Summer of '63

In June of 1963, days after my graduation from the segregated Negro high school in Sumter, South Carolina, I received a letter from my favorite aunt who lived up north in Philadelphia. The envelope contained a sheet of blue-lined notebook paper, a train ticket, a twenty-dollar bill, and a shiny brochure.

Dear Sarah, I got you a summer job! My friend Claudia Lee from around the corner is the cook at a fancy camp for White girls up in Vermont. She says you can be her helper. The job pays $300 plus train fare, room and board. Wish I could'a had a chance like this when I was your age. I had to pick cotton or take care of White folks' babies. I'm sending you a little spending money for the trip here. See you soon. Love, Aunt Susie. p.s. This is a real opportunity!

I sure didn't feel cooking for some White girls was an opportunity! Times were changing for Negroes (that's what we called ourselves then). For me, opportunity was joining the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee's lunch counter sit-ins, or marching with Dr. Martin Luther King. I was only seventeen, but I had a heart full of reasons to hate White people and their restrictive laws: I loved to read but couldn't use the town library; I paid full admission price to the Sumter Movie Theater, even though my only access was via a side alley that led to seats in a balcony.

My mother's death a few months earlier had increased my bitterness. During one of her frequent asthma attacks, I took her to the Negro wing of the local hospital where she was injected with numerous drugs and admitted "only for observation," an intern had assured me. "Asthma doesn't kill you." However, the next morning, a White nurse relayed the news that earlier, they had found my mother dead. "How could you have found her dead?" I screamed. "You were supposed to be observing her! Why'd you let her die? You wouldn't have let her die if she'd been White."

The nurse clenched her mouth in a hard line. "That's unfair." she said.

"You're the ones who're unfair!" I said through quivering lips, then turned and ran from the hospital. I remembered a time before when I had I railed about the unequal treatment of Negroes. My mother had slapped me and, while the tears welled up in my eyes, said, "I did that for your own good? to teach you to control your tongue. Talking like that causes trouble with White folks, and I've already had my share of that."

My older sisters had explained what she meant: our long-absent father had once challenged the fairness of paying colored teachers less than White teachers and joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to seek equal pay. He was fired from his principal's job and blacklisted from teaching. Our family lost everything, and he started drinking heavily, then drifted away.

I wanted to continue my father's fight, but Mama was dead, and no matter how much I mourned her death, I had to get on with my life and college was my only way out of South Carolina. I re-read my aunt's letter and ground my teeth in frustration. I didn't want a job as a cook's helper. I deserved a job befitting a college girl. I had an acceptance letter from Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland. However, the letter made no mention of a scholarship, and my National Defense Student Loan would barely cover tuition, room and board. I decided to accept the camp job. How bad could it be?

As my train headed toward my Philadelphia rendezvous with Mrs. Lee, I leafed through the brochure my aunt had sent. From its glossy pages, Camp Beenadeewin emerged like a mountain sanctuary -a place that would inspire parents to gladly pay the extravagant sum of $600 for their daughters to attend a three-week session amidst the marvels of nature. Horseback riding, archery, arts and crafts, drama, and swimming in the camp's very own lake. Swimming appealed to me most. Negroes weren't allowed in Sumter's public pool, and Mama's stories about the water moccasins had kept me away from the muddy pond at the edge of town; so I'd never learned to swim. But I wanted to learn and vowed to do so before the summer was over. A voice in the back of my mind intruded on my daydream by asking whether White people in Vermont were different from those in Sumter? I used an old civics lesson to quiet the voice: northerners had been opposed to slavery.

Aunt Susie was waiting when I stepped off the train in Philadelphia. "You look more and more like your mother," she said, as she touched my cheek. "I'm glad I got a chance to see you before you left for camp."

I leaned into her embrace and inhaled *My Sin* perfume. Mama had worn it too. My chest tightened and my eyes burned, but I held back the tears and kept my resolve to show my aunt that I was now a grown-up. We made our way from the noisy platform into the cavernous station where scores of travelers - Negro and White - milled around the ticket counter or sat patiently on curved-back pine benches.

Aunt Susie waved at a buxom, caramel-colored woman. "That's Mrs. Lee," she said.

When we reached her side, the woman extended a plump hand. "Hello, Sarah, I'm glad you're going with us. I don't often get college girls to work in the kitchen."

Thrilled to be called a college girl, I beamed as I returned her gentle handshake. "I'll do my best."

"That's all I ask," she said. "No more, no less." She smiled warmly and I smiled back. She sounded just like my teachers at school.

One by one, five more Negro girls arrived and were introduced by Mrs. Lee as the rest of the kitchen help. A brown eyed, sandy-haired boy about eighteen arrived as our train was announced. "My name is Charles," he said, and offered to carry one of my suitcases. When we reached our track, I kissed Aunt Susie and boarded the train. From a window seat, I waved to her. She blew me a kiss and mouthed the words, "God be with you." It seemed like God had abandoned me. I was filled with a mixture of conflicting emotions. The train whistle blew and we pulled away. I busied myself by arranging my suitcases. I couldn't look back. If I did, I knew I'd cry.

"White River Junction, next stop, White River Junction," the conductor announced, swaying from side to side as he navigated the aisle.

"That's our stop," Mrs. Lee said.

I was the last to step from the train onto the wooden platform that stood like an unfinished bridge in a cool, green clearing. Mrs. Lee and the others had already started down the steep staircase at the end. Birdcalls drifted from the forest that loomed over the one-room station house a few yards away. A hand-lettered sign on its padlocked door read *White River Junction Station House*. Compared to this place, Sumter was a bustling metropolis. The train snorted and pulled away just as a white man beckoned us toward his wood-paneled station wagon.

"Hello, Mr. Henry, how are you?" Mrs. Lee said to the gangly old man who got out and reached for her suitcases.

"Fine, thank you," he replied, while deftly loading the suitcases onto the wagon's overhead rack. "Throw the big stuff up here," he said gruffly, "and I'll tie it down."

The nine of us squeezed inside the station wagon and embarked on the last leg of our journey. Sumter County had few hills, and I was unprepared for the gargantuan mountains that covered with thick, green forests. Several of the girls dozed, but I stayed alert, feasting on my new environment. I was enthralled by picture-book-like farmhouses nestled in deep valleys, clouds that looked like smoke rings around

distant mountain tops, cows posed on sloping pastures where rounded boulders sprouted like oversized watermelons. Vermont really was different!

Suddenly, Mr. Henry's voice startled me. "Look to your right and you'll see Camp Beenadeewin." Carved into the valley below, among the trees surrounding a looking-glass lake, was a series of clearings dotted with wooden cabins. Soon, we turned onto a road bordered by stately evergreens, then onto one that skirted a lake. My heart leaped at the sight of that shimmering blue water: it was the place where I'd finally learn to swim. The sun had just reached the horizon and filled the sky with a rosy glow when Mr. Henry stopped the car near a wooden building that resembled a grange hall. "Well, folks," he said, "This is it, Camp Beenadeewin - Your home-away-from-home for the next seven weeks."

A silver haired man and a plump, blond woman hurried toward us and embraced Mrs. Lee. After speaking softly to her for a few moments, the woman turned to us. "Welcome to Camp Beenadeewin. I am Mrs. Victoria Winston and this is Mr. Clay Winston. We have owned Camp Beenadeewin for more than 30 years. I'm sure, you'll grow to love it as much as Mr. Winston and I do. We are happy you've come to help us care for our lovely campers and counselors. Mrs. Lee has quite a culinary reputation with our girls. I'm sure all of you will help her maintain it." She then took her husband's arm and they strolled off.

"Is anybody besides me hungry?" asked Mrs. Lee.

We all raised our hands, as if we were still in school.

"Good," Mrs. Lee said. "While you get settled, I'll whip up something to eat. How's bacon, scrambled eggs, and pancakes with good old Vermont maple syrup?"

We sent up a chorus of yeses.

"Barbara," Mrs. Lee said to one of the girls in our group, "You've been here before, show everybody where things are. Then bring them over to the kitchen."

At the supply house, Mr. Henry issued each of us a set of sheets and two scratchy blankets. Barbara then led the girls to a two-room cabin with three cots in one room and a pair of bunk beds in the other. Chinks in the split pine wallboards allowed the setting sun's rays to filter through and settle in ominous shadows across the room. I had a sinking feeling. Everything seemed old and shabby. I wondered if the White girls' cabins were any better than ours. "Where's the bathroom?" I asked.

Barbara walked to a screened window and pointed to a wooden outhouse a short distance away from our cabin. It looked just like the one in my grandmother's backyard. "They don't have indoor plumbing here?" I asked, incredulously. Barbara shook her head and pointed to a roofless, wooden enclosure. "That's where we shower."

After finishing my first meal and returning to the cabin, I made my bed and climbed into it fully clothed. I pulled both blankets around me, but they weren't enough to warm the chill that invaded my bones. I lay there shivering, knowing that I had made a mistake. I cried quietly, hoping none of the other girls could hear me. I wished I were still home and wondered how I would survive for seven whole weeks.

Mrs. Lee said her homemade cookies were a big favorite with the campers, so before they arrived, we had to make enough to last through both sessions of camp. Day after day, we chopped, measured, and mixed ingredients then rolled, cut, dropped and baked cookies. The air was filled with the aroma of oatmeal-raisin, sugar, cinnamon, and molasses crisp cookies. Mrs. Lee was a patient, but demanding boss and Charles and I labored under her demands. She had designated Charles chef's assistant, but he and I worked side by side, learning our way around the big old kitchen where bowls were the size of drums, and the gleaming stainless-steel mixer stood as tall as I did. Each night, I fell into an exhausted, dreamless sleep.

On our fifth day, the White campers began to arrive. Car doors slammed repeatedly, giggles and screams of joyful reunion echoed all around. Charles and I were peeling potatoes and onions for dinner, but I frequently went to the dining hall door and peered out at the happy chaos. Chauffeurs in dark suits and visored caps unloaded suitcases from the trunks of big black limousines with license plates from places like Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

Some campers were accompanied by young, well-dressed mothers who looked like they had never lifted anything heavier than a cup of tea. My mother had wanted a life like I imagined they lived - a pampered life as the wife of a successful man. She thought she'd found such a life with my father. It probably would have been too, if he hadn't run afoul of the White establishment.

"These girls actually seem happy to be coming to a place like this," I said to Charles. "I can't imagine anybody paying $600 to spend three weeks in a raggedy place like this."

Charles chuckled before answering. "All year long, these girls live in mansions - with maids and butlers. They think this place is exciting. Gives them a chance to be on their own and *commune with nature,* like the brochure says." He guffawed.

I laughed too, as I recalled my last trip to the outhouse where I found a raccoon curled up on the floor. "I hate it here," I said, sobering up. "Mrs. Lee says we can't go in the lake or ride the horses or anything. It's as bad as being in South Carolina. I thought it was different up north."

Charles dumped a 10-pound bag of onions into one tub of the big steel sink and turned on the cold water. "It is. You don't have to worry about having your head bashed in for looking a White person in the eye. And you get paid for your labor."

I grunted, picked up an onion and began to peel off its thin brown layers, grateful that I could cry without anyone asking why. Maybe we were getting paid, but it sure wasn't any better than life in South Carolina.

Camp shifted into full swing and our days were filled with preparing, serving, and cleaning up after meals. Before coming to Beenadeewin, I had never done domestic work, so I found it strange to serve these young White girls. Mrs. Lee said I was to address each camper and counselor, whatever her age, as Miss. I said the word only when she was within hearing. None of the campers called me anything, except girl and they said that only when they wanted more of something: "Girl, you! Bring me some more milk. Girl, bring me some more butter. Some more gravy, girl." God, how I hated that tone.

When I asked Mrs. Lee why we couldn't ride the horses or swim in the lake, she had smiled sadly and said, "We're the help, and up here, the help doesn't mingle with the campers." Up north, it seemed segregation was a matter of class as well as skin color.

Even though it wasn't my job to serve the tables, I helped out wherever I was needed. At first, some campers stared curiously (didn't their rich parents tell them It was impolite to stare?); others pointed and whispered; a few treated me like I was their personal servant. Occasionally, one muttered "thank you" when I proffered fresh water, napkins, or refilled dishes.

Always, I felt them examining me, as if I were a strange laboratory animal. Couldn't they see that I was just like them? I wanted to tell them that in a few months I would be in college studying to become a French translator at the United Nations. I wanted to show them the medal I won for writing the best news story in any high school paper (Negro or White) in the whole state of South Carolina. I

wanted to tell them that I had been elected to the National Honor Society and show them the tiny gold and black pin I'd been awarded. Instead, I buttered slices of toast as they dropped off the revolving toaster rack, pressed them into the plate of cinnamon sugar, and pretended it didn't matter what they thought of me.

However, even though I hated the way they studied me, I was shamelessly curious about them. Never before had I been in such close proximity to so many White girls my own age. Day by day, eavesdropping grew easier as they got used to my "brown" presence. No one worries about a pine tree hearing secrets and I became about as significant as a pine tree. Listening to their conversations, I learned that White skin brought no solace from problems; that money did not prevent sadness and heartache; that White girls were cruel to each other (I had always assumed that Whites were only cruel to Negroes); that most White girl want to be blond and would die for the perfect tan. The last discovery gave me a lot to think about. Why, since they didn't even like brown-skinned people, would they want to have skin like mine?

Six days a week, I followed the same schedule: up by 5:30, and straight into the kitchen; after breakfast was served, I had a two-hour break before starting lunch; after lunch, another two-hour break before dinner. We made everything the campers ate and it was backbreaking work to prepare such large quantities of food, day after day. My only pleasure was eating.

During a lull in breakfast one morning, Mrs. Lee pointed out a corner table where the counselors ate. Most of them seemed to be my age or a little older. "They're all college girls, like you," she said. "Mrs. Winston thinks college girls set a good example for the young campers."

"They're not college girls like me," I answered. "They're White. And I'll bet they're making more money than I am, for a lot less work."

Mrs. Lee shrugged. "That's how life is."

I couldn't understand why adults just accepted everything. Just because that's the way it's always been doesn't mean that's the way it has to be. I knew that when I got to be an adult, I would do whatever I could to change things.

Every Sunday, after the kitchen crew served breakfast and lunch, and prepared box suppers for the campers, Mr. Henry took us sightseeing. After a few Sundays of becoming the sights for the locals, I grew reluctant to join the tour. But there was nothing else to do, so I'd go, forcing myself to ignore the stares, pretending that I was a tourist on vacation. The only trip I looked forward to was the one to

Montpelier, the state capital, where I expected to see others who shared my skin color. When we didn't, I surmised that we were the only Negroes in Vermont. No wonder everyone stared at us.

We took a guided tour through the atrium of the State Capital building, where I noticed seashells embedded in the marble floor. The guide said they were prehistoric fossils, left behind when glaciers carved their way across the land. I wondered what I could leave behind as proof that I had been in Vermont, proof for the next Negroes that someone like them had been here before?

The guide talked about the spirit of hard work and self-denial that marked Vermonters, and I began to understand the austerity at Camp Beenadeewin. Back home, Negroes strove to gain the material things that Vermonters could easily have but shunned. To them, matters of principle were more important. Matters of principle were important to me too. I had hated it when clerks at Belk Stroman left my mother unserved while they waited on all the White folks, even those who arrived after us. I'd hated standing in the rear of a bus while empty seats abounded in the front ? seats reserved for Whites only. Those things branded me inferior, though I knew I wasn't, and I wanted to change them. I was ashamed that I was in Vermont, instead of at home, crusading to make southerners to change their ways.

After meals, while the other girls who worked in the kitchen cleaned up and washed dishes, Charles and I usually sat at a picnic table and talked. He'd never been south of Philadelphia, and I told him about life below the Mason-Dixon Line. He couldn't understand why Negroes stayed in the south, since Whites treated them so badly there. I repeated the explanation my mother had offered when I urged her to leave Sumter: "You can love a place and want to stay there, even though it's not perfect."

"That's crazy," Charles said. I smiled, remembering when I had voiced that exact sentiment to my mother.

Mid-July, four weeks after our arrival at Camp Beenadeewin, the first set of campers left, and I was free until the second set arrived two days later. I had declined to join the Sunday tour and was alone in the cabin. The afternoon air was hot and still. Sweat beaded up all over me and I was miserably uncomfortable. I decided to go for a walk near the lake, even though I'd been warned that it was off-limits to kitchen help.

The well-worn path to the lake took me through a stand of pines trees where brown needles cushioned the cool pathway. I considered staying there in the shade,

but the persistent gnats and summer flies made me press on. When the path neared the lake, it widened and descended a sharp bank. I stopped, overpowered by the lake's beauty and size. I shaded my eyes against the afternoon sun. The lake extended as far as I could see. Tall trees cloaked in feathery foliage protectively surrounded it. To my right, several rowboats were tied to a wooden dock. To my left, the pathway disappeared into the lake. I swatted a mosquito on my arm and scratched at the resulting sting. It was minor, compared to the deep sting that tortured my heart. I wanted to cry.

What gave these White people the right to keep me from going into this lake? They didn't make it. God did. And He made it for everybody. Surely there was room for me to enjoy its coolness. I removed my sandals, then walked down the bank. At the water's edge, I stopped. What if someone saw me? The thought of getting caught chilled my bravery. I looked around but saw no one.

Still, I was afraid. My heart beat faster and I could almost hear Mama's voice. "Sarah, don't make trouble. Put on your shoes and go back to that cabin right now!" I ignored the voice and waded in. The sun was hot against my top half while my feet and legs were icy cold. It was a tantalizing feeling. I squished the mud on the bottom between my toes and a cloud swirled around my feet.

I listened for sounds, but all I heard were chickadee's chirping and squirrels rustling through the trees. I lifted my skirt and waded farther out. The water was now midway to my thighs. I shivered with delight, tucked my skirt in my waistband and bent to splash water on my mosquito-bitten forearm. Suddenly, I was angry. Angry at all the campers, at all the White people in Vermont. Angry at their selfishness, at the unfairness of life that showed me its bounty but denied me access. Angry at myself for my helplessness and fear.

I began to cry and strike at the water with my palms. I wanted to punish these people. But how? Then it came to me. Since they thought I was going to contaminate their beautiful lake, I would. Slowly and deliberately, I waded back to the water's edge, lowered my cotton panties, squatted down and peed. I watched my urine flow into the lake and felt a sense of satisfaction. I had made my own mark on that vast, beautiful place.

After a while, I collected my sandals and headed back to my cabin. As I approached the stand of pine trees, a young woman with a long, blond ponytail stepped out from behind a tree and blocked my path. "Why did you do that?" she asked.

I stared into her big blue eyes and defiantly answered, "Because I wanted to." I tried to pass her, to reach the safety of the cabin, but she thrust out a freckled arm and stopped me. "Let me pass," I said.

"If I tell Mrs. Winston, you'll be in big trouble," she answered.

"You can tell whoever you want. I don't care," I said. But I did care. My heart was doing flip-flops and my blood was pounding in my ears. What would Mrs. Lee say? And Aunt Susie? I had let them down. Would I be sent home in disgrace? Would I lose all the money I had endured such hardship to earn? A sense of doom settled around my heart.

"If you don't care, why do you look so scared?" the girl asked.

I thought I saw amusement in her eyes. That made me so angry it overpowered my fear. "You startled me," I said, mustering the calmest voice I could. "I didn't think anyone was around."

"There's always somebody around this place when you do something you're not supposed to do," she said.

Suddenly, this mocking girl embodied all the White people who stood between me and what I wanted to do. I shouted at her, "What gives anybody the right to say I'm not supposed to come down to this lake?. Or swim in it?"

She laughed. "What you were doing wasn't swimming."

I folded my arms and raised my chin. I wouldn't let her see my fear. "Are you going to let me pass or what?"

"Don't you want to know if I'm going to report you?"

"I don't care what you do," I answered, haughtily, though I couldn't banish the tremble I felt in my voice.

"That's not true. You wouldn't be working here if you didn't need the money. If I tell Mrs. Winston, you'll be in big trouble."

"So, are you gonna tell her?"

Suddenly, the girl collapsed into giggles. "Everybody pees in the lake. They just don't make a pilgrimage to do it."

I didn't laugh with her. Maybe she thought this was a joke, but I didn't.

"I've seen you in the dining hall," she said, regaining her composure, "watching us. You're always so serious. Don't worry, I won't tell. It'll be our little secret."

"Don't expect me to thank you," I answered, ungraciously.

"Why are you so angry? I'm trying to be nice to you."

"Why am I angry?" I repeated, surprised by the indignation in my voice. "Wouldn't you be angry if they brought you here and kept you penned up like an animal? Everything at this camp is off-limits to me, except the kitchen!"

The girl stared at me but said nothing. She looked appropriately dismayed. That pleased me and diluted my anger. "I'm not as angry as I should be," I said. "If I were, I would have burned this whole place down, instead of peeing in the lake."

"But that would hurt you too," she said. Her words sounded sincere, but I was suspicious. "Why do you care?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that all White people don't dislike you?"

"No, it hasn't," I said.

"I don't dislike you," she said softly.

Uncomfortable with her words and the emotion in her voice, I wanted to run back to the safety of my cabin. "Does that mean you're going to let me by?" I asked.

She stepped aside and gestured for me to pass. I could feel her eyes following me. After a few steps, I turned back and mumbled "thank you." I sprinted back to my cabin, flung myself on my cot and lay there trembling. Mama had always said you couldn't trust White folks. "They'll lie to you with a smile on their lips," she had said. Was she right? Would this White girl betray me?

The next morning while we prepared breakfast, I told Charles what had happened at the lake. He guffawed loudly. "I can't imagine prim little you lifting your dress and peeing in Lake Beenadeewin," he said, then added in a sing-song voice, "What would your Mama say to that?"

I narrowed my eyes and stuck my tongue out at him.

"Hey, I like the idea. Sorta like the way dogs mark their territory. Maybe I'll go do it too."

"This isn't funny, Charles. I'm scared she's going to tell somebody and get me in a whole lot of trouble."

He shrugged than grinned. "Well, the die's cast. You'll just have to wait and see what she does."

Days later, as I stacked bread on the toaster racks, I looked across the serving counter into the same blue eyes I had seen the previous day. My heart flip-flopped.

"Good morning," she said. "May I have two slices of cinnamon toast?"

I placed the toast on a plate and slid it across to her. "My name's Sharon," she said. "What's yours?"

"Sarah," I replied, without looking at her.

"Stop looking so scared, Sarah. I told you your secret's safe with me." She flashed me a smile, then returned to the counselor's table.

Was I really safe? Maybe Mama hadn't been right about all White people.

"Sarah, go stir the Maypo before it sticks to the bottom of the pot," Mrs. Lee called to me. "The next round of campers will be coming in soon."

A day later, between lunch and dinner, as I sat at our picnic table waiting for Charles, I heard twigs cracking and looked up to see Sharon approaching.

"Sarah," she said, "can I talk to you?"

"About what?" I asked, suspiciously.

"Nothing in particular. Just talk."

I shrugged and looked around, hoping Charles would come out and rescue me from this awkward encounter. "Is it okay if I sit down?" she asked.

I shrugged again. "It's not my picnic table," I said grudgingly, not wanting to encourage her.

Sharon straddled the bench on the other side. "Where are you from?"

"South Carolina" She laughed. "So that explains your funny accent."

"What funny accent?" I said, defensively, wishing Charles would show up.

"You talk different from Mrs. Lee and the other girls in the kitchen."

"They're from Philadelphia."

"The guy too?" "Charles? Yeah, he's from Philadelphia, too."

"My college roommate is from there. She calls it Philly. You'd like her."

"Is she a Negro?" I asked, implying that that would be the only reason I might like her room-mate. If Sharon got my meaning, she didn't let on.

"No, she's not. But you'd like her anyway."

"You don't know what I'd like," I said curtly. "You don't know anything about me."

Sharon gave that amused smile that really irritated me.

"I know enough about you to know you'd like her. She's got your spunk. Always in trouble for saying what she thinks. I wish I could be like that."

"Like what?" I asked. "In trouble, or saying what you think?"

"You don't have to take offense at everything I say," Sharon said testily. "It was meant as a compliment."

As I looked at the angry pout her lips formed, I realized that Sharon was treating me like an ordinary human being, the way I wanted White people to treat me, but I was acting like an angry animal. "I'm sorry," I said. "My mother always told me my mouth would be the death of me. Every year I make a resolution to talk less, but I never keep it more than a few days."

"I don't think you talk much at all? though sometimes you do say mean things." She flashed a mock-stern look that made furrows between her eyebrows. Then she softened. "My resolution is always to talk more, especially about things that matter. I don't do that either."

"I'm curious about something," I said. "Why didn't you tell anyone what you saw me do at the lake?"

Sharon's face grew serious. "I didn't see anything so very wrong with what you did. If they kept me out of the lake, I'd want to do the same thing. Somebody ought to

tell Mrs. Winston that what she's doing is wrong. Things are changing in the world today."

What was this girl saying? Was she planning a protest march up here? "I don't think this is the time for you to start keeping resolutions," I said. "Not if you want to keep your job." From the corner of my eye, I spotted Charles standing at the edge of the dining hall and waved for him to come over. "Sharon, this is Charles. Charles, this is Sharon. I told you about her."

"What did she tell you about me?" Sharon asked as she extended her hand to Charles.

To my surprise, Charles took her hand in his, bent forward and brushed her fingertips with his lips. "Just that you walk softly and carry a big stick," he said.

"She's only half right," Sharon said. "Which half?" he asked.

Sharon grinned. "You'll have to find out for yourself."

Uncomfortable with their banter, I interrupted. "Isn't it time for us to get back to work, Charles?"

He nodded. "That's why I came to get you, but I was distracted."

Sharon giggled. "I've got to get back to work too. Maybe we can do this again"

I hope not, I said to myself. "What was that all about, Charles?" I asked as soon as we reached the kitchen.

"Drama."

"Drama?"

"Yeah, drama. She's the drama teacher."

"How do you know?"

"I did a little snooping after you told me she saw you at the lake."

"And what's hand kissing got to do with drama?"

"Why Sarah, do I detect jealousy in your voice?"

"I'm not jealous!"

"You don't need to be. You're my friend and I wanted to help you. I figured if I could get on her good side, maybe I could keep her from telling anybody. Since she teaches drama, she must like acting. I saw Cary Grant do that hand-kissing bit in a movie."

"I don't think I have to worry about her telling anybody," I said. "But you'd better worry about kissing White girls' hands. Where I come from, Negro boys don't even think about doing that. Not if they want to grow up to be men."

"We're not down south, Sarah."

"Doesn't matter. Things are the same all over."

"No, they're not, " he said. "That's why the Freedom Riders are going south."

"What do you mean you never talked to a White person before me?" Sharon asked, her voice shrill with disbelief.

"I've talked to them," I answered, "but only when I was buying something in a store. Never like this, except once."

"What did you talk about then?"

"Rip."

"Who's Rip?" she asked.

I hesitated. I hadn't even told Charles about Rip. "Rip was my dog," I finally said. "I named him after Rip Van Winkle because he slept a lot when I first got him. One day when I came home from school, I couldn't find him. I cried and cried. About a month later, I saw him in a lady's yard, not far from our house. When I told her he was my dog, she said if I wanted him back, I had to pay for his vet's bill and the food she'd fed him. My mother said she didn't have money for that, so I told her to get the sheriff to make the lady give him back. She told me that the sheriff was White, just like the lady, and since it was only our word against hers that Rip was my dog, the sheriff would side with the White lady."

Sharon stared solemnly at me, tears shining in her eyes. "Did you get him back?"

"No."

"Is that why you hate White people?"

"I don't hate White people," I said, then added, "At least, not all of them."

"That was a rotten thing for that woman to do, Sharon said. "I'd hate her too. What did she look like? I want to picture her while I hate her now."

I tried to remember what the woman looked like. All I could recall was that she was White. "I can't remember," I admitted.

"I'd never forget the face of the person who stole my dog," she said. "Not ever."

Sharon was right. As much as I hated that woman, I shouldn't have forgotten what she looked like. She was a cruel person, but only one person, not a whole race of people. I had been wrong to substitute her skin color for her crime.

"Tomorrow the campers leave," Sharon said, as we sat at the picnic table our last afternoon together.

"And we're leaving the day after that," I said. "I can hardly wait."

"Haven't you gotten to like Camp Beenadeewin, even a teeny, little bit?" she asked.

I looked up at the trees that towered around the compound. Thanks to Sharon, I could identify them as sugar maples, White birch, eastern hemlock and chestnut. Still, I longed for oak, pecan and China berry trees. . . even the mulberry tree that each summer littered the ground beneath its fuzzy green leaves with fat, purple berries that stained everything they touched. Trees that held memories for me. Trees that I would always recognize, whatever the season. "It's been an experience," I said finally. "I learned a lot, and I met you."

"Will you tell your friends about me?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Will you tell your friends about me?"

"I've already written my roommate about you. She wrote back that she's thinking about becoming a Freedom Rider." *A White girl risking her life to get equal rights for Negroes. Would wonders never cease?* It had taken a trip to Vermont for me to discover what White people could be like. I looked closely at Sharon, trying to memorize her face. I wanted to remember it, so that she would not blend into the faceless mass of White people who inhabited my past. Mostly, I would remember her blue eyes and the way they changed color when she was sad or angry, and her eyelashes - so pale they were almost silver. But I also would remember the way she pressed her lips tightly together when she was tense or amused and trying not to

laugh, and the way her cheeks reddened when she blushed. And I would remember that, like me, she bit her nails, which we both resolved to stop.

Mrs. Winston waved as Mr. Henry started the engine. "Good-bye girls. Thank you for all your hard work. I hope you'll come back next summer."

Not if I can help it, I said to myself. When we reached the road that circled the lake, I spotted Sharon walking alone. When we passed her, she turned toward the car, our eyes met, and she waved. I waved back.

"You know that girl?" Mrs. Lee asked.

"A little," I answered, "just a little." *But not nearly enough*, I thought. Sharon had made me reconsider a lot of things my mother had taught me - things Mama had thought necessary for my survival. But so much was changing in my world. Since I wanted to change the way White people thought about me, maybe I needed to change the way I thought about them. As the station wagon pulled onto the evergreen-lined road out of camp, I looked back with mixed feelings. I would never love Camp Beenadeewin the way Sharon did, but I had learned a lot of things during my stay there. Things that would affect my life forever.