

Chapter 28

I'd never seen a man like Mr. Woodford before. He was from Boston, he said, and right away I remembered what Aunt Pett had said. "Boston has some breeding," she had said. I guess Aunt Pett knew what she was talking about because Mr. Woodford was literally overflowing with breeding. I looked up into his bony face and I kept picturing him with a tea cup in his hand; he was sitting in some dark, heavily-furnished drawing room and an older lady with a high collar kept asking: "Sugar, Mr. Woodford? Lemon?...."

Right then, though, he was wearing a tweed jacket and was also smoking a pipe. I guess everybody in the whole state of Connecticut smokes pipes. But I liked Mr. Woodford, better almost than anybody else I'd met. He had very nice brown eyes that made you think he understood you, wanted to help you. Like he could say: "Just any time at all. Just call me. Anytime at all."

"We've certainly heard a great deal about you, Mr. Woodford,"

Mother said. And, bloom, I remembered what Arthur had first written about Mr. Woodford---that it was him that was always going in to try to wake up Bob Leyden at nights. I wish Mother hadn't said that. He probably knew what she was referring to.

"And I've read a great deal about you," he said.

"Oh, mercy," Mother said, "You mean The News Review. I'm afraid you had a rather bad impression."

"No, I was very interested in it." He looked at me then and I tried to get a very saintly look on my face. For some reason I wanted him to think I was full of pathos like Mr. Hopper had said.

"They really took us to task, didn't they?" Father said.

*gal
100* "It must be difficult, always being the target for that sort of thing. In some ways the country has been rather unfair to the South, I think." some reason

Father got this very wide smile on his face. "Sirper had said, "May I shake your hand? You're a gentleman---a true gentleman."

Mr. Woodford sort of laughed and took Father's hand. "No, as I say, I was very interested in the writer's approach to the problem. But I was disappointed our friend Arthur wasn't roasted along with the rest of you."

"Man, I'm not," Arthur said. It was the first time Arthur had said anything since Mr. Woodford had come up. He was standing there beaming at Mr. Woodford like he owned him or something. I guess he wanted us to see how fine he was.

"And speaking of that," Father said, looking at Arthur. "Have you taught this boy how to punctuate and spell yet?"

Mr. Woodford kind of frowned. "We're progressing," he said. "rrogressing."

"Good!" Father said. "Pretty hopeless case in the beginning, wasn't it?"

START "We've had worse," Mr. Woodford said and started dragging on his pipe.

"It's such a lovely school," Mother said. I guess she thought it was selfish to talk any more about Arthur, but Mr. Woodford acted like he didn't hear her:

"I'm very interested in this boy of yours, Mr. Whitfield."

"Yes? How's that?"

"Well, I've told Arthur and I'd like to suggest it to you, too."

"What, Mr. Woodford?" Mother asked. I knew she was panic stricken and so was I. I started looking up at the sky.

"I think---well---I believe you're going to have a writer on your hands."

I just looked at him.

it to you,

"A whaaat?" Father asked.

was panic

"Yes, I've talked to Arthur once before about this. I don't know whether he told you or not."

"I think he mentioned something," Father said. "But---" He didn't finish. I knew he was thinking about the peculiar letter Arthur had written us once---and also his letter to the newspaper.

"Of course he has a long way to go. There's still that matter of grammar and spelling to conquer." He smiled and patted Arthur on the back. "Right, Arthur?"

"Yes sir," Arthur said, kind of straightening back his shoulders.

"Just recently"---Mr. Woodford started lighting his pipe---"Arthur handed in a theme that was quite remarkable. Very interesting. I gave you a B on that, Arthur."

"You did?" Arthur said. Never in all my entire existance have I ever seen Arthur so happy. He was literally glowing with grinning.

"I did," Mr. Woodford said. "And I would have given you an A if you'd got 'because of and due to' through that skull of yours."

Mother looked at Arthur. "Well, Arthur, a B!"

"Uh huh," Arthur said, but his eyes were sparkling gloriously anyway.

"Yes, I've been very interested in this boy," Mr. Woodford said, "from the very beginning. Yes sir, I think Arthur may be quite a fine writer one of these days."

Father shook his head. "Well, you certainly fooled me."

"Of course he'll have to work," ~~Mr. Woodford said.~~ "Work isn't exactly one of our stronger points, is it Arthur?"

Arthur kind of laughed. "I guess not."

"Well, well," Mother said, almost like she was thinking. "A wri-ter in the family." ~~fooled me."~~

"Uh huh," Arthur said again. ~~id.~~ "Work i

But I just kept standing there, staring at Mr. Woodford. I don't know what I was feeling. I think maybe I was sort of out of my mind and couldn't feel anything. I had thought about all this before, you know, but I don't think I really believed it at the time. Not really. But now, now it looked like it really was so.

"It's interesting to see these boys develop," Mr. Woodford said. "They come to us green as grass and just like that--" he snapped his fingers--"they begin to ripen, mature. Amazing, really."

"I'm sure," Mother said. "Teaching is the greatest profession in the world, I think. It must be a pleasure to know you have contributed something to a boy's growth."

Mr. Woodford nodded. "Yes. Yes, it is. But speaking of that--" he looked at his watch -- "I'm due in the main office about--now. Room assignments for next year." He sort of cocked his head at

Mother. "One of the not so interesting duties of the profession."

"I guess not," Mother said and laughed her short laugh.

He shook hands with Mother and Father. "Sorry to have to be hurrying away." And then he said the nicest thing in the world to me. He said: "It was a pleasure to meet you, Felicia." And he meant it, too. I know he did. But, idiot me, I couldn't even answer him. I guess I was still much too stunned over what he'd said about Arthur.

I just watched him going across the lawn, kind of loping with his long legs. Then when he disappeared into the building, I turned back to Arthur again. He was standing a little away from us and somehow standing there in his dark-blue blazer he seemed a very much older Arthur, a different Arthur---even his nose seemed to have grown. of loping w

gosh "Why, he's matured!" I said to myself. "Just kidding, I think he's matured!" I just stared at him and then my mind started whirling. I kept thinking all these very strange things, things that had gone before like they were one million years ago: Arthur coming home with his pitiful drawing of an apple, boys teasing him and that excruciating piano recital. "But, Allison, he's the last of the Whitfields..." "The last of the..." Then Mrs. Ewing talking: "Some day I think Arthur's going to be an interesting man." And then him going away on the train: "Good-bye. Good-byeeee." Christmas: "Yeah, I've had some pretty good times, I guess..." And "who washed more windows---with the best spirit. The best spirit. The best spirit. The best..."

"I've decided to get a job on the newspaper this summer," he was saying.

I jerked back into listening again.

"Oh?" Mother said.

"Uh huh. I know old Mr. Henry'll let me do something. Mr. Woodford says working on a newspaper is the best way in the world to become a writer."

"Well, maybe so," Mother said. "We'll see when we get home."

"Either that or I'm gonna write stories all summer--send 'em in to The New Yorker magazine. Mr. Woodford says The New Yorker is the best--"

"Don't you think that's a little ambitious for a start?" Mother asked.

"What?"

"The New Yorker."

Start
"Shoot, no! Mr. Woodford's got this friend that used to work on it and he said they were always flying around trying to find somebody new that can write stuff. They don't care whether you're from Georgia or not."

"I should hope not," Father said.

"Naw, you write something about like a cocktail party or something--like in Atlanta--and they'll print it. They're a pretty sophisticated bunch of old bastards on The New Yorker."

"Now, Arthur," Mother said. "I don't like that. I don't like that at all."

"What?"

"You know what."

"Oh!" He kind of looked down at the ground. "But, man, I got a million things to write about. I got a billion things to--"

I thought I heard Father sigh, but I wasn't sure because somewhere, far away, while Arthur was talking I heard the sound of a

train whistle. It sounded long and lonely in the morning sun and all at once I started thinking about home. Everything was so strange in Connecticut---the sound of voices, the smell of the air. I wanted to be in Georgia again, to see the red-clay fields and touch the leaves of the great sad oaks. Everything was so different here. "Arthur, a writer..." That was why he had always been a dreamer then. "He dreams all the time, Mrs. Whitfield. He just sits there and dreams..."

The train whistle sounded again. It sounded like time passing and I formed this picture in my mind. I could see our house in Ashton---a hundred years from now. Thousands of people were flocking to it and, inside, all the rooms were marked off with ropes. People were coming to see the place where Arthur Whitfield lived. The famous writer. My brother!

All at once I felt a kind of crying inside and I ~~th~~house in "Oh, Arthur, Arthur. You're going to show everybody yet! You ~~were~~ going to be famous! You're going to be a great, famous man, Arthur!" And I smiled at him, full of pride and crying. "You'll show them, Arthur! You'll show them! You'll show everybody!"

~~And two large tears rolled down my cheeks.~~