



hairline rule x 1 1/2
24 Caslon OS ital #3371

1 1/2 / 14
Chelmsford
x 23

Chapter 2

Felicia watched as the familiar black car made its way down the drive-
 way. When it reached the gate she thought she saw her mother turn in the
 front seat and wave, so she stood on tip-toes and waved back. She was
 still waving as the car drove out the tall iron gates. Afterward, she
 stood there for a while, still looking as if somehow the car would turn
 and come back to her. Sighing heavily, she turned ^{away} to go back down the
 driveway. In the distance she saw two ^{girls} ~~boys~~ with tennis rackets in their
 hands. They were wearing raincoats over their shorts, and the brunette
 girl was laughing. Everyone seemed to know someone, everyone but her. She
 sighed again and her breath came in short, staccato jerks.

Over Miss Gates' ^s office was a sign written in a printed handwriting:
 "New Girls Enter Here." Felicia clutched her small pocketbook closer to
 her and entered. A thin woman with wiry brown hair and bulging blue eyes
 was writing at her desk.

"Yes?" she said in a strident voice.

"Miss Gates?" Felicia asked softly. "Miss Eubanks said[↑]~~---~~_M"

"I am Miss Gates." She looked up and down at Felicia; her eyelashes were cream-colored.

"I[↑]~~---~~_MI'm a new girl."

"You haven't been shown your room yet then?" The voice was like the rest of her[↑]~~---~~_M strained, tense~~---~~_M nerve fighting nerve.

"No Ma'm. Miss Eubanks[↑]~~---~~_M"

"Yes, well, what is your name?" She took a paper from a wire basket on the desk.

"Felicia. Felicia Whitfield." She brushed back a wisp of hair from her eyes.

Miss Gates ran her finger down the paper. "Felicia Carr Whitfield?"

"Yes Ma'm."

"Well, Felicia Carr," said Miss Gates, "you are in room [↑]four! In the old building. We have three girls in [↑]room [↑]four this year. Harriet Cannon McNulty has already arrived." She looked up at Felicia as if she were about to make a dare. "Harriet Cannon is from St. Louis, one of our old girls."

"Yes'm."

Miss Gates studied Felicia's face for a moment and then she pressed her lips into almost a smile. "Felicia Carr, you will learn that at Chesney Hall we don't say 'yes'm' or 'no'm' as the washerwomen do; we say, 'yes, Miss Gates' or 'no, Miss Gates'[↑]~~---~~_M never 'yes'm!' It just isn't done."

Felicia immediately felt the blush hot on her face. She started to touch the desk with her hand but jerked it back. "I'm sorry," she said and looked away. The corners of her lips were pressing inward and her

throat ached terribly now. It was a humiliating error.

"All right," said Miss Gates, rising from the chair. "I'll show you your room. It's one of the large, old rooms. Our old girls always like the large rooms."

Felicia picked up her suitcase in the hall and then holding on to her purse, gloves, and suitcase, followed Miss Gates up the slender, circular stairway.

"This stairway," said Miss Gates, "is one of the show places of Virginia. Tourists come from all over just to see it. This is the old Comstock house, you know; built long before the War Between the States--- one of the famous old Virginia---." M 2

Felicia looked up and could see the rounded stairway, winding up for four stories.

Miss Gates glanced back at her. "You must learn to appreciate its beauty. All the girls do."

When they got to the third floor Miss Gates paused and looked about. "Now, ⁴room four," she said. "Where is it? Oh, yes! You have the room with the balcony! All the girls want that one!" She knocked on a heavy, white, ²panelled ~~door~~ ₂—three short raps. Hall. 4

"Cannon here!" Called a husky voice from inside.

The door opened wide and a short girl, almost plump, with straight reddish hair and freckles opened the door. "Oh?" she said, looking from Miss Gates to Felicia. "I didn't know who it was." She began backing away from the door, tucking in a striped shirttail.

"Felicia Carr," said Miss Gates, "this is Harriet Cannon McNulty."

The girl glanced at Felicia and quickly turned to Miss Gates. "The room's pretty messy, Miss Gates. I was just unpacking."

Miss Gates strode in the room in front of Felicia. "Do you unpack

lying on the bed?"

"I wasn't lying on the bed," the girl protested.

"Then why is the bed messed?"

"I guess I was lying down earlier." She gave a short laugh and looked from Felicia to Miss Gates again. "I was just TM ~~---~~"

"You know very ^{well} ~~well~~, Harriet Cannon, we don't sit on our beds or lie on them during the day unless we are ill. A lady always sits in a chair. She doesn't lounge around on a bed."

"I know, Miss Gates."

Felicia stood just inside the room, still clutching ~~on to~~ her suitcase, purse, and gloves. The room was large with high ceilings and centered by an unused fireplace and mantel. Facing the mantel were two cots, and on the left, in the corner, was another which looked out onto a small, wrought-iron balcony. Clothes were scattered everywhere TM ~~---~~ sweaters, skirts, wads of tissue paper, a bedroom slipper.

"We don't want to start giving a new girl a bad impression right away, do we?" said Miss Gates, her head shaking more nervously than ever.

"No, Miss Gates," the girl said almost wearily.

"Now you show Felicia Carr where she can put her things. The New York train arrives in half an hour and I'll be busy downstairs." she turned to the door.

Harriet Cannon looked at Felicia and rolled her eyes upward.

"We have thirty-three girls coming on the New York train," Miss Gates said. "Thirty-three!" She took hold of the door handle. "Straighten the room, Harriet Cannon!"

The door closed and for a few moments Harriet Cannon stood there with her hands on her hips staring at it. "The bitch!" she muttered. "I

literally can't stand that woman." She ran her fingers through her short hair. "All the damn last year she picked on me!"

Felicia tried to smile. Everything about the girl was red^h---hair, eyebrows, lashes. Still, she had oddly pleasant features---a straight wide mouth, small nose, and button brown eyes. She looked more like a teddy bear than anything else.

"I'm sorry, but^h---" She jerked her shirttail inside her skirt. "She makes me so darned mad! She's been here practically since the Wise Men and she thinks she owns the place." She glanced at Felicia. "What'd she say your name was?"

"Felicia. Just Felicia."

"I know. She calls literally everybody by double names. I'm Cannon^h---" She wrinkled her nose. "Just plain, simple Cannon!" She went over and plumped herself down on the bed nearest the balcony. "Take any bed and bureau you want, I guess. I don't know what sort of weird individual is coming to occupy the other one. Closet's out in the hall^h---"

Felicia looked at the two small bureaus with the white-framed mirrors over them. The other one was larger and already decorated with pictures and what looked to Felicia like dozens of perfume bottles.

"Your trunk and stuff are out in the hall, too."

Felicia put her suitcase on the cot nearest Cannon's.

"Where d'you say you were from?"

"Ashton. Ashton, Georgia."

"Where?!" Cannon stopped bouncing.

"Ashton. It's small."

"There was this girl visiting St. Louis from South Carolina or some^h place this summer. She had this crumby^m drawl and all the boys thought she

was just di-vine! My brother got this mad crush on her."

Felicia smiled at her and opened the suitcase. Inside, carefully folded, were the familiar things Velvet, the colored cook at home, had packed yesterday. "Miss Felicia gwana be the nicest lookin' girl in the en-tire school," Velvet had said when she was packing. But Velvet didn't know. Velvet didn't know anything. The thought of Velvet and home and the clothes laying there so carefully packed made her want to cry again.

Cannon leaned forward. "I'm sure glad you got here. This place has been like a tomb. ~~Just~~ this one other girl was here last night but she just happens to have congenital B.O."

Felicia looked up from the suitcase.

"Actually, I mean. She's been to doctors and everything, they say, but it's simply dread-ful. This one girl had to room with her last year and she literally nearly died." Cannon started laughing. "Old Punky. She nearly died."

"I never heard of that," Felicia said.

"Uh huh. Lots of people have it, I guess." Cannon fell back on the bed. "Jeez, I hate this place!"

Felicia dampened her lips. "It's pretty strict, isn't it?"

"Strict?!" Cannon screwed up her face. "My god!" She got up from the bed and went over to the small rocker by the window. "You just don't know!" She sat down and began rocking furiously. "You can't do anything. No television. No magazines except THE SATURDAY REVIEW. I'm dying for a cigarette. I'd give my soul for just one drag^{1/2}-one, long drag." She stopped rocking and leaned forward. "What's that?"

"This?" Felicia held up the plaid jacket to her suit. "Just a jacket."

"Nifty."

"Thank you," Felicia said quietly and carefully folded the jacket

file.5

and put it on the bed. She wished the girl would quit looking into her suitcase.

"You'll hate it here," Cannon said.

Felicia didn't say anything.

"You will. Honest to god. Do you know, if you step on the floor without your bedroom slippers on---I mean, just one step, and Gates or some⁺ body just happens to see you, that's a week's restriction right there."

Felicia looked up at her and blinked. "For just that? Just stepping on the floor?"

"Uh huh. And do you know they won't even let you speak to a man. Not actually, I mean. They'll let them come and sit for two hours on Sunday. But nobody wants to come because there's this chaperone breathing down your neck the whole time." She yawned. "Course it doesn't matter too much about the men, I guess. Miss Eubanks makes the cooks put salt⁺ peter in all the food."

Somewhere, some place, Felicia had heard that word before. "What's that?" she asked.

"Haven't you ever heard of saltpeter?"

"I'm not real sure."

"It's this white-looking stuff. It's all over the place, literally² especially on the vegetables. They give it to you³---you know, so you won't have any desiiiiiire or anything." Her brown eyes snapped. "Ya know?"

"Desires?" Felicia asked quietly.

"Uh, too many old maids running round the ^{place} ~~joint~~."

Felicia tried to laugh.

"Just look at the spinach sometimes. If you see little white specks in it. That's it! They give it to all the men in the army¹²---bushels of it."

Felicia thought of Miss Eubanks. She pictured her with her Jeffersonian face, tipping into the kitchen with boxes of the white powder.

"Course I don't know how long the stuff works," Cannon said. She got up from the rocker and began looking at herself sideways in the bureau mirror.

Felicia stopped taking the things out of her suitcase and sat on the floor. She watched as Cannon began drawing a comb through her hair. Suddenly she slammed the comb down. "My god! What time is it?"

Felicia looked at her watch. "Two-thirty."

"My pill! Almost forgot my pill!" she opened the top bureau drawer and took out a small bottle. "These things keep me alive."

"What are they?"

"For thyroid. I've got this wild thyroid."

"Oh," Felicia said, and watched her plop the pill in her mouth.

"Uh huh. If I don't take them I cry all the time, literally. I cried for a whole year when Mother died. They thought I was going crazy. But it wasn't anything except thyroid."

Felicia looked at the silver-framed picture on the bureau. "Is that your mother?" she asked quietly out of respect.

"Uh huh. She just happened to die ~~the~~ the year before they sent me here. My father didn't know what to do with me. He gave me an insurance policy and a picture of Jesus for Christmas. He literally didn't know what to do with me." She lifted her hands. "But, c'est dommage."

Felicia didn't say anything, and Cannon took up the comb again, trying to smooth her hair back from her ears. "He's getting married again, though. They've already written Eubanks they want me home for the wedding. I might go, just to get out of here for a while. The woman's very tacky."

Felicia looked down at her hands.

fell. 6

"I mean actually tacky. She wears these dread-ful hats---Ya know? Little straw jobbies with green veils. Chee-zus. I mean she's²¹---" ^M

Suddenly the door to the room was thrust open and a girl with short dark hair and blue eyes stood in the doorway. "Cannon!" the girl shouted and came forward with outstretched hands.

Cannon banged the comb down on the bureau. "Oh, no! Look who they let back in!"

The two embraced for a wild second, laughing.

"What happened to you?" said the girl, giggling. "Why didn't you write?" She glanced at Felicia once and then turned her back. "I waited all summer for a letter from St. Louis, Mo."

Felicia looked at the girl. She was wearing a trimly tailored tweed suit, low-heeled black shoes and very dark lipstick.

"I swear to god I didn't think you were coming back," Cannon said. "I thought your mother was on the Farmington kick."

"She was until this corny neighbor of mine got sent there. Social climbing to the last, you know."

Cannon laughed. "I never thought I'd see you back here again. Not after²¹--- ^M Where did you get that lipstick?"

The girl brushed her eyebrow with her finger. "From Punky, on the train. It's hers. Looks sort of like a French whore, doesn't it?"

"You're such ^a refined person, Pedie. ~~Very refined.~~"

The girl giggled. "Come on, ^While I unpack! We're just across the hall!"

"You mean Gates actually gave you a decent place to live in?"

"We're all up here. Tookie²¹---everybody. Come on, I've got to tell you about the Cape. There was this divine man from Andover²¹---" ^M

"Not another one from Andover," Cannon said. "What ever happened to St. Marks."

"Dull!"

"You mean we've got to hear about Andover all year?" Cannon screwed up her face.

"He's di-vine, Cannon," the girl said, hugging her arms to herself. "Come on! I've got a picture and Cheeta's here, too."

"Not Cheeta?! I can't stand it." Cannon went over to the bed. "Let me straighten this thing up first. Gates has already been in here, yack-
ing at me for sitting on the damn bed of all things."

Felicia, still sitting on the floor by her opened suitcase, tried to smile at the mention of Miss Gates. She dampened her lips and looked up at Cannon.

"Oh!" Cannon said. "Ex-cuse me, Felicia. Pardonnez. Pedie, this is my roommate."

Pedie looked down at Felicia with wide blue-green eyes. She was one of the prettiest girls Felicia had ever seen.

"Felicia's from Georgia," Cannon said.

"Atlanta?" Pedie asked.

"No, Ashton. Ashton, Georgia."

"Oh?" the girl said and for a moment appeared to be analyzing the fact. Felicia suddenly felt too thin and the brown jumper she was wearing seemed awfully childish.

Pedie turned back to Cannon again. "Well, come on! Everybody's dying to see you. We had hysterics about you all the way down on the train, talk-
ing about you and those Persian cigarettes."

"Oh, god, those things!" Cannon hastily ran her hand across the

spread on her bed.

"Come on," Pedie said again.

The two left the room and Felicia could hear them laughing as they went across the hall. Another girl shrieked out Cannon's name and there was more laughter. A door closed and there was silence.

Felicia slowly got up from the floor and sat in the small rocking chair. She looked at the bureau with all of Cannon's pictures and perfume bottles. There was one large framed picture with small snapshots pasted behind glass. Some of the pictures were of boys, gay, smiling boys. The others ^{were} of girls. The only pictures Felicia had were the two small photo-^{graph} graphs of her mother and father. She had nothing like the perfume bottles either, only one small bottle of cologne her Aunt Pett in Charleston had sent her before she left Ashton. She wished she had thought of bringing some pictures of her friends at home. She had dozens of friends in Ashton, but they weren't like the girls here. At home she could make people laugh like Cannon did here. She was always doing crazy things, but here it was different, she was a different person; she wouldn't ever be able to make anybody laugh. She looked at the other empty cot. "If only it's a new girl," ~~She~~ thought. "Somebody like me, somebody who ^{is} ~~is~~"

She got up and looked at herself in Cannon's mirror. "Character," her Aunt Pett had always said. "Sarah, the child has character in her face." She wished she didn't have that; she wished she looked like Pedie or somebody, even Cannon. "Why, Felicia, your hair is a lovely blond and you have a fine twinkle in your eye," her mother had tried to console her. Felicia put her face closer to the mirror and screwed up her face. "It doesn't even look like I've got any eyebrows." She slowly ran her fingers over her left eyebrow. "Too blond," she said and sighed. She went over

photo-
graph
Gall. 7

to the screen door that led out onto the balcony. She could see the sky there, a bright blue, and a bird passed by ~~high~~ high up. She wondered if she could see another, but none passed and the glare hurt her eyes. If she were home now... If only she were home! She thought of her brother Arthur. Soon he would be leaving for the Navy and she'd probably never see him again. It ^{had been} ~~was~~ awful yesterday when they left home, the pain of it ^{was} still with her, the terrible struggle to keep back the tears. She hadn't wanted anyone to come out to the car to tell her good-bye. But they all came, Velvet, the cook, and Velvet's son Isaiah. She could still hear Arthur: "Good-bye!" His voice had seemed to fade away. And she would probably never see....

There was a loud knock at the door and she turned. A thin girl with straight black hair and silver-rimmed glasses stuck her head inside the door. "Are you Felicia Whitfield?"

"Yes?"

"They sent me to tell you you've got a telephone call ~~down~~ downstairs."

Felicia hurried down the winding stairway and into the hall where a telephone rested on a table. "Hello," she said breathlessly.

"Felicia?" It was her mother. "Dear? Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Well, how are you?"

"All right. I'm all right."

"Have you met your roommate?"

"Uh huh. She's an old girl, from St. Louis, Missouri. The other one hasn't come yet."

"You have two?"

"Uh huh. I mean, yes."

"Do you like the one from St. Louis?"

"Uh--^h_m" Felicia sat down in the straight-backed chair.

"Well, dear, what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"You don't sound like yourself. Are you feeling all right?"

"Sort of---^h_m kind of nauseated or something."

"Goodness! Is there a nurse or doctor there?"

"I think there's one, a nurse or something."

There was a short silence. "Have you met any of the other girls?"

"Uh huh."

"Do you like them?"

"All right, I guess."

"Do your clothes seem all right?"

"They're all right. I guess they are."

"Well, dear. Have you unpacked yet?"

"I was doing that when you called."

"That's fine. Now, just keep busy these first few days. We'll be leaving first thing in the morning. I thought Miss Eubanks was lovely, didn't you?"

"Miss Eubanks?" Felicia sighed. "Mother, can you hear me if I whisper?"

"I'll try to. Why?"

"Mother," she strained a whisper, cupping her hand over the mouth-^h piece. "I guess you and Father better come and get me."

"Why, whatever for?"

"I don't like it here. Honestly, I---^h_m"

"Oh, Felicia. How silly! Of course you're going to like it. You

haven't given it a chance yet."

"Yes, I have too. Everybody's all different¹---and¹---Mother, can you hear me?"

"Yes,"

She put her lips closer to the phone. "Mother, they¹---they put this white stuff in the food and¹---"

"Whaaaaaat?"

"I said they put this¹---" She heard her father saying something. "Mother?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"They don't want you to have any desires or anything and¹---"

"Whaaaaaat?"

"My roommate's got thyroid and there's this other girl that's got¹---"

"Nonsense, Felicia."

"No, I wanta get outa here. I¹---"

"Pure nonsense!"

"But you and Father don't eat it."

"Eat what?"

"This white¹---"

"Don't be silly, Felicia."

"Then can I go home?"

"No. Now you keep busy and learn to know some of the other girls."

"But¹---"

"Just go back to your unpacking and don't think about any of that nonsense."

"But it's true, Mother. I¹---I¹---" She could feel the tears start to come.

Page 8

"And, Felicia, don't forget to say your prayers."

"Prayers?"

"Yes. And the pills Dr. Woodson gave you for your teeth. Don't forget them."

"No, but---"

"Good-bye, dear. Just keep busy. We love you very much."

"I know, but---" She felt her throat tighten further. "Good-bye. Tell Father good---"

She put down the receiver slowly and stood looking at it. Then she walked out into the main hallway where a group of girls were standing near the stairway. Another girl, a tall blond, wearing a dark blue suit and carrying a round hat box, came through the entrance door.

"Polly!" cried one of the girls near the stairway. "Polly Osterhaupt!" Two of the girls ran to the tall blond. "You look divine!"

Felicia turned and began the heavy climb up the circular stairway again. Half-way up she paused and looked back at the group below. They were all smiling and suddenly the girl Polly, tossed her head back and laughed---a low, throaty laugh. Felicia looked at her and then, standing there, watching, she felt the tiny corners of her lips began to tremble. Two large tears rolled down her cheeks. And it was then, finally, she burst into a flood of tears and ran up the stairs, two at a time.

