

Chapter 18

The book Patsy had found to instruct them on the mysteries of child-
 birth was a massive, elaborately bound volume of microscopic print entitled
 "Pregnancy and Childbed", published in the year 1844. Its pages were
 freckled with brown age spots and filled with copious foot notes. Patsy
 had come across the book in the far stacks of the school library and
 reckoning it for what it was, had stolen it.

gal 82 "Having babies couldn't be any different now than it's always been,"
 she told Felicia. "Literally everybody had them at home then. Nobody went
 to a hospital."

Felicia continued to read: "Madame Boivin has invented a very useful
 speculum, consisting of two half cylinders, (Fig. 7) joined at their outer
 extremities to transverse limbs of brass, the one hollow and the other
 solid. The solid part passes into the hollow limb, and is moved backwards
 and forwards (thus opening or closing the blades of the speculum) by a
 small wheel with teeth, turned by a key...."

Felicia looked at the picture of the cruel instrument and shuddered. She banged the book shut. "I don't understand any of this stuff." They were sitting inside one of the small rooms in the practise house. Three pianos in other rooms were going at once.

"Well, we're just going to have to understand it," Patsy said.

Felicia looked back at the book. "You know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think you're going to have to go to a doctor, I mean right away. What if you have to have one of those things Jacqueline Kennedy had or something?"

"Caes^orean?"

"Yes. What if you have to have that?"

Patsy pushed her hair back behind her ears. "I don't think there's a chance of it. My hips are pretty wide. You judge from where your hip bones jut out. See?" She spread her fingers out across her stomach. There was a large gap between the two handspreads.

"I don't care. Somehow you're going to have to see a doctor, then you can ask him what all you're supposed to do." Felicia opened the book again. "...As the head of the baby begins to emerge..." Her eyes grew wider.

"Just think of all the women in Africa and places like that," Patsy said. "They just lie down on the side of the road and then go right back in the field to work."

"I don't see how. Do you?"

"Certainly. And you're all the time reading about girls that have babies in high-school bathrooms and stuff. It's done all the time."

"Yes, but how do they cut the cord and all that?" Felicia was still frowning. "How're we gonna do that?"

"Just cut it," Patsy said. "With some scissors."

"Oh, gosh, Patsy!" Felicia put her hand to her stomach. "Don't you guess that hurts?"

Patsy shook her head. "You can't even feel it."

"But where're you supposed to cut it?"

Patsy pointed to the book. "It says in there. About two inches and then you're supposed to tie it up?"

"Tie it up?"

"Uh. The best thing to use is shoe strings, you know, in case of an emergency. We've got to get a lot of shoe strings."

"But what happens to the rest of it?"

"Rest of what?"

"The cord? After you cut it off the baby what happens to the part that's attached to you?"

"It just kind of zooks on back into you."

"You mean everybody's got this great cord inside them?"

"Felicia, really. Where have you been all your life?"

"I dunno."

"You just cut the cord and tie it up to stop the bleeding and then what's left just easily floats on back in you."

"Ohhhhhhme." Felicia turned toward the piano and rested her elbow on the piano keys.

Patsy took up the book again and began reading. "Now see, it says here about ^{the} placenta." She pointed to the page.

"About what?"

"The placenta. It's more commonly called the ahftah-birth."

"After birth?" Felicia shook her head. "You mean there's more?"

"Uh huh. Ahftah the baby itself is born you wait around awhile for this

other thing to come."

"What other thing?"

"The placenta. I'm telling you."

"Well, what is it?" Felicia wrinkled her nose.

"It's nothing, really, just this very harmless something." Patsy began to read again.

"Hey," Felicia said. "You know in the movies when somebody's having a baby in some poor person's house?"

Patsy looked up and frowned.

"Why does everybody rush around bringing buckets and buckets of boiled water and stuff?"

"To sterilize things, silly. We'll have to sterilize the scissors and, of course, the shoe strings."

"Yes, but if we're in a hotel how're we gonna get the boiled water?"

"We'll just ring room service, tell them you've got diabetes and have to sterilize your needle. Now don't worry about that sort of thing."

Felicia looked down at her hands. "Patsy, d'you guess you bleed an awful lot when you have a baby?" She looked up. "I guess you'd better have some cotton and stuff along, too, huh?"

"You don't bleed very much." Patsy ~~relaxed~~^{placed} the book in her lap.

"Now, look, Felicia. You've got to understand that having a baby is the most natural thing on earth. You just have to keep telling yourself that."

"I know it."

"There isn't a great deal of bleeding at all. About the only thing that happens is you break this huge sack of water and when that happens nine times out of ten you're sitting on the john. Don't you see?"

Felicia suddenly felt a rush of saliva in her mouth like nausea.

"Patsy, really, you're just going to have to go to a doctor. Tell him

gal 83

your husband's in the army and you live way out in the country and you just may have to have your baby alone and what to do."

~~Patsy didn't say anything.~~ ^{Patsy} She was looking out the window. Outside were the empty tennis courts and beyond ^{them} the tall spruces that now looked very old and sad. "I guess I'll have to," she said finally, and then she turned abruptly. "Can you help me?"

"What doya mean?"

"To get out of here without anyone knowing? Those woods lead to the main road. You don't have to go through the gate."

Felicia put her hand to her neck. "Patsy, I'm on the ~~Board~~! I caaaaan't!"

"All you have to do is just make up some little story if somebody comes round wondering ~~where~~ I am. I'd have to go on a Saturday ~~to~~ ^Mtomorrow. It wouldn't take any time, just to go into Chesney and come right back again."

Felicia sat up straighter. "Patsy, if you leave these grounds I don't want to know anything about it."

"Silly girl."

"But, look, I'm on the ~~Board~~! I'd have to report you. If I didn't and you got caught ~~it~~" ^M Felicia shook her head. "I don't want to know anything about it."

Patsy sighed. "Really, Felicia, you amaze me sometime."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Half the time you're so terribly adult about things and then other times you get this irritating little rah-rah school attitude."

The remark irritated Felicia. Even in the beginning, when she was first appointed to the ~~Board~~, Patsy hadn't said anything about it. Cannon had congratulated her, but Patsy never said anything.

"Actually," Patsy was saying, "you're far superior to most of these silly girls here. I've always thought you should be in Europe. You'd be much happier—because of your cosmopolitan outlook, I mean." She shrugged her shoulders. "But then again."

Felicia just looked at her.

"You really are going to have to come over and visit me next year."

"In Europe?" Felicia asked quietly, but she felt her face flush.

"Yes, you must."

Felicia tried to hide her smile. She saw herself sitting at some sidewalk cafe. There was a green and white striped awning and red geraniums blooming nearby.

"What fun it would be to show you Europe."

Felicia looked away. "That would be nice." She looked back at Patsy and beamed.

"You would ab-so-lute-ly adore it. You were meant for Europe, as a matter of fact. We could take Hack's little car and drive through Italy. You'll adore Italy, especially Florence."

Felicia relaxed her arms in her lap. "Oh, Patsy!"

Patsy yawned. "But now, cutie, let's get this hideous little business over. Actually, I think you're right about the doctor. Isn't it foul? I mean having to sneak around like a criminal or something?"

Felicia nodded.

"Now, the only—th~~really~~, the on-ly thing you have to do is just not let anyone know where I am. And, actually, you may not even have to do that. Simple?"

Felicia nodded again.

"Good girl." Patsy stood up. The oversize sweater still hid her growing waistline adequately. Felicia found herself constantly watching

for the slightest change.

"I think I'll go tomorrow," Patsy said.

"But, gosh, you'll run into everybody in Chesney, chaperones and everybody. Don't go on a Saturday!"

Patsy shook her head. "Don't forget that stupid basketball game."

"Oh, that's right." The Blues were going to play the Whites. Command performance. "You don't think anybody'll wonder where you are?"

"No, but you can just say sort of casually that I'm in study hall or something."

Felicia's hands were damp. She wiped them on the side of her dress.

"Patsy, if you get caughtth---

"I won't! But, really, I'm the one who should be nervous about it, not you."

"I guess so."

"Now, you just do that for me like a cute girl."

Felicia brushed her bangs back. "What a mess."

"Well, it won't be too long now."

March, April, and May; Felicia was mentally counting. Three months. Felicia She
 She was too drained to say anything else, and she watched as Patsy wrapped
 up the medical book with a piece of brown paper, and tenderly cradled it
 in her arm, and she opened the door to the practise room.

The Blues were beating the Whites. The two captains, Marjorie Cooke and "Pan Lamb" Hill, were giving their all for the teams. The Whites had won the cup last year, and the Blues were willing to commit murder if necessary to get the cup back.

Felicia was ill. She was sitting on the brick wall between Cannon and Pedie and she could scarcely see the flailing arms and moving feet

before her. Patsy had been gone two hours, and if she didn't get back in time for dinner, there would be an investigation, questions, and ~~7~~^m

"God, that Fan Lamb! Cannon said. "She looks like one of the Gladiators of old. Those legs!"

Pedie giggled. She was wearing a dark blue sweater and skirt and her dark hair, neatly fixed with an invisible hair net, made a nice contrast to her pale skin and green eyes. She leaned over Felicia and put her hand on Cannon's shoulder. "Think of the man that'll marry her!"

"Cheeesus, god," Cannon said. "He'll have to be an amazon! Hey, look at that!"

Fan Lamb, losing control, had leapt to the sideline and knocked square into Miss Brock, ^{whose} her whistle ^{went} askew and ^{whose} her short straight hair ^{fell} falling in her face. Both were grounded.

The wall of girls began to snicker. Miss Brock immediately picked herself up and, brushing her shorts with her left hand, reached down to give Fan Lamb an assist to her feet. Fan Lamb, shaking her head in mock disgust, tromped back onto the court, the hero still, the good guy, the savior of the day. The faculty, sitting in prim attendance in nearby straight chairs, applauded politely. Fan Lamb had character; everyone knew that.

"One more kick in Brock's teeth and I'd have applauded," Cannon said.

Felicia tried to laugh. But nothing was funny. Nothing at all. She glanced at her watch. Ten of five. The basketball game would be over soon. The one thing that worried her the most was the single fact that Miss Eubanks wasn't at the game. What if she had gone into Chesney and suddenly run into Patsy or something. "This is the last," Felicia kept saying to herself. "This is the last time I'll ever help anybody do any thing."

More applause. Fan Lamb had made a basket. It was hopeless for the

Blues now. Marjorie Cooke, a six-foot, slender blond with slanting eyes, bad skin and a button nose, was going ~~down~~ into defeat like a good Blue captain should, still fighting, still calling out commands.

"Poor old Cooke," Pedie said.

"Cooke's a good girl," Cannon said.

They sat in silence, witnessing the inevitability of loss. Any other day Felicia, too, would have shared the emotion of the moment. She was a Blue and during the swimming meet she had discovered in herself an almost burning team loyalty. She had thought if the Blues didn't win she would throw herself into the swimming pool and drown herself. The Blues did win that time, though, and afterward she had joined the squealing, hugging throng about Cooke with such fever-pitch delight she almost did fall into the pool.

Five o'clock. Miss Brock blew her whistle. Unanimous applause. Fan Lamb and the Whites had triumphed. Fan Lamb was surrounded by girls. Marjorie Cooke was walking away with her head hanging down and her lips pinched together. She was angry about something.

"It's that damn Phyllis Harris," Felicia heard someone say. "She went around stepping on everybody's feet on purpose. Cooke is fuuuuur-i-ous!"

Felicia started back to her room. It was five-fifteen now. If Patsy wasn't there, it was hopeless. Some of the teachers would be driving into Chesney about this time and ~~---~~"

gal 85 "Hey, Feee-licia!"

It was Cannon.

"Waita minute."

Cannon came up beside her. "Where's Miss Glamourpoose?"

"Who, Patsy?"

"I didn't see her out there giving her all for Fan Lamb."

"I don't know where she is. I think she said she was going to study hall or something." Felicia looked up at the sky and began whistling.

"Pity," Cannon said.

Felicia stopped whistling. "What?"

"She oughtta been out there tromping around the basketball court. Get some of the bitchiness out of her."

Felicia laughed, but **it** was a nervous laugh.

"Cheeesus, I don't see what you see in that girl. Literally. You two aren't at all alike."

"I dunno," Felicia said. "I guess I just feel sorry for her or something."

"Sorry for her? My god."

"I really do." She glanced at Cannon. "Did you know her mother and father are going to get a divorce?"

"Yeh?"

"Uh huh. Her father is really horrible. He used to practically beat Patsy and Gigi! Patsy just hates him." (One always had to exaggerate slightly for Cannon.)

"You mean the Deodorant King used to beat old Dedham?"

Felicia nodded. "That's what she said. She's had a horrible life, and now the way Peter treated her and everything."

"I guess that was a bit cruddy. He must be bastard number two of the world."

"Who's number one?"

"I dunno. But he must be around somewhere."

Felicia gave a short laugh, and started walking slower. "She really does need friends, Cannon. Honestly."

Cannon shook her head. "I guess so, but it isn't gonna be me. I just can't go that girl. I mean she doesn't exactly go out of her way to endear herself. You've gotta admit that."

"I know it," Felicia said. "I know it."

"Oh will." Cannon took hold of the door to the annex. "We don't have too much time before it's all over."

Felicia turned to her sharply. "Whatdoya mean?"

Cannon looked at her and there was surprise on her face. "I mean before we get out of here. What did you think I meant?"

"Oh, nothing."

Cannon kept looking at her. "Whitfield, are you trying to keep something from me? This is old Mother Confessor McNulty, Our Lady of the Gossips. You know me."

Felicia laughed. "No, I was just thinking about getting out of here myself. Gosh, I'll be glad. Won't you?"

Cannon kept looking at Felicia and then as if she had satisfied herself about something she turned. "I've gotta go get my lab book in Study Hall. See you later."

Felicia stood looking after Cannon as she walked down the hall. She was positive Cannon didn't suspect anything. If she did, she would say something, certainly. Cannon never kept anything to herself, especially about Patsy. "Oh me." Felicia sighed and hurried back to the room.

Patsy was there. She still had on her coat and her face was flushed, her hair wind-blown. "Hurry, shut the door."

Felicia quickly closed it. "Well, what happened?"

Patsy put her hand to her forehead. "You'd never guess."

"What?"

"That minister! Carrington."

"He didn't see you?"

"I don't know. I think he did."

Felicia collapsed on her cot. "Oh, Paaa-tsy, no!"

"Just as I was coming out of the doctor's office. There he was getting into his car."

"Do you think he saw you?" Felicia sat up.

"I'm not sure. He kept looking round and stuff. I flew back inside the building."

"Maybe he didn't see you then."

"Maybe, but you know what a little buddy he is of Miss Eubanks!"

"I know it."

Patsy went over to sit in the rocking chair. "And I didn't see a doctor!"

"You didn't?" Felicia frowned at her. "Whyyyyy?"

"They aren't in their offices on Saturday afternoon."

Felicia groaned. "None of them?"

"I went to two places." Patsy shook her head. "And I cawn't do that again. I nearly killed myself out there in those woods. I fell down once and then I got a ride into town with this old country woman ~~I~~ ~~I~~" *gal 86*
She began to cry, shaking her head. "I'm so scared. I'm scared out of my mind."

Felicia didn't say anything. A mild panic had taken hold of her. Patsy was supposed to be the calm one. She had never mentioned being afraid before. "Look, Patsy," she said with a little desperation in her voice.

"What?"

"Look." Felicia leaned forward. "I think we better tell somebody because ~~I~~" *m*

Patsy jerked her head up. "No! No! No!"

"Now, look." Felicia dampened her lips.

"No!"

Felicia let her hands go limp in her lap.

"I'm going to have this baby and no one's going to know about it--- especially my mother. It'd ruin her life and she's not well. And it'd ruin Gigi's life, too. I've got to think about Gigi, too, you know."

"I know but ~~it's~~"

"We've just got to study that book. We've got to memorize every word of it. Now you promised me. You promised me, Felicia Whitfield. Didn't you?"

"I guess so."

"All right then."

Felicia started to say something, but Cannon came through the door.

"Frogs! Frogs!" she said, waving her biology book. "Who knowest the inside of a ~~ch~~" She stopped short. "Hey, what's the matter? What's the matter with you two?"