

Chapter 19

Fear began to mount. It was a constant threat that the Reverend Mr. Carrington might have seen Patsy in Chesney. When he came to the school for one of his jovial Sunday dinners, Patsy, sitting at the opposite table, watched him constantly, his every move, as if in some magical way she might read in his pallid, smiling face her own secret terror. And yet nothing happened. That night Miss Eubanks as usual stood her watch at the dining room entrance, bidding her "good evening" with the same sombre voice that never wavered, never changed. One night she actually smiled at Patsy. Yet was there meaning in the smile, a kind of great glory before the end? One never knew.

Felicia herself caught the fear, the burden of silence. She looked at everyone around her, so safe, so innocent in their daily routines. The problem of concealing Patsy's swelling body was constant. Patsy asked, and the request was granted, that she sit at the dieters' table. It became a little joke between Patsy and Miss Mahaffey, the dietician, Miss Mahaffey lingering over the pleasantries longer than was necessary: "Still

worried about our boy friend, are we? Afraid he won't like our chubby little figure? Ha ha ha ha ha. You girls, worrying about your little figures...."

And there was Cannon. Patsy had ordered another girdle and some maternity bras from Saks, carefully explaining to those anonymous faces at the store that she had gained weight and had learned that maternity bras were good for this. She said she was ordering the bras for "several of us", and to clinch the authenticity ordered ten in several sizes. (She had written the letter five times.) When the package arrived, Cannon brought it up to the room, waiting there for Patsy to open it. But Patsy was afraid the word "maternity" might appear on the label or bill so she dismissed the package with a casual: "It's nothing. Just some bras and stuff. Mummy sent them." Cannon seemed satisfied enough, but the uneasiness bore down.

Felicia worried about everything. She sat in the Board meetings, wringing her handkerchief underneath the table, as Mary Olmquist read the weekly "reports" from girls: "I chewed chewing gum last week"---"Mary Lewis and Paggie Masterson skipped chapel on Tuesday"---"I created a disturbance during vespers Sunday night"---"Polly Cramer chased Cannon McNulty with a dissected biology frog and disturbed people reading in the library...."

A more serious offense occurred when two seniors abused their senior privileges by meeting two boys one afternoon. They were given permission to visit in the house of a day student in Chesney and it was there the crime occurred. Both girls had smoked and one confessed to partaking of an alcoholic beverage. (One beer, it later turned out, and not a pint of bourbon.) The issue to be argued by the Board then (and later by the faculty) was whether the girls should be expelled or merely severely re-

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primanded. Result: both girls would be divested of all offices and privileges and would be campused until the end of school. They would be allowed to graduate however; and this was explained by Miss Eubanks in a tremulous chapel talk: "In consideration of the two girls unblemished four years at the school...." Felicia took no part in the argument, but voted for the lesser penalty. Somehow she saw herself in the tearful, accused faces of the girls.

That same night she went through her own Gethsemane, weighing duty against charity. By all rights she should resign from the Board, confess her fault, live with disgrace. Yet there was charity, too, wasn't there? Wasn't it more right to protect Patsy from the cruel disgrace of exposure? Help her? Help the other person? Yes. But would she have done it for anyone other than Patsy? She didn't know. All she knew was she had taken an oath once, placed her hand on a Bible, promising to uphold the school rules. What was right? What was wrong?

In it all, too, was the wrong Patsy herself had committed. Late into the night Felicia lay thinking. "...From all inordinate and sinful affections; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord deliver us," said the Litany in the Common Prayer. How could she? How could she? There were so many questions. To Felicia it was beyond imagining how someone could actually sleep in the same bed with a man, especially with someone who was married. Patsy had one faded picture of Peter, a snapshot. It was taken on a beach, a rather ugly beach. Peter was wearing a white shirt and bermuda shorts. He was slender and short with narrow shoulders and sober, almost surly eyes. Patsy was near by, wearing a bright cotton sheath and bending over a picnic basket, her blond hair falling in her face. The picture wasn't good, Patsy said over and over. But Felicia stared at the picture and tried to see in the man's

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slender face what it was that had caused Patsy to so completely lose herself. In study hall Felicia had looked up the word "adultery". It said: "Voluntary sexual intercourse by a married man with another than his wife or by a married woman with another than her husband." So it was only Peter who was wrong; Patsy was not married so she hadn't really committed anything. Even so. Felicia pictured Patsy closing the door to some room and getting undressed in front of ~~the~~ ^M a MAN! "How frightened she must have been!" She wondered if they had done this before or after the picture had been taken. Nothing in their faces seemed to indicate either. But, oddly, it never did. It had always surprised Felicia to see couples when they returned from wedding trips. She always expected them to look different, but they never did. Once she had thought of asking Patsy what it was like, sleeping with a man, but she never dared ask. She never dared ask Patsy any of the details that so burned to be asked. And Patsy never volunteered. So the mysteries and the arguments remained, tossing and turning in the night. What was right? What was wrong?

At the end of every week Felicia and Patsy met in the practice house to view the week's events and plot the activities for the coming week. Spring was coming on and this involved a change of dress. Patsy had ordered some overblouses and skirts from Best's, ^{+ Co.} and she had let out some of the skirts she wore ~~at night~~, so with a full blouse she looked as if she had only gained weight. She took special pains with her face, too, wearing alternating black and white ribbon bands over the crown of her head and tucked underneath her hair in the back.

"Yes, but it's the last two months that're worrying me," Felicia told her one afternoon. "I mean you're all right now, but you know what it says in the book!"

"I've got that all planned," Patsy said.

"What?"

"Next week I'm going to leave the diet table, just say I'm tired of dieting and it'll just be I'm gaining again. Besides, I'm just one of those people who won't show too much. I told you I'm just like ~~---~~"

"Yes, but you just wait," Felicia said. "You see women walking down the street and they look like they could practically put their stomachs in a wheelbarrow."

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"I guess not," Felicia said. "But we can't be talking around about things too much. Cannon'll really start thinking something. I think she thinks we're acting funny anyway."

"Cannon's too naive," Patsy said. "She's really so terribly naive."

Felicia didn't say anything.

"But you know who worries me, actually, the most?"

"Who?"

"Miss Brock! With her little basketball. God, she gives me a pain."

"Do you think she suspects anything?"

"No, but this afternoon she told me I was getting awfully hippy."

"Ohhhhhme," Felicia moaned. "D'you think she thinks anything? Do you?"

"Probably not. I think she just has sort of a lesbian interest in everybody's figure."

Felicia looked away. She started to ask Patsy what lesbian interest was, but she decided not to. "I know it," was all she said. She looked back at Patsy. "D'you guess it hurts you or anything?"

"What?"

"Gym and all."

"I don't think so. It says in there---" Patsy pointed to the unwrapped book---"that exercise is good for you. It says you're supposed to walk a lot and things."

"Yes, but not tennis, d'you think? Does it say anything about that?"

"It doesn't actually ^{mention} ~~mention~~ tennis specifically, but I don't think a casual game could hurt you. At the Cape one Summer there was this adorable gehl who was pregnant and she did everything. Of course, all the older people were horrified. But she played tennis."

Felicia put her hands to her face and leaned her elbows onto the back of the chair in front of her. "Honestly, Patsy, you really don't look---" She shook her head. Somehow she couldn't bring herself to say the word "pregnant."

"But, God, I am! At night and stuff I can actually feel it moving around. It's wierd."

Felicia's elbows fell off the chair. "Moving?" For some reason it was the first time she had ever thought of the baby itself. That it was to be a live human being, a breathing baby who would feel and want and need had never actually crossed her mind. She had been too caught up in Patsy herself.

Felicia looked at her. "Patsy?" she asked softly. "Does it mean anything to you?"

"What?"

"Your baby. Don't you guess you'll probably love it?"

"My god, no! I loathe it! Do you think I want to be this way for godsakes?"

"No, but---I just can't imagine what it would be like, having my own baby. I think I might love it all the same." ~~Don't~~ "Felicia frowned---" ~~I mean~~ "don't you ever get to wondering about it, what it'll be like and

what's going to happen to it, your own baby?"

"It'll probably have two heads," was all Patsy said. "Let's ^{go} before somebody comes in here."

Felicia got up from the chair slowly. She was thinking that if she were Patsy she'd probably feel the same way, hate the thing that was giving her sickness and fear and pain. Yes, she guessed she would. But the fact the baby had moved, this unknown creature who only she and Patsy knew about, made her want to protect it somehow, maybe even love it. It was so pitifully defenseless. For a moment she thought of Isaiah and death. Being born only to die again. Why should things matter so?

"Ahn't you coming?" Patsy asked.

~~The end of March~~ brought April's ^{to Chesney Hall} Spring. One day Polly Osterhaupt came into chapel wearing a blue cotton golf dress with a white sweater round her shoulders, and the next day the whole school was wearing cottons with white sweaters round their shoulders. Polly Osterhaupt with her Long Island sense of things still set the pace of ^{everything,} ~~things.~~ She and four other girls, two of them juniors, had formed a little group last Fall, and now they were absolute in their rule, dominating everything^m---fashion, jargon, speech inflections^{to m}---all. They were Chesney Hall's "Rat Pack", as Cannon referred to them, and Polly Osterhaupt with her tall blond energy and breathy way of speaking was the biggest Rat of all.

One of the privileges brought on by ~~Spring~~ was that during morning study halls girls were allowed to sit outside and study, the theory being that nature and sunshine were healthy for the budding intellect. Through no fault of her own Felicia one morning found herself square in the midst of the Rat Pack. She had planned to find a place alone, so she could thoroughly absorb the future tense of the verb "aller". (Madame de

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Crèvecoeur had been given to sudden pop tests recently.) In former study periods outside Felicia had sat under the rose arbor in the South Garden. In a way, she had sort of claimed it as her own because it was isolated and no one else had seemed to find it. But on this particular morning she burst round the corner of the annex as usual and there, horrors of horror, was the entire Osterhaupt pack—~~all~~ all four of them, neatly groomed and utterly confined to themselves. Felicia started to turn, go back, but there was one empty chair and after all what other purpose had she in coming to this hidden corner of the garden? All four of the girls looked up at her, and the astonishment on their faces was so marked Felicia stopped dead in her tracks. What right did she have, this lowly one, ^{to come} ~~coming~~ upon splendor in this rude way?

But she couldn't turn now, so she walked forward, sat down in the white wooden chair and with much fluttering and turning of pages in her French book said: "I've got to learn the future tense of 'aller'." She was more than conscious of the four pair of eyes examining this odd performance. She looked up and giggled nervously.

The eyes went slowly back to their books, but the chair was hard and the back slanted so that it made writing difficult. Felicia had planned to write out the verb as many times as was necessary until she learned it. She opened her notebook, holding it on her knees, but all she wrote was: "Felicia Whitfield. Felicia Whitfield. Chesney Hall," over and over. She glanced up at Polly Osterhaupt, the great one. Polly was reading from a small blue book and her assurance was so complete it seemed as if each word were making an everlasting imprint on her brain. The name of the book was "The Comedy of the Tempest," and every now and then she would underline a sentence and then neatly write it down on a piece of paper. Ancy Tucker with her neatly combed page-boy was writing

a letter on top of her stationery box. She was frowning and her eyebrows turned up at the ends. Felicia had never noticed Ancy's eyebrows before; there was something mean in the way they turned up; everybody said Ancy was "mean", "bad news". Felicia went back to her own writing: "A-L-L-E-R, future tense. J'irai; tu iras; il iras". Or was it "irat"?

"Ohhhhhh", yawned Polly Osterhaupt, stretching her arms above her head. It looked as if she were unfurling herself, like the sleeping giant of old.

Automatically, it seemed, all books slammed shut. Osterhaupt had spoken. Our big blond Osterhaupt has finished reading.

Ancy Tucker put down her pen.

"God, are you still writing that letter?" Polly asked her.

Ancy grinned. "Honestly, he's really being so inane about it all."

"Well, why don't you just go then?"

"I could, I suppose, but he'll be at the Cape anyway and ^{7/3}if I go down there in June ^{1/2}---I don't know. It all seems so siii-llly. He's being so sort of unreasonable about it."

"For godsakes just tell him we've all planned this for months and you just can't let down these perfectly good friends of yours. He'll understand."

Ruthie Suthers put her feet up on the arm of Polly's chair. "After all, it isn't as if you were married or anything." She didn't look at Ancy.

"I know it," Ancy said. "But he's gotten this sort of incredible little ownership attitude."

"Dear Jesus," moaned Polly Osterhaupt. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes as if the full sun would somehow ease these earthly worries. Polly had light tan eyelashes.

Ruthie Suthers shoved Polly's chair slightly: "Polly, are you sure Hahvey Islan'll be there^h~~---~~_m---I mean while we are?"

Polly didn't move, but her closed eyelids twitched slightly. "He always has been^h~~---~~_m---unless he's gotten up some corny trip to Europe or something."

"God, I'll die if he's not. I'll literally diiiiii."

Polly yawned again and sat up. "You know who he used to go with, don't you?" She gave a half smile.

"Who?"

"I told you." Polly glanced at Felicia, and Felicia started writing again: "Felicia Whitfield. Felicia Whit^h~~---~~_m---"

"Oh! You mean Dedham!"

"He was mad for her, actually. But Dave Walling said he was madder for her cash." Polly looked wistfully into space. "Dave Walling is really so fun-neeenee."

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"No," protested Ruthie. "Hahve's not like that at all. I mean he's really divine. Last year he was studying Asian religions. You know? He was mad about it. He talked about it for hours. Not Zen or anything but these really very obscure religions." She began tapping her pencil on her knee. "Did he ever actually go with Dedham?"

"As much as he could. She was really hideous to him. I mean she'd promise to do these things with him and then never show, things like that."

Felicia's face was burning. She didn't know exactly what they were talking about. And it was apparent they didn't want her to know. It was humiliating.

"I hope she's still carrying those ninety-thousand pounds when he sees her," Ruthie Suthers said.

Ancy Tucker laughed. "Really, Suthers, you're so charitable."

Ruthie Suthers' eyes grew wider. "Well, god, she looks like she's pregnant. I swear she does."

Felicia dropped her pencil on the ground and leaned to pick it up.

"Honestly, Ruthie," said Polly Osterhaupt. She indicated her head toward Felicia.

"I don't care," said Ruthie. "Haven't you noticed?"

"Actually, I think she looks better," said Polly. "She needed to gain some. You'll have to admit ~~she's~~ she's a bee-u-ti-ful gehl, kind of Garboish really."

"I know it! Damn it!" said Ruthie. "But she's just not Hahvey Islan's type. She's got a crummy personality."

"~~...~~Felicia Whitfield. Felicia Whitfield. Felicia~~---~~" Felicia put her hand to her forehead. It was damp.

"How do you like rooming with Patsy Dedham?" Polly asked Felicia. It was a casual question, as if Felicia had been in on the conversation all along.

Felicia looked up from her notebook. "Huh?" The four pair of eyes were looking at her curiously. "Oh, you mean Patsy! Fine! I like her."

Polly turned slowly to Ancy with a decided smirk.

Ancy returned the look and then leaned her head back. "Ohhhh, this sun. This sun. I absolutely can't wait until ~~Summer~~ Summer."

"But don't forget about secretarial school!" said Ruthie Suthers and giggled.

Ancy sat up quickly. "Don't mention it! I think my father's lost his mind. I really do."

Ruthie grinned. "Did you hear about that, Polly? Ancy's father said she had to go to secretarial school this ~~Summer~~ Summer. He's already got her enrolled, of all things."

"Whatever god for?" asked Polly.

Ancy sighed. "I don't know. He wrote me this lengthy, lengthy letter---" she rolled her eyes upwardth_M "all about how everybody ought to know how to do something and so he's enrolled me in this corny little school for a month in August. I'll have to pound on typewriters and things."

They all laughed, and even Felicia strained a smile. The corners of her mouth ached.

"He's gotten so sort ofth_M" The bell rang.

"Here we go!" Polly said, getting up from the chair. "We are such stuff as Dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleepth_M God, if I flunk this test, I'll join you in that school, Ancy."

They all left, and Felicia trailed them out of the garden.

"They don't really think she's pregnant. They don't really think so," she kept saying to herself. "They're justth_M" But she still didn't know the future tense of ALLER.