

THE  
HELP

*Kathryn Stockett*

AMY EINHORN BOOKS  
PUBLISHED BY G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
A MEMBER OF PENGUIN GROUP (USA) INC.  
NEW YORK

her the few times Hilly allowed Missus Walters to host bridge club. Minny and Aibileen are both still in their white uniforms.

"Hello," I say from my side of the room. "Good to see you again."

"Miss Skeeter." Minny nods. She settles in a wooden chair Aibileen has brought out from the kitchen, and the frame creaks. I sit on the far end of the sofa. Aibileen sits on the other end of the sofa, between us.

I clear my throat, produce a nervous smile. Minny doesn't smile back. She is fat and short and strong. Her skin is blacker than Aibileen's by ten shades, and shiny and taut, like a pair of new patent shoes.

"I already told Minny how we doing the stories," Aibileen says to me. "You helping me write mine. And hers she gone tell you, while you write it down."

"And Minny, everything you say here is in confidence," I say. "You'll get to read everything we—"

"What makes you think colored people need your help?" Minny stands up, chair scraping. "Why you even care about this? You *white*."

I look at Aibileen. I've never had a colored person speak to me this way.

"We all working for the same thing here, Minny," Aibileen says. "We just talking."

"And what thing is that?" Minny says to me. "Maybe you just want me to tell you all this stuff so I get in trouble." Minny points to the window. "Medgar Evers, the NAACP officer who live five minutes away, they blew up his carport last night. For *talking*."

My face is burning red. I speak slowly. "We want to show your perspective... so people might understand what it's like from your side. We—we hope it might change some things around here."

"What you think you gone change with this? What law you want to reform so it say you got to be nice to your maid?"

"Now hold on," I say, "I'm not trying to change any laws here. I'm just talking about attitudes and—"

"You know what'll happen if people catch us? Forget the time I accidentally use the wrong changing room down at McRae's women's wear, I'd have *guns* pointing at my house."

There's a still, tight moment in the room with just the sound of the brown Timex clock ticking on the shelf.

"You don't have to do this, Minny," Aibileen says. "It's alright if you want a change your mind."

Slowly, warily, Minny settles again in her chair. "I do it. I just want make sure she understand, this ain't no *game* we playing here."

I glance at Aibileen. She nods at me. I take a deep breath. My hands are shaking.

I start with the background questions and somehow we back our way into talking about Minny's work. She looks at Aibileen as she talks, like she's trying to forget I'm even in the room. I record everything she says, my pencil scratching as fast as I can move it. We thought it might be less formal than using the typewriter.

"Then they's one job where I work late ever night. And you know what happened?"

"What's... that?" I ask, even though she's looking at Aibileen.

"*Oh, Minny*," she cat-calls, "*you the best help we ever had. Big Minny, you gone keep you on forever*. Then one day she say she gone give me a week a paid vacation. I ain't had no vacation, paid or unpaid, in my entire life. And when pull up a week later to go back to work, they gone. Moved to Mobile. She tell somebody she scared I'd find new work before she move. Miss Lazy Fingers couldn't go a day without having a maid waiting on her."

She suddenly stands up, throws her bag on her arm. "I got to go. You giving me the heart palpitations talking bout this." And out she goes, slamming the door behind her.

I look up, wipe the sweat off my temple.

"And that was a good mood," Aibileen says.

## CHAPTER 13

FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, the three of us arrange ourselves in the same seats in Aibileen's small, warm living room. Minny storms in mad, quiets down as she tells Aibileen her story, then rushes out in a rage as fast as she came in. I write down as much as I can.

When Minny lapses into news about Miss Celia—"She sneaking upstairs, think I don't see her, but I know, that crazy lady up to something"—she always stops herself, the way Aibileen does when she speaks of Constantine. "That ain't part a my story. You leave Miss Celia out a this." She watches me until my writing stops.

Besides her furiousness at white people, Minny likes to talk about food. "Let's see, I put the green beans in first, then I go on and get the pork chops going cause, mmm-mmm, I like my chops hot out the pan, you know."

One day, while she's saying, "...got a white baby on one arm, green beans in the pot—" she stops. Cocks her jaw at me. Taps her foot.

"Half this stuff don't have nothing to do with colored rights. Ain't but day-to-day business." She eyes me up and down. "Look to me like you just writing *life*."

I stop my pencil. She's right. I realize that's just what I wanted to do. I tell her, "I hope so." She gets up and says she's got more important things to worry about than what I'm hoping for.

THE NEXT EVENING, I'm working upstairs in my room, banging the keys on my Corona. Suddenly I hear Mother hit the stairs running. In two seconds she's made it in my room. "Eugenia!" she whispers.

I stand so fast my chair teeters, trying to guard the contents of my typewriter. "Yes ma'am?"

"Now don't panic but there is a man—a very *tall* man—downstairs see you."

"Who?"

"He says his name is Stuart *Whitworth*."

"What?"

"He said y'all spent an evening together awhile back but how can that be, I didn't know anything—"

"Christ."

"Don't take the Lord's name in vain, Eugenia Phelan. Just put some lipstick on."

"Believe me, Mama," I say, putting on lipstick anyway. "Jesus wouldn't like him either."

I brush my hair because I know it's awful. I even wash the typewriter ink and correcting fluid off my hands and elbows. But I won't change clothes not for him.

Mother gives me a quick up and down in my dungarees and Daddy's o button-up white shirt. "Is he a Greenwood Whitworth or a Natchez?"

"He's the state senator's son."

Mother's jaw drops so far it hits her string of pearls. I go down the stairs past the assembly of our childhood portraits. Pictures of Carlton line the wall, taken up until about the day before yesterday. Pictures of me stretch back when I was twelve. "Mother, give us some privacy." I watch as she slowly drags herself back to her room, glancing over her shoulder before she disappears.

I walk out onto the porch, and there he is. Three months after our date there is Stuart Whitworth himself, standing on my front porch in khaki pants and a blue coat and a red tie like he's ready for Sunday dinner.