

A LACEY SUMMER

by Marsha L. Grant (c) 1995

Comedy/drama. When a 16-year-old girl from Chicago is dumped on three elderly aunts in rural South Carolina, it's a battle of wills--north against the south and youthful rebellion versus traditional mores--until she realizes that these lost relatives, despite their old-fashioned ways, offer the security and sense of belonging that she so desperately seeks. The time is present; interior unit set; running time approx. 90 minutes

CAST

(4 women, 2 men)

BESS LACEY, a widow in her 60's.
ROSE LACEY, her invalid sister in her 70's.
VI LACEY, their mildly retarded younger sister.
MATTIE LACEY, their 16-year-old niece.
MR. CAVANAUGH, a widower in his 60's.
ANDY, Mr. Cavanaugh's 19-year-old grandson.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I, Scene 1: Mid-afternoon in early June.
ACT I, Scene 2: Later the same day.
ACT I, Scene 3: Two weeks later.

Intermission

ACT II, Scene 1: One week later
ACT II, Scene 2: Later the same day.
ACT II, Scene 3: Two days later.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The unit set is the front parlor of a Victorian farmhouse on the outskirts of a small town in the low country of South Carolina. It has a morning room divided from the main parlor DL. UR on a one-step riser is the entry hall off of which is the front door exit, and to the R a hallway to the kitchen & dining rooms. L of the front door is a curtained window and steps up to the bedrooms. The entryway is divided from the parlor by an arch. The morning room is furnished with a daybed, side table and chair, a lace-curtained window on the L wall. The parlor is furnished with a worn loveseat C, a small side chair at one end, a lady's rocker at the other, and a coffee table between them. A small half-moon table for the telephone sits under the window in the entry hall. An old upright piano, tall shelf, or long table is placed on the back wall behind the sofa decked with several generations of family pictures. Decorative wall items might include family portraits, a reproduction of a Monet painting, cross-stitch maxims. There are antimacassars and knitted afghans on the furniture.

The sisters are not oblivious to the modern world, but their dress and hairstyles are out-of-fashion, influenced by the times and culture of an earlier generation. Vi is mildly retarded, but should not be portrayed as a caricature. Somewhat childish in her interpersonal relationships, she has been overly protected by her sisters. At no time should we feel pity for her, merely charmed by her endearing manner.

Mr. Cavanaugh is a handyman, and dresses according to the dictates of the script. Andy is a college-boy and dresses accordingly. Mattie intentionally wears outfits to shock her ultra-conservative southern aunts.

ACT I, Scene 1

[Before curtain rise, MATTIE'S voice is heard offstage or over a sound system.]

MATTIE: *(VO)* Do you remember how you felt about things when you were a kid? *(beat)* Well, do you? *(beat)* I don't. Not really. How I felt about things wasn't important until my mother died. I was thirteen, and for the next three years all I did was feel awful. Then something happened to change all that. I discovered my father's family. No big deal? Well, if you're dumped on three crazy old-maid aunts in no-where-ville, South Carolina... dumped *for two whole months*... Feeling awful changed to horrible, the most horrible time in my entire life.

[At rise the parlor is lit, Rose's room is dark. BESS enters from the steps wielding a feather duster and begins to straighten up the parlor in anticipation of guests. It is mid-afternoon on a hot day in June. ROSE is asleep on the daybed in the morning room. VI enters with a vase of garden flowers.]

VI: Where do you want these, Bess?

BESS: On the piano, I think.

VI: Do you like them?

BESS: Very much. I love the way you set off the red Cosmos with Queen Anne's Lace. You have a real knack for flower arranging, Vi.

VI: Thank you. Flowers are my number two favorite thing. *(puts them on piano and stands back to look)* What do you think?

BESS: They're lost among the ancestors. Try someplace else.

VI: *(looks around the room)* Oh, dear. Maybe I should put them by the front door. Then she'll see them first thing when she comes in.

BESS: Good idea. Did you fix an arrangement for her room?

VI: I put some purple violets on her dresser. Do you think she'll notice?

BESS: I'm sure she will.

VI: I put Dorothy on her pillow...

BESS: That's nice.

VI: Lucy Prescott dropped off a pie. I think it's apple.

BESS: I didn't hear her drive up.

VI: She said she was too busy to come in. Maybe later. I put it in the kitchen.

BESS: That's fine. Mama used to arrange violets in her little hobnail candy dish. Remember?

VI: Oh, dear! I put them in a juice glass. I better go change them. Is it still in the breakfront?

BESS: The last time I looked. *(VI crosses to hall, sets the vase on the half-moon table by the front door, then re-enters the parlor and stands just inside the archway staring straight ahead.)* That breakfront needs a good spring turnout. We'll do it this fall. What do you say, Vi? *(loudly)* Vi?

VI: Huh? Oh... do you want something, Bess?

BESS: Just the flowers.

VI: I put them on the table by the door.

BESS: I was talking about the violets.

VI: Oh, yes...in Mama's candy dish...I remember. The parlor looks real nice, Bess.

BESS: Thanks. I hope she won't be disappointed.

VI: Disappointed...why?

BESS: Everything about this old house is so timeworn. *(beat)* I wish we knew more about her... what she likes to do... to read... I could see if the library has her favorite authors.

VI: She can borrow my books if she wants to.

BESS: You be sure and tell her, all right?

VI: All right! Is Rose still asleep?

BESS: I was just going to check on her. Why don't you get a can of lemon concentrate out of the freezer. I'll make us some lemonade as soon as I'm finished in here.

VI: OK.

BESS: And, Vi...

VI: Yes?

BESS: Keep your hands off Lucy's pie. *(crosses to Rose's room)*

VI: I will. *(exits to kitchen)*

[CROSSFADE to morning room as BESS enters. ROSE, dressed in a faded bed jacket, is propped up on pillows, eyes closed, an open book lying on her chest. BESS picks up the book, marks the place, and lays it on the bedside table.]

ROSE: Don't lose my place.

BESS: I marked it for you, Rose.

ROSE: Is she here?

BESS: No, not yet. Did you have a good nap?

ROSE: Just dosed off when you woke me up. That man picking her up?

BESS: Yes, he is.

ROSE: In that disreputable old truck, I suppose. Won't make a very good first impression. How will they know each other?

BESS: I gave Mr. Cavanaugh her photo.

ROSE: That picture is three years old. She might have changed.

BESS: Not that much. Sit up a little so I can plump your pillows.

ROSE: I'm surprised Brother agreed to your arrangements. His only child being met at the airport by our tenant farmer. It's scandalous!

BESS: I wish you would quit disparaging our closest neighbor just because his family fell on hard times.

ROSE: Blood will tell. I don't like asking him for favors.

BESS: I didn't ask. He offered. Besides, I couldn't leave you here alone while I made that long drive into the city.

ROSE: Vi could have stayed with me.

BESS: *(aside)* Vi's not competent to look after herself.

ROSE: Speak up. I can't hear you.

BESS: Do you need to use the bathroom?

ROSE: No. Quit fussing over me, Bess. Don't you have more important things to do?

BESS: Nothing is more important than your health, Rose.

ROSE: This old carcass isn't worth the trouble you expend trying to keep it alive. Why do you bother?

BESS: Because I love you, even if you do try my patience at times.

ROSE: Brother doesn't care whether I live or die. He hasn't set foot in this house in twenty-five years. After all this time, it seems only natural he'd want to see his daughter safely here, and visit with his family for a spell. Family's more important than a bunch of Orientals. Doesn't he remember what they did to our young men back in '44?

BESS: Brother wasn't even born then, Rose.

ROSE: I know that. I was referring to his lapse of memory.

BESS: We've been friends with the Japanese for over fifty years.

ROSE: Maybe you've been friends with them. I certainly haven't.

BESS: You've never even met a person of Japanese descent.

ROSE: I most certainly did. The Prescott sisters hired one to do their yard work... back in '75, I think. He didn't last very long. Made just enough money to bring his family over, then moved to the city. Very inconsiderate of him. The sisters had to find another yardman to finish out the summer.

BESS: Well, Brother's trip to Japan is important... something to do with trade agreements. And Mattie gets to spend the summer with us while he's gone. Isn't that lovely?

ROSE: Time will tell. *(beat)* Poor, motherless girl. I forget, what did she die of?

BESS: Mattie's not dead, Rose. We were just talking about her.

ROSE: Don't treat me like I'm senile. I'm referring to her mother, of course.

BESS: She died of cancer. Don't you recall? You asked Brother why they didn't operate, and he said it wouldn't do any good. The cancer had already spread too far.

ROSE: I don't recall anything of the sort. You made up the whole thing just to confuse me.

BESS: If you believe that, then you are senile.

ROSE: I suppose she'll have one of those awful Yankee accents.

BESS: Maybe not. But if she does, I trust you'll remember your southern upbringing and not make an issue of it.

ROSE: Don't lecture me, Bess. You sound like Mama.

BESS: Do you want me to help you to the parlor?

ROSE: No, I'm not feeling so good today. Where's Vi?

BESS: Arranging violets in Mama's hobnail candy dish.

ROSE: She'll break it. Why doesn't she use a juice glass? Then, if it shatters, we haven't lost an heirloom.

BESS: You worry too much, Rose.

ROSE: Pot calling the kettle black. Besides, what else can I do, confined as I am? Worry and read these trashy novels. Disgusting stuff... page after page of explicit sex. How many ways can you describe it, for heaven's sake? Give me the Bronte sisters any day.

BESS: Next time I'm at the library I'll get you a copy of *Wuthering Heights*.

ROSE: Don't bother. I can recite it from memory.

BESS: Would you like some juice and cookies?

ROSE: No, I've lost my appetite. I wonder whom she looks like? Probably, her mother, more's the pity.

BESS: I was given to understand her mother was quite attractive.

ROSE: According to whom, may I ask?

BESS: Brother, I suppose. Anyway, you can decide for yourself when she gets here.

ROSE: She'd better make it soon. I'd like to meet Brother's only child before I'm dead and buried. Hand me those pills, Bess, the pink ones. I can feel my heart racing.

BESS: Lie back and take some deep breaths. You aren't due for more medication until after supper.

ROSE: Who says?

BESS: Your doctor.

ROSE: What does he know?

BESS: He's a cardiac specialist.

ROSE: Born yesterday. I'm just a case number in his files, a faceless old lady waiting to die...

BESS: ...writhing on the floor in pain and agony. I've heard it all before, Rose. Now, stop talking nonsense and go back to sleep. I'm sorry I disturbed you.

ROSE: I am not talking nonsense. You hope I'll go senile, so you can tuck me away in one of those nursing homes, out of sight, out of mind. You think I'll be too far-gone to know the difference. But I will. And I'll haunt you till your last dying breath...

BESS: Good night, Rose. *(CROSSFADE as she crosses to the parlor. VI enters with the violet arrangement.)*

VI: How does this look?

BESS: It's lovely, Vi. Run it up to her bedroom before she gets here.

VI: How's Rose? I heard her shouting at you again.

BESS: She's having one of her bad days.

VI: She'll feel better when Mattie get here, don't you think?

BESS: I hope so.

VI: I wonder what girls her age talk about.

BESS: Probably, the same things we did.

VI: Clothes and boys.

BESS: What?

VI: Clothes and boys. That's what we talked about, remember?

BESS: I remember you wearing my favorite skirt and spilling punch all down the front of it.

VI: The black felt with the fuzzy poodle. I remember. You didn't talk to me for a week. Then you swiped my new blouse... the pink nylon you could almost see through? But Mama said it was scandalous, and made you take it off.

BESS: The flowers, Vi...

VI: I'm going... *(crosses to hall, then turns back)* Don't forget the lemonade.

BESS: I won't.

[VI exits; BESS straightens a picture, flicks at another spot of dust and starts for the kitchen when she hears an old pickup truck pull up offstage.]

BESS: They're here, Vi. *(opens the door)*

CAV: *(offstage)* Afternoon, Miss Bess. Sure is a hot one, ain't it?

BESS: That it is, Mr. Cavanaugh. Is Mattie with you? Oh there she is. Come on in, Mattie. Mr. Cavanaugh will get your luggage.

[MATTIE enters. She's dressed in jeans and a tee shirt, a large canvas tote slung over her shoulder. Her attitude is defensive and insolent.]

BESS: We've so looked forward to meeting you, my dear, and delighted you're going to spend the summer with us. May I give you a hug?

MATTIE: I'd rather you didn't. Which one are you?

BESS: I'm your aunt Elizabeth, the middle one. But call me Bess. Everyone does. My goodness, you're so grown up... such a lovely young lady. You're what now... sixteen?

MATTIE: Yep, for two whole months.

BESS: For two whole months. Well, I never would have recognized you... all grown up.

MATTIE: You said that already.

BESS: So I did. Please, make yourself at home. *(CAVANAUGH enters carrying two large suitcases)* Just leave those by the door, Mr. Cavanaugh, and come join us. I bet you both could do with a glass of something cold.

CAV: That I could, Miss Bess. Can't remember when it's been this hot so early in the season. Sucks the juices right out of you, it does.

MATTIE: I'm dying for a Coke.

BESS: I'm sorry. We don't have any soda pop.

MATTIE: I'll go get some. Where's the nearest 7-Eleven?

BESS: There's only one, out by the highway, too far to walk I'm afraid. I'll go to the store as soon as you're settled in.

MATTIE: That's cool. Is this where you live.. I mean, is this the living room?

BESS: We call it the parlor. It's where we receive our guests.

MATTIE: Where do you watch TV, chill out?

BESS: Chill out?

MATTIE: You know... hang loose, take your shoes off, relax...

BESS: Well, we used to 'chill out,' as you call it, in the morning room until Rose became bedridden. Now, it's her room. As soon as she wakes from her nap I'll take you in to meet her.

MATTIE: Is that where you stash the TV?

BESS: There's an old Motorola cabinet in the dining room, but it holds only books now. After Papa died we hardly ever watched it, so we never got around to replacing the old set.

MATTIE: No TV? Get real!

BESS: Our lifestyle may not be what you're used to, but I think you'll find lots to do here.

MATTIE: Yeah... like what?

BESS: Well, the young people like to go swimming... we have a nice municipal pool. And the Knights of Columbus have dances in their recreation hall on Friday nights. On the fourth of July there will be a band and picnic on the courthouse lawn...

MATTIE: You're putting me on!

BESS: Not at all.

MATTIE: This isn't happening... it's a time warp... when I wake up it'll all be just be a bad dream... *[VI bursts into the room and envelops MATTIE in a hug.]*

VI: Oh, Mattie, I'm so glad you're here. How was your trip? How's Brother doing? I put flowers in your room, and Dorothy on your bed...

MATTIE: *(pushes VI away with a look of aversion)* Whoa!

VI: Oh, dear! Bess says I always talk too much when I get excited.

MATTIE: Let me guess... you must be Vi.

VI: That's right. I'm your Aunt Viola. Just look at you... all grown up. Isn't she all grown up, Bess?

MATTIE: Let's not go through that again.

VI: Did I say something wrong?

BESS: No, dear. Mattie just thinks we're a little old fashioned, that's all.

VI: You don't like this dress?

BESS: Your dress is lovely. Tell you what. You keep Mattie and Mr. Cavanaugh company while I make some lemonade to go with my old-fashioned sugar cookies. How does that set with you, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: Sets just fine, Miss Bess.

BESS: Mattie?

MATTIE: Whatever.

BESS: I'll be right back. (*exits*)

VI: Mattie...that's short for Matilda, isn't it? That was Mama's name, too.

MATTIE: I know. I hate it.

VI: You hate your name? Why? I think it's a beautiful name.

MATTIE: Matilda Rose Lacey. Sounds like a character from *Little Women*.

VI: Oh, that's my favorite book. I'll give you my copy if you want to read it.

MATTIE: I already did. Ten years ago.

VI: Oh. Do you like dolls?

MATTIE: Excuse me?

VI: Dolls...I have lots of them. Dorothy, my Wizard of Oz doll, is my most favorite. Would you like to meet her?

MATTIE: Not really.

VI: That's okay. You can meet her later. I put her on your bed. Do you talk about clothes and boys and things like that?

MATTIE: Things like what?

VI: You know, things you like to do.

MATTIE: What I'd like to do... is take a bath. I feel positively grimy. You do have running water, don't you? I don't have to go outside and pump it by hand or anything?

VI: Don't be silly. The bathroom is upstairs right next to your bedroom. I put out the new towels for you.

MATTIE: Oh, goodie!

CAV: Want me to take your cases up, Miss Mattie?

MATTIE: Stay put, Mr. Cavanaugh. I have everything I need right here. *(picks up her tote)* It was Dad's idea to bring all that stuff. *(gestures to the luggage in the hall)* Like I plan to stick around that long. I knew this was a mistake.

VI: I always feel grimy after a trip, too.

MATTIE: Really? The first thousand miles was a breeze... just a couple of hours by jet. What killed me was the last fifty in a pickup without shocks or air conditioning. So... if you don't mind, I'll check out the plumbing. Upstairs, right?

VI: There's some bath salts on the washstand next to the tub. Use as much as you want.

MATTIE: Sure, sure. *(exits)*

VI: I don't think she likes us.

CAV: Give her time, Miss Vi. I don't think she's ever been away from home before.

VI: How do you know that?

CAV: Just a feeling I got, listening to her talk about how she was gonna miss her friends... how her Daddy made her come... why didn't I get a new truck...

VI: Brother *made* her come? Oh, dear! No wonder she's mad. *(BESS enters with a tray of lemonade and cookies)*

BESS: Where's Mattie?

VI: Upstairs, taking a bath.

BESS: Let's hope it improves her disposition. She certainly made it clear that she didn't want any of my lemonade and cookies. So, help yourself, Mr. Cavanaugh. It's the least we can do after you put yourself out for us.

CAV: No trouble at all, Miss Bess. Glad to help out.

BESS: Mattie didn't say anything about your flowers, did she, Vi? I'm sorry. You wanted so much to please her.

VI: It doesn't matter.

BESS: Yes, it does. Good manners are not old fashioned. I apologize for my niece's rude behavior, Mr. Cavanaugh. I hope the drive wasn't too unpleasant.

CAV: No apology necessary, Miss Bess. Mattie will come around after a bit. Just needs to settle in.

BESS: Mattie lost her mother three years ago. She probably feels like she's been set adrift... without the guidance she needs to cope with the changes in her life.

CAV: Sorry to hear that. My grandson's coming' down from college next week. You remember Andy, don't you? Spent summers here when he was a young scrapper...

BESS: In college now, is he? My, how time flies.

CAV: Well, I thought... that is, if you ladies don't object... I'd ask him to squire Mattie around...'til she's had time to make some friends of her own, that is.

VI: Oh, I bet Mattie will like that.

BESS: Do you think Andy will be agreeable? We don't want to impose.

CAV: He won't mind. He's a good kid.

BESS: Well then.... help yourself to more cookies, Mr. Cavanaugh. May I refill your glass?

CAV: One more, then I gotta go. (*chuckles*) Talk about a rock and a hard place. If Mattie and Miss Rose ever lock horns, you'll need me to scrape up the pieces.

BESS: Let's hope it never comes to that. Rose's heart is failing, and we try not to cause her any undue stress. However... some days she tries my patience so...,

CAV: It ain't hard to see who Mattie takes after... dogged as a mule, gotta have her own way... like two peas in the same pod.

VI: *(giggles)* Oh, Mr. Cavanaugh, you say the funniest things.

BESS: *(scolding)* Wipe your mouth, Vi. You're dropping crumbs all down the front of your dress.

VI: Sorry, Bess.

ROSE: *(from her bedroom)* Bess? Has she come yet? Don't leave me in the dark. I hear you talking to someone. Answer me, Bess! I know you're out there...

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 2

[Two hours later. MATTIE enters the parlor from the steps wearing cutoffs and tee shirt, her hair spiked and multicolored. ROSE is asleep in the morning room.]

MATTIE: Where did everybody go? *(crosses back to hall and shouts)* Anybody home? *(opens front door, looks out, then quickly shuts it)* Geez, feels like a sauna out there.

ROSE: *(rousing from sleep)* Somebody call? Is that you, Bess? Vi? Who's out there? Hello...

MATTIE: *(tentatively crossing L)* Hello...

ROSE: Hello...

MATTIE: Hello...

ROSE: Don't stand there hooting. Come in here. *(CROSSFADE as MATTIE enters Rose's room cautiously)* You must be Mattie.

MATTIE: Yep, that's me.

ROSE: It is I.

MATTIE: Excuse me?

ROSE: Your grammar is atrocious.

MATTIE: (*shrugs*) So? You a teacher or somethin'?

ROSE: I used to be. What in God's name did you do to your hair?

MATTIE: Look, lady, what I do to my hair is none of your business. Who the hell are you, anyway?

ROSE: Your aunt Rose--that's who the hell I am.

MATTIE: Figures. Where did your crazy sisters go?

ROSE: Mind your manners, young lady. We may be the elder generation, but we're not demented.

MATTIE: Could've fooled me.

ROSE: And we don't swear in this house, either.

MATTIE: You started it.

ROSE: I was calling upon my Maker to provide a rational explanation for your bizarre appearance.

MATTIE: What's so bizarre about my appearance? All my friends dress like this.

ROSE: More's the pity. I can abide the shorts and tee shirt, but not the hair.

MATTIE: (*defensively*) What's wrong with my hair?

ROSE: It does have a certain shock value, if that's what you're after. How do you get it to stick up like that?

MATTIE: Hair gel.

ROSE: And the color?

MATTIE: Colored hair spray. Wanna try some?

ROSE: Don't be absurd. Will it wash out?

MATTIE: Yeah, it washes out.

ROSE: Then do it.

MATTIE: Right now?

ROSE: No, right now I want you to stay and talk to me. I've been waiting sixteen years to meet you. Sit down.

MATTIE: I don't plan to stay that long.

ROSE: I said, sit down! (*MATTIE sits in the chair beside the bed*) You were named after me, you know.

MATTIE: Yeah... you and my Lacey grandmother. It's a real bummer.

ROSE: I'll ignore that retort since it's meaning eludes me. Tell me about yourself.

MATTIE: You can read the book. What's the matter with you, anyway?

ROSE: Old age. It comes to all of us, if we're lucky.

MATTIE: What's luck got to do with it?

ROSE: I was thinking of your mother, God rest her soul.

MATTIE: I don't want to talk about her.

ROSE: Why not?

MATTIE: Talking won't bring her back.

ROSE: Not in the flesh, but it helps keep her spirit alive.

MATTIE: (*forcefully*) I said I don't want to talk about her.

ROSE: Then talk to me about Matilda Rose.

MATTIE: You and Aunt Vi! What do you want... my life history in two sentences of polite conversation?

ROSE: That would be preferable to the rude disrespect you've exhibited so far.

What grade are you in?

MATTIE: I'll be a junior this fall.

ROSE: What are your favorite subjects?

MATTIE: Lunch and recess.

ROSE: You sound like a contentious six-year-old. Cut the flippancy and act your age.

MATTIE: You're the one with the dumb questions. I didn't ask to come here.

ROSE: No, you were invited, and at the very least we expect a guest in our home to show some respect.

MATTIE: Sure, sure. The last thing my Dad said to me was, "Mind your manners, Mattie. I don't want to hear from the old ladies that you've been disrespectful."

ROSE: Sage advice. (*MATTIE starts for the door*) Where are you going?

MATTIE: Out!

ROSE: You haven't been excused.

MATTIE: Tough shit. You ain't my teacher.

ROSE: We don't voice crudities in this house, either, young lady.

MATTIE: What *can* you do around here?

ROSE: If you wish to be treated as an adult, you must act like one. Street language demeans you.

MATTIE: Look, I didn't come in here for a lecture. Can I go now?

ROSE: I'm certain that you're able, but I don't wish it. (*Defiantly, MATTIE sits back down in the chair—there is a long pause.*) May we call a temporary truce?

MATTIE: It's your house.

ROSE: And I make the rules.

MATTIE: If you say so.

ROSE: I say so. Since you're so reluctant to talk about yourself, why don't you ask me something?

MATTIE: Like what?

ROSE: Aren't you at all curious about your father's family? (*MATTIE shrugs*) Wouldn't you like to know more about us?

MATTIE: (*disdainfully*) No. (*relenting a little*) Well, maybe.

ROSE: Now's your chance.

MATTIE: (*thinks a moment*) Why don't you guys have a TV?

ROSE: I don't know. Is it that important to you?

MATTIE: No, it just seems weird, that's all.

ROSE: Were you one of those children raised by Sesame Street?

MATTIE: Not really.

ROSE: Do you watch a lot of TV at home?

MATTIE: Didn't use to.

ROSE: And now?

MATTIE: Dad does.

ROSE: What do you do?

MATTIE: Things.

ROSE: What sort of things?

MATTIE: Just things. Look, I don't want to talk about it.

ROSE: All right. (*MATTIE squirms uncomfortably as ROSE looks at her in silence*)

Do you like your room?

MATTIE: It's OK. Who put the flowers up there?

ROSE: Vi. She wanted to do something for you... to make you feel welcome.

MATTIE: That was nice. What's wrong with her, anyway?

ROSE: She's a little slow at times...

MATTIE: She's not crazy, is she?

ROSE: Sometimes I think she's the sanest person in this household.

MATTIE: What happened to her?

ROSE: Meningitis when she was six months old. She nearly died.

MATTIE: Sorry. I didn't know.

ROSE: What has your Dad told you about us?

MATTIE: Just that you were a little old fashioned. I can't believe you don't have a TV.

ROSE: We may not have the latest technology at our fingertips, but we're hardly ignorant. We just lead a different kind of life down here.

MATTIE: Like what?

ROSE: Well, for one thing, we make time to talk to each other.

MATTIE: So?

ROSE: And we practice what your Dad calls old-fashioned hospitality.

MATTIE: So?

ROSE: So... you might learn something from us.

MATTIE: Look, lady, the only reason I'm here is because my Dad needed a babysitter while he's in Japan. I didn't come because I wanted to. And I don't need any lessons from you.

ROSE: Perhaps you're right. It's not my place to tell you how to dress or act. But, it seems to me that our time together will be infinitely more pleasant if we can find some common ground for civil discourse.

MATTIE: What? Talk English.

ROSE: (*chuckles*) Why don't you start by calling me Aunt Rose.

MATTIE: All right. *May* I leave now? *Aunt Rose*?

ROSE: Not just yet. We've barely broken the ice. How do you like our weather?

MATTIE: Is it always this hot?

ROSE: Wait a month. It gets even hotter, but it's only an hour's drive to the ocean. Have you ever been there?

MATTIE: No, but I've been swimming in Lake Michigan.

ROSE: People say there's no comparison. South Carolina has the nicest beaches anywhere on the east coast.

MATTIE: If you say so.

ROSE: That's where you'll find all the young people your age.

MATTIE: How am I supposed to meet them?

ROSE: Mr. Cavanaugh's grandson will be coming down from college soon, and he'll show you around.

MATTEI: What if he doesn't want to?

ROSE: I don't see any reason why he wouldn't. You're an attractive young lady, or you would be if you'd do something with your hair, and knock that chip off your shoulder.

MATTIE: Boy, when you dump on somebody, you dump.

ROSE: Just giving tit for tat, dear. But don't mind me. As you've noted in your uniquely expressive vocabulary, we're a little behind the times.

MATTIE: Yeah, about a hundred years. Bet you don't have a microwave either.

ROSE: No, I'm afraid we don't. Bess refuses to get one. Now where did I put with my pocket book? Oh, never mind. Pull those tulips out of the pot.

MATTIE: Why?

ROSE: Humor me, will you?

MATTIE: Are they real?

ROSE: Of course not. Can't you tell the difference?

MATTIE: Up close, I can. *(yanks them out of the pot)* There's a whole wad of bills stashed in here. Don't you believe in banks? What if the house burnt down? *(begins counting them)*

ROSE: The least of my worries would be a little cash.

MATTIE: A little! There's over \$800 here. Where did it come from?

ROSE: It's my egg money.

MATTIE: Your what?

ROSE: Just an expression. Will it be enough?

MATTIE: Enough for what?

ROSE: To buy a TV and one of those things you put movies in.

MATTIE: A VCR or DVD?

ROSE: Whatever appeals to you. Is that enough money to cover it?

MATTIE: With change left over. Are you serious?

ROSE: Of course. You do like movies, don't you?

MATTIE: Yeah.

ROSE: So do I. What are your favorites?

MATTIE: Action thrillers.

ROSE: Gracious me, we have something in common after all. Do you have a driver's license?

MATTIE: Got it this spring.

ROSE: Bess went to the store to get you some soda pop. When she gets back, borrow the car and go shopping. There's a Blockbuster right next door to the electronics place.

MATTIE: How do I find it?

ROSE: The road in front of this house goes straight through town. It's about three miles on your left. You can't miss it.

MATTIE: OK. Can I ask you something personal?

ROSE: You *may* ask me anything you like.

MATTIE: Trying to talk to you sucks.

ROSE: What's your question?

MATTIE: I forgot... oh, yeah... you ever been married?

ROSE: No, why do you ask?

MATTIE: Just curious. Aunt Bess?

ROSE: Her husband passed away a few years ago. No children, unfortunately. You're our sole legacy, my dear.

MATTIE: What about Vi?

ROSE: Briefly. She was just a child, so naturally Papa had it annulled.

MATTIE: Naturally.

ROSE: Anything else I can help you with, now that you've let your defensives slip a little?

MATTIE: How about I buy a microwave, too. It's great for heating up pizza.

ROSE: Don't believe I've ever had one.

MATTIE: No pizza? Wow! Totally unbelievable!

ROSE: You've said that already. Now, I'm getting a little tired. Would you please get Vi for me?

MATTIE: What do you need?

ROSE: What I need only Vi can provide.

MATTIE: OK, if you say so.

ROSE: I say so. *(beat)* Well, if you promise not to tattle, I'll let you in on a secret.

MATTIE: Sure. What's the big secret?

ROSE: That, I can't tell you. This old house harbors many secrets, as you'll soon discover.

MATTIE: Then, why bring it up?

ROSE: Because this is just a small one, of no consequence, really. *(conspiratorially)* Vi keeps a bottle of Southern Comfort hidden in her hatbox, and sometimes we have a little tot before supper. Bess would have a hissy-fit if she found out. Isn't that scandalous?

MATTIE: Why aunt Rose.....absofuckinlutely!

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 3

[Two weeks later. A TV and VCR have been added to the parlor. At rise VI and ROSE are watching the tape, Little Women.]

VI: It's so sad when Beth dies... *(starts to cry)*

ROSE: *(handing her a tissue)* It's just a story, Vi.

[BESS enters from the steps, pauses and watches the scene while she puts on her earrings.]

VI: This is the best part. Poor Marmee and Jo... *(ROSE picks up the remote and stops the tape)* Why did you do that? I want to see the end.

ROSE: Jo writes the book, marries her poor professor, and everyone lives happily ever after. *(hands VI another tape)* Here, put this one in.

VI: What is it?

ROSE: What difference does it make. At least we haven't seen it a hundred times.

BESS: Can I get either of you something before I go?

ROSE: We're doing just fine, Bess. Give my love to ladies of the Altar Guild. And tell Emily Prescott if she blankets my casket with Easter Lilies, I'll rise up and put a curse on her. *(Vi giggles)*

BESS: I'll do no such thing. You can tell her yourself.

ROSE: The Prescott sisters are not on my tour tomorrow.

BESS: I wish you'd change your mind...

ROSE: Everything's been arranged. I'm going to surprise a few old friends who've had the audacity to prematurely cross me off their visiting list.

BESS: Then, at least let me do the driving.

ROSE: After Mattie struggled so hard to master the stick shift on that old Buick? She'd never forgive us.

BESS: What if you get dizzy, or black out? Mattie can't tend to you and drive at the same time.

ROSE: Andy is going with us.

BESS: I see. But I think you're foolish to put yourself at risk. Mattie has got to learn to consider the needs of others before disrupting everyone's routine with her impulsive ideas.

ROSE: It was my idea, not Mattie's. Give the child a break, Bess. Not a day goes by that you don't read her the riot act for some infringement on your impossible list of rules.

BESS: We have an established routine that's necessary for your health and Vi's well being...

ROSE: Well, I've never felt better, and Vi's never been happier. Now, go to your meeting and let us watch... *(picks up tape) Die Hard II.*

BESS: You have the number if you need to reach me.

ROSE: Nothing is going to happen.

VI: Get some more cokes, Bess. I drank the last one.

BESS: I bought two cartons less than a week ago... *(knock at the door)*
Rose, are you expecting someone? *(crosses to open it)*

ROSE: Just the Grim Reaper, but I told him not to come today.

CAV: Afternoon, Miss Bess.

VI: *(to Rose)* It's Mr. Cavanaugh. Can he watch the movie with us, Rose?

ROSE: Not now, Vi...

BESS: I was on my way out, Mr. Cavanaugh. What can I do for you?

CAV: I put those new hinges on the gate, like you wanted. Works just fine now, 'cept it needs a new latch. Anything else you want fixed, while I got my tools handy an' all?

BESS: No, I don't think so. May I pay you later? I'm in a bit of a rush...

ROSE: The window sash in my room sticks. When Mattie tried to open it for me yesterday, one of the panes cracked.

CAV: *(striding into the parlor)* The wood's swollen with the dampness. I'll take a look at it, and put in a new glass...

BESS: Now is not a good time, Mr. Cavanaugh. We'll talk about it tomorrow.

ROSE: What's wrong with now, Bess? Sooner begun, sooner done.

BESS: Rose, I don't have time to wait around. I'm running late as it is.

ROSE: Then go. Mr. Cavanaugh will fix the cracked pane, and Vi will see him out when he's finished.

BESS: I don't feel right, leaving you and Vi alone...

ROSE: Oh, for heaven's sake! Mr. Cavanaugh is hardly the type to ravish two old ladies who have been his friend and neighbor for lo, these many years. He's a perfect gentleman, aren't you, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: Yes, ma'am.

ROSE: Run along to your meeting, Bess.

BESS: Well... don't take all day, Mr. Cavanaugh.

CAV: No, ma'am, I won't.

VI: Don't forget the cokes, Bess.

BESS: I won't. *(exits)*

CAV: You're looking mighty chipper today, Miss Rose. But something's sure ailing Miss Bess. She's antsy as a dog with a flea it can't scratch.

ROSE: Miss Bess is suffering from insurrection anxiety.

CAV: *(puzzled)* Yes ma'am, if you say so. How do you ladies like your new VCR?

ROSE: We like it just fine, thank you.

VI: Mattie got me *Little Women*. It's so sad when Beth dies. I cry buckets every time I watch it.

CAV: I'm sorry, Miss Vi. Don't seem right that a pretty lady like you...

ROSE: Mr. Cavanaugh, don't you have something to do?

CAV: Sure thing, Miss Rose.

VI: *(cooly)* When you're finished, come watch the movie with us. Rose picked it out. It's kind of scary...

CAV: I'd like that, Miss Vi.

ROSE: Mr. Cavanaugh? *(points to her bedroom)*

CAV: Yes, ma'am. *(exits as VI stares after him)*

ROSE: Vi?

VI: *(looks at the tape she's holding)* I think we saw this one before.

ROSE: That was *Die Hard I*.

VI: I hope this one's not so bloody.

ROSE: Close your eyes when it gets to the bloody part.

VI: Then I'll miss the whole movie.

MATTIE: *(enters furtively via front door)* Hi guys! Is aunt Bess around?

ROSE: She just left for her Altar Guild meeting.

VI: Hi, Mattie.

MATTIE: How ya doing, Vi. Like your dress. Is it new?

VI: It's just an old one...

ROSE: Put the movie in, Vi.

MATTIE: Old or not, it's a pretty dress, Vi.

VI: Thank you.

MATTIE: The coast is clear, Andy. *(ANDY enters with a large cardboard box)*

VI: Hi, Andy.

ANDY: Afternoon, ladies.

ROSE: You've been shopping, I see.

ANDY: Yes ma'am.

VI: What's in the box?

MATTIE: It's a surprise for aunt Bess.

ROSE: That come from my nest egg?

MATTIE: Nope. Used my own money.

ROSE: Good. Come watch the movie with us. It's one of you favorites.

MATTIE: In a minute. *(exits to kitchen with ANDY in tow)*

VI: I love surprises. Wonder what they got Bess?

ROSE: I have no idea.

VI: Let's go peek...

ROSE: You do, and I'll erase Little Women.

VI: Don't you dare...

ROSE: (*picks up the remote*) Watch me.

VI: (*ejects the tape*) You have to get it first.

ROSE: Relax, Vi. I wouldn't think of killing off those insipid women. Aren't you a little over-dressed for a hot afternoon? If I didn't know better, I'd say you were planning to go somewhere.

VI: (*timidly*) Maybe I am.

ROSE: Is it a secret?

VI: Not exactly...

ROSE: But you haven't told Bess yet, have you?

VI: I'm afraid she'll say, no.

ROSE: Why would she do that?

VI: (*whispers*) Because I have a date with Mr. Cavanaugh.

ROSE: You what....?

VI: Don't get mad. We're just going to play bingo in the church basement.

ROSE: I'm not mad at you, Vi. Just surprised. I hope you win lots of money.

VI: Me, too.

ROSE: When were you planning to tell Bess?

VI: After supper.

ROSE: And when is Mr. Cavanaugh coming to pick you up?

VI: After supper.

ROSE: I can hardly wait until after supper. When did you and Mr. Cavanaugh...?

VI: Yesterday. I was weeding the garden, and Mr. Cavanaugh was fixing that fence post next to barn, and we got to talking... you know... about the weather...how nice the garden looked...

ROSE: ...and somewhere between the summer squash and the pigweed, he asked you on a date.

VI: It would have been rude to say no, don't you think?

ROSE: Naturally.

VI: Then you don't mind?

ROSE: Of course not. Why should I?

VI: You know... Brother... and Belle... [*ANDY and MATTIE appear in the doorway*]

ROSE: That was a long time ago. I'm surprised that you remember.

MATTIE: Remember what, aunt Rose?

ROSE: Nothing. Vi just told me she's stepping out this evening with your grandfather, Andy. I don't suppose you two know anything about it. (*they look at each other & shrug*) That's what I thought. Sit down, young man. I'm getting a crick in my neck. When did you get to be so tall?

ANDY: (*sitting*) Overnight, if you believe my mama.

ROSE: Where do you call home, now?

ANDY: Pawleys Island.

ROSE: The crown jewel of Carolina low country. Lovely spot if you survive the hurricanes. Your people are doing okay, then?

ANDY: Yes, ma'am. They're doing just fine.

ROSE: And where are you going to school?

MATTIE: I warned you, Andy...

ROSE: Hush, Mattie. If I'm going to put my life into this boy's hands tomorrow, I'm entitled to know...

MATTIE: Believe me, Aunt Rose, he's totally trustworthy. Aren't you, Andy?

ANDY: Yes, ma'am.

MATTIE: Will you drop that "ma'am" stuff? It makes me feel like an old lady.

ROSE: It's a sign of respect, Mattie, something you could do with a little more of.

MATTIE: *(defensively)* Yeah, yeah..

ROSE: Yeah, what?

MATTIE: Yes, ma'am!

ROSE: That's better. When do we get to see the surprise?

MATTIE: When aunt Bess gets home.

ROSE: Your aunt Bess thinks you've already gone too far. I didn't tell her that I underwrote the TV and VCR.

ANDY: Then, I guess you're not interested in seeing what Mattie bought for you and Miss Vi. Too bad. She'll just have to return them...

VI: I want to see my present. May I?

MATTIE: *(pulls two tissue-wrapped gifts from her tote; hands one to VI and one to ROSE)* One for you, and one for you.

ROSE: How thoughtful, but you shouldn't have...

VI: Look, Rose. It's a Jo March doll. Isn't she beautiful? Oh, thank you, Mattie. *(hugs her)* Thank you, thank you, thank you!

ANDY: Aren't you going to look at yours, Miss Rose?

ROSE: If it's poor Beth... *(MATTIE takes the package from her and removes the tissue paper. It's a delicately painted porcelain rose.)* Oh, my! It's absolutely beautiful. I don't know what to say...

MATTIE: I'm glad you like it.

ROSE: Very much. Speaking of presents, I found something in my jewelry box I want you to have. *(pulls a locket from her pocket and gives it to Mattie)*

MATTIE: What's this?

ROSE: What does it look like?

VI: It's a locket, Mattie.

MATTIE: I can see that. But why are you giving it to me, aunt Rose?

ROSE: It's simpler than changing my will.

VI: I've got one, too, Mattie. Mine's got a picture of Mama and me in it. What does yours have?

MATTIE: I don't know. Let's see. *(opens the locket)*

VI: Oh, that's Rose, a long time ago.

MATTIE: Who's the baby? *(VI grabs the locket and hides it behind her back)*

VI: Don't look, Mattie. Rose, you did a bad thing. We promised Mama and Papa.

ROSE: It's all right, Vi. Give Mattie the locket.

VI: *(shaking her head violently)* No, no, no, no...

MATTIE: What's wrong?

VI: It's a secret. Mama and Papa said never tell... we promised.

ROSE: Vi...

VI: *(adamantly)* No!

MATTIE: Let her keep it, aunt Rose. I'm not real big on wearing things like that, anyway.

VI: See, Mattie doesn't want it.

ROSE: *(holds out her hand)* Give it to me, Vi. *(VI reluctantly gives it to ROSE who then hands it to MATTIE.)*

ROSE: You don't have to wear it, but indulge an old lady's whim, will you? It's important to me that you have it.

VI: Bess is gonna be mad at you, Rose.

ROSE: No, she's not, because you're not going to tell her.

VI: Another secret? (*BESS enters*)

ROSE: Something like that. (*to BESS*) Back so soon?

BESS: I forgot Lucy Prescott's pie plate. Hello, Andy. You and Mattie finished your shopping?

ANDY: Yes, ma'am.

BESS: Is your grandfather still here?

ANDY: (*looks confused*) I don't know...

ROSE: He fixing the broken pane in my bedroom.

BESS: Then I expect he could use your help, Andy

ANDY: Yes, ma'am. I'll go see. Anyway, he needs to get home early so he can spruce up for his big date tonight.

BESS: I didn't know he was seeing anyone.

ANDY: He and Miss Vi...

ROSE: Go check on your grandfather, Andy. Now!

ANDY: Yes, ma'am. (*crosses to bedroom door*)

BESS: Just a minute, young man. What were you saying about Vi?

ANDY: Nothing. (*exits to bedroom*)

BESS: Vi, is there something you want to tell me?

ROSE: We can talk later, Bess. Lucy's waiting for her pie plate. (*picks up the remote*)

BESS: Why do I free something catastrophic is about to happen?

ROSE: Hush, Bess. We're going to watch a movie.

BESS: I'll be right back. *(exits to kitchen)*

VI: Oh, dear. I knew there'd be trouble...

MATTIE: What trouble, aunt Vi?

ROSE: I'll explain later. *(loud crash is heard offstage; ANDY enters from the bedroom, CAV following.)*

ANDY: What was that?

ROSE: I think somebody's precious pie plate just hit the floor. *(BESS enters)*

BESS: *(furious)* Mattie, is this some kind of a joke?

MATTIE: What?

BESS: If you're responsible for bringing that thing into this house, then you can remove it. Right now! Do you hear me? Immediately!

MATTIE: But, why...?

BESS: You're so determined to have your own way, you never stop to consider anybody else. Well, this time you've gone too far...

ROSE: That's unkind, Bess...

BESS: Rose, you, of all people, should be the most concerned. That machine could kill you.

MATTIE: Get real! A microwave doesn't kill people.

BESS: It can if you're wearing a pacemaker.

MATTIE: Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't know...

ROSE: Unless you're standing right next to one of those things, it doesn't pose any danger.

CAV: No worse 'n a TV, I read someplace.

BESS: Mr. Cavanaugh, when I want your opinion, I'll ask for it. If you're through fixing Rose's window, I'll thank you and your grandson to be on your way.

CAV: I got the cracked pane out, Miss Rose, but I still need to put in the new glass, else all the bugs'll come in. That screen's got holes the size of walnuts in it.

BESS: Then what are you standing there for?

CAV: Yes, ma'am. I got the glass in m' truck...I'll go get it. Better come with me, Andy. Might need some help... (*exits; ANDY follows.*)

ROSE: Don't want my bedroom full of bugs, do we, Bess?

BESS: Don't change the subject, Rose.

ROSE: Before you dismiss Mattie's gift out-of-hand, why don't you try it out. Then, if you don't like it, she can return it to the store. But don't use me as your excuse. When was the last time I was in your kitchen?

BESS: That's beside the point. I told Mattie I did not want one of those things, and she blatantly ignored my wishes.

ROSE: That was not her intent, Bess. She was trying to do something nice for you...

VI: Look Bess, Mattie bought me a Jo March doll.

BESS: (*heatedly*) This is not about dolls, Vi. It goes beyond bread and butter gifts. It's about disrupting our way of life, risking Rose's health...

ROSE: Bess, I will decide what is a health risk and what is not when it's my person involved. Quit talking about me as if I had senile dementia.

VI: (*starting to cry*) Please, don't fight...

BESS: Don't start bawling, Vi. It's very unattractive. Now, Mattie, it's time we came an understanding. I will not permit a guest in our home to dictate how we live. If you persist in thinking you can do just as you please, with no thought to how it may affect the rest of us, other arrangements will have to be made...

MATTIE: That's fine with me. Coming here wasn't my idea...

BESS: You've made that quite clear from day one. Your father...

MATTIE: What about my father?

BESS: Your father has not set foot in this house in twenty-five years.

MATTIE: So?

BESS: So, when he asked us to look after his daughter while he was out of the country, we looked forward to your visit, hoped that we might re-establish family ties... The last thing we expected was that our hospitality would be met with insolence and hostility.

MATTIE: Hostility? I just bought you all some presents, for God's sake...

ROSE: Mattie doesn't deserve that invective, Bess...

MATTIE: What have I done that's so awful?

ROSE: You haven't done a thing, Mattie, except become the unwitting catalyst for resurrecting an ancient feud.

MATTIE: I don't understand...

ROSE: Nor will you until we relinquish some old family secrets that have clouded our reasoning far too long.

VI: Rose, we promised Mama and Papa...

ROSE: Vi, this has nothing to do with our promise to Mama and Papa. They passed on long before Brother left us.

BESS: Rose, I'd think twice before making a deathbed confession. The rest of us will still have to live with your mistakes.

ROSE: Don't bury me yet. I'll tell you when it's time for the last rites. Why are you standing there aggravating my heart condition? Lucy Prescott is waiting for what's left of her precious pie plate.

BESS: I'm not moving from this spot until Mattie takes that thing out of my kitchen.

MATTIE: What do you want me to do with it?

BESS: Put it in the barn, until you can return it.

MATTIE: So much for southern hospitality... what a crock! (*crosses to hall*)

BESS: (*grabs MATTIE'S arm*) And whatever you and Vi have cooked up behind my back, just put it on hold until we've had a chance to discuss it.

MATTIE: What's to discuss? You got a problem with Vi going out with Mr. Cavanaugh? It's not like they haven't been properly introduced.

BESS: They're what? I don't believe you. Vi, is this true?

VI: (*sheepishly*) Yes...

BESS: (*shouting out front door*) Andrew! Come in here!

MATTIE: Andy hasn't done anything.

BESS: Rose, I can't believe you sat by and let this happen.

ROSE: If you're referring to that unfortunate situation with Brother and Belle...

BESS: What else would I be talking about?

VI: Don't fight, don't fight...

ROSE: Hush, Vi...

ANDY: (*entering*) Yes, ma'am?

BESS: Andy, I want the truth. What, exactly, have you and my niece been plotting behind my back?

ANDY: (*looks at MATTIE, she shrugs, he turns back to BESS*) Plotting? Why, ma'am, I don't have a devious bone in my body. Now, if you're missing the family silver plate...

BESS: Cut the smart talk, young man. I will not tolerate...

MATTIE: You don't tolerate anything that isn't on your list of do's and don'ts. Is that why my Dad left? Did he get fed up with you bossing him around? Well, did he?

BESS: Go ahead and tell her, Rose. Tell her why her father refuses to come here. Tell her what you really think about our neighbors, the Cavanaugh's. Tell her what a hypocrite you are. (*CAVANAUGH enters and pauses, sensing the tension in the room*) Mr. Cavanaugh already knows the story, Rose. Why don't you enlighten Andy and Mattie.

ROSE: I'm tired. I need to go lie down now...

BESS: Not until you've told Mattie why her father stormed out of here twenty-five years ago, never to return.

MATTIE: Look, you guys, I'm sorry I brought it up. It's none of my business...

ROSE: No, you're wrong, Mattie. You should know why your father has been estranged from his family all these years. I don't think it's going to change anything, except, perhaps, to reinforce your poor opinion of us, but it will help you understand your father's point of view. Bess would like you to believe that it's solely my fault, and I will take full responsibility, but in reality we're all to blame...the Lacey's, the town, the culture in which we grew up, everything we were taught to believe... It was all of these things that triggered the violent argument I had with your father... over this girl he was seeing.

BESS: Not just any girl, Rose. Tell them who it was.

ANDY: You don't have to tell us. Like Mattie said, it's none of our business...

CAV: Miss Rose is talking about my sister, Andy, your aunt Belle.

ROSE: Yes, your baby sister, Mr. Cavanaugh. Like Brother, she was a long time coming, not born until her parents were in their middle years. We all doted on her, pretty as a Gerber poster child with Shirley Temple curls. She and Brother were the same age, and living next door to each other it was natural they grew up together. Like kissing cousins, we used to say. As they grew older their fondness for one another developed into... well, let us say, something more serious. We should have anticipated it, seen it coming, and done something to nip it in the bud...

MATTIE: Why? It sounds like one of those storybook romances. Boy falls in love with girl next door.

ROSE: This was not fiction, Mattie, and it did not have a happy ending. You see, our family and the landed gentry of this county looked down on the Cavanaugh's. Tenant farmers, no better than poor white trash, we called them. Doting on their babies was one thing. An alliance was totally unacceptable. I forbade Brother ever to see her again. He retaliated by making our life a living hell, so we were more than a little relieved, when he finally left home. It never occurred to us that his departure was irrevocable.

MATTIE: I can't believe my Dad would hold a grudge all these years over some girl... unless... she didn't do something stupid, did she...like jump off a bridge?

CAV: No, missy, nothing like that. Belle's been happily married for over twenty years, two children all grown, a grandbaby on the way.

MATTIE: Then what's the big deal? Why is Dad still mad at you?

ROSE: You underestimate a southerner's tenacity, Mattie. We have friends who still blame the Yankee invasion for every misdeed or problem that plagues the south today. I'm not surprised that Brother still holds us accountable.

MATTIE: Wow! You people really blow my mind.

CAV: I'll finish fixing your window tomorrow, Miss Rose. Andy 'n I better go now.

BESS: Not until he and Mattie do some explaining...

CAV: 'Scuse me, ma'am... they done nothing wrong. I'm the one who asked Miss Vi...

BESS: And just who put the notion in your head, Mr. Cavanaugh? Surely you don't expect me to believe that after all these years, you're suddenly smitten with my younger sister, especially after the way your family was treated.

CAV: Begging your pardon, Miss Bess, but what happened way back then ain't got nuthin' to do with now.

ROSE: If Vi wants to go out with Mr. Cavanaugh...

BESS: Vi's not capable...

MATTIE: Because you don't give her a chance to be. Stop treating her like a baby. Vi's a lot smarter than you think.

BESS: Mattie, you've caused enough grief for one day. I'm still waiting for you to remove that thing from my kitchen. Now, excuse yourself, and take Andy with you.

MATTIE: Remove it yourself, you old bitch. *(BESS slaps her. Mattie reacts, and dashes for the stairs)* I'd be outta here in a minute, if I had someplace to go. Damn you all, anyway!

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 1

[One week later. ANDY and ROSE are watching TV]

ROSE: That girl is an idiot. Doesn't she realize that jerk coming on to her is the serial killer?

ANDY: How do you know?

ROSE: Look at him. Long, greasy hair, squinty eyes, scruffy beard... no kiss is going to turn that slime ball into prince charming.

ANDY: When did you start watching the soaps, Miss Rose?

ROSE: Mattie forgot to pick up some more movies.

ANDY: Nothing on AMC, TMC, TBS, Bravo?

ROSE: S-E-X, and I've seen them all. (BESS enters from the steps)

BESS: Where's Mattie? *(They ignore her)*

ROSE: Look out, blondie, he's right behind you. *(she reacts to the violence on TV)* See, Andy, I told you so.

BESS: What are you two watching?

ROSE: *(turns off the TV with the remote)* Nothing. Ready to go, Bess?

BESS: Yes. Will you be all right until I get back?

ROSE: I'm coming with you.

BESS: Rose, you're still recuperating from your outing last week. You need to lie down and rest.

ROSE: I did not get dressed up to take a nap. Mattie's bringing the car around so I won't have to walk so far.

BESS: Why today, Rose? You never used to go to Altar Guild meetings. They bored you to tears, remember?

ROSE: I'm not starting a tradition. You said that I would have to tell Emily Prescott off face-to-face, so that's what I'm going to do.

BESS: I didn't think you'd take me seriously. Write her a letter.

ROSE: I want to enjoy her reaction. *(MATTIE enters via the front door and hands BESS the car keys.)*

MATTIE: All gassed up and ready to rock and roll.

BESS: Is this another one of your bright ideas, Mattie?

ROSE: It was my bright idea, Bess. Don't equate this deplorable assemblage of body parts with my gray matter that still functions quite clearly.

BESS: That's all too evident. Okay, let's get you to the car. *(With ANDY and MATTIE supporting her, ROSE moves slowly to the front door)* Have you seen Vi? She disappeared right after lunch.

ROSE: She's out in the garden. Where else would she be?

BESS: It's much too hot for her to be outside this time of day. I'll wager she forgot her sun hat, too.

ROSE: Leave her alone, Bess. Vi can decide for herself if she needs a sunbonnet.

BESS: Rose, if you're going to argue with me all afternoon...

ROSE: When you stop trying to orchestrate everyone's life, I'll behave myself. *(winks at MATTIE as she, ANDY, and BESS exit)*

MATTIE: *(at the door)* Be careful of the steps, aunt Rose... Andy, watch her head... don't slam the door on her hand... *(closes the door and crosses to the parlor)* Bitch, bitch, bitch! Aunt Bess, don't you ever let up? *(ANDY enters)*

ANDY: What have you done to those two old women, Mattie? They're ready to tear each other's hair out.

MATTIE: Sure, sure...everything's my fault.

ANDY: Lighten up, kid. Can't you take a joke?

MATTIE: This is not a fun place.

ANDY: Could have fooled me.

MATTIE: Aunt Rose looked awfully pale, don't you think?

ANDY: I didn't notice.

MATTIE: She's been having trouble breathing. I don't think she should have gone... listen to me. I sound just like aunt Bess.

ANDY: Quit worrying. Rose will be fine. Hey, you're not still up-tight about your Dad, are you?

MATTIE: If you don't mind being called poor white trash, why should I care about something that happened before I was born. Just think, if my Dad hadn't blown his cool, we'd be related.

ANDY: First cousins... what a ghastly thought.

MATTIE: Too close to be the kissin' kind, so back off, lover boy.

ANDY: Never gave it a thought. I want to leave here with my face intact.

MATTIE: I can't believe Rose broke up a love affair just because the Lacey's had more money than the Cavanaugh's.

ANDY: Wise up, Mattie. The heirs to the Rockefeller and Kennedy fortunes don't marry their gardeners or tenant farmers. In the south, though, it has more to do with bloodlines. If you can't trace your ancestors back to some prince or duke, you're an upstart—a nobody.

MATTIE: Well, Mr. Nobody, I bet you didn't know that Rose and Vi snort whiskey behind aunt Bess's back.

ANDY: You're kidding'?

MATTIE: Nope. Vi keeps a bottle stashed in her hatbox. Isn't that a hoot?

ANDY: Wait 'til I tell Grandpa.

MATTIE: You do, and you die. I promised Rose I wouldn't tattle.

ANDY: I see you're wearing the locket she gave you.

MATTIE: Yeah...makes her happy. I'm gonna miss that old lady when I go home.

ANDY: Then you finally heard from your Dad?

MATTIE: One postcard, mailed the day he arrived. Big deal!

ANDY: Aw... poor Mattie... Daddy's living it up while you're stuck here with the old-maid aunts and the handyman's grandson.

MATTIE: What would you know...*(punches him in the arm)*... big college jock. *(he tickles her)* Now, stop that!

ANDY: Just trying to getcha outta your funk. Wanna go swimming'?

MATTIE: And leave Vi here by herself. Heaven forbid! The crazy retard might set the house on fire.

ANDY: Crazy retard? What's with you, today? Bess still on your case?

MATTIE: When is she not.

ANDY: Well, the crazy retard and Grandpa had a good time playing bingo. He's definitely smitten.

MATTIE: Then he should marry her and take her away from this fortress of gloom and doom.

ANDY: I'll tell him you said that.

MATTIE: Don't you dare! If it gets back to you-know-who...

ANDY: It was your idea.

MATTIE: You went along with it.

ANDY: It didn't take much persuasion.

MATTIE: They looked so cute together. He opened the car door for her, took her hand to help her out... It was so sweet.

ANDY: What were you doing, peeking through the curtains?

MATTIE: Absofuckinlutely.

ANDY: I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

MATTIE: You gotta a problem with the way I talk?

ANDY: You're a nice girl. You don't have to try and shock people to get attention.

MATTIE: If I embarrass you, just say so, and I'm gone.

ANDY: Where you planning to go?

MATTIE: None of your business.

ANDY: You're right. It's none of my business what you say or do.

MATTIE: You got it, mister.

ANDY: You know, you're a lot more fun when you don't have that chip on your shoulder.

MATTIE: Thank you Aunt Rose. Well, I'm not your summer charity case, so you can just waltz outta here anytime you want.

ANDY: Okay, if that's how you feel.

MATTIE: That's how I feel.

ANDY: Then I guess our swimming date is off.

MATTIE: I might say something rude and embarrass you in front of your friends.

ANDY: How come you can dish it out, but when I give it back, you take it personally?

MATTIE: I don't let what other people say get to me.

ANDY: The hell you don't...

MATTIE: Oh, my goodness, was that a cuss work I heard you say?

ANDY: Got a pocket full of 'em. Only this good ole boy was taught by his good ole southern mama that it wasn't polite to swear in front of a lady.

MATTIE: Then you're safe, 'cause I ain't no lady.

ANDY: You got that right. You're just a mixed-up sixteen-year-old kid.

MATTIE: I ain't no kid, either.

ANDY: Look, this conversation's going nowhere. Are you coming swimming with me, or not?

MATTIE: Not! *(Knock at the door)*

CAV: *(offstage)* Andy? Are you and Miss Mattie in there?

MATTIE: Speaking of good ole boys, doesn't your grandfather ever go home?

ANDY: Boy, do you run hot and cold. A few minutes ago you were carrying on about how sweet he is.

MATTIE: Oh, shut up and go see what he wants.

ANDY: Ask him yourself. *(opens the door)* There's nobody home, Grandpa. I was just leaving.

CAV: I'm looking for Miss Vi. She out in her garden?

ANDY: I think she is.

MATTIE: Probably dead from a sunstroke!

CAV: That you, Miss Mattie?

MATTIE: *(affecting an exaggerated southern drawl)* It is aahh, Mr. Cavanaugh.

CAV: You two have a tiff?

ANDY: It's not important. Let's go find Vi. See ya around, kid. *(exits with CAV)*

MATTIE: Don't count on it, college boy. *(beat, then tearfully)* Where are you, Daddy, when I need you? *(curls up in a fetal position on the loveseat)*

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 2

[Later the same day. MATTIE is curled up asleep on the loveseat. VI enters. Her face and shirt are smudged with dirt.]

VI: Mattie? Wake up, Mattie.

MATTIE: (*rousing from sleep*) What time is it?

VI: Five o'clock. Time for the news.

MATTIE: I must have dosed off.

VI: Is Rose still asleep?

MATTIE: Aunt Rose went with aunt Bess. I thought they'd be back by now.

VI: Turn on the news, Mattie...the one where the pretty black girl does the weather.

MATTIE: (*hands her the remote*) Here. You find the channel. I'm gonna get a Coke.

VI: There aren't any more. I drank the last one.

MATTIE: Damn!

VI: Shouldn't you check on Rose?

MATTIE: I just told you, she's not here.

VI: Where is she?

MATTIE: At that meeting with aunt Bess.

VI: Oh, yes. I forgot.

MATTIE: Did Mr. Cavanaugh find you?

VI: Uh-huh. He asked me to go to the picture show with him.

MATTIE: Did you say, yes?

VI: I said I'd have to ask Bess.

MATTIE: Vi, I know it's none of my business, but you shouldn't have to ask Bess every time you want to do something. If you want to go to the movies with Mr. Cavanaugh, then go. It's your life.

VI: I don't want Bess to get mad at me...

MATTIE: (*vehemently*) Oh, screw aunt Bess! (*Vi reacts*) I'm sorry. Just because Andy and I had a "tiff," I shouldn't take it out on you. Found a new doll on my bed this morning.

VI: Suzie Q. They like to take turns.

MATTIE: Aunt Vi, why do you have so many dolls?

VI: They're my babies.

MATTIE: Too bad you never had a real one.

VI: Oh, but I did...almost, that is.

MATTIE: Really? When was that?

VI: A long time ago.

MATTIE: What happened to it?

VI: It came too early and died.

MATTIE: You miscarried.

VI: That's right. Bess said it was a blessing.

MATTIE: She would. I bet you'd have made a great mother.

VI: You think so? Mama said, if I ever let a boy touch me again, God would strike me dead.

MATTIE: I thought you were married?

VI: Not after the baby came. Papa fixed it.

MATTIE: What about Mr. Cavanaugh?

VI: (*giggles*) Mr. Cavanaugh's not a boy. He's my friend.

MATTIE: Vi, is your baby the big secret nobody will talk about?

VI: No, it's something different.

MATTIE: Does it have anything to do with my Dad?

VI: I can't tell you. I promised Mama and Papa.

MATTIE: I don't think they'd mind. After all, I'm part of this family.

VI: Don't make me tell you, Mattie. Bess'd get mad.

MATTIE: So, what else is new?

VI: What does that mean?

MATTIE: Nothing. Let's watch the news. *(as she hits the remote BESS enters, obviously upset)* You're late. We were getting worried. *(crosses to the door)* I'll go help aunt Rose out of the car.

BESS: She didn't come back with me.

VI: Mr. Cavanaugh asked me to go to the picture show with him tonight. Can I?

BESS: Turn that thing off, Vi. Your face is all dirty. You know that you're supposed to wash up before you come into the parlor.

VI: I'm sorry. I forgot.

MATTIE: Where is she?

BESS: In the hospital.

MATTIE: What happened?

BESS: She keeled over...right when Emily Prescott got up to give the benediction. I thought she was putting on an act...but she was white as a sheet, barely breathing. The paramedics rushed her to the hospital.

MATTIE: How she's doing?

BESS: Not good. I just came home to change clothes and see about your supper. I need to get back as soon as possible.

VI: Can I go, too?

BESS: I'd rather you didn't, Vi. There's nothing we can do but wait and see.

MATTIE: Was it a heart attack?

BESS: That's what they're saying. They won't know for sure until all the tests come back.

MATTIE: Is she going to make it?

BESS: I hope so, but you never know...

MATTIE: Is there anything we can do?

BESS: No. There's leftover ham in the kitchen. Why don't make some sandwiches while I go change.

MATTIE: OK. *(exits to kitchen)*

VI: What about me?

BESS: Go wash your hands and face. *(knock on front door)* Who can that be? *(she opens it to admit MR. CAVANAUGH.)*

CAV: Evening, Miss Bess. Don't mean to intrude, but one of the ladies from church called about Rose. Just wondered if there's something I can do to help.

BESS: There's nothing anybody can do right now, Mr. Cavanaugh, but pray.

CAV: A Miss Prescott is bringing over a casserole and pie...

VI: I'll go tell Mattie...

BESS: Let her be, Vi. Have you ever tasted one of Lucy Prescott's casseroles, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: No, ma'am, don't believe I have.

BESS: Keep it that way. Now, if you'll excuse me...

CAV: I'll stick around if you want, Miss Bess... in case you need me for something.

BESS: Suit yourself. *(exits up the steps)*

CAV: I'm real sorry about your sister, Miss Vi.

VI: Is Rose going to die?

CAV: I hope not.

VI: She's been sick a long time... just like Mama... and Mama died.

CAV: Well, doctors are smarter now, and Miss Rose is a strong lady.

VI: I'm scared. *(starts to cry)*

CAV: *(takes her hand)* She's gonna be all right. You'll see.

VI: I guess we can't go to the picture show tonight.

CAV: We'll go some other time.

VI: Promise?

CAV: Promise. Soon as we know Miss Rose is going to be all right.

VI: What kind of movies do you like, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: Whatever kind you like, Miss Vi.

VI: Then, let's pick one that's not real loud and bloody. That's what Mattie and Rose like to watch. They scare me and make my ears hurt.

CAV: They do, huh?

VI: Yes. I like movies about dogs, and grumpy old men...

CAV: Me, too. And that Miss Sophie Lor-en...she's reee-ly something. *(VI looks hurt)* Oh, but she ain't as pretty as you, Miss Vi. 'Sides, she's a movie star. It ain't like I'm ever gonna meet her in person.

VI: You're teasing me, aren't you, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: I'd never say anything to hurt you, Miss Vi. You should know that.

VI: You're a nice man, Mr. Cavanaugh. I like you.

CAV: I like you, too, Miss Vi.

VI: Does that mean you're my beau?

CAV: 'Spect it does.

VI: I'm glad. Only...

CAV: Only, what?

VI: Only, Bess might send me away.

CAV: Why would she do that?

VI: A long time ago Rose had a beau, and Mama sent her away.

CAV: I don't understand. What's Miss Rose's beau got to do with us?

VI: Something... but I don't remember.

CAV: I recall Miss Rose going away for a spell. But then she come home to take care of your baby brother, your mama being so sick and all. It was a long time ago. *(phone rings)*

BESS: *(offstage)* Somebody get that, will you?

MATTIE: *(runs into the hall and picks up the receiver)* Hello?.....Just a minute. Aunt Bess? It's the hospital. Evening, Mr. Cavanaugh. Wanna ham sandwich?

CAV: No thank you, Miss Mattie. I already had supper.

BESS: *(enters)* Hello?.....Yes, this is Elizabeth Lacey..... I understand. I'll be right there.

MATTIE: What happened?

BESS: Rose went into respiratory arrest.

VI: Rose is dead, isn't she?

BESS: No, baby, she's still alive. *(aside to MATTIE)* They have her stabilized, but the doctors don't hold out much hope. I've got to go. *(to CAV)* Look after Vi, will you, Mr. Cavanaugh?

CAV: Sure thing, Miss Bess. Don't you worry now. We'll be praying for her.

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 3

[Two days later. BESS is making up ROSE'S bed, stopping to wipe away tears. She picks up an open book, marks the place and puts it neatly on the bedside table. VI enters and places her Jo March doll on the pillow.]

VI: You don't mind, do you, Bess?

BESS: No, of course not. *(straightens the doll's dress)*

VI: I never told her good bye.

BESS: You can do that today.

VI: She can't hear me now.

BESS: She'll know, just the same.

VI: Are you sure?

BESS: I'm sure.

VI: Promise me, you won't die, Bess.

BESS: Honey, I can't promise you that.

VI: If you die I won't have anybody.

BESS: I *can* promise that there will always be someone here to take care of you.

VI: Like Mattie, or Mr. Cavanaugh?

BESS: Somebody. *(CROSSFADE as she takes VI by the hand and leads her into the parlor)* You look very nice, Vi. Why don't you go put on your pretty straw hat, and don't forget your white gloves.

VI: OK. *(phone rings)*

BESS: Don't stop to play with your dolls. Mr. Cavanaugh and Andy will be here to pick us up in a few minutes. *(VI exits up the steps)*
Hello.....Thank goodness you called. The viewing is today, but we can wait until you get here to hold the service.....I see. Well, you know best. Just a minute, I'll get her. *(shouting up the steps)*
Mattie, it's your father.

MATTIE: *(enters and takes the receiver from BESS)* Daddy?.....
I'm okay. Where are you?.....Aren't you coming?.....
But, Daddy.....Yeah, sure, I understand.....love you, too.

BESS: He's not coming, is he?

MATTIE: He says he can't leave right now. It's too critical.

BESS: I'm sorry.

MATTIE: No big deal. He's never around when I need him.

BESS: Why is it that those we love are doomed to disappoint us?

MATTIE: Should I take that personally?

BESS: I wasn't talking about you.

MATTIE: You blame me for Rose's death.

BESS: No, I don't.

MATTIE: She wanted to go on that trip, you know. I didn't talk her into it.

BESS: I know. You're going with us, aren't you? It would look funny if you didn't.

MATTIE: Why should I care what it looks like? They're your friends, not mine.

BESS: Please, Mattie, I can't handle your arguments today. I think you should go, for Rose's sake.

MATTIE: She won't know if I'm there or not.

BESS: Suit yourself, then. You always do.

MATTIE: Oh, give me a break! Rose was special.... I just can't face seeing her lying in the casket, all made up to look like she's still alive. It's gruesome.

BESS: I tend to agree, but it's expected of us.

MATTIE: You should have seen her... pointing out where so-and-so used to live, greeting her friends like some la-de-da Queen Bee. She was unbelievable! We even stopped by the cemetery. She wanted to show me where my ancestors were buried, and where she'd be laid to rest--her words, not mine.

BESS: She made all the arrangements, you know...including what kind of flowers were to be put on her casket.

MATTIE: Yeah, I remember. No Easter Lilies. How's Vi doin'?

BESS: Like a child, she accepts death better than adults do.

MATTIE: I think you protect her too much.

BESS: You're not in a position to judge...

MATTIE: She told me about the miscarriage.

BESS: That's never been a secret.

MATTIE: Just one of those little inconsequential ones?

BESS: Like the whiskey bottle Vi keeps hidden in her hat box.

MATTIE: You don't miss much, do you?

BESS: I'm the housekeeper.

MATTIE: Then you tell me. What did happen that's so horrible, nobody will talk about it?

BESS: Not so horrible. Just unfortunate, considering the times we lived in.

MATTIE: Times have changed, in case you haven't noticed. Why keep it a secret anymore?

BESS: Because it's not my place, or Vi's, to say anything.

MATTIE: Whose, then?

BESS: Rose's.

MATTIE: Boy, are you a big help. Rose is dead. She's not going to be telling anybody, anything, anymore.

BESS: I wouldn't be too sure about that. If you change your mind about going, put on a skirt and comb your hair.

MATTIE: Sez who?

BESS: I do. You will not disgrace the family by showing up in cutoffs and a dirty tee shirt. Surely, your mother impressed some proprieties upon you.

MATTIE: Leave my mother out of this. You don't know anything about her.

BESS: I'm sure she had some excellent qualities, or Brother would not have been attracted to her.

MATTIE: My mother was the most wonderful person in the entire universe. It's my Dad, your brother, who's the big ass-hole.

BESS: Mattie! That kind of language is uncalled for!

MATTIE: Well, that's what he is, whether you like it or not.

BESS: You're understandably upset because he's not coming...

MATTIE: If you wanna know the truth, I didn't expect him to.

BESS: Why do you say that?

MATTIE: Because he doesn't give a damn about anything except his job.

BESS: I find that hard to believe. Sometimes people change when they lose a loved one. They may appear to be indifferent, but that's only because they're afraid of being hurt again.

MATTIE: I'm his daughter, for heaven's sake...

BESS: Let go of your anger, Mattie.

MATTIE: What makes you think I'm angry? I'm not angry...

BESS: Sorry. I guess you have every right to be.

MATTIE: Yeah, I have every damned right to hate his guts. It's not enough that I had to lose my mother...my father might as well be dead, too.

BESS: What was he like before your mother died?

MATTIE: *(long pause)* Different...he was a totally different person.

BESS: How so?

MATTIE: Well, for one thing, he laughed...a lot. We all did. Dad called us his wild, crazy girls. And Mom called him her mad, dashing, buccaneer, and off we'd go... camping in the Ozarks, or a weekend in the city shopping and seeing some shows. One summer we toured Mexico, and once we rented a houseboat for a whole month. It was riot watching my Dad try to teach Mom how to water-ski. But she got him back when the three of us went skating for the first time. She was a pro, and he kept falling on his face. We laughed...yeah...we laughed a lot. Dad was a totally different person before Mom got sick.

BESS: And afterwards?

MATTIE: Now, we live together, but we don't, if you know what I mean. When he comes home from work, he'll say, 'how was school?'...fine...'any homework?' ...yes...'better get at it'...sure...then he disappears into his study to eat supper in front of the TV. I hang out with my friends on weekends, and he doesn't even ask where I'm going or when I'm coming home. Great life, wouldn't you say?

BESS: I'm sorry, Mattie. I had no idea.,,

MATTIE: Doesn't matter. Like you said...people change. *(VI enters struggling with her gloves)* I like your dress and hat, Vi.

VI: Thank you. I want to look nice for Rose.

MATTIE: What's with the gloves? It's hotter 'n blue blazes out there.

VI: We always wear gloves to church. Mama said so.

BESS: Forget the gloves, Vi. Mattie's right. It's too hot, and Mama's rules belong to a by-gone age.

VI: If you're sure it's okay...

BESS: I'm sure. Be patient with your father, Mattie. You're both recovering from a great loss, and time is needed for the healing process.

MATTIE: It's been three years. How much longer do I have to wait?

BESS: Depends on the person.

MATTIE: We're talking about a man who still holds a grudge after twenty-five years. Don't you think he could swallow his pride long enough to attend his sister's funeral?

BESS: It would have been nice, but it's too late now.

MATTIE: Too late for what?

BESS: For a reconciliation. Brother and Rose...

VI: Don't say it, Bess. We promised!

MATTIE: Promised what, Vi?

VI: *(with emphasis)* Can't tell you!

MATTIE: *(exasperated)* I give up. You people act like you belong to some exclusive club, and unless you're born to it you can't get in.

BESS: You're not the first person to accuse us of being clannish. What outsiders don't realize is that we're taught from childhood to distrust anything that might change the way we view the world. I admit it's terribly provincial. The greater sin is that we're so arrogant about it.

MATTIE: Then crawl back into your house of rules and take your secrets to the grave, for all I care. What difference does it make? When I leave here, I'm never coming back.

VI: Not ever?

MATTIE: Why should I? I'm not a member of this family. I'm one of those outsiders Bess is talking about. I just wish aunt Rose had lived long enough to tell me...

BESS: Rose did tell you.

MATTIE: Tell me what?

BESS: The locket she gave you. Did you take a good look at it?

VI: *(forcefully)* Bess, we promised Mama and Papa...

BESS: It's all right, Vi. We don't have to keep the promise any longer. Mama and Papa and Rose can no longer be hurt by anything we say.

VI: You sure?

BESS: I'm very, very, sure.

VI: Okay. Go ahead, Mattie. Open it. Bess says it's all right now. Let me see, too.

MATTIE: *(removes the locket and opens it)* Two faded photos... one of Rose when she much younger, you said, and a baby. Who's the baby?

BESS: You don't see a resemblance?

MATTIE: Babies look like babies. Who is it?

VI: It's Brother. Can't you tell?

MATTIE: He's a changed a bit since I've known him.

BESS: Don't you think it strange how quickly you and Rose developed an affinity for one another?

MATTIE: Not really. She was funny and fun to be with.

BESS: And obstreperous and self-willed as you. Even Mr. Cavanaugh remarked on it.

MATTIE: Well, it's not like we weren't related... *(looks at the pictures and the light dawns)* Are you trying to tell me...

BESS: Rose knew her time was short, and she wanted very much to get to know her granddaughter.

MATTIE: Well, I'll be...! So that's the shocking secret nobody would talk about. Aunt Rose had a baby out of wedlock. Big deal! It happens all the time...

BESS: Not to the Lacey's, God forbid. We grew up at a time when families were socially ostracized if their daughters got into trouble, and society did not look kindly upon unwed mothers.

MATTIE: Well, they aren't too thrilled about it today, but they don't sweep it under the rug and pretend it never happened. How did you keep it so hush-hush? Lock Rose and Mama in the attic until the kid was born?

BESS: There were places people could go... Mama wasn't at all well, and very rarely left the house.

MATTIE: I thought things like that only happened in the middle ages.

BESS: Well into the 20th century I'm afraid.

MATTIE: Who was my grandfather? Is he still around, or did your dear Papa restore the family honor by dispatching him in a duel?

BESS: He was a soldier, stationed at Ft. Jackson. Rose dated him when she was visiting a girlhood friend in Columbia.

MATTIE: You ever meet him?

BESS: No. Rose never even revealed his name. Apparently, he took off when she told him about the baby.

MATTIE: Does my Dad know?

BESS: I don't think she ever told him. I'm certain no one else did.

MATTIE: So, that's why you invited me here.

BESS: It's part of the reason.

MATTIE: What's the other part?

BESS: Well, we hoped your father would come, too.

MATTIE: So Rose you could see her son before she...

BESS: Yes.

MATTIE: (*angry*) Then you should have told him. You people blow my mind.

BESS: Rose didn't want him to feel obligated...

MATTIE: How do you know what he'd feel? You never gave him the chance...

BESS: I realize it's difficult for you to understand, but we were taught never to ask favors of anyone, or to expect them.

MATTIE: Sounds pretty stupid to me.

BESS: Perhaps, but that's how we were brought up.

MATTIE: Well, I guess you want me to hang around for the funeral...

BESS: I think you owe Rose that much.

MATTIE: Yeah, but I'll be outta your hair as soon as we pop her in the ground. I'll go pack my things...

BESS: Where will you go?

MATTIE: If I'd had that figured out, I'd have been long gone by now.

BESS: Then I'm glad you didn't. It would have broken Rose's heart.

MATTIE: But not yours.

BESS: To be honest, no.

MATTIE: I'll call some of my friends back home. Maybe one of them will put me up till Dad gets back.

BESS: Before you make those calls, I have something to say.

MATTIE: Oh, spare me the goodbye speech... Gee, Mattie, you're a nice kid, but...

BESS: No, I won't ignore the obvious, or pretend it didn't happen. You have been disruptive, hostile, and rude, and I've resented your influence on Rose and Vi. I'm used to calling the shots around here, and I don't like having my authority usurped. On the other hand, there were times when you demonstrated such sensitivity, especially with Vi, I felt guilty for "getting on your case," as you call it. You may find this difficult to believe, but I'd like to be your friend. Something tells me you could use one right now.

MATTIE: What are you suggesting?

BESS: I want you to stay. Rose's death leaves an empty space in our lives. There's no way that you, or anybody else, can hope to fill it, but your presence here will help.

MATTIE: Help what? If my dad was the mistake you have to live with, what does that make me? Mistake number two?

BESS: I'm sorry, Mattie. It was a cruel thing to say.

MATTIE: But you do it so well. Give me one reason...

BESS: To try and make it up to you.

VI: Please stay, Mattie. I don't want you to go.

MATTIE: I'm not going to turn into a paragon of southern virtue, just because you're giving me a second chance.

BESS: Nor will I. We'll do battle from time to time. That much I can be sure of. But I can handle it, if you can.

MATTIE: Well, I do owe a certain college jock an apology for being such a jerk. I'll think about it, OK?

BESS: OK. *(knock at the door)* If I'm not mistaken, that'll be the college jock and his grandfather here to pick us up.

MATTIE: Do I have time to put on a skirt and comb my hair?

BESS: We'll wait for you.

MATTIE: Be right back. *(exits upstairs)*

VI: Do you want me to let them in, Bess?

BESS: Ask them to wait in the car, will you please, Vi? I need a moment alone.

VI: *(crossing to the door)* OK.

BESS: And Vi...

VI: Yes?

BESS: Tell Mr. Cavanaugh that I think it would be nice if he took you to the picture show tonight.

VI: Oh, he'll say it's not fitting.

BESS: Tell him... tell him, Rose says it's all right.

VI: *(big smile)* Thanks, Bess. *[SLOW FADE TO BLACK as VI exits the front door and BESS crosses to Rose's room.]*

MATTIE: (VO) Well, that's what happened. As you probably guessed, I hung around the rest of the summer...even learned to say "yes ma'am," and "no sir," just like the natives. The Fourth of July bash was kind of

fun. Lots of good-looking college jocks showed up, and since I was the new girl in town... well, I don't have to spell it out. Every Tuesday night Mr. Cavanaugh took Vi to play bingo in the church basement, and on Thursday's they went to the picture show together, regular as clockwork. Friday's, we'd rent a couple of movies and fix popcorn...Vi, Bess, Andy, Mr. Cavanaugh, and myself...sort of like one of those extended families you read about. When it was time for me to go home, Andy promised to write. He did...once. But every Sunday, regular as clockwork, aunt Bess or Vi calls... just to chat, they say. It makes me feel special, knowing they care. That's what life's all about, don't you think? Keeping in touch with the people you love? My grandmother taught me that--when I was sixteen--my *first* Lacey summer.