

Chapter 26

Well, we didn't turn out too badly after all. When we drove up to the school, though, I nearly collapsed. There were these three very long black cars where you had to park and standing by them were three white chauffeurs! There were a lot of other cars, just plain ones like ours, but just seeing the chauffeurs all dressed up in their hats and coats and the cars shining and everything made you kind of guess what was inside and I really felt like turning back. I kept rolling my eyes upward but Mother made me quit it.

The reception was held on the lawn like Arthur said it would be, in front of this very old brick building. They served lemonade, cookies and nuts and there were all these white women serving behind tables with tablecloths on them. Arthur and them weren't there. Just parents. Most of the boys were practising for the songs they were going to sing at Class Day.

I guess there were about fifty-million people milling around on the lawn---women with hats on and quite a few bald-headed men wearing heavy tweed jackets, even though it was ~~June~~ ^{July}. That's what I hate, you know, when you first go into an unknown place and absolutely nobody speaks to you, like Charleston. I felt like my arms were getting longer and longer. It didn't seem to bother Mother and Father, though. They just plowed right on in and immediately started talking to this teacher that had perspiration on his upper lip. He said he knew Arthur but had never taught him or anything. Right away he wanted to talk about the situation with the colored people in Georgia. I guess he had read Mr. Hopper's article, too. He wanted to know what Father thought now about colored people and he listened like he was really interested. You could sort of tell, though, he didn't ~~ever~~ ^{never} talke Georgia, but he was nice about it anyway. out the situ-

As usual, nobody said anything to me and I wonderedadif rwe were going to stand there all morning talking about colored people. You'd think people weren't ^{wouldn't be} too interested in all that up in Connecticut, but they are. You can just sit and have dinner with somebody up in Connecticut and they'll start talking about colored people. Up there they think people go around beating colored people in the South---all the time. This one ~~woman~~ ^{man} we met said she had sent money to the N.A.A.C.P. to help the "poor souls." I thought it was just as bad of her to be calling colored people "poor souls" as it was for her to be telling us that. If I were colored I wouldn't want to be called a "poor soul" and I know Velvet would die---so would a lot of people I know.

Anyway, I just kind of stood there by Mother and Father,

but since what they were talking about didn't interest me too much any more, I started looking around at everybody else. I wanted to see if I could spot any night-club people. There was one woman that was very popular. Everybody kept coming up to her and saying things, but she never said much back. Mr. Sykes, the headmaster, stayed by her all the time. I knew it was Mr. Sykes because his picture was all over the catalogue we had at home. I used to stare at him all the time. But he looked younger than in his picture and very superior. He was wearing a vest and smoking a pipe. Also he had these chains dangling across his front. I guess you'd call Mr. Sykes a handsome man, but he certainly did look superior even if he was beaming at everybody. He had the pinkest cheeks I've ever seen.

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younger

The woman he was talking to was tall and she had vest anark, knitted-looking dress which made her look awfully thin across her now and then she would sort of twitch a smile at Mr. Sykes and then go back to looking somewhere else again. Mr. Sykes talked and laughed all the time, but she never said very much. I'm sure she went to night clubs because she looked awfully rich. Isn't it peculiar that rich people are always thin and poor people fat? Every rich person I've ever met was thin, especially up in Connecticut, and they always look dreadfully unhappy about it.

But then I nearly fell over when I heard Mother telling the teacher that she had never met Mr. Sykes and that she certainly would like to. The teacher pointed him out and then led us over to meet him. Mr. Sykes seemed overjoyed to meet us and then he introduced us to the woman, Mrs. ~~Phillips~~ Phillips.

Mrs. Phillips just stared at us and it turned out she was

from a place called Oyster Bay, New York, and was always giving benefits. She had a son at school, "Chawlie-boy," that she was taking to Rome with her next year because she had always believed in first hand education. Mr. Sykes explained all this right in front of her and she just kept staring at Mother and Father. Finally, she asked where we were from and when Mother said Georgia, she just kind of raised one eyebrow and said "coot." I suppose she meant that it was "cute" we were from Georgia. That's the dumbest thing I ever heard and Mother and Father looked down at the ground. She wanted to know if we lived there all the time.

"Yes," Mother said, "Georgia is our home."

I have friends in Thomasville," Mrs. Phillips said. "They hunt."

I told you, didn't I? I think I did anyway. Evedydowntherner you meet knows about Thomasville and when they tell ya the timit, you're supposed to die of joy or something because you know they expect you to. I don't know why they buy all our old houses down there; they're not Southerners. Why do you suppose?

Mrs. Phillips, though, was a dreadful woman, I thought, because when Father started talking to her she began waving to this other woman in a large hat and left us without even saying anything.

Mr. Sykes sort of laughed nervously and moved to stand nearer us. "Well," he said, as if he were trying to sound relieved that Mrs. Phillips had gone: "I'm certainly pleased to meet the parents of Arthur Whit-field!"

I could have sunk right down in the ground. The way he said it made you wonder if he really meant it or not. If you ask me, I think he would much rather have been standing there talking to

"Chawlie-boy's" Mother because she's so rich and all.

"We're so pleased with the school, Mr. Sykes," Mother said. "Arthur has certainly developed in these two years."

Mr. Sykes smiled and began knocking his pipe on his shoe. "We usually find this," he said, "---especially when we get a boy early. The change is more rapid than it ever will be again."

"Yes, I suppose so," Mother said.

Father started to say something, but then these very pitiful-looking people came up to shake hands with Mr. Sykes. Both of them, the man and the woman, had sort of pink-gray hair and white eyelashes; their eyes looked like rabbit eyes. Pelham was their name and and their son was a senior who had written this very beautiful and probing poem about being sixteen. ^e Very as going to read it at Class Day. The name of it was "Woykes. Bond", which, frankly, didn't sound very beautiful to me. ^{ay} hair and

Mr. Sykes is very partial to explaining other people to you. All the time ^{he} was explaining about the Pelhams, Mrs. Pelham kept giving out this gasping kind of giggle. She was a poet, too, she said, and began gasping and fluttering her eyelashes. She practically committed suicide when she heard Father had gone to Sewanee Military Academy. ^S She had had a poem in the Sewanee Review once. She thought that was about the best magazine published in America today. I started to say I was reading it, too, but I thought I'd just better be quiet. I decided I was going to look up one of her poems when I got home.

Mr. Pelham didn't say much because he was an insurance man and didn't know too much about poetry and Sewanee. His Company had an office in Atlanta, though, and he had to go there sometimes.

I thought he was pretty nice because he said he was very fond of the South. He wanted to know if we'd noticed his Company's new building in Jacksonville, Florida, and Father said "yes."

Pretty boring. Who in the world wants to stand up and talk about buildings and junk? All the time they were talking, Mr. Sykes kept glancing at Mother and Father very secretly. I kept wondering what he thought of us, so I looked at them too. To me they looked just as nice as most people---nicer than a lot of them---and their voices sounded so much softer and kinder. I don't think Mr. Sykes thought we were rich or anything, but he had a look in his eye---a kind of beam---that made you think he liked us---

Finally, though, there wasn't much else to say to Mr. And Mrs. Pelham, so we excused ourselves and went over to get ~~winder~~. I knew Mother had wanted to stand there and talk to ~~ing~~, but she about Arthur, but Mr. Sykes was this very popular man and you knew he didn't ^{really} want to talk about it then.

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Inside this one building you could hear Arthur and them singing. A very pretty dark-haired woman with exceedingly high heels began talking to Mother and I. "The dahlings! Just listen to them!" She said she was going to have to go and have a peak at them. "Don't you want to see?" she asked Mother. Father was talking to this bald man, so Mother and the woman and I went over to the door and looked in. The boys were standing up on this kind of stage, and there was this tall man in front of them, waving his hands like a mad man and clapping his hands: "Pee-nisimo! Pee-nisimo!" he kept shouting, even while they were singing.

"The lambs," the woman kept saying.

Mother and I didn't say anything. Arthur was in the back and

all you could see was just the top of his glasses. They were singing:

Fair are the me-a-dows. Fairer still the woo-ud-lands. In the-uh bloom-in-ing garb of Spring. Je-sus is pu-u-er. Je-sus is fair-u-er Than all the...."

Then the man started shouting. "All right now. Again!

Begin again!"

I didn't think the singing was all that bad, but the director looked like he was ready to have ten million fits. He kept ducking his head down and raising his elbows like he was ready to dive into a swimming pool. The singing wasn't all that important to get so mad about, I didn't think. But the boys looked like it was. They all looked scared to death.

"Fair are the me-a-dows. Fairer still the woo-ud..."

"We'd better go," Mother said. "I guess they don't to dive. be disturbed."

The woman crinkled her eyes at us. "I just can't wait to see little Knox. He's my hearrrrrt!"

"Knox?" Mother asked. "Not Knox Campbell? Are you---?"

"Why, yes," the woman said. "And--? Of course! Your Southern accent!"

Mother said yes, she was Arthur's mother, and when she did you would have thought Mrs. Campbell was ready to fall all over Mother. Then she sighed this heavy sigh and said Arthur was "just a little angel. I'm simply mad for him." Mother said she did so appreciate their having Arthur to their house and she didn't think Arthur had ever been so royally entertained. "It was so dear of you to take them to all those places."

"Cute," Mrs. Campbell said. I declare, everybody in the north says "cute" all the time,--cute of you do this and cute of you

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to do that.

"We loved taking them," she went on. "If you could have seen Arthur's expression---especially in the Stork Club. I thought his eyes were going to pop right out of his head. "

Mother laughed and put her handkerchief to her lips. "It was certainly a thrill for him."

I didn't think Mother ought to have said that. It sounded like we never had been anywhere and that if somebody ever did take us to a place like the Stork Club we would be so pitifully overjoyed we'd probably pass out or something.

Also, I was thinking about what Arthur had told us about Knox becoming an alcoholic, sitting up in his room and shaking and stuff. I wondered if Mrs. Campbell knew about that.

Anyway, we alked on back to the lemonade table and Mrs. Campbell said she just had to find her husband so he could meet you. "You just have to meet Campie." Then she went flying around about lawn looking for him. I spotted him right away. He was this dark-haired, sort of embarrassed-looking man and Mrs. Campbell practically dragged him over to us.

"These," she said, waving her open hand out at Mother and Father, "are the Whitfields!"

We all beamed triumphantly and Mr. Campbell sort of half-way smiled and shook hands with Father. He was a heavy-set man with very nice eyebrows. I kept seeing rows and rows of dressmaker dummies. I remembered that that was what Arthur said Knox's Father did. Too, I remembered he wasn't really Knox's father, but that he was always taking Knox to night clubs anyway. I liked him exceedingly because he shook hands with me. He was the only one practically that did.

"Later, though, I told Mother I thought Mrs. Campbell was sort of peculiar, but Mother said she thought she was "sweet." The thing was that Mrs. Campbell kept attaching herself to us and when that one teacher we'd met at first brought over this Episcopal rector to us, she didn't even go away then.

The rector started talking about some of Mother's relatives. He knew Aunt Pett ("Yeeees, of course") and Uncle Petrie and everybody. He had this church in New York now, he said, but he had grown up in South Carolina and knew literally everybody in Charleston. ("Charming place. Abso-lute-ly charming.") He told a story about some Gullahs ^{in South Carolina} and we all laughed hysterically, but it wasn't funny at all. He thought so and practically perished laughing at him himself. He was very nice, though. He also knew Father's cousin that is a lawyer in Baltimore and goes racing anybody doing church work all over the place. g.") He tol

While they were talking, Mrs. Phillips (!) came over and just butted right in. She wanted to talk to the rector about this church benefit she was having. Mother tried to introduce her to Mrs. Campbell, but she just barely nodded her head and went right on talking to the rector. She was nicer to him than to anybody. Wonder why it is that rich women are always so nice to ministers. They're horrifyingly rude to everybody else, but just let them start talking to a minister and they smile and carry on like they were the most wonderful, religious person in the world. gal 96

We left them talking and the four of us (with Mrs. Campbell) went dragging around the lawn some more. We did meet a lot of other very nice parents, though, and this one man and his wife asked us to have dinner with them that night since we were all staying at the Hotel Browne. Later we discovered he was one of the largest

bankers in the world. He didn't look it. His wife was very sweet but she didn't have too nice clothes on. Maybe it is true what Father said about what's inside you being all that counts.

Anyway, I thought Class Day would never begin. It got pretty tiresome, just wandering around listening to everybody. My jaws were aching from having to grin so much and there wasn't anybody there my age---just these very, very small children---little boys all dressed up in dark-blue coats with brass buttons and little girls with high white socks. They all looked nice, though.

FINALLY, after literally hours, people started wandering into the chapel. We followed them and sat near the back with all the other families. It was a very beautiful chapel with stain-glass windows, but also pretty bare. Arthur and the rest of the boys sat up front. I could just see the back of Arthur's head though. noticed he wasn't grinning and whispering like the rest of the wandering. He was looking straight ahead and I knew he was waiting for the moment when his name was called out and he could walk up and receive the Amos T. Caldwell award. He had even had his hair cut, because the two bumps on the back of his head were standing out.

I wasn't going to kneel when we first went in. I wasn't sure whether they did that up in Connecticut. But when I saw a lot of other people doing it, I did too. So I prayed Arthur would get the award. "Let him get it, God," I said. I know you're not suppose to ask God for all this junk and stuff you want. He'll think you're a heretic or something, but I did it anyway because I ~~knew Mother probably was and, besides,~~ Arthur wanted the award so ve-ry much....