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Chapter 4

"Here goes," Cannon said as she pushed open the door with the palms of both her hands.

Felicia followed her inside and both immediately looked at the corner of the room where the third cot had been placed. No one was there, but a belted polo coat was lying on the footboard and beside it lay a wool plaid scarf and brown pig skin gloves. Two alligator suitcases, one slightly open and the other marked "Brown's Hotel, London!" were neatly placed side by side on the floor. A suggestion of perfume seemed to hover over the scene.

"I used to have a coat like that," Cannon said. "Except hers is Peck and Peck. I'll bet you." She went over and examined the label in the back. "Peck and Peck! I told you!"

The door to the room opened with a thrust and Cannon immediately dropped the coat. A girl with straight blond hair and grey eyes looked first at

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Cannon and then at Felicia. She was wearing a severely tailored dark blue suit, embellished with only a small ^{pin} circle gold near the lapel. The severity of the suit, however, seemed to give to her slenderness added height, though generally she would be classified as rather short. She was a handsome girl, more handsome than actually pretty. Yet there was some+ thing unmistakably cold about her looks, too, something about the molded chin or the short upper lip, a kind of haughtiness that seemed to belie the polo coat and the gay plaid of the scarf.

"Hi," Cannon said, "I was just trying to see if your coat was Peck and Peck."

"Yes, it is," the girl said, her eyes instantly taking in the length and breadth of Cannon. Her dark lashes were long, thick, and straight.

"Nifty," Cannon said.

"Pardon?"

"The coat," Cannon said, indicating it with one open palm but not touching it.

"Thank you."

Cannon laughed a little nervously. "I'm Cannon McNulty and this is Felicia Whitfield form Gawwwwwja."

"Patsy Dedham!" said the girl and walked with almost a stride over to the cot where she quickly took up her coat.

Cannon backed away. "Polly Osterhaupt's been waiting for you to come all day."

The girl turned to her and frowned. "Who?" Her voice had almost a metallic quality, making Cannon's voice sound more hoarse and lower than ever.

"Polly Osterhaupt!"

"Oh, yes! Polly. I ran across her this summer, I guess."

"Osterhaupt told me," Cannon said. "In Canada."

The girl looked about. "Incidentally, I assume these are mine."
She indicated the cot and bureau.

"All yours," said Cannon.

Patsy took one long look at Cannon's bureau with its larger mirror and extra drawers.

"We just sort of took things over, I guess," Cannon said.

Patsy glanced at Felicia and didn't say anything. Felicia wished Cannon hadn't said we.

"They're not exactly generous here, are they?" said Patsy, carefully folding the coat that Cannon had dropped into a heap.

"Not exactly," Cannon said.

Felicia looked away. She didn't want to ~~just~~ stand there, staring at the girl. She went over and sat down on her own cot.

"This has been the worst daaaaye," Patsy Dedham said, picking up her pocketbook and, from underneath, a bunch of ~~some~~ six or seven letters, some written on blue stationery with printed, rounded handwriting. She glanced through the envelopes quickly and then sat down, crossing her legs and sighing. "God, what a day!" She ran her long fingers along her leg, then looked up at Cannon with wide ^agrey eyes. "We were late getting out of customs in New York and my father's pilot had to fly me down here and there was this little dinky airport."

"I know, the Chesney airport!" Cannon said and laughed.

"It was like flying into the wilderness!" One of her shoes---small, black, and low-heeled, dangled from her stockinged toes.

"You just don't know," Cannon said. "This is the original wilderness!"

Patsy glanced at Cannon and then smiled at Felicia, an almost Mona Lisa

smile.

Felicia smiled back brightly. She didn't know what to say to the girl. She wished she had Cannon's easy way.

Patsy picked up her letters again.

"Did you just get those?" Cannon asked.

"I guess so. They handed them to me when I arrived." She opened one of the envelopes and merely glanced down the pages. The letters were apparently from friends. But she didn't seem too anxious to read them. She glanced through the envelopes again and ripped open one small envelope. "Excuse me for a minute," she said to Cannon.

"Go right ahead," Cannon said and fell backward on her bed.

The letter was short, only one page, but Patsy read it intently, frowning, and then she put it aside, slowly. For a moment she sat there, a look of concern, almost a hurt, ~~covering~~ her face. "Well," she said shortly, "this is getting me nowhere." She stood up. "Where are the closets?" She was looking at Felicia and the fact ^{that} the question was add-
ressed to her instead of Cannon seemed so much of a compliment that, flustered and pointing, Felicia answered almost too eagerly:

"Out in the hall! That's where the closets are ~~—~~ I mean." It was the first time that day Felicia had felt, even in the slightest, a sense of authority and it was a warm feeling, one she immediately transferred to Patsy Dedham.

Patsy didn't say anything. She hugged her coat to her and strode out into the hall, leaving the room oddly silent and somehow pointless.

Cannon watched her go and then fell backwards onto her cot again. She lay there staring up at the ceiling. "D'you know what I think?" she said finally.

Felicia, staring almost open-mouthed at the door where Patsy had just departed, turned round then. "What?"

"I think we've just received a bitch-type for a roommate. I just sort of feel it. Ya know?"

"Why?"

Cannon leaned up on her elbow. "I've seen her type before—always swaggering around in riding clothes or some damn thing, acting like they're Queen Pooh Pooh of the world. Cheee-zus."

Felicia glanced at the door again. She didn't want Patsy Dedham to hear them. "She certainly is pretty, though. Isn't she?"

"Looks like a mean damn bastard to me!" Cannon plopped on her back again. "Lord, what deodorant hath wrought!"

"Maybe she'll be all right," was all Felicia said. She didn't want Cannon to know how really impressed she was with Patsy Dedham. As a matter of fact, she didn't want any one to know she was impressed with anything. That was the way to be, she was discovering.

"Just wait," Cannon said.

Patsy came back into the room again.

"Did you find your closet?" Felicia asked her.

"Yes, thanks."

Cannon sat up. "Some arrangement, huh? Closets out in the hall and the john a thousand miles away."

Patsy didn't look at Cannon. She immediately began taking things out of her suitcase, folding them and efficiently putting them in her bureau drawer. "All these American schools are alike, I guess. With their odd little rules and systems."

"Where did you go before?" Cannon asked, looking down at her finger-nails.

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 "Switzerland last year. Before that, Dobbs!"

"Did you like?" Cannon asked. "Switzerland, I mean."

"Divine!" She flashed a smile and her teeth were very even and white.

Felicia dampened her lips and looked down at the collar on her dress. She had never known anyone who had actually lived in Europe. In Ashton it was a rarity even to be sent to Virginia to school, but Europe! She wondered if she would ever be able to talk to Patsy Dedham. How wonderful to be like that, she was thinking. How wonderful just to be Patsy Dedham!

"Half of St. Louis goes to Dobbs," Cannon said.

Patsy turned to her then. "Are you from St. Louis?" She was smiling broadly, really for the first time.

"Yes," Cannon said, looking straight back at her.

"You know the Lelanne's then, Phil and all of them?"

"I know them," Cannon said, "but not well. They think I'm still in kindergarten or something."

For a moment Patsy seemed to be studying this fact, analyzing it as if it revealed something that might effect future relationships. Then she laughed, tossing her head back. "Phil came up with the St. Louis polo team last year. God, what a character! He kept sending me these crazy telegrams asking me to come out to St. Louis."

"Sounds like the Lelames, breweries and all. There's a lot of beer behind all that gall!"

"Oh?" said Patsy and looked away again.

Felicia listened to all this, but her exclusion was beginning to seem almost purposeful. She went over to her bureau and took out her green and white striped pajamas. In the mirror above the bureau she could see her own reflex^{ct}ion looking back at her. There were faint smudges of dark

under her eyes and again she realized how tired she was. She touched her hand to her hair but immediately withdrew it. If only she looked like Patsy Dedham, she thought. If only she knew about polo teams and Switzerland and knew people who sent crazy telegrams. These were the things that mattered; these were the things that made other people like you.

She undressed slowly and after putting on her pajamas, carefully folded back the sheets and one blanket. The cot was narrow and the mattress sagged in the middle. It seemed strange to be in this tightly made little cot instead of her own four-poster bed at home. She wondered if she would be able to sleep amidst such strangeness.

Half-sitting with the pillow propped up in back of her (she didn't dare to actually lie down, not yet) she began listening to Cannon and Patsy again.

Cannon, seemingly inexhaustable, was sitting on the foot of her cot, freely swinging her legs back and forth over the small iron footboard.

"Why didn't you go back ^{to} Dobbs instead of coming here?" she asked Patsy.

"My sister, I guess," Patsy said. "My mother thinks we ought not to be in the same school and Gigi knew all this crowd there this year. Besides, my grandmother just happens to know Miss Eubanks. They went to Wellesley or something, I guess."

"That was unfortunate," Cannon said.

"Why?" asked Patsy. (She pronounced it "Whaaahye.")

"I'd rather be anywhere in the universe but here," Cannon said and yawned.

"Chesney's a good school, one of the top five."

"Mayhap," Cannon said, "but it just so happens to attract the top goons of the world also. A goon is born"---she raised her arm dramatically---"watch her! Before you know it she'll be registered at Chesney

Hall and then their little monsters'll be registered all over again.

Hideous! Foul!"

* (Patsy just looked at her with cold grey^a eyes and then, turning, took a light blue night shirt from her bureau drawer. She half-way glanced back at Cannon. "Do you mind? I really do have to get some sleep. It's really been a bumpy day."

For a moment Cannon looked confused, then she said: "Noop, not-a-tall" and swung her legs over to the side of the cot.

Within seconds Cannon herself was in a pair of red pajamas, sitting cross-legged in the middle of the bed brushing her hair. She looked like a firey red ball sitting there. "...Forty-four, forty-five..." She grinned at Felicia. "Hundred strokes every night! For my be-a-uty! ...Sixty-seven, sixty-eight!" She dropped her brush. "My pill! Forgot my pill!" Barefoot she ran over to her bureau, plopped the pill in her mouth, and then once in the bed again, continued her counting out loud: "...sixty-nine, seventy..."

Patsy Dedham was lying with her left arm over her eyes. Lying there she looked much younger, almost like a little girl. Suddenly she sat up. "Actually, I mean. Do you mind? I'm really not feeling very well. I don't want to be rude or anything, but..."

gal 18 Cannon hesitated with the brush half-way through a stroke and just stared back at Patsy. Then she slowly put the brush aside, got up and still bare foot went over and turned out the lights. "Light bell's going to ring in a minute anyway," she said.

No one said anything from the darkened cots and then came one loud thud and a clear: "Bitch! Damn bitch!"

It was Cannon's unmistakably hoarse voice and for a moment Felicia

was terrified she was referring to Patsy, but then followed: "I broke my toe! I know I broke my damn toe!"

Felicia sat up. "Do you want me to turn on the light? Are you hurt?"

"No, no, I'm all right. Just maimed for life, that's all! Damn rocking chair!" She limped over to the bed and after a rather noisy groping for the brush resumed brushing her hair again. With each stroke tiny sparks flew from her hair.

"Hey, look at your hair!" Felicia whispered to her.

Cannon brushed again and quickly held the brush out so the sparks flew from it. "Health! That's what it is. My pills are working!"

Felicia kept looking at it. "It's fascinating, Cannon," she said, but then there was a pointed turning in the bed from Patsy Dedham's corner.

Cannon punched Felicia's cot with her toe. "What did I tell you?" she whispered.

"Uh huh," was all Felicia said and then the room was awkwardly hushed.

Felicia kept sitting for a while, trying to accustom her eyes to the darkness. By and by, as she made out the lines of the rocking chair, bureaus and fireplace, she lay back down, resting her head on the pillow. Her whole body seemed to relax with the long sigh that came from her. And then for the first time, oddly, the odor of the room seemed to pervade everything else. She had never really noticed it before, but suddenly here it was, the smell of old woods, grown slightly acrid with the years of chemicals, paints, and age, like something sterile without warmth for

feeling.

How still the room was! She went over in her mind the events of the day, and as she did, tiny lights swirled before her eyes. Snatches of conversation came back to her, over and over, Cannon's voice, Miss Gate's, Pedie, and Patsy Dedham, and through it all her own straining and groping to give some appearance of ease, to be a part of it all, to be liked. She saw the faces of her mother and father as they talked to Miss Eubanks and suddenly there was her brother Arthur, with his thick horn-rimmed glasses, "Good-byeeee, good-byeeee, good..." And all at once her eyes filled with tears. If only she were home, to wake up to everything that was familiar. She could never be like these girls, so confident, so at ease in their special way of looking and talking. But she must get along! And with her fists doubled, she said: "I will! I will! I will!"

Somewhere, far in the strange black night, she heard the sound of a train. It was going somewhere, feeling its way through the night. "Home. Home..."

