

Chapter 6

Felicia went straight to her room, climbing the dark back stairs two at a time. Madame de Crévecœur had so pleased her with her magnificent, generous wink that for the first time since she had been at Chesney Hall she felt like actually running.

She opened the door to her room and the noon sunlight, streaming through the long high windows, flooded her with greeting. The cots, made by the three girls earlier that morning, were still neatly spread and there seemed an orderliness to things that had come only this day.

Cannon and Patsy had not returned yet, and it was good to have this moment alone. Felicia looked in her mirror and hastily drew a comb through her hair. She started to place the comb back on the bureau, ^{and} but as she glanced up at the mirror she saw Patsy Dedham slowly coming into the room. She was reading a letter, only one page, and it looked like the one she had read the night before, the one that for an instant had seemed to dis-

turb her so.

when Felicia picked up her books off the bureau and started to say "hi", but with a shock she saw Patsy ~~was~~ sitting on the bed, limply holding the letter; tears were streaming down her face.

"Oh, Patsy! What is it? Is something wrong?" Felicia brushed back her bangs. The sight ^{of Patsy} was almost frightening. Weeping was the last thing she had ever thought of in connection with ~~Patsy~~ ^{her}; so much of the world's glories were hers, tears seemed impossible. Felicia's first reaction was that someone must have died.

Patsy ~~didn't say anything.~~ She ~~just~~ glanced at Felicia, then immediately turned her head and fell face down on the bed. Her hand, still clutching the letter, hung loosely from the bed, and Felicia saw the letter, only a few short paragraphs, was typewritten. ^{that it was}

"Patsy," Felicia said again. There was no answer. Felicia stood there in the middle of the room, staring at the girl, ^{is who now seemed so frail} She was sobbing silently, ~~and her body seemed so frail.~~

"Allons, enfants de la pa---treeeuuh!" Cannon burst into the room with loud singing. Her voice grew instantly softer as she saw Felicia.

"Hey, what the ^M---?"

Felicia pointed to Patsy, and Cannon looked dumbly at ^{her roommate} the sobbing girl. "What's the matter? What happened?"

Felicia shrugged her shoulders. "She got a letter or something."

Cannon went over to her and touched her shoulder. "Hey, Dedham. Is there anything we can do? Huh?"

Patsy shook her head.

Cannon looked round at Felicia and raised her eyebrows, then turning back she said: "Hey, are you sick or something? You want the nurse

or ~~---~~"
M

"Just leave me alone, pu-leeese."

~~Cannon just looked down at the sobbing girl.~~ "Well, look ~~---~~ I mean
M we want to help you. Ya know?"

"Nobody can help me. Not now!" Patsy began to sob harder. "Please leave me alone."

Cannon started to turn, but ^{instead} she leaned down and ~~started~~ ^{ed} looking at the letter in Patsy's hand.

Suddenly Patsy jerked around. "Leave me alone!" she shouted and crumpled the letter up in her fist.

Cannon immediately backed away. "Alone she must be," she said and raised her hands in a gesture of helplessness.

Felicia went over and sat in the rocking chair. A sense of high excitement came to her. She watched as Patsy leaned over to get a piece of Kleenex from the box in her bureau drawer. But instead of taking the Kleenex, she got up from the bed and fairly ran out of the room, holding her hand over her mouth.

"My god," Cannon said. "She's gonna lose her cookies."

"She's sick, Cannon," Felicia said. "She really is."

"Uh uh." Cannon shook her head slowly.

Felicia just stared at her. Cannon had a look of utter calmness on her face.

"She just got a 'Dear John', that's all."

"A what!?"

"That letter was from a man!"

"Oh!"

"Uh huh." Cannon went over to Patsy's cot and picked up the rumpled sheet of paper. She read it slowly, then looked at Felicia. "Here, read

it!"

"Cannon! We can't!"

"Read it! Hurry!"

~~Felicia~~ shook her head.

"~~Hurry!~~" Cannon thrust the letter in front of her.

Felicia took the wadded paper and smoothed it out on her lap.

San Remo

Little one, (~~it began~~)

I hate to be the one to break the news. But don't say Aileen and I didn't try to warn you. Angel, lover-boy is married, has been, was, and is the father (though probable not so proud) of three strapping bambini.

They arrived from the States yesterday (she, a rather pleasant looking blond, leading her flock like a mother hen) and you should see lover-boy trying to avoid us. I'm sorry, sweetheart, but that's the way it is.

Your father was right, you know. It's no good, Patsy girl. For God's sake forget him and shed no tears from those beautiful, grey eyes. The ocean's full of both ~~tears~~ and fish.

Aileen sends her love and we miss you, of course. Tony is practically in mourning. So be a good little school girl and write us often.

|| Your dotting uncle,
|| "Hack"

In a round, printed handwriting was a note: "Darling ~~girl~~, we're both truly sorry. A."

Felicia immediately rumbled up the letter and put it on the foot of the bed again.

"Well?" ~~Cannon~~ said.

~~Felicia~~ just looked at her.

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"Whatdaya think?" Cannon asked.

"I don't know," Felicia said. "D'you guess ~~who~~ ^{she} was going with some-
body married?"

"What else? But if you ask me, (Cannon intermittently used ~~the~~ broad
A; she pronounced it ~~Awsk~~) I think it's right down common."

Felicia was thinking of all the married men she had known, friends of
her mother and father and even younger. They were all ancient, dull, and
from another world. "How old do you guess he was?"

"Forty. Fifty," Cannon said nonchalantly.

"Oh, Cannon, she couldn't have!"

"Silly girl. Haven't you ever read Lolita?"

Felicia shook her head.

"She was only thirteen or something and Dedham's seventeen if she's
a day."

"But, Cannon, she couldn't have!"

Cannon sat on the end of Felicia's cot. "Happens all the time."

"Whatdaya mean?"

"People getting hooked up with some married jerk."

"But not^{ly}---" Felicia dampened her lips. "But not somebody you know!"

Cannon yawned. "This friend of mine^{ly}---not really, but she was sort
of, you know, ^{ly}in our crowd. ^{ly}She practically committed hari kari over this
man in St. Louis."

"And he was married?"

"Uh. Twice. He'd been married twice."

"Gosh." Felicia leaned back in the chair. "I didn't think they
thought about^{ly}---I mean, married people. ^{ly}I didn't think they thought about
all that after they're married."

"That's all they do think about. Just because they're bored to hell and back. The married ones are the worst, always on the prowl for somebody." Cannon looked down at her fingernails.

Felicia kept looking at Cannon. Her heart was pounding inside. It was exciting, fascinating.

"Yep, our roommate's gone and got herself ~~it~~" Cannon immediately started whistling. Patsy was ~~back~~ in the room. Her eyes were swollen and red.

"Feel better?" Cannon asked her.

"I guess so," Patsy managed to say. "It was just some news, ~~dis-~~ turbing news."

"I hope nobody died or anything," Cannon said.

"No, my uncle. He's very ill. He's my favorite uncle." She brought the Kleenex to her nose.

"Oh," Cannon said thinly.

"I'm sorry," Felicia said as quickly as she could. In no way did she want Patsy to know they had read the letter.

A bell rang.

"Lunch!" said Cannon, standing up. "Let's go. I'm starved!"

Patsy lay back on the bed and pulled a blue comforter over her legs.

"Aren't you going to lunch?" Felicia asked her.

"No, I don't think so. I really can't." Patsy's hair was damp and one bleached strand fell alongside her face, making the hollows in her cheeks more prominent.

"They'll send somebody up here for you if you aren't there," Cannon said. "You'd better go."

"Let them!"

"Do you want one of us to stay with you?" Felicia asked softly.

"I mean, in case you ¹⁷~~---~~"

Patsy shook her head.

"God, Dedham," Cannon said. "I know how you feel. "D'you want us to bring you something?"

"No, I just want to be alone. Please!" The "please" was so like a command that both Felicia and Cannon quickly moved away from the bed.

Cannon beckoned to Felicia. "So long," she called out as the two left the room.

Outside in the hall, Felicia and Cannon just looked at each other.

"She's got it bad," Cannon said.

"I feel kind of sorry for her," Felicia said.

"I don't. I knew there was something about that girl the first time I saw her. She just hasn't quite got it, ya know?"

"Got what?"

"Just a lit-tle too jet-setty, mink, and manurish." Cannon took hold of the stair rail. "I told you, that's one thing about old Chesney. At least they try to avoid the trash of the world. Come on, I'm starved."

That night, before dinner, when Cannon and Felicia came back into the room, Miss Godhue, the trained nurse, was standing over Patsy's bed. Patsy had a thermometer in her ^{mouth}~~mouth~~ and Miss Godhue was holding her wrist.

"Hi, Miss Godhue," Cannon said cheerily, but Miss Godhue did not look up from her watch. Nevertheless, it was a relief to have the starched, hooked-nosed presence in the room. Patsy had stayed in her room all afternoon, missing study hall and gym, the latter an offense so serious that an investigation had become necessary.

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"No fever," said Miss Godhue as she looked at the thermometer.

"Now, Patsy, what seems to be the trouble? Are we feeling just a little homesick? Just a weee bit?"

Patsy shook her head slowly.

"Miss Godhæe," Cannon said in an odd, almost sweet voice.

Miss Godhue turned to Cannon, irritated.

"It's probably none of my business," Cannon said, looking at the ceiling and in every direction except Miss Godhue's, "but Patsy's just gotten distressing news. Ya know?"

Miss Godhue turned to Patsy. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"My uncle's sick," Patsy said in a pale voice and turned her head to the wall.

"My, my," said Miss Godhue. "Well, shouldn't we call your parents? I'm sure after you talk to them, you'll discoverth_m---"

Patsy turned to her quickly. "No! That isn't necessary." She sat up.

"Would you like Miss Eubanks to call? Or I can call for you? Find out justth_m---"

"No, that isn't necessary at all. I'll be all right."

"Yes, well." Miss Godhue stood up straighter. "Then I think we should dress for dinner, try to eat something. We don't like to miss our meals."

"I'll be all right," said Patsy and drew her knees up to her and rested her head on them, letting her hair cover her face.

Miss Godhue patted her on the back. "We all have our griefs," she said matter-of-factly. "We must learn to meet them."

Patsy looked up into her face and with red-rimmed eyes examined the plain face of the woman.

Felicia had never seen a face quite so pained as Patsy's and she was wondering how it was that love, or the loss of love, could cause such tears. She had often wondered this. In the movies and in books people were always raging around because someone had turned them down. She thought of George Riererson at home¹⁵ George with his sleepy eyes, duck-tail haircut, and large, dangling hands. She could see him on the dance floor, ~~him~~, his long legs and feet twisting in a loose, almost Negroid fashion and his sleepy eyes watching Mary Ellen Orms, her chubby body abandoned to the African beat. Felicia had been in love with George Riererson, but he had never spoken to her or danced with her at dances. That was pretty sad. She guessed it was the same with Patsy. But if George Riererson had been married, she would never have thought of him again; it would have been impossible. He might just as well be dead.

"You'll be all right, Patsy," said Miss Godhue.

"Thank you, nurse," mumbled Patsy.

"My name is Godhue, Miss Godhue!"

Cannon looked at Felicia. In the school catalogue Miss Godhue's picture was there enjoying the same status as the faculty. Felicia remembered noticing ~~that~~ ^{that}.

"Yes! Of course!" said Patsy. "Miss Godhue."

"Very well," said Miss Godhue. She turned to Cannon and Felicia.

"Good evening, girls." She walked crisply out of the room.

Patsy looked at the door closed by Miss Godhue. "School nurses are all alike," she said.

"I know it," Cannon said. "You could be dying, literally, and all they'd give you is an aspirin. Last year when Mary Olmquist practically gave me a concussion of the brain on the hockey field, that's all old

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Godhue gave me^{1/2}---an asprin!²"

Patsy tried to smile at Cannon, but then she put her hands to the back of her neck and stretching her head backward moaned "Ohhhhhh, God."

Cannon sat down in the rocking chair, and then looking steadily at Patsy said: "Nobody's really sick. Are they?" She asked this quietly and both Felicia and Patsy turned to her, startled.

"What do you mean exactly?" Patsy said.

"I mean, nobody's really sick. There's something else, isn't there? Your uncle isn't sick."

Felicia felt her throat go dry. Was Cannon actually going to tell Patsy they had read her letter?

Patsy's lips evened into one thin line. "Have you by any chance been reading my mail?"

"No, I did not read your mail; But why didn't you want Eubanks to call your parents?"

Patsy sat up, putting her feet to the floor. "I just happen to think that is none of your business."

Cannon lifted one hand, a slightly halting gesture. "Sorry," she said. "Je regret. I **just** thought you might want to talk about it, psychologically. That's all."

"Well, I do not!"

An awkward silence ^{peruaded} ~~reigned in~~ the room. ~~And~~ Felicia found even breathing difficult, as if she might ~~further~~ disturb the charge that ran between Patsy's corner of the room and Cannon's.

After a while Cannon dramatically walked out into the hall, her bare feet pointedly ^{noisy} ~~loud~~ on the uncarpeted floor. ~~With~~in minutes she returned carrying a green wool dress still on its hanger. She dropped the dress

on her cot and began noisily rummaging in her bureau drawer.

Felicia thought of saying something, but thought better of it and picked up her history book, pretending to read. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Cannon drop a pill in her mouth, then quickly divest herself of her sweater and skirt. Impatiently she pulled the green dress over her head and stood there for a few moments, like a hidden clown, her arms foolishly stretched up into the sleeves.

The dress fit snugly and was flattering to her reddish hair and firmly rounded body. She stepped into high-heeled brown alligator shoes, clomped back to her bureau and ran the brush quickly through her hair, three strokes, and then threw the brush back on the bureau.

"Au revoir, you bitches!" she called and was out the door.

Felicia looked slyly over at Patsy, who sat with folded arms, looking into space.

"Doesn't that child have a mother?" Patsy asked, not turning her head.

"No, she's dead," Felicia said quietly.

"That's what's wrong with her then. She's completely lacking in any sense of ^{the} ~~the~~" She turned to Felicia. "Why in the world (she pronounced it 'wehld') does she talk the way she does. It isn't exactly clever."

For some reason Felicia wanted to come to Cannon's defense. She wanted to say "I don't think she really means anything by it." But she didn't say anything and for a second she regretted the weakness.

"Do you happen to know if she actually read my mail?" Patsy was looking at Felicia with grave eyes, still puffy from the afternoon's orgy of tears.

Felicia looked away; she could feel the color coming to her face. "I don't know," she said. She dampened her lips. "I really don't." She

looked back at Patsy.

Patsy looked down at her hands. She had long tapering fingers, still slightly bronzed from the summer's sun and her nails were pale and carefully manicured. "She was right, you know."

"About what?" Felicia asked. Her heart began to beat faster again.

Patsy looked up. Her eyes were astonishingly large. "No one is ill, my uncle I mean." She sighed heavily. "Only myself, I guess."

"What's the matter?" Felicia asked. She could hear the thinness in her own voice.

"I was a fool, I guess." Patsy looked away. "I believed somebody."

"Some boy or something?" Felicia asked. She couldn't bring herself to say man.

Patsy nodded. "He was married." She looked back at Felicia, her level eyes not changing expression nor showing any change of emotion. It was merely a statement of fact. Yet her lips were smiling oddly.

"Oh, Pat-sy," Felicia said, summing up any dramatic ability she had. Within the moment she decided the role she must play¹⁷~~---~~no shock, only deep concern for a friend's tragedy. She frowned deeply. file. 28

Patsy just looked at her, with eyes showing only curiosity at another's reaction.

"You mean somebody you were going with?"

Patsy nodded, still searching Felicia's face.

"Did you know it?"

"No."

Felicia wished she would look away.

"He has children. We were desperately in love."

Felicia dampened her lips. "How awful!"

"Yes. Yes, it is."

Felicia wondered if Patsy were going to cry again. She thought not.

"My father literally loathed him." The odd smile came back to her lips.

"But then why did ^{cl}---" Felicia shook her head. "How old was he?"

She really wanted to know.

"Twenty-nine. He wanted to be a writer. He's divine, a divine writer."

"Gosh, and he never told you he was married! He never ^{cl}---"

"He tried to once, I think. I know ^e something was wrong. Oh, I don't know." She looked out toward the balcony and as she did she suddenly looked older. "I hate my father," she said calmly. "He made me come back. Even Mummy wanted us in Switzerland ^{cl}---Gigi and myself."

"Did she ^{cl}---your mother know him?"

"No."

"Did your father?"

"Once. He met him once."

"Well, can't you write to him or something? Maybe he'll get a divorce or ^{cl}---"

Patsy shook her head.

"You'll ^{cl}---" Felicia dampened her lips again. "You'll graduate in the spring and maybe by that time ^{cl}---"

"No," Patsy said, and her eyes then looked suddenly frightened.

They looked at each other for a few minutes, and Felicia was struck by the look in the girl's eyes, an almost pleading look.

"I don't know what to do," Patsy said.

Felicia didn't say anything.

"Well," Patsy said. Her voice was tremulous and distant. "We'd better dress for dinner."

Felicia just sat there.

"I'd rather, of course, you wouldn't say anything about this," Patsy said as she folded her sweater. "You were cute to listen. I guess I needed an ear. I---" Tears came to her eyes again.

Felicia didn't move. "I won't, Patsy!" Her fists were doubled up. "I won't tell any ~~body~~! I never will!" She meant it. How flattered she was that Patsy had chosen her to tell all this to! How tragic, how good, how wonderful Patsy Dedham!

And it was a warm feeling that night, walking into the dining room with Patsy. They were friends, good friends, and everyone was looking.