

Chapter 8

Felicia paused for a moment in the letter she was writing home. From her desk in the long study hall she could see Patsy six rows over. She was holding a book in her hands, but she wasn't reading ~~from~~ it. Her eyes had a far look, ~~and she sat looking into space,~~ her hair slightly stringy, and dark circles ~~beneath~~ ^{ringed} her eyes. It was true what Cannon had said: "Dedham's looking a bit chewed upon. Don't you think?" The expression had angered Felicia in the beginning, but she was becoming more accustomed to Cannon's special kind of lingo and took the remark ~~for how~~ ^{as} it was ~~meant,~~ ^{intended} just a statement of fact that Patsy was not quite the glamorous being she had been when she'd first arrived. She stayed in her room most of the time now, complaining of vague stomach upsets and headaches ("migrains, just like ~~My~~ mummy has"), emerging only for classes and the mail which was distributed twice a day. Patsy's mail was voluminous, ~~at least~~ ^{at} by Felicia's standards; Felicia's friends in Ashton had not yet reached the

letter-writing stage and the only mail she got was from her mother and father, her Aunt Pett in Charleston, and one from the rector of the church in Ashton who wanted to offer prayers "for the beginning days of a new experience." Somehow the letter from the rector was a little embarrassing. She was sure no one else had got such a letter. She wished it had been from a boy, one she could have shown to other people. (Sharing letters, especially from boys, was an understood fact at Chesney Hall; it raised one's status considerably.)

Occasionally Patsy would ask Felicia to check her mail box for her. Most of the time the "D" box was jammed with envelopes. Yesterday "Dinky" Downing, a thin, funny-looking brunette from High Point, North Carolina had fumed in front of the mailbox: "Paayatsy ~~Dayudum!~~ Dayudum! Dayudum! Dayudum! Nothin' but Dayudum!" Felicia laughed. She liked Dinky Downing. Dinky was her age and in the same class, sharing most of the humiliations of such a status---extra tutoring, no clique, no mail, and the inexcusable offense of never having heard of Brooks Brothers before. Dinky occasionally came up to Felicia's room and ordinarily Felicia ~~most likely~~ would have had Dinky for one of her best friends, but Felicia was too caught up now in the magic of Patsy to drop such inferior levels.

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Patsy had written her Uncle "Hack" in ~~Europe~~ ^{San Remo}, but he was in Rome and her aunt had written she had no further news of Peter---that Patsy should "for godsakes" forget him. Then one Saturday night Patsy stayed away from the movie being shown downstairs and wrote Peter herself, mailing it in care of American Express. Felicia stayed in the room with her, watching Patsy as she alternately wrote, re-read, and wrote some more. She ~~didn't know~~ ^{had no idea} what Patsy had written, but it was a long letter, written on Chesney Hall stationery and then copied over on her own ^a grey stationery.

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She asked Felicia to mail it for her, and then the long wait began. They actually counted the number of days it would take for an answer to come. Patsy thought ten days. And on the tenth day Felicia looked into the "D" box, almost praying she could be the bearer of glad tidings. There was no letter at all. ^{passed} And the days ^{waned}; no letter came. The talk around the halls was that Patsy Dedham was a snob. The rumor was aided immensely by Polly Osterhaupt whose repeated overtures were chilled by Patsy. Cannon stayed more and more in the rooms across the hall where a record player, mixed with chatter and giggles, ran almost constantly. Felicia was not sure what her own image in all this was. Instinctively she felt a kind of power-behind-the-throne ease growing within her. For (snob though Patsy may be) Patsy's presence was always felt. Just that week Felicia had been put at Patsy's table and there was no doubt just who was in charge there; whenever Patsy said anything, anything at all, the entire table hushed in reverent silence. She had "impeccable taste in clothes", as Pedie put it, and each day when she walked into chapel all eyes were upon her. Therefore it was this proximity (the chosen knave) that seemed to give Felicia some of the confidence she sought. She spoke to everyone now (the knave was not a snob; the knave was a jolly knave) and was delighted as the responses seemed to grow friendlier and friendlier. She was beginning to like Chesney Hall.

Anyway, (she continued her letter home,) That's the kind of sweater I want. Nobody here wears the kinds I have. They have to be from England or Brooks Brothers. Also I want this one just plain gold pin, a circle one. It's very important that I have one because Grandmother's pearl and diamond one is very nice but people here like to have just very plain ones.

Algebra is simply terrible. I can't wait for you to meet Patsy Dedham. She's wonderful, a senior and has travelled all over the world. Most people think she's snobbish, but she isn't at all.

I'm sorry Arthur can't get home for Christmas. Patsy

says since there isn't a war or anything it looks like the Navy could let them out for just a little while. Anyway, I bet Arthur hates it, chipping paint on Christmas. It's too bad he didn't want to be an officer, but maybe it will help his story writing like he says.

Everybody's dying to get home. So am I. I hope there's a lot of dances and things.

Well, I have to go to English class next, so I'd better look over my homework. We have mostly grammar, but we're also examining poetry. It's hard because we have to give all the secret meaning of poems.

Love,
Felicia

P.S. A very brilliant woman spoke to us in chapel a couple of weeks ago. She hates the South. Isn't it horrible about President Kennedy? Miss Eubanks prayed in chapel and this one girl cried so hard she had to be asked to leave. It's just terrible. I'll never get over it as long as I live. Honestly.

Felicia read the letter over quickly. It was a pretty good letter, she thought, but she knew her mother would be surprised to read what she had written about dances. She had never expressed such a desire before, not after the one or two disastrous affairs she had attended. Only one or two boys had ever danced with her, and the last dance she went to, Bobby Acker who had on a suit that felt like horse hair, had to dance practically the whole dance with her until, blessedly, Mrs. Summer called out "now everyone swap partners, please." But the talk here was so much about assemblies, cotillions, and invitations that Felicia, so caught up in the world of others, almost forgot there were no such things as assemblies and engraved invitations in Ashton. Besides, when she went home she had already decided ^{that} she was going to have her new Patsy ~~Dedham~~ ^{rdham} personality. How fine it would be! She pictured herself in her new sweater and skirt and the slightly haughty look that so characterized Patsy. She also had practised ^c the sort of grave, tragic look Patsy some-

times had in her eyes, and she felt she had pretty well ~~attained~~^{mastered} it. It was glorious!

English class was the largest ~~class~~^M Felicia had--fifteen girls. ~~But~~^{III} it was also the class she liked best. She had never really read poetry before. It was a new world, this world of anguish, love, and death, and it seemed the answer to all she had ever felt. The poems were like voices ~~and~~^{that} seemed to speak only to her, the part of her she would never admit to a living soul. To know there were others who knew shame, hurt, and some-^Ftimes wanted to die was so warm, so good that she felt sometimes she could read poetry forever, recognizing herself in each anguished cry. If only poetry were all there were to school! In a way she figured this was the reason she couldn't grasp Algebra, because every time she read the problem about ~~X~~ going up the stream and ~~Y~~ coming down, all she could picture was the stream itself with slow, meandering canoes rippling through the tree-lined water. ~~Never~~ once did she consider where ~~Z~~ might be, which was the burning question. She never cared. But she had to care or Miss Munford's dark threats of repeating the course would come true. English was her course, and she even liked Miss Peacock.

No one else liked Miss Peacock. The fact she had been so named was even a joke. "She has a figure like a milk bottle," Pedie had said about her. And she did--^Qsmall, slanting shoulders, narrow breast, and expanding hips. Yet she was tall and her head was crowned with white hair drawn up-^{making a}ward into a pompadour--^{effect}ridiculous ~~somehow~~^{effect} with the dark eyebrows which went up into almost clown-like triangles. Miss Peacock rarely laughed. At the dinner table she sat with her right hand behind her back and merely nodded to each girl as she came to the table. What private thoughts must

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have turned in the woman's brain, so filled with poetry and the giving of it, probably no one ever knew. ~~When~~ ^{where} she went to her home in a small Virginia town each summer ~~she went home to~~ another Miss Peacock, her sister, ^{lived} and how their days were spent there no one ever knew ~~that~~ either. Yet Felicia liked her, this odd woman who had first given her the ears to hear the lonely cries of others.

"~~Tears~~ by Lizette Woodworth Reese," said Miss Peacock now in her precise, prissy voice. She ~~was wearing~~ ^{wore} a long-sleeved, black polka-dot dress and ^{sat} ~~sitting~~ there behind her desk with her right hand behind her back, ~~one wondered~~ ^{she} how many times, how many years, how many days, she had begun the hour just so.

She turned her gaze to the windows, which were set low in the basement classroom. "~~Tears~~ by Lizette Woodworth Reese," she repeated and her oddly foolish face, ^{the} the eyebrows, the long nose, and the pinched lips, ^{was} was without emotion or feeling.

Felicia looked down at her book. In a scratchy handwriting she had written: "Try to find out thought." She had read and re-read the poem last night in study hall and wasn't sure whether she had understood it or not. She quickly re-read it again:

When I consider life and its few years---
 A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
 A call to battle, and the battle done
 Ere the last echo dies within our ears:
 A rose choked in the grass; an hour of fears;
 The gusts that past a darkening shore do beat;
 The burst of music down an unlistening street,
 I wonder at the idleness of tears.

Ye old, old dead and ye of yesternight,
 Chieftains, and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
 By every cup of sorrow that you had,
 Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
 How each hath back what once he stayed to weep:
 Homer his sight, David his little lad!

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"Where was Miss Reese born, Mary Margaret?" Miss Peacock asked Dinky Downing. (Dinky was "Mary Margaret" only to Miss Peacock.)

"Uhhhh, New York!" said Dinky. "She was born in New York, wasn't she?"

"She was not born in New York," said Miss Peacock, her gaze searching the room slowly.

"Oh!" squeaked Dinky and grinned helplessly.

"Alice, where was Miss Reese born?" she asked the brunette from Maine.

"She was born January ^{9th} ~~ninth~~, 1856, near Baltimore, Maryland," said Alice in her fast-paced accent. Alice was thought to be "brilliant"; Miss Peacock always read Alice's themes aloud because they were "natural", she said.

"That is correct," said Miss Peacock. Her eyes scanned the room again. "Barbara, would you care to give us your idea what the poem Tears means?"

Barbara Chisolm promptly cleared her throat. She was a plump, heavy-lidded girl whose father was a colonel in the army. Barbara's tales of ~~exc~~ ^scapades with various second lieutenants were lurid.

"I'm not exactly sure, Miss Peacock, but I think it says that there's no sense in going around crying and all because if you do you'll end up like Homer and them." She wagged her head from side to side and looked drowsily at Miss Peacock.

Miss Peacock looked out the window again. "What do you think it means, Felicia?" The question was almost like a sigh.

Felicia felt all eyes turn to her and she knew she was blushing. She hated reciting in class. Every time she was called on something seemed to jolt inside her and her heart began to flutter. "What I got was ~~it~~ ^{it}" She

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blew a wisp of hair out of her eyes. "I mean, I think it says that perhaps you don't have everything you want on earth soTM" She could hear her own voice; it sounded more Southern and drawling than ever; she wished she could have written it instead of saying itTM. "But life is just a very few years andTM and most of what we have tears about are earthly things. But Homer's got his sight backTM---he's deadTM---David has his sonTM---he's dead, too. So why not die?" She looked questioningly back at Miss Peacock and Miss Peacock looked down at her hands.

"Not very well expressed," she said, "but I think perhaps you have the thought." Her eyebrows seemed to rise to higher triangles.

Felicia was pleased and looked around her for approval. There was none.

"Earthly tears are idle, Miss Reese seems to tell us," explained Miss Peacock. "She pleads that she may be free from these earthly emotions and that she may be given wisdom to see the freedom that is in heavenTM--- for Homer now has his sight returned to him and David, his son." Miss Peacock looked straight at Felicia. "Miss Reese borders on the sentimental but with artistry she misses it."

Felicia nodded gravely to Miss Peacock and wrote in her bookTM---"Just misses sentimentality." This was the sort of thing Miss Peacock might ask on an exam, a discussion question. Chesney Hall loved discussion questions. Felicia had never had these before. In Ashton all they did was fill in the blanks.

The girl next to Felicia, Elaine Karr, raised her hand. Elaine was a tall, rather pretty girl whose good looks made her blatant dumbness quaint rather than irritatingTM. Elaine Karr was very well liked.

"Yes, Elaine?" said Miss Peacock wearily.

"Miss Peacock, what I don't understand, though, is ~~Miss~~ Miss Peacock, I don't think dying would be so great. I don't see why Miss Reese thinks that would be so good. I mean even if you do get all those awards and things."

Miss Peacock looked at her with level eyes. "Perhaps, Elaine, you have never experienced sorrow as Miss Reese had."

Elaine looked back at the teacher. She was frowning deeply. "I guess not," she said. "But that's kind of pitiful, isn't it?"

A suggestion of a smile played on Miss Peacock's lips and the whole room laughed. The smile quickly vanished, a pointed rebuff to the laughter. "Pitiable, Elaine," said Miss Peacock. "Pitable, not pitiful."

Elaine frowned deeper.

"Now Edwin Markham," said Miss Peacock. "Mary Pless, can you tell us something about Edwin Markham?"

Mary Pless was wearing her raincoat and the beige color of it was almost oddly the same color as Mary Pless herself and equally as insignificant. No one turned to hear her.

"He was a man of the people, born in Oregon and did common labor."

"Yes," said Miss Peacock, "and are we able to see some of his early life carried through his poems?"

"Yes," said Mary Pless.

Miss Peacock nodded and her eyes searched the room. "Now I want each of you to write me a few paragraphs on the The Man With The Hoe, what you think it means, your opinion of the poem, and the message Edwin Markham has for us."

There was much rattling of paper. Dinky Downing raised her hand.

"Just a couple of paragraphs, Miss Peacock?"

"Yes," said Miss Peacock, and looked ~~comically~~ out of the window again.

Felicia looked over at Elaine Karr's book. Over Edwin Markham's name she had written: "Edward T. ~~Brearton~~. Ed ~~Brearton~~. ^{Choate!} ~~Brearton~~ Eddy. Eddy ~~Brearton~~."

Elaine glanced at Felicia. "I didn't get anything out of it. Did you?"

Felicia shook her head, but she was confident she knew more than Elaine. She doubted if Elaine had even read the poem.

"Be careful with your grammar," said Miss Peacock. "I shall take five points off for each misspelled word and each error in grammar."

Felicia looked up. That's what infuriated her about everything ~~---~~ how could anybody write anything when they had to think about spelling and grammar all the time. She began to write:

"The Man With the Hoe" is a very beautiful poem written by Edwin Markham, who was common. It's based on a world-famous painting which shows a poor man standing in a field and leaning upon his hoe. Edwin Markham wants to know what is going to become of him and his like.

The lust for gold is very aparent in "The Man With the Hoe." Also what man has done to man. Edwin Markham thinks that careless men that lust for gold have forgotten common men such as the one in the world-famous painting and this is a dastardly crime. The man with the hoe is soul-quinched, as many are today, because other men have forgotten him.

Edwin Markham keeps asking how the future will deal with such people. In my opinion, I think this is a very beautiful poem, making use of such words as pleades and the serafin. It is not sentimental at all, but is filled with artistry. The thought is of the highest. Edwin Markham is out-raged that farmers and common people, such as the man with the hoe, have to suffer so. There were no labor unions or such things in those days. I liked it tremendous-ly because of its thought and artistry.

Felicia carefully re-read what she had written. There seemed to be no misspelled words and she was certain she would get an "85" at least. From the blackboard she copied down the honor pledge: "I pledge that I have neither given nor received help during the writing of this examination.

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Signed, Felicia Whitfield." Miss Peacock gave the assignment for the next day and English class was over. Tomorrow they would "investigate dangling participles."

The weather that afternoon turned bitter cold, and Felicia was glad when gym was over. It wasn't so much the cold (yet she sometimes hated leaving the warmth of study hall to go out into the ~~November~~ ^{November} wind.) But she didn't like team games---^{1/2}_Mvolley ball, hockey, ^{or} and basketball. She would much rather have played tennis or gone swimming in the heated pool. Riding was only once a week and that had to be signed up for a week in advance.

However, Miss Brock, the gym teacher, preferred team games for the autumn and winter months. And it was from these Miss Brock chose her favorites, the rather muscular-legged girls who entered the games with the same determined fervor that Miss Brock herself did. Miss Brock moved there on the sidelines of the game, a stocky, well-coordinated woman of thirty-five or so, with an ominous whistle hanging from her neck, and her smooth perfection in all things athletic stood out like a well-oiled machine among the army of gawky, mishapen girls who knocked into each other, tromped about the field, and inevitably plopped to the ground, or ^{stubbed} ~~stumped~~ a toe. There was a touch of the ordinary in Miss Brock, who in more heightened moments during the game, would blow her whistle and shout out in a coarse voice; "Get those legs moving, Jones! Guarrrrd yourrr opponent therrre, Millerr! Don't let herrr get in therrre!" It was frantic and Felicia hated it. She was always glad when the hour was over.

She walked back to her room with Cannon, ^{were} both their faces flushed from the bite of the wind, and Cannon was in high, gay spirits because she was leaving for the weekend to attend her father's wedding in St. Louis.

"It's just getting out of here," Cannon said. "I don't give a damn about the wedding."

"But don't you like her at all, Cannon? I mean she's practically going to be your mother."

"Not my mother, she's not!"

"But your father must like her!"

"He was just lonely, that's all. Too, I guess he didn't want Johnny and I to grow up, you know, in a broken home. Silly man!"

"I guess not," Felicia mumbled. She remembered a friend of her mothers', Mrs. Johnson at home, saying she would never send a daughter of hers to boarding school because everybody there was a "product of a broken home." This was not true. Felicia hadn't met one person whose parents were divorced. Maybe one or two. But most of the parents sounded just like plain nice people and not especially rich either. Of course there were some who were rich, very rich, like Patsy Dedham and some others. Most, though, were pretty much like she was and quite a few even were there on scholarships.

"Any-way," Cannon said, throwing her arms up in the air, "by Friday night I'll be freeeee!" She looked over at Felicia and grinned. "I'll leave you all alone with that crud of a roommate! Cheeee-sus!"

"Aw, Cannon, she's not all that bad. She's just miserable, that's all."

"Miserable! About what?"

"You know. You read the letter."

"Oh, that!" Cannon slowed her walking. "That's not what she's miserable about."

Felicia turned to her sharply. "Whadoya mean?"

"It's something else, I think." She stopped walking entirely. "Some-

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thing you and I don't know about¹⁻²---something more than just some man she got a crush on. I mean, really."

"No, she's really upset. Honestly. You ought to just hear¹⁻²"

Somebody called Felicia's name. It was Pedie, leaning out of one of the top casement windows.

"Whaaat?" Felicia called back.

"Peacock's been looking ^{you} ~~for~~₂ all over the place. She says for you to come to the classroom immediately!"

Felicia looked at Cannon. "Miss Peacock?" She frowned. "What d'you guess she wants?"

"God knows!" Cannon said. "You better go on, though."

Felicia kept looking at Cannon. What could Miss Peacock possibly want? She thought of the test that morning.

"You'd better hep-to," Cannon said.

"I guess so," Felicia said and then, almost running, she made her way through the east garden and over to the new annex.

The only light on in the basement classrooms was the one in Miss Peacock's corner room. It was slightly spooky, the dark empty hall and the one light. Felicia wondered if she and Miss Peacock would be the only ones in the room.

The first person she saw when she entered the room was Elaine Karr. She was sitting in her usual desk, next to Felicia's, and she still had on her gym clothes and sweat shirt. She must have been sitting there for sometime because her face was slightly pale and she didn't smile or any[#] thing when Felicia came in the room.

Felicia immediately sat down in her desk and Miss Peacock, her hand behind her back as usual, in no way ^{acknowledged} ~~recognized~~ her presence in[#] the room. Felicia glanced over at Elaine, but Elaine only dampened her lips and

looked down at a wadded piece of Kleenex in her hand.

Miss Peacock then nodded to Felicia and picked up two pieces of theme paper. With a start Felicia saw that one of the papers was hers, this morning's test. Her first thought was that she had failed, and the fact ^{being} ~~she had been~~ coupled with Elaine Karr was not exactly complimentary. For whereas Elaine had turned her dumbness into advantage, it was an advantage Felicia did not want, especially when it came to her new-found love, poetry.

Miss Peacock looked first at Elaine and then back at Felicia again. "I see you both signed the honor pledge this morning," she said, and her voice was deeper than Felicia had ever heard it.

Felicia glanced at Elaine and then leaned forward.

"I must say how taken I was by the similarity in your two papers." She raised her triangular eyebrows and looked straight at Felicia. "Do you have anything to say about this?"

The message came slowly to Felicia and when it did she leaned back in her desk and just stared, open-mouthed, at the woman. She could say nothing.

"Elaine?" asked Miss Peacock. She was deadly serious.

Elaine moved slightly in her desk. "I don't know what you mean, Miss Peacock?"

"Do you think you should have signed the honor pledge?"

"Yes," said Elaine, frowning. "Of course. Everybody has to."

"Felicia?"

Felicia only nodded.

"Then how do you explain these similarities?" Miss Peacock picked up the two papers. "Felicia, you have written: ^g 'The lust for gold is

very apparant^{e, i, j}---' Apparent was spelled with one 'P'^{e, j}---in "The Man With the Hoe." She glanced at Elaine. "Your paper, Elaine, says 'The lust for gold is exceedingly apparant'---Again 'apparent'^{e, j} was spelled with one 'P'^{e, j}---"

Felicia looked over at Elaine. Elaine was staring straight ahead at Miss Peacock, her chin juttet out and her forehead creased into deep lines.

"Now in your third paragraph, Felicia, you have written; 'In my opinion, I think this is a very beautiful poem, making use of such word as the P/eiades'^{i, m}---also misspelled^s---'and the seraphim'^{i, m}---misspelled again.^s" Miss Peacock did not look at Elaine. "Elaine, you chose to write almost the same words." She put the two papers aside and looked toward the windows. "There are other similarities."

Felicia followed the woman's gaze and was struck by her own reflexion^{ct} in the window. It was dark outside. She immediately looked away and then she heard her own voice:

"Miss Peacock, I did ~~not~~ cheat."

"Neither did I!" Elaine followed immediately but with more force in her voice.

Miss Peacock seemed to sigh. "As you know, we have the honor system here. If one of you feels you have been dishonest, then you must report yourself. If you do not, then I will have to make my own decision as to what to do." She looked at Felicia. "I do not have to tell you how grave an offense cheating is." She dampened her lips. "You live with your own conscience."

"Well, I certainly didn't cheat," Elaine said and looked over at Felicia.

Felicia said nothing. Cheating was a shipping offense. In a panic she thought of her mother and father, their disgrace if she were kicked

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out, sent home, ~~Everyone in Ashton would know and they would never believe she hadn't.~~

"I will say no more about this now," said Miss Peacock. "You must search your own conscience." She picked up the two papers and rose from behind her desk.

Felicia watched her go from the room and for a moment she started to go after her, run after her, but she stayed at her desk unable to move.

Elaine got up. "Did you copy anything off my paper?" she asked, looking down at Felicia.

Felicia looked up at her. "You know I didn't. You know exactly!"

"Well, I certainly didn't copy yours! Why should anybody want to copy yours anyway?"

Felicia didn't say anything. She got up from her desk, walked past Elaine and out the door. It wasn't until she got to the assembly hall that the angry tears began to roll down her cheeks. Putting her hand to her mouth, she ~~fairly~~ ran across the polished floor.