



hairline rule $\times 15 \frac{1}{2}$

Chapter 5

24 Caslow OS Stal #3371

11 1/2
14
Caslow OS
x23

The chapel was not actually a chapel. It was one large room attached to the new annex and equipped with a stage and long windows on either side. Felicia, in a cloud of fractions, ~~X~~'s and ~~Y~~'s from Algebra class, hugged her books to her and, alone, found her way through the crowded dark hall and into chapel. She started to sit in the back, which seemed the safest venture, but these seats were reserved for faculty only. (Miss Paley rather brusquely informed her of the fact.) So she sat midway along the rows of folding chairs. Further down she saw Cannon, Patsy, and Pedie sitting side by side. All three were wearing plaid skirts and long Shetland sweaters. For a moment Felicia thought of joining them, but the seat beside Cannon was soon taken by Polly Osterhaupt, the senior, who immediately began leaning over Cannon and talking to Patsy. It was obvious that Patsy Dedham had already established a kind of early renown. At breakfast that morning, Miss James, the Spanish teacher, had asked who

she was. "Attractive, isn't she?" said Miss James. And everyone solemnly agreed. Admitting someone was "attractive" was always solemn business; only the unattractive brought out the lilt in the eyes. Patsy Dedham was someone to be reckoned with.

Miss Eubanks, her rimless glasses pinched to her nose, stood on the stage behind a small lectern. She was going over notes in her hand, yet one had the distinct impression she was also aware of her approaching audience, as if one false move from anyone and she would immediately abandon her notes and fling out some bitter word of dismissal. Miss Eubanks never missed anything. "Trigger happy" is how Cannon had explained her. "Eubanks uses a mean gun."

Felicia opened her algebra book and read again the little blue slip of paper that contained her schedule of classes. She had already had European history and algebra. French and English were yet to come. ~~Yet~~ it was the smallness of the classes that frightened her the most. (Only seven in her algebra class!) She felt so exposed; no place to hide.

~~Just now~~ her dullness in algebra had reached almost the panic stage when Miss Munford, ~~an~~ English woman with a high, harsh voice, had asked her a question. The question came after a full period of Miss Munford angrily punctuating the blackboard with chalked ~~X~~'s and dashes and quickly coming to conclusions that Felicia had long since lost in the sing-song monotony of her high British voice. Felicia had not known the answer, and after class Miss Munford had wearily told her they would have to use Saturday mornings for extra tutoring. It was to be a lonely affair with just Miss Munford and herself struggling against the blackboard. The thought was horrifying.

"Hi," whined a voice next to her. It was Hook, the girl who had sat across from Felicia at dinner last night.

"Oh, hi," Felicia said, grateful even to the miserable Hook for recognizing her. She had been the only one so far that day.

"Thank God we don't have a speaker," said Hook. "Only Eubanks."

Felicia smiled at her.

"Hope my stomach doesn't growl," Hook said, pressing her books to her. "Every chapel last year my stomach kept growling."

"Gosh," Felicia said.

"Uh huh," said Hook, and looked miserably up at Miss Eubanks.

Miss Abernathy, the music teacher, her chipper personality managing to beam through her unmade-up face, tip-toed to the piano behind Miss Eubanks. She had naturally curly, dark hair that stood out on both sides of her face, and her rather prominent nose, almost hooked, gave a classical outline as she sat slightly stooped and hollow-chested before the piano.

Miss Eubanks turned to her and nodded, and at this signal the entire room rose in unison as Miss Abernathy ripped through a few introductory chords of "Lead Kindly Light." Felicia shared one of the red hymnals with Hook, who, almost clutching her half of the book, labored through the song in the same whining and sniffing voice she used when she ~~spoke~~ ^{spoke}. Felicia only pretended to sing, but she was aware, too, of the other voices around her. They were all so different from the drawling Southern voices she was accustomed to in the small Episcopal church at home. The hymn was faster paced and the "R's", "D's" and "T's" were so sharply distinct.

When the singing was over everyone sat down again, and Miss Eubanks, book in hand, stood almost at attention, looking beyond the room as if this room, this moment, had no part of the great message she was soon to bring.

"Give us men, O Lord!" Miss Eubanks read with dramatic emphasis.

"Strong men! Tall men!"

"That's a new wrinkle," whispered Hook and grinned nastily.

If anyone else had said that, Felicia might have thought it was funny, because there was something funny about Miss Eubanks standing up there on the stage praying for men to come to Chesney Hall. Yet it was the brand of humor Miss Gates would have called "ordinary", "vulgar," and "silly." It didn't show the right kind of spirit. Felicia looked about her; no one else seemed to see the humor in it. They sat looking up at Miss Eubanks with wide eyes as if they understood the seriousness of this melancholy plea from their Mistress.

When Miss Eubanks finished reading she slowly rested the book on the lectern, then dampening her lips as if to replace the unheard applause with a gesture, she carefully took up a slip of paper. Everything Miss Eubanks did had a kind of unspoken warning to it, like a doctor in his office before he tells the news of coming pain and loss.

"Now, gulls," she said finally, looking not at her audience but out the tall windows again. "This is our first chapel meeting together and I have a few remarks I would like to make this morning."

Felicia moved slightly in her chair so she could see better.

"Gulls," she said again, but with her head lifted this time and her eyes shut, "we are at a beginning. We are beginning a grand adventure together, an adventure not only of the mind but of the heart and spirit as well. We shall grow together, you as well as I." She placed both hands tenderly on the lectern and then suddenly a surprising gleam, almost mischievous, came into her eyes. "You won't believe this," she said in a natural, almost coy voice, "but I propose to grow, too. I have a great

deal to learn, too, and I shall learn from you."

gal 20 [The gleam and the voice were met with only wide-eyed solemnity, there-
fore they quickly vanished. "We are privileged people in this room today,"
she continued in an entirely different pace and tone. "We represent only
a small fraction of our great nation. But with privilege, as with all
gifts, comes responsibility. There are four words we have here at Chesney
Hall, and at the beginning of each year I always like to remind ourselves
of them." She looked up at the ceiling as if the four words were written
there. "Work, scholarship, thrift, and prayer." She said these slowly and
repeated them for emphasis. "Work, scholarship, thrift, and prayer. These
are the eternal virtues, gulls, and I want them imprinted in your minds.
I want you to think about them, understand them, and know them so well you
will remember them all the days of your life." She looked down at her
notes. "Yes, we are in a race for survival in this world, and to survive
there can be no second best. Each of us must give her best and sometimes
more. Do a little more than is expected of you, gulls, and you will always
succeed in life^{ch}_M—not only for yourselves but for others as well. That
is what we ask of you here at Chesney Hall. Remember what I have said
this day. I shall give you my best and in return I ask for yours."

She stood there for a while, her chin lifted. It was the first time
Felicia had noticed the prominence of Miss Eubanks' chin; it was her best
feature. "Now," she said and walked to the side of the lectern. "There
are a few additional things I would like to say." She glanced out the
side windows again. There the rolling Virginia lawns and meadows were
still green with the waning days of September. The tall boxwoods and
foot-high brick walls had the look of age and old sorrows. "How lovely
are Thy dwelling places, O Lord," she said in almost a whisper. "How

wonderously and greatly are we made." She paused and looked back at her hushed audience. "These were my thoughts this morning as I took my early walk. I thought how privileged we are to be surrounded by such eternal beauty. And then, gulls, I was shocked to discover we had here at this lovely place people who did not share my joy in our bounty. Chewing gum wrappers, bits of paper, candy wrappers---marring our grounds. Could a Chesney Hall gull be so careless?" She seemed to be examining the room, and since her question was marked with only silence she asked again;

"Chesney Hall gulls do not chew chewing gum. Do they, gulls?"

A chorus of voices responded: "Noooooo, Miss Eubanks."

"Chesney Hall gulls do not carelessly throw away papers, do they, gulls?"

"Noooo, Miss Eubanks."

"Chesney Hall gulls always respect beauty and the property of others. Don't they gulls?"

"Yassss, Miss Eubanks."

"Very well, then," said Miss Eubanks, her chin lifted again. But she seemed pleased with her response---a good Captain's by-play with his trusted lieutenants. Onward and upward, gulls!

She turned half-way to Miss Abernathy then and nodded slightly. Miss Abernathy immediately jolted into martial music and the room of "privileged few" filed out the doors, orderly and row upon row.

Chapel was followed by what Miss Eubanks called "mid-morning snacks." It was held outside in the east garden, and was designed for the Hooks of the world whose uncontrollable stomachs would not obey the two o'clock luncheon hour. Lemonade, crackers, and cookies were served from a long

table prepared for the daily rite. A long line had already formed near the table, and girls, already served, were sipping from paper cups, and sitting along the wall and on the stone benches placed intermittently about the garden. Patsy Dedham, Cannon, Polly Osterhaupt, Pedie, and a few others Felicia did not know were sitting on the wall near the grape arbor. Their long socks, blowing hair, and plaid skirts added to the color of the beginning Fall.

"Come on," Hook whined to Felicia after they had been served, "we can sit over there by the steps." Felicia had not wanted to sit with Hook. Snack-time was an important time, she could see. It was when you showed the world just who your friends were; this was clique-time, friend-time, and if you sat with somebody like Hook, then right away you were marked. Felicia looked over by the grape arbor; there was more room on the wall.

"Let's just go over and sit with Cannon and them," she said as nonchalantly as she could. But the brazenness was not without cost. As she came toward the splendid gathering no one spoke; in no way did they acknowledge the presence of someone new. Felicia sat down slowly on the wall nearest Patsy Dedham, and Hook, her shoulders sloping, plopped down next to Felicia in a cloud of sighing gloom.

"Don't you remembah?" Polly Osterhaupt, her big blondness and her fluttering, breathy voice dominating everyone else, was talking to Patsy Dedham. "Scotty Childs! Syosset! Ivy. He was always going with that dreary girl, ⁹⁷ Sally Whatshername." Gall. 21

"Oh, yes!" said Patsy. "She had those kind of droopy-drop eyes!"

Polly Osterhaupt laughed, tossing her head back. (There were only a few whom she honored with this laugh.) "Yes and Bob Corning kept saying

how sexy she was?"

"Bob Corning's a nifty guy," said Patsy Dedham.

"Hell, fire, manure!" Cannon on the other side of Polly Osterhaupt suddenly stood up. Her skirt was drenched in lemonade.

"For godsakes, McNulty," Polly Osterhaupt said to Cannon, "there's no need in sounding exactly like a hood!"

"Well, look at me!" Cannon said.

"Get a napkin, then," said Polly. "God, you talk just like a hood."

Cannon, halfway hopping to the long table for an extra napkin, glanced back at the laughing behind her and, as she did, bumped squarely into Miss Abernathy, the music teacher, spilling the remaining lemonade onto the teacher.

"Dear God," moaned Polly Osterhaupt, and Pedie, on the other side, began to giggle.

"Ex-cuse me, Miss Abernathy! Gee, Miss Abernathy! Did I drench you?" said Cannon, elaborately wiping the woman's black skirt with her hand.

"Noo, noo!" chirped Miss Abernathy. "But you should watch where you're going, dear."

"I knowwww it," said Cannon. "God, ex-cuse me."

"Don't say that, Cannon," said Miss Abernathy. "Don't say God" (she almost whispered the word) ^g that way." (she almost whispered the word) ^g that way." $\frac{1}{M}$

"Oh, no, Miss Abernathy."

Felicia watched the scene and was relieved that at least Cannon had interrupted the exclusive talk between Patsy Dedham and Polly Osterhaupt. She glanced at Patsy whose straight fair hair and ^a grey eyes seemed more emphasized here in the sunlight. In the entire gathering of girls ~~it was~~ ^{alone} she ~~who~~ stood out ~~among the other less perfected in the garden.~~ One could never say that Chesney Hall attracted the beauties of the world; ^{Short}

bow legs, thick glasses, and what Cannon would have called just down-right horrors, were very much in evidence. ^{rose} That, along with the "just all right", ^q seemed the rule of thumb. As Cannon said: ^q "The cheap minked and perfumed go elsewhere."

"She's such a cu-ute girl," said Patsy Dedham, looking at Cannon.

The glory of it all, thought Felicia. ^q Patsy Dedham saying something nice about you! "She really is," Felicia said aloud.

"She'll never last the year out," ^q whined Hook.

Patsy Dedham looked over at Hook, her eyes at once revealing a decision of instant dismissal. Then she looked at Felicia. "Oh, hello theah," she said.

"Hello," Felicia said, beaming a smile. "Do you feel better today? I mean ^q---"

"Pardon?"

Felicia dampened her lips. The abruptness of the "pardon" and the frown on the girl's face seemed almost angry. Felicia sat up straighter. "You said you were so tired from the plane trip. D'you feel better now?"

"Oh! Yes! Fine!" she looked away immediately.

It was a stupid question, Felicia realized. Dumb. Something an old woman would have asked. She let her shoulders slump again.

For a while no one said anything, then Polly Osterhaupt, half-stretch-^q ing said: ^q "Well, back to the galley. I've got to proctor study hall next period." She rose to her ^{go} large-boned height, merely glancing at Felicia and Hook. "Look, sweetie-face," she said to Patsy in a complete change of voice, incongruously gentle ^q for her. "Come over to our hall after lunch. I'll show you all those pictures ^q---Scotty and all of them."

"Divine," said Patsy, getting up, too. And then without saying any ^q

thing to Felicia or Hook the two walked away.

"She's pretty, isn't she?" whined Hook, still huddled there as if they shared things, she and Felicia.

"Who?" Felicia asked almost angrily. She didn't want any part of Hook, now less than ever.

"That girl, whatever her name is."

"Patsy Dedham," said Felicia, watching as Pedie, too, her books in hand, got up to go over to talk to a short dark-haired girl with intense eyes and a turned-up nose. Felicia looked back at Hook, her cloying poison seeming to loom larger than ever. Felicia stood up. "I've got to go," she said. She started to walk away.

"Wait for me," called Hook.

Felicia didn't look back; she strode toward the classrooms with her head hanging down. At the door, however, she hesitated for a moment. A slight feeling of guilt had come to her. She had never hurt anyone before, never consciously. She had always thought it was impossible. But, now, she was in a race for survival.

Madame de Crèvecoeur, short, ample, her greying hair strained to a bun in the back of her head, solidly reigned behind her desk in Room 11, the room just off the first landing. Why Madame de Crèvecoeur's French classes were isolated this way was nobody's particular secret. "She looks just like a bulldog," Cannon had told Felicia. "For godsakes don't get crossed up with her!" Yet it was Madame de Crèvecoeur who gave some of the stature to Chesney Hall. A three time widow from the Midi, she had come to Chesney Hall twenty years previously and, ever since, the school (and Madame de Crèvecoeur) boasted of the fact that no Chesney Hall girl, with only one exception, had ever failed to pass a French college board.

"And she was stupeed, stupeed, stupeed!" explained Madame de Crévecoeur ^g in reference to the girl who had failed to pass. That had happened some fifteen years ago, but on Madame de Crévecoeur's calendar it was a dark day indeed. All this was carefully drawn out for Felicia by Cannon, and the fact that Felicia had been placed in a special class (only four girls) under Madame de Crévecoeur did not ease her feelings. She felt she already had a mark against her since she and the three others were the only ones in her class who had not had French before ^h ~~---a~~ lack ^m almost indecent. ^o

"Bonjoo," muttered Madame de Crévecoeur wearily as each girl came into the classroom. She sat writing at her desk, but with each greeting she glanced up with surprisingly large, tragic, brown eyes. No one responded to her greeting.

Felicia sat in the front seat nearest the door and her body was electric as she waited for the hour to begin. Madame de Crévecoeur was writing what looked to Felicia like a letter, and the fact that four girls had entered her room seemed only a rude interruption; the pleasure at hand was decidedly the writing of the letter. Her mouth curled downward on her full pale face and it was only the eyes, soulful and haunting, that told of some long ago beauty that once must have attracted the love of three husbands.

She was wearing a black cotton dress, obviously many times washed, which dipped to a slightly wrinkled V in the front, revealing the amplex of her bosom and the reddish skin that ^{might} ~~seemed~~, with only the slightest pro-^o vocation, ~~would instantly~~ turn into a firey red.

She carefully put aside her pen, ^g and then, ^g taking up a slender notebook, came a clear, resounding: ^g "Balls!"

It jolted the room and the four girls looked at each other.

"Balls! Répondez s'il vous plaît!" She looked at the four with flashing eyes.

No one said anything.

"Eh bien," she sighed heavily. "Ann Tho-mass Balls. Present? Oui?"

"Oh!" said a pleasantly chubby blond girl on the other side of the room. "I'm here." She touched her fingers to her mouth.

Madame de Crèvecoeur looked at the beaming girl with what amounted to a sneer.

"Arris!" Her voice had a savage, flat quality.

"Present," came another voice.

"Storr!"

The girl in the middle, the one with the scrubbed red face and brown frizzy hair, cleared her throat. "Present."

"Whееееetfield!"

"Present," said Felicia thinly.

The eyes flashed and the notebook was placed aside.

Felicia watched, ~~her almost~~ entranced.

"Eh, eh, eh," said Madame, wagging her head from side to side ~~an~~ almost coquettish gesture, odd in one so otherwise firmly planted. Yet there was a kind of grace in her actions, too; ~~The~~ use of her hands, ~~dis-~~ ^{was} distinctly gentle in movement. She picked up the textbook and almost tenderly opened it to its beginning. But then she suddenly took hold of both sides of the desk and almost gripping it, leaned forward. "Ouvrez les livres!" she commanded, her eyes snapping and her mouth curved downward into an ugly dare.

For a moment no one did anything, and then with intuitive brilliance the girl next to Felicia opened her book. The others followed.

"Oui!" said Madame. And she immediately leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms over her bosom and looking out the window with half-closed, bored eyes. "Theee al-pha-bet!" she said in a voice clear of scarcely any accent.

Felicia ~~studiedly~~ looked down at her book, ⁹ but [≡] inside she began to relax. If the alphabet was all they had to conquer in the hour, she felt reasonably assured of safety.

"Theee al-pha-bet!" Madame repeated again. "Facile, eh?"

No one said anything.

"Non?"

Felicia looked up. All at once the woman's face was lighted with such a beam of pleasure---almost impish---that one couldn't fail to join in this odd sign of joy. Felicia smiled back at her.

"You!" said Madame. "Wheeeetfield! Lisez!" She pointed her finger at Felicia.

Felicia felt her face bolt red. She stared back at the woman.

"You are stupeeed, oui?" said Madame. "You do not haff much heeere? Non?" she said, baring her teeth and pointing to her head.

Felicia's face was burning and her heart beat so she could scarcely ~~swallow~~ ^{breathe}.

"Read the alphabet, Wheeeetfield," said Madame in a voice almost nonchalant.

Felicia looked down at the page. "A, b, c, d, e, f, g---

foot "Non, non, non," interrupted Madame loudly. She got up from behind the desk and came forward, standing in front of Felicia in almost a crouching position. "Regardez!" she said in a gargling voice.

Felicia looked up into the red face.

July 23

"Aihhhhh," she said, her mouth stretched wide and her finger pointing to her throat. Felicia saw two gold teeth flash brilliantly in her mouth.

"Ah," said Felicia quietly.

"Non, non, non, non, regardez!" She kept jabbing her throat. "Aihhhhh."

"Ahhhhhh," said Felicia softly.

"Open the mooose!" shouted the woman.

Felicia was conscious of the other three girls looking at her with pained faces. She opened her mouth as wide as she could. "Ahhhhhh."

"Bon dieu," muttered Madame in defeat. "Eh bien, continuez!"

Felicia looked up at her.

"Behhhhh," said Madame.

"Beh."

"Non, non, non, non!" said Madame, throwing up her hands. "You do not talk right. Where you come from you talk lack theeese?"

Felicia didn't ^{answer} say anything.

"You have a home, leetle girl, eh?"

"Georgia," said Felicia. She felt like crying. "I live in Georgia."

"Ahhh," said Madame, her eyes receiving this delightful fact. She nodded her head. "Jawwwwjah!"

Felicia nodded.

"That is where they beat the Niggahs, eh?"

Felicia shook her head slowly.

"Ah, oui! Deep sud---lack Meeeseeseeppee, eh? No good for Neeegahs!" And suddenly she laughed, a loud, almost peasant laugh.

"Veddy bad for pauvre Neeegah! Virginie better. Oui?"

Felicia dampened her lips, but she smiled back at the woman. She thought she sensed some spark of amiability in the face. If so, it was

no time to forfeit such a headway.

"Sehhhhh," said Madame.

Felicia looked at her quizzically.

Madame pointed to Felicia's book.

"Oh! Sen."

"Bon! Dehhhh!....."

Painfully and slowly the entire alphabet was dredged from the pages and recited to the room, sometimes duet, othertimes solo, and at the end Felicia was left clutching her fingers to her throat, drained of all energy. Almost disloyally the other girls gave her no sigh of recognition at the end of the recital. No applause. No rewards. It was a "thank God that I am not as other men" reaction, and Felicia was left alone with her burning humiliation.

The next day's assignment was the definite "arteeeele" and the Lord's Prayer, to be recited in full. Felicia decided that if she had to stay in the bathroom all night she would know every word and syllable of the prayer. (The pronunciation was written out on another sheet of paper.) But that was tomorrow.

At the end of the period she hugged her books to her and with shaking legs got up from her desk and went toward the door.

"Au-revoir, Wheeeetfield!"

Felicia looked back at the woman. She was smiling pleasantly. And then, without warning, ^{madame} she winked, a friendly wink that almost spoke of collusion, as if they had been in some gay game together, she and Felicia.

For a moment Felicia just stared at her, and then as the full import of the wink came to her, she broke into a broad smile. "She likes me," she thought. And with the realization she rushed from the room, almost

fall. 24

stumbling over another girl as she went out the door. She believed she adored Madame de Crévecour^e: she believed she really did!

Almost whistling she went back to her room.