming up the stairway.

"Go in and ~~was~~^{take} that off-^{im}-immediately!" She kind of hissed it at me and then because of the other people she couldn't say any more, but I think they heard her anyway. She started smiling and went up to the people. They all started carrying on with that false joy grown ups have when they're trying to be nice. One of the women pointed at me and said, "Is that Felicia?"

Mother just glanced back at me. "Yes, she's doing a little errand for Ann. She'll be back in a minute."

I ran across the hall and into the bedroom. I was furious! And also I knew Aunt Ann was probably going around the room telling everybody. That's what older people^{do} all the time. They think everything you do is absolutely hilarious and they can

say anything they want to about you any time they feel like it. They don't care if you're standing right there hearing it half the time.

Mother came into the bedroom.

"Well, I hope you're sat-is-fied," I said.

"Satisfied about what?" she asked. She looked very pretty in her grey dress.

"Humiliating me in front of all those people!" I picked up this sweater on the bed and threw it across the room.

"Now, Felicia, you just control yourself!"

~~O~~ I HATE that word "control." Control yourself! CONTROL YOURSELF! It makes you sound like you're foaming at the mouth or something.

"Ordering something to drink," she said. "I'm ashamed of you. And your face!"

"Go on, then," I said. "Go on. I won't even go to the cocktail party. I just ^{want} want go!"

She came over to me and put her hand on the side of my face. "Felicia," she said very softly, "of course you're coming. Now, just run in and wash your face."

I guess I was so glad she wasn't mad any more that I didn't say anything.

"Run along now in the bathroom. And I think you could fix your hair more becomingly."

"All right," I said in this tone to show her I was a slave.

"Be quick," she called to me. "There're so many people who want to meet you."

The stuff was horrible to get off---especially the lipstick. I used cold cream and everything and didn't ever get it all off.

But, finally, I got to looking like my old, sad self again---hair hanging down on the sides, straight, and my bangs brushed all the way back. Also my face was pretty red from scrubbing it so hard. I didn't care how I looked any more, thought I made this dreadful face in the mirror and then dragged on into the drawing room again.

Without any lipstick and stuff I got to feeling tall and stupid again. Millions of people had come and I didn't know who I was going to talk to. You know, at a cocktail party, you can't just stand up there grinning like an idiot. You have to talk to somebody. You've never seen such a mixed-up group of people in your life. Ancient people, as old as Aunt Pett, were there. Some were as young as Winky but most were Mother and Aunt Ann's age. Everybody was holding glasses and talking. It sounded funny with all their Charleston accents. "Boe-et" for "boat" and "ayette" for "eight." All that. Finally, this older man came up to me. He was very tall and very thin and had gobs of white hair. But guess what he did? He bowed to me! To me! I shook his hand and curtsied which isn't so bad to do if the other person does what he's supposed to.

He said he was this name I didn't understand. But it sounded like Pringney. "And you're Felicia? Felicia Whitfield?" He was very serious.

"Yes," I said. "I'm my mother's daughter. Mrs. Whitfield? I'm the only girl."

gal 82 "I know. I know," he said and smiled a very nice smile because he had eyes that were very blue. "But, now, don't you have a drink?"

I started blushing. "I don't drink whiskey very much,"

I said. "I guess I'm not allowed to." I kind of rolled my eyes upward and started tapping my foot.

"Lovely," he said, "I've never enjoyed the sight of a young lady drinking whiskey. But wouldn't you like a lemonade or something else?"

"Yes, I think I would. I really do." That was nice of him, telling me he didn't like to see young ladies drinking whiskey. It made you feel like you were the nicest person in the whole room.

He held up his hand slightly to the butler and immediately the butler came prancing over again.

"A lemonade, please. For the young lady."

The butler kind of looked at me and I knew what he was thinking---about the Old Fashion and all.

"Yes, sir," he said and went off with the tray.

"Let's see," the man said, rubbing his chin. "Felicia Whitfield. Felicia Whitfield. I believe she is---let's see---" he glanced at me---"she is twelve years old!"

I shook my head violently. "Thirteen!" I said. "Thirteen! I'm in Junior-High School now."

"Ohhh yes," he said.

"My brother Arthur is fifteen now. He had to go to Connecticut, you know."

"To Connecticut?"

"Yes, to this school. We thought he needed a change of atmosphere."

For some reason the man laughed, but he had a nice laugh too. "I think we all need a change of atmosphere sometimes," he said.

"Uh huh, I think so too." I was trying to think up some-

thing else to say and then it came to me. "Mr. Pringney---"
I kind of slurred his name, "What do you think of Robert Browning's
sanguinary period?"

"What's that?" He leaned down closer to me. I thought
maybe he was a little deaf.

"Robert Browning's sanguinary period?" I practically
shouted it.

He raised up. ^{"Oahhh"} ~~"Gosh"~~ he said in his Charleston accent,
"Robert Browning, the poet."

I nearly died. "Yes, you know when he was going around with
this happy outlook all the time? Instead of his down-trodden
one?"

He started forwning. "Yes, of course." He looked at me
with his head half cocked. "Do you read Mr. Browning?"

"All the time. I'm extremely partial to him." (Lie.)

"Well, I think you're a very intelligent young lady. Mr.
Browning has been a fvorite of mine too."

"He is?"

"Yes." He smiled again, almost pitifully, and looking prac-
tically at the ceiling said:

~~Oh, to be in England~~ ^{1/2e}
"Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England---now!"

*l for line
center on longest
line.*

Sad! It gave you this feeling he really did want to be
in England---even more than Charleston. "Gosh," I said.

He started to say something else but this other man with
black-grey eyebrows came up to us. "Quoting poetry, Battle,"

he said, not even looking at me. "So that's why you're such a favorite with all the ladies."

Mr. Pringney thought that was highly amusing, but then he remembered me.

"This is Felicia Whitfield, Foster. Felicia, Mr. Foster Pereaux."

I shook his hand, but I didn't curtsy.

"Foster," Mr. Pringney said, "we have been discussing Robert Browning's sanguinary period. I'll wager you don't even know what that is."

"Robert Browning's what?" he asked and lighted a cigarette.

"Sanguinary period."

"I didn't know he had one," Mr. Pereaux said and ~~chuckled~~ ^{chuckled} quite rudely, I thought.

Mr. Pringney thought that was highly amusing also. "Well, my young friend and I know about it. In Georgia they're very concerned with Mr. Browning."

"That's so? That so?"

"I haven't exactly taken him up in school yet," I said. "I just kind of read it on my own. You ought to talk to my brother Arthur. He knows every^hthing about Robert Browning. He's always writing essays."

Mr. Pringney turned to Mr. Pereaux. "Arthur is up in Connecticut getting a change of atmosphere."

"Who is Ar^rthur?" Mr. Pereaux said. Mr. Pereaux was a very confused sort of man.

"Her brother. He's in school up there."

"Then I'm sure he's getting a change of atmosphere," Mr. Pereaux said.

The butler came with my lemonade. He had fixed it with a cherry in it.

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"Thank you," I said to the butler and took the drink. He had to hand me the napkin. I forgot to take it. Embarrassing, and both of the men were staring, too. I'm always forgetting napkins, just like Isaiah.

To cover up my mistake, I said, "Charleston is certainly full of grace and charm."

"How's that?" Mr. Pringney said.

"I said: Charleston certainly is full of grace and charm."

"Good!" Mr. Pereaux said. "It's half your city, you know."

"I know it," I said. "It's not a thing like where I come from. People in Ashton don't have much intellect."

Mr. Pringney really laughed that time. "Here," he said to Mr. Pereaux, giving him his glass. And he took out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

Mr. Pereaux was smiling too.

Mother came up and joined us. "What's going on over here?"

Mr. Pringney finished wiping his eyes. "Seyruh, you have quite a daughter! Quite a daughter!"

Mother looked at me, very pleased. "Felicia's going to be all right."

"I think she already is," Mr. Pereaux said.

I've never been so happy in all my life. Nothing has ever made me feel so like flying. I didn't even care when this friend of Mother's came up and all four of them started talking about this friend of their's that'd fallen ⁱⁿ love with this man that fixed lawnmowers. It was the talk of Charleston and everybody was fascinated with it. The woman had just gone down to have her lawnmower ^{wet}

fixed, took one look at the man and had fallen madly in love. They had run away to be married and were living in some run-down place outside the city. The woman's family was in mourning.

While they were talking about that, they pretty much ignored me, but I didn't care. Things like that interest me hugely. Love and all. I can't wait until somebody falls in love with me. Probably nobody ever will, but I don't think I'd be particularly partial to somebody that fixed lawnmowers. You'd have to sit up and talk about lawnmowers for the rest of your life. He wouldn't know a thing about Robert Browning, just grease and bolts and screws, and your children would grow up saying things like "I aint" and "he come" and stuff.

It was pretty good, though, just standing there listening to all that. I didn't have to think up anything to say and you could kind of relax for a while. That's the thing about a cocktail party, you've always got to be thinking up fascinating things to say to people or they'll go away. It's terribly exhausting. I like just kind of standing there, listening. But then I looked toward the door and BLOOM!--I saw this rather large, sandy-haired young man in a black suit walk into the room. Right away I knew who it was! Tom Gibbings! I looked about the room for Winky. She was talking to a couple about her age and had her back to the door. The young man went up to her, said something, and Winky said something to him, but she wasn't smiling or anything like she usually does at people.

I was pretty surprised at Tom. I didn't think he was so bad looking. He was sort of fat, but you knew he had muscles, too. One thing, though, his hair was too long. It was blond and kind of came swooping down at the back. Arthur would have died. He

can't stand men that wear their hair too long. But really he wasn't bad looking at all. He had very nice features. His nose wasn't broken or anything and he had very, very dark brown eyes. He looked a little like Tarzan in the movies, except he was blond and fatter.

But then out came this cigarette holder! Right away he started looking like somebody that'd half scare you to death. I got to wondering if Aunt Ann had invited him to come. But I guess Winky had and just forgot to tell him not to after he'd asked her to marry him and all.

I couldn't stand it any longer, so I spotted this bowl of cheese bits and decided I'd take up my old routine of passing things. I went straight up to them and held out the bowl to Winky. She introduced me to the other couple. The girl was very pretty with sparkling green eyes and her husband wore horn-rimmed glasses.

"And I'm Tom Gibbings," Tom said to me in this accent that sounded almost English. He said "Tawn" instead of "Tom."

I kind of glanced at Winky, then I said: "How-do-you-do?" Up close, he was better looking than far away because you couldn't see his body and you forgot about him being kind of fat. He was the only man in the room with a black suit on.

"F_elicia's from Georgia," Winky said to the other couple.

"P_i-ty" said Tom. "That's nothing to laugh about."

I felt the blood rush to my face! But the other couple thought that was kind of funny because the husband was trying not to laugh.

"That isn't funny, Tom," Winky said. "Add where are you from?"

"From the world," Tom said. "Of the world."

"Ohio," Winky said. "I don't think that's anything to laugh

about either."

"Now ~~the~~ angel," Tom said. He blew this great gust of smoke straight up into the air. I hated him, but I stretched the bowl of cheese bits out to him anyway.

"Think you," he said, and I noticed he had short fingers.

"How's business, Tom?" the husband asked. Isn't it funny? I don't care where you are, there's always being somebody with horn-rimmed glasses on, asking "How's business?" Men in Ashton are always asking Father that. Poor men, they really do have boring lives.

"Passable," Tom said.

"Still clipping coupons?"

"In a way."

"What he ~~means~~ ^{means} is," Winky said. "No, he doesn't have a job."

"Why, angel," Tom said. "I do. I do."

"What?" Winky asked.

"This," he said, holding up his glass. "Peachy."

"Yes," Winky said. "Peachy."

Tom flipped his cigarette in the ashtray but some of the ashes fell off onto the table. He brushed them off with his thick hand and suddenly got this serious look on his face. "No, as a matter of fact, I'm leaving this quaint old masterpiece of a city--- just about---Wednesday!"

Winky looked at him sharply.

"You are?" the other girl said. "Why, Tom, we'll miss you. Where're you going?"

"Back to New York. A friend at college---at least his father--- offered me a job, in advertising. Rinso white and all that sort of thing."

"How wonderful," the girl said.

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Tom looked at Winky. "Yes," he said, "I think it's rather courageous of me, myself."

I couldn't just stand there. You can't just stand there holding a bowl of cheese bits saying nothing, so I moved on around the room, telling everybody that Father was "just fine." Everybody wanted to know. They like Father an awful lot in Charleston, but he can't ever come as much as us because he's so harassed all the time. That's what I told this one older lady and she thought that was pretty funny. Older people are always finding something to laugh about. It's amazing.

I didn't listen much to what most of them said, though. I was thinking too much about Winky and Tom. I was thinking that if Tom did go to New York, Winky really would be all alone then. But I didn't blame Winky for not liking him. You could just tell he didn't have any good connections in Charleston. I don't know why--- he just looked like somebody that wouldn't have good connections--- in the South anyway. Still, he wasn't bad looking and he did have all that money. I'd rather marry him than a lawnmower fixer. Maybe.

About two-thirty everybody started going home for dinner. I told you everybody has their dinner at three o'clock. That's why they like to give their cocktail parties after church. Because then everybody goes home pretty early. Aunt Ann said that some people, the new ones that ^{we} moved to Charleston, have dinner ~~at~~ at night, but they're never invited to the old Charleston parties. It's pitiful.

Anyway, I got a new duty, helping these older ladies down the stairway. Aunt Ann suggested it and one with a cane nearly broke my shoulder she leaned so heavily on my arm. I didn't mind

too much, though, because it gives you sort of a good feeling, helping older ladies down the stairs. It's another funny thing about me, but, you know, I'm very much in favor of older ladies. They really have wonderful senses of humor and they're so much nicer than middle-aged ones. Middle-aged ones, a lot of them, are terribly snobbish. I mean really snobbish. Not like Aunt Pett, that is just used to her ways, but they pretty much go around hating everybody. I don't know why it is, but you just notice sometimes.

Well, anyway, there I was---going up and down, up and down, like an elevator. Mr. Pringney helped one down too and they laughed all the way. Older people have worlds of fun, especially in Charleston. THEN, when I thought all the older ones had gone, I decided I'd better go on back up and see what had happened to Winky and Tom. But I didn't have to! Out of the blue they came racing down the stairway---together! I nearly fainted. Winky had this tan sweater thrown over her shoulders. "Felicia," she said, kind of giggling, "tell Mother I won't be here for dinner."

I didn't say a thing.

"Will you?" she asked and gave me this huge, wide smile like she was trying to tell me something.

"Okay, Winky," I said very weakly.

"Adieu, ma petite," Tom said to me.

"Adieu," I said. I know a lot of French words.

But I just stood there for a while, flabbergasted, and then I hurried on outside. The gate was still open and I went over by the tea-olive bush where I could see better. Winky and Tom were getting into Tom's car. It was a foreign car, black and sort of cream-colored. Winky was brushing her hair back with her hand and

she looked very gay, like she was doing everything in the world to keep from just out-and-out beaming. Then, just like that, I knew what was happening. I knew it! Winky was going to marry him. She really was. Even after last night and everything. They'd live in New York, and when they came home they'd have to stay with Tom's rich-cheap family because Aunt Pett probably wouldn't have that kind of element in her house. It made me sort of sick in my stomach.

They rode away with a great roaring of the engine and I heard Winky laugh.

"Just because she's lonesome," I thought. And then I had this vision. I kept seeing Winky, like some mist, like lonesomeness, and Tom was this shiny, brassy, new automobile. He was taking her away.

gal 85 "...And our girls marrying the Lord knows who. And our girls marrying the Lord knows---" Aunt Pett talking. I walked on back to the house, but on the way I passed by the oak tree where the moss was hanging. It looked old and very dead, like *(the moss)* an old, dreary Sunday afternoon when the Summer's on. Charleston was changing, I thought. The whole South was, even Georgia. Everything was changing. The new and the old. But the new! The new! It was enough to make you want to throw yourself on the ground and die dead away---in a field of violets.

Oh, ~~but~~ Winky, you'll miss us so! In time... In time...