

Chapter 21

Nothing is ever the way one expects it will be. Two things happened that Felicia had not counted on. The first was the general calmness that had taken hold of her. The next morning she sat in her room, staring at Patsy's cot, still unmade, and the only feeling she had was one of fatigue. Her hands rested heavily in her lap and there was a dull ache somewhere in her back and legs. Otherwise, she felt nothing, not revulsion, not hate, not even fear. Cannon had been called down first to see Miss Eubanks. Felicia would be next. Yet she knew she would walk into the office, face the woman, hear her pronouncements and walk out again with^T out the slightest tremor of her hand.

Was it to be this way with her then? She was thinking of other things that had happened in the year: her first day at Chesney Hall, the humidity, the fear, the wonder of it; then there was the time she had been accused of cheating; SM Even to herself she had dramatized the con-^T sequences, and, dramatizing, had really enjoyed it. She knew that now. ^{with} Again there was the first class she had had ^{under} Madame de

Crévecoeur, "Madame of the Broken Heart!" How frightened she had been as she repeated the wierd-sounding vowels and consonants of the French alphabet. Afterward there was all the ~~time of~~ plotting and planning with Patsy. But ~~there was~~ ^{she had} no feeling now. Just fatigue and the vague aching.

The second thing she had not counted on was the reaction of the school to what had happened. Felicia had oftene imagined what it would be. She had expected something tremendous, an earthquake, the stars falling out of the heavens, Miss Eubanks thrusting herself off the chapel stage, anything. She had even imagined the institution itself might stop functioning, close down. None of these things happened and routine was as usual. But it was the reaction of the girls Felicia had not counted on. In a matter of hours, as soon as the events of the night were thoroughly digested, the decision had been rendered: Patsy had been raised up as a kind of patron saint of melancholy, ^{and} ~~yet~~ Felicia had come out the villain, the one who had committed the graver crime. Patsy was only to be pitied. Felicia heard their remarks as she went through the halls: "Think of what she must have gone through—all those months! Just think!—² Cannon said she knew something was wrong, but pregnant! My God! It was the last thing on earth she'd thought of." ¹ "Uh huh, Patsy's all right, but the baby died this morning, something wrong with its lungs. Patsy's mother's flying down. It's really just traaaagic." ¹ "No, I don't know who he was. I think he was in the Army or something and they were going to be married." ¹ "Whitfield! That dope! It's just like Miss Abernathy said, she could have actually killed Patsy, not telling anybody. Yes, she did everything, even helped her go into Chesney, went with her, I think. Sure, she's on the Board." ¹ "Just ruined the reputation of the school." ¹

Felicia had paused at the door. Are they talking about me? Felicia Whitfield? Why, no one has ever hated me. They have loved me, my mother, my father, my ~~...~~

But there were no more tears. Not now. Odd, Patsy's cot wasn't even messed. The sheet and blue wool blanket were neatly folded back as if a fragile child might have slept there. The third floor was so quiet, ^{was} "Everyone ~~s~~ in class." Felicia had never sat in her room in the morning before. The sun was so bright in the morning. It wasn't as if she were in a school at all; it was almost as if she were visiting someone, a guest in another's house. Impossible she had been actually confined here, a prisoner waiting for the jury to return. Yet it was so. "I wonder," she said aloud. "I wonder ~~...~~" She half ~~tried~~ to think of some defense, a plea for herself. But that was all over. Lying across Miss Peacock's bed last night, she had sobbed out the whole story, every detail of it. "She's going to die! She's going to die!" she kept shouting.

Cannon came back to the room shortly before noon. "She wants to see you now," she mumbled. She only glanced at Felicia and went over to her bureau and began brushing her hair. Felicia had never seen Cannon like this before, averting her eyes, as if she were afraid Felicia might know what had transpired downstairs, hinting at a grueling experience in which she, Cannon, had finally won acquittal.

gal 93 Felicia got up from the rocking chair. She didn't say anything to Cannon. She closed the door quietly behind her and walked down the stairway. Miss Gates was standing at her door, but when she saw Felicia she quickly vanished inside.

Miss Eubanks' door was slightly ajar. Felicia knocked anyway.

"Come in, please," came the voice, oddly disturbing in its unexpected pleasantness.

Miss Eubanks was wearing her long-sleeved, rust-colored dress and she was fingering spectacles in her hand, the ones she usually wore hanging on a chain from her neck. "Sit down, Felicia."

For the first time Felicia noticed Miss Eubanks had only one rug in her office, a thin Oriental one, so that the legs of the chair met the bare polished wood of the floor. It was a graceful chair, Felicia noticed, Hepplewhite, much like the chair in her Aunt Pett's house in Charleston. Funny to be thinking of that now. She sat down.

Miss Eubanks placed her glasses aside and folded her hands on top of the desk. The room had the atmosphere of by-gone conference^s about it. Heated talk to and fro. There was no clutter in the room, no smoke, no bits of scribbled paper, yet the atmosphere was there all the same.

"I have just spoken with your father," said Miss Eubanks. "He is coming."

My father coming here? How business-like she had said it, as if she were merely delivering a message.

Miss Eubanks looked up from her folded hands and then at Felicia in such a way as to suggest permanency, as if her eyes with the orange flecks would never leave Felicia's face. "He was understandably troubled, of course."

Felicia nodded once. Understandably troubled? What did that mean?

"Now let us review this again," said Miss Eubanks.

Felicia wished she would look away.

"Now as Miss Peacock informs me, you have been cognizant of Patricia's condition for some time. Is that correct?"

Felicia nodded, but then she saw the glass paperweight. It was the kind you could turn over and the little house and the street would be filled with snow. Her mother had one on her desk upstairs at home. She

wondered if Miss Eubanks ever turned it up and watched the snow.

"Is that correct?" asked Miss Eubanks.

9 Felicia looked back at her. "Oh, yes! For about ~~two~~^{1 1/2} months, I think. She told me about two months ago."

"I see. And your plans were to stop off somewhere on your trip to Pennsylvania after school. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Without benefit of medical care of any kind?"

"We had a book," Felicia said.

"A book? I see. What sort of book may I ask?"

"It was a doctor book about what to do."

"In childbirth?"

Felicia nodded.

"And you thought by reading the book you would be capable of aiding Patricia?"

Felicia looked at the paperweight again. "I wasn't sure I could."

"I see." Miss Eubanks moved her hands, still folded. "Now, Felicia, you were aware, were you not, that Patricia left the campus unchaperoned?"

"I knew about it." She nodded her head. "It was the afternoon of the basketball game ~~you~~^{1 1/2} you know when the Blues lost ~~that~~^{1 1/2} that's when she went."

"You knew, of course, she was breaking a school rule."

"Yes." Felicia wanted to reach out for the paperweight. It was exactly like her mother's, like home, only the colors were richer, newer, blues and pinks and yellows.

Miss Eubanks leaned back in her chair. "Felicia," she said, looking at her curiously, "did it ever occur to you the danger you were putting Patricia in, that she might have lost her life?" She was frowning deeply. "Why, what would you have done if she had had some mishap going

into Chesney¹²~~---~~_M an automobile might have struck her. She might easily have been killed."

Felicia looked back at her and frowned to meet the deeper frown. "I guess I didn't think of that. I was just afraid she'd get caught."

"Were you afraid for Patricia or afraid for yourself?"

Felicia's mind began to swirl. "I don't know," she said quietly. My father's coming. My father's coming. They're going to kick me out. They're¹²~~---~~_M when I go home I can turn Mother's paperweight over and over, all I want to¹²~~---~~_M.

Miss Eubanks leaned forward again. "We had great faith in you here, Felicia."

Felicia just looked at her.

"You were very well thought of. Tell me, you liked us here, you were loyal to the school?"

Felicia looked down at her hands. "Yes."

Miss Eubanks' voice came louder. "Then, why, child? Why did you do this?"

The tone of the voice was startling. Felicia put her hand to her throat. "I don't know. I felt sorry for her. I really did."

"Sorry or just curious, Felicia?"

Felicia shook her head. "I don't know."

"I don't know either," said Miss Eubanks. "To so blatantly abuse the honor system¹²~~---~~_M you, a member of the Board¹²~~---~~_M Miss Eubanks sighed heavily~~---~~ and to endanger a gull's life. I¹²~~---~~_M just don't know what to say to you."

Felicia didn't say anything. The room was thick with silence. Even Thomas Jefferson seemed to accuse. It was strange about Thomas Jefferson. The last time she had talked with Miss Eubanks he had seemed to be smiling.

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Now he looked stern, even angry.

"You say you felt sorry for Patricia," said Miss Eubanks.

Felicia nodded. "She cried all the time and, see, she didn't want anybody to know because it would ruin her mother's life. Her mother's gonna divorce her father."

Miss Eubanks closed her eyes; there were blue veins in the eyelids. "Then you thought you were protecting her? Is that it?"

"I thought I was."

Miss Eubanks opened her eyes. "Oh dear, protecting her!" she said, shaking her head at the very hopelessness of it all. "You realize now, of course, you were merely being weak."

"I guess so," Felicia said quietly.

"A stronger, wiser gull would have done the correct thing, reported Patricia's condition to the proper authorities. She could have been helped in a discreet way." Miss Eubanks leaned forward and her chin seemed to jut out. "Life is hard, young ^{gull} girl!" Her fist was doubled. "It is very hard."

Felicia just looked at her and then she heard herself saying: "I thought it was going to be so good. I couldn't wait to get older. Once i even wrote a ^h---"

She started to tell Miss Eubanks about the book she had written last Summer, but Miss Eubanks interrupted her.

"Life is good, providing one is equipped to meet it. We're not equipped if we're weak and sentimental. You were both."

Felicia only nodded.

Miss Eubanks folded her hands gently again. "My wish for you, Felicia, is that you learn the difference between weakness and strength. We are dismissing you from this school because of your weakness and we shall pray

for your strength and for your courage."

Felicia looked at her. You won't pray for anybody, Miss Eubanks.
You don't care. You don't really care. You're not going to pray for me.
Not ever.

"I must tell you that the ~~B~~board's vote to expel you was unanimous. The gulls felt you had betrayed the school, your friend, and most of all yourself. The faculty joined them with one exception."

Felicia dampened her lips. She was waiting to hear who the one exception was, but Miss Eubanks only sighed again. She was not going to say. She leaned back again. "Now I suggest you gather your things to-
gether. Your father^M—" there was a slight tinge of annoyance as she said the word father, as if by association he, too, this man who had brought her up, wallowed in weakness and sentimentality^q—"your father says he will be here sometime late this afternoon. Miss Mahaffey will send your lunch to your room."

"Now?" Felicia asked. "You want me to leave today?" She hadn't expected this. Somehow she had the idea she would be here for days, maybe even weeks. May would come on and then the Shakesperean play and then exams and... "Today?" she asked again.

"We think it is better to make the break as soon as possible^M for the rest of the school, you understand. The gulls have been very upset by this terrible thing." Miss Eubanks began tapping her fingers.

Felicia looked at the fingers. They were very wrinkled.

"I don't have to say to you how sorry I am your year has turned out so unfavorably. I think the faculty joins me in this."

Felicia looked at her. "Thank you," she said.

"Perhaps you will find your place at another school. I hope so, for your sake and the sake of your family."

"I don't guess another school would want me."

"There are other schools," said Miss Eubanks and she got up from her chair. She looked taller than she ever had before. "Very well then."

Felicia got up, too. Was this all then? Did she say goodbye to her now, this woman she would never see again? Somehow she had felt Miss Eubanks would be with her always. But there was one more thing she wanted to ask. "Miss Eubanks?"

"Yes."

"Miss Eubanks, can I go to see her? For just a little while?"

"Patricia?"

"Yes, before I go."

Miss Eubanks placed her fingers lightly to her neck. "I shall think it over. I will send you word."

"Yes ma'm." Felicia started toward the door.

"Good-bye, Felicia."

Felicia looked at her. "Good-bye, Miss Eubanks." She waited for her to say something else.

"Good-bye," Miss Eubanks said a second time. It was final.

The hospital corridor was busy with people. White-starched nurses, bouyant in their health and command, walked briskly amongst the slow, meandering families as they stared, curious, into the open rooms of patients. Visiting hours had just begun for the small country hospital and Felicia, clutching her gloves and pocketbook, joined the people in their sad, dark parade. Miss Gates was waiting impatiently in the outer lobby, so Felicia knew she couldn't stay long. She hurried.

Room 103 was at the end of the corridor and, predictably, it was the only room with the door closed. Felicia hesitated, preparing herself for

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what she might meet inside. Then she opened the door and immediately what seemed like a burst of sunlight blurred her eyes.

"Why, Felicia!" came Patsy's voice. It was the tone of the voice, so bright and sure, and the white walls, so marked a contrast to the dark hall outside, that for the moment dazed Felicia. Patsy, in a blue bed-jacket, with a tall vase of blood red roses on a table beside her, was grinning almost impishly from the raised pillow. In the corner of the room, sitting near the wide window, was Patsy's mother. Felicia knew her instantly, though she had never seen a picture of her and Patsy had never actually described her—^h~~a~~^m slender woman, tall as she sat in her chair, with high cheekbones, a thin mouth and piercing violet blue eyes. She must have been in her late forties, Felicia was thinking. Her ^agrey-blond hair was cut short and her ruddy complexion gave her a look of having borne much of weathers, yet, with her dark blue silk suit, careful grooming, and the suggestion of haughtiness in her mouth and eyes, it seemed im-^rpossible that weather, of any sort, had ever seriously touched her. She was knitting. Rather she had been knitting. When Felicia entered the room, she was holding the knitting up but looking with startled eyes at the intruder who had come upon them.

Felicia looked back at the bed. Patsy was holding the sheet up to her neck, her eyes twinkling, as if any minute now she would explode into a fit of girlish giggles. The look was contageⁱous. Felicia smiled.

"Hello, Patsy," was all she could say.

"Mummy," Patsy said. "This is my roommate, Felicia Whitfield. She's from Georgia some place."

Mrs. Dedham closed her eyes slowly and just as slowly opened them.

"How do you do?" she said, only a suggestion of a smile on her thin lips.

She then looked at Patsy. "I thought you said your roommate was from St. Louis."

"One of them," Patsy said. "Didn't I tell you I had two?"

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Dedham and continued with her knitting.

"Yes, we were a regular little gang," said Patsy.

Mrs. Dedham didn't look up.

"Well, sit down, Felicia," Patsy said. "Tell me everything! What did Miss Eubanks have to ~~do~~^{ok}" Patsy tried to sit up straighter.

"Patsy, you must be quiet now," said Mrs. Dedham.

"They don't care," said Patsy. She looked back at Felicia. "Do you know this silly nurse actually had me walking this morning? She did. Kept calling me 'We!' "

"You look fine," said Felicia and she smiled nervously at Mrs. Dedham. Somehow she wanted the woman to know they were friends, close friends, she and Patsy.

"Patsy's been through a great deal," said Mrs. Dedham.

Felicia looked back at Patsy.

"Well, sit down, tell me what happened?" Patsy asked.

"Nothing much," Felicia said. "Everybody went to classes and everything."

"But what did they saaaaay, I mean everybody?"

"I guess they were pretty shocked."

Patsy gave a short laugh. "Mummy, you have no idea what it was like, I mean trying not to show and everything." She looked back at Felicia. "Mummy's been divine about it all." She wrinkled her nose at her mother. "You're a darling anyway, a true blue darling."

Mrs. Dedham closed her eyes and opened them again. There was a suggestion of a smile. *gal 96*

"They kicked me out, Patsy," Felicia said.

Mrs. Dedham stopped knitting, and Felicia was conscious of her blue

eyes again.

"Heaven! Absolute heaven!" said Patsy. "Ahn't you glad?"

Felicia looked down at her gloves. They were white and there was a smudge on the second finger.

"Of course she isn't!" said Mrs. Dedham. "What a pity." She blinked and continued looking at Felicia.

Felicia tried to smile at her.

"As a mattah of faaa-act," said Patsy. "I presume I've been kicked out, too. Nobody's said anything about that."

"Oh, yes, Patsy," said Mrs. Dedham. "I spoke with Miss Eubanks this morning, over the phone."

Patsy giggled. "Was she all moral and everything?"

"No, just firm. And, incidentally," Mrs. Dedham looked back at Felicia. "I wonder if you would be so kind to do us a little favor?"

For the first time the woman's face had softened.

"There's the mattah of Patsy's clothes and things. Could you possibly pack them and send them to our apartment in New York? It would be very good of you."

Felicia just looked at her. "I don't know. I'm leaving today. I've got a lot of ~~packing~~ to do, too, I guess."

Mrs. Dedham blinked again. "Oh, of course. Well, what about one of the maids? We'll give a little tip or something."

"Mummy, darling," Patsy said. "You're so naive. Chesney doesn't have any maids ~~except~~ in the dining room. Maybe one of them would do it. Be a darling, Felicia, and ask them. Will you? Mummy's so really quite fagged out ~~the~~ the plane trip down and everything." She grinned at her mother. "Did Felix fly you?"

"Yes, he was divine as usual. Couldn't have been more help."

"Felix is a grand old peacherine, that's what he is." Patsy looked at Felicia. "Daddy's pilot."

"Oh!" Felicia said.

Mrs. Dedham began rummaging around in her pocketbook. "Now here's our address," she said, writing on a small note pad. "We'll be at this address for a week or so anyway." She finished writing and folding the note tucked in a five-dollar bill. "Would you mind seeing to this for us, please?"

Felicia took the note. "I'll try to."

"That is very good of you," said Mrs. Dedham. "I do want to get Patsy away from here as soon as possible. You understand, I'm sure."

Felicia nodded.

"Oh, yes! Mummy and I are going to Europe. We're going to have a sort of museumy summer, very touristy and all that."

Felicia tried to smile. But she was thinking of the farm and Patsy's invitation.

"I thought it would be rather fun," said Mrs. Dedham. "Oh, Patsy, I did tell you, didn't I, that Gigi's bringing some friends over? She's had it planned ^{for} ~~so~~ so long I just couldn't tell her not to bring them."

"Great!" said Patsy.

"I thought they could stay with Hack and Aileen ~~at~~ ^M at least while we're away." Mrs. Dedham glanced at Felicia. "My brother lives in Italy now."

Felicia nodded.

"Mummy wants to do the Scandinavian countries. She's gotten a new mad on ~~for~~ Munch. You know? The Norwegian painter."

Felicia shook her head.

"He's mahvellous!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dedham. "I've become very interested in Edvard

Munch. I want to see the museum in Oslo^{the}~~---~~the Munch museum."

"That'll be nice," Felicia said to her.

"How many are coming with Gigi, Mummy?"

"I don't know. Three or four, I guess."

"Oh, God, they're probably that same giggly, glad little group she worships so." Patsy looked at Felicia. "Gigi has the wierdest friends."

"Well, she enjoys them, Patsy," said Mrs. Dedham.

"I know. I know." Patsy stretched her arms out and yawning covered her mouth with her hand. "God, I'll be glad when we get out of here," she said. "This place is so squeakily clean, it gives me the creeps."

"Now, Patsy," said Mrs. Dedham. She put her knitting aside. "I do think you need your rest now." She turned to Felicia. "She's been through so much, you know."

Felicia looked at Patsy. She had her eyes closed, but a smile was on her lips.

"I've got to go, anyway," said Felicia. She stood up. But there was an ache in her throat, and for the first time that day she wanted to cry.

Mrs. Dedham stood up, too. "Now you'll do that for me, won't you, uh^{uh}~~---~~Felicia it is, isn't it?"

"Yes, Felicia." Her voice was trembling.

"I mean find someone to send Patsy's things."

"Yes, yes, I will!" Felicia looked back at the bed. Patsy turned her head and opened her eyes. She half smiled at Felicia.

"You were cute to come," she said.

Felicia just nodded, but she managed a smile.

Patsy lifted her hand with difficulty. "Bye."

"Good-bye, Patsy," Felicia said. She was still smiling somehow.

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"Good-bye, Mrs. Dedham."

Mrs. Dedham had her back turned. She glanced round at Felicia questioningly. "Oh, good-bye." She seemed to sing it.

Felicia looked back once at Patsy. She had already turned her head. Her eyes were closed again. Felicia left the room, closed the door carefully and, dazed, walked down the hall.

"She never even liked me. She never even ^g....." But Miss Gates was waiting. _M