

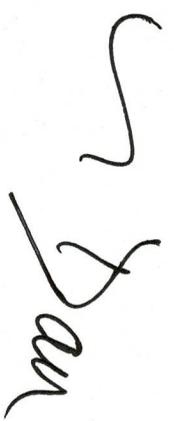
Daniel,

1/29/24

This is the article/  
interview I wrote about

Miss Penches/Elsie Griner, Jr./  
Anabel Alderman

Please use for bio/background  
info - I can send better-  
quality photos of Anabel

 Dan

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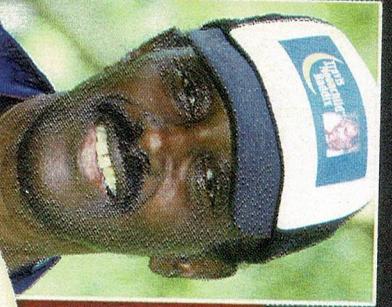
# BLUES & RHYTHM

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INTERVIEW



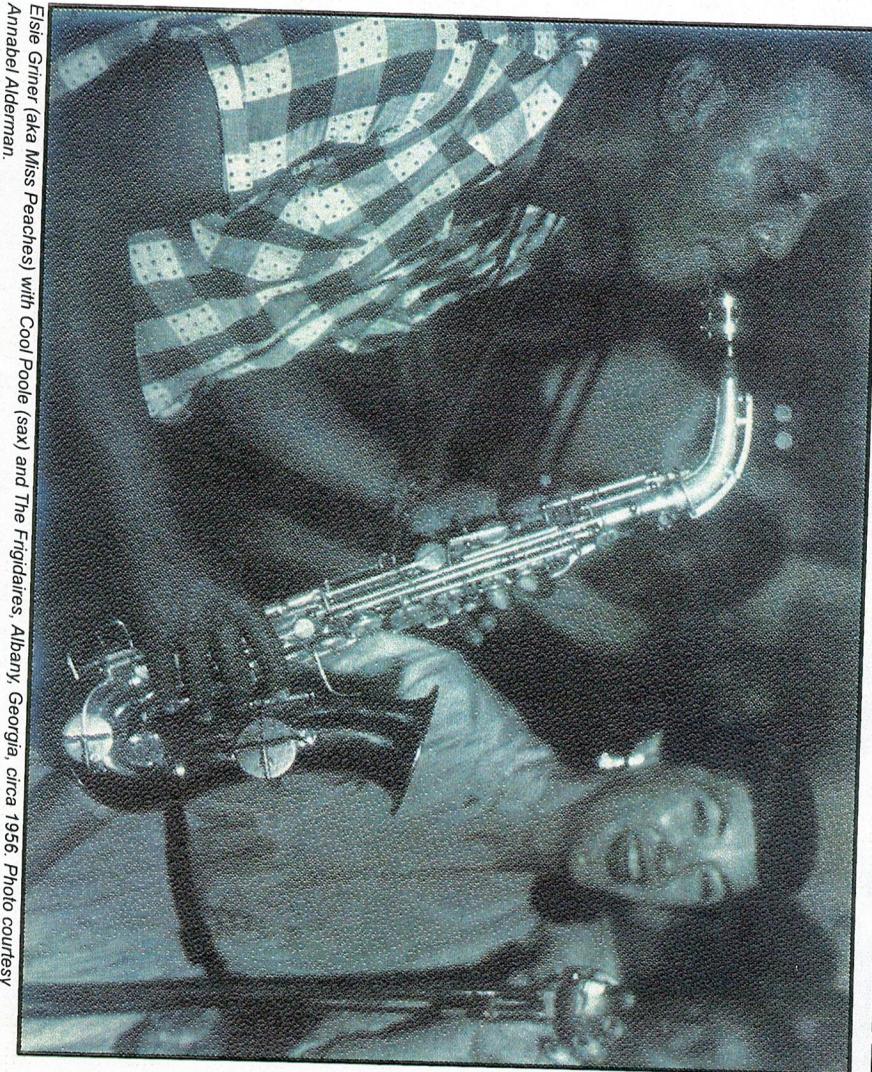
The Story of  
Miss Peaches



# The Life Story of Louisiana Red



# 'CALLIN' MOODY FIELD'



Elsie Griner (aka Miss Peaches) with Cool Poole (sax) and The Frigidaires, Albany, Georgia, circa 1956. Photo courtesy

## The Story of Miss Peaches

*Interviewed By Dan Kochakian*

Many B&R readers will recognize the name Miss Peaches from her big rhythm and blues local hit, 'Callin' Moody Field', on Groove, recorded in Atlanta and released in 1954. Most of us believed that Miss Peaches was a black American singer from the southeast, but we now come to the startling revelation that Miss Peaches is white!

The black dialect and accent on the recording is fully explained in this story by Miss Peaches, aka Elsie Griner, Jr. An exceptionally intelligent and talented woman, Ms. Griner was a recording artist, newspaper owner, private investigator, political satirist, comedienne and then a novelist. Enjoy this fascinating tale from Miss Peaches' ambitious youth to her current ruminations on life.

I was born in Nashville, Georgia, on 15th July, 1924. My mother was Elsie Higgs Griner and she was a lawyer. There was no such thing as a woman lawyer in those days, but she stood the bar and passed it in 1929. You didn't have to have a degree then. She studied by working for judges. Three people took the exam the day she did and two of them passed. It was actually a three day test.

My father died in a VA hospital in 1927 when I was three. My mother's father lived with us in those days, but a woman's touch was needed.

So my mother hired two ladies who were black to take care of the house and see after my brother, Geunie (Ju-nee), and me. One was named Ruthie Mae and the other was named Peaches and they stayed with us during the day while my mother was at work. My mother had a lot of black clients and with Ruthie Mae and Peaches, we became immersed in the black culture and I think it's safe to say that I'm an Ebonics scholar!

NB: Ebonics is defined as 'the linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendant of African origin. It includes the various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of black people, especially those who have adapted to colonial circumstances. Ebonics derives its form from sound and refers to the study of the language of black people in all its cultural uniqueness.'

My mother was a free spirit. She wanted to name me after her and that's what she did. That's why I'm a junior! I don't know how she came up with the name of Geunie for my brother.

Geunie was four years older than I was and the thing that interested him the most was music. My mother and her sister, Arlo, who also lived with us for a while, played the piano and we'd gather around the piano every night and sing to their piano playing. Geunie picked it up. After one music lesson, he came home, laid aside his teacher's workbook and said, "I'm not going back. She's not going to teach me what I want to know." So it's truthful to say he was self-taught.

True to our black upbringing, Geunie and I learned to dance on the back beat. That's the only way I can dance now. When Ruthie and Peaches found out that a black band was going to be in Waycross, traveling between New York and Miami, they would get our momma, 'Miss Mama' as we called her, to take us all over there. The white people sat in the balcony of the city auditorium and the black people were on the dance floor, so Ruthie Mae and Peaches would go have a good time on the dance floor, but they would always come back and get us and take us backstage to meet the musicians. It was just part of our lives. We never thought about it as being anything but normal.



Label shot: Dan Kochakian.

We saw lots of the big orchestras, and one of the bandleaders, whose name escapes me right now, wanted to take my brother on the road him. Geunie had played piano for the guy and he was mighty impressed. Miss Mama said, "Absolutely not!"

Peaches was Ruthie Mae's niece and Aunt Sarah, who was really Ruthie Mae's grandmother, lived in our house with them. Aunt Sarah got so she couldn't stay by herself in the daytime and she had more family in Waycross, so they decided they would just all move to Waycross. That was when I was about thirteen.

Soon after they left us, we got into the gospel singing business and we sang gospel music with a lady preacher named Maxie Sheed Patten. In many ways, she was a major influence on my life. I've known her to preach for more than two hours and not a soul would walk away!

"Well, yeah, we'll record y'all's gospel!" We went to Atlanta, which is where they did a lot of recording in those days, and went to radio station WGST's studio to do the recording. We had to wait until midnight when the station went off the air to use the studio. We recorded a couple of numbers and along about 2 or 3:30am, we took a little break and my brother and I were tireless, so we were entertaining the other folks there with 'Callin' Moody Field'.

It was just a throw-away and Sam Wallace, who was the A&R man for Victor, came roaring out of the engineer's booth and yelled, "Stop what you're doing. Forget gospel. We're going to record that!"

The song was about me calling the base operator at Moody Field, the Air Force base near Valdosta, to talk to my boyfriend in Company B. But when I get through to the Company B clerk, he can't find my boyfriend. This was



Geunie Griner, unknown sax player, Cool Pool, Albany, Georgia, 1956.  
Photo courtesy Annabel Alderman.

done with Geunie playing blues piano as my accompaniment. The song just came to me. We just did it right then and that was good since we never did do a re-take.

Geunie, my mother and I were known as The Holy Notes. Some time after the 'Callin' Moody Field' recording, RCA Victor did record our gospel songs. We received letters saying that we were the best black gospel group people ever heard. People who heard our records didn't know that we were white!

RCA released 'Callin' Moody Field' within a week on its Groove label. It was the swiftest release anybody ever heard. Bill Lowery was there in the studio with Sam Wallace on that first recording session. I don't know if Bill worked for RCA, but he and Sam were good friends and maybe Sam had to get Bill to get the studio for us to do the recording. Along with Bill and Sam at the session were Piano Red and Zenas Sears, the disc jockey. I was in some good company and they were, too!

I never wrote 'Callin' Moody Field' before we recorded it, as a matter of fact, and after it was recorded, the first thing I did was play it and copy it down and memorise it because in the studio, it was all off the top of my head. The way it came about was one day I was driving my mother to Valdosta to court, and we had to go through Ray City. Just before we got to Ray City, she said, "Stop at that telephone." So I pulled up to the only phone in Ray City and a young black lady was on the phone. So we just sat there with the car doors open because it was hot weather and with the doors open, we couldn't help but hear her. She was making these disjointed comments to whomsoever was on the other end of the line and it was just kind of funny to me. She got through talking and my mother went in there and called back to the office, came back and got in the car and we went on to Valdosta.

My aunt and uncle, who have never cracked a smile on Sunday of that week and I couldn't help it. I'm just an entertainer, so when they got here, we all just stood around and did these weak smile things and then I said, "Y'all want to hear something? Let me tell you about a phone

my version of what this lady had said on the telephone and I'll be dogged, they fell off the sofa laughing. See, I was making it up as I went along in a real black accent and I'd do it around here for folks and they'd all laugh. I never did it the same way twice because I didn't remember it, so all of my comedy work after that had turned into extemporaneous. I don't do blue lines and I don't do vulgarity and I don't do profanity. I do funny! So, a lot of it was extemporaneous.

I was about thirty then and after the Groove record came out, I talked to Sam Wallace on the phone one day, saying, "What do we do now?" and he said, "I don't know. Get you a radio show." I asked the guy who had the radio station here and he said, "I don't think so."

So I went to Moultrie and talked to the owners of WMTM. They were Norris Mills who was known as Pee Wee, and his partner Douglas J. Turner. Pee Wee had a brother named Gene who was a disc jockey and also had a country and western band. Norris and Turner said, "Oh, well, yeah. Well give it a try. Thirty minutes. Every day, Monday through Friday". Geunie and I came home and we had a radio show, but we didn't know what we were gonna do! What are we gonna do for thirty minutes? So, we sat down and figured it out for a while and finally, about 3 o'clock in the morning of the day we were supposed to start, I said, "Oh! I know what we'll do! We'll call it Miss Peach's Café and the music we play will be on the jukebox at the café". That was so simple. It was just there staring me in the face.

The engineer picked us out a theme song. We didn't know anything about it and we were there to do the show, whatever it was, and from



Above: Elsie Griner Jr. in the recording studio. Photo courtesy Annabel Alderman  
Below: The Holy Notes: Geunie Griner, Elsie Griner Sr., Elsie Griner Jnr., and Galen 'Penny' Alderman. Photo courtesy Annabel Alderman.

# GROOVE

A PRODUCT OF RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA



GIVE IT NEW R&B HIT!!

## GROOVE

RECORDS

"MISS PEACHES"

### "CALLIN' MOODY FIELD"

(Parts 1 & 2)

78 rpm cut no. G-4009  
45 rpm cut no. G-4009



Ric Cartey, Freddie Weller and Billy Joe Royal hacking Elsie Griner on her second LP, 'The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.' Tom'. Courtesy Annabel Alderman.

that first day on, people would come from other towns to sit in the lobby so they could watch and hear our show firsthand. We did it three days and the folks at the station said, "This ain't working out. You're gonna have to do an hour", so we said, "Oh, yeah!"

So we did an hour and did that for several months and then there was an ad in *Billboard* magazine about wanting somebody to do a radio show in Houston for KYOK, the white-owned black station. We said, "Hey! Wouldn't that be good?" That'd pay lots of good money". WMTM never paid us a dime and we never asked for a dime.

We went to New Orleans for the audition and we were so good, there was just no contest. They wanted us to start a week from that day, so we said, "Oh, sure". We were on at nighttime and the second night we were on, we had more than 2000 telephone calls for requests! Talking about tying up the phones. We'd been there about ten days when the black newspaper came out with a red editorial on the front page, saying, "These SOB's are taking black jobs and we ain't gonna have it", so we lost our jobs.

In 1961, we recorded another version of 'Callin' Moody Field' for Bill Lowery's N.R.C. label in Atlanta. On the other side is 'The Man', a song I really like.

On that one, Miss Peaches calls the C.O. at Moody Field. She didn't know his name, but thought his initials were C.O. She talks to him about what was going on at her cafe in Willacoochee and she wanted him to raise the rank of her boyfriend, Charlie.

In the mid-1960s, we did a third version of 'Callin' Moody Field' and 'The Man'. People think it was recorded live but we just had a party at Bill Lowery's studio with a bunch of people. Judge's Chambers Records was Bill's label.

We did three albums on that label, too. My heartbreaking story about the second one, 'Safari Down South', is that my brother Geunie isn't on it because he died just before it was recorded. He died on 20th July, 1975. He was only 47. Geunie and I wrote every bit of that album in a period of two days. The group on the cover we called 'The Number One Boys', but I swear, I don't remember their names. They all played on the beat and that's very frustrating to me.

We went back home and Miss Mama was still practicing law, so we always had a home to go back to. I forgot what we did then, but in 1961, the editor of *The Nashville Herald*, the weekly paper here, died unexpectedly. *The Herald* was the second oldest business in the county. It was what they called a 'hot shop'. After every issue, they would melt down the metal and recast it and the typesetting was done on a Linotype machine. It was as old and decrepit a shop as anybody's ever seen. Neither my brother nor I had even been in there, but my mother represented the editor's widow and there was the newspaper that had to come out. There just wasn't any way around it. So, my mother said to my brother and me, 'Y'all go down there and help 'em get the newspaper out until we can

sell it'. Oh, sure! You bell! So, we went down there to help them out.

We had the back shop help who could melt down the metal and run the Linotype.

run the press. We had an old magazine press. We discovered that there's a lot to run a newspaper, so we got Miss Mama to lend us an electric typewriter that we could use to write the news. This went on two or three

weeks. Timney Griffin, the editor of *The Valdosta Daily Times*, called me up one day and said, "Who are you? And I want to know who taught you to write headlines" and I said, "Nobody", and he said, "Well, you cannot hyphenate a headline. I'm comin' up there this afternoon and I'll show you how to write a headline" and he came and showed me how. It was simple, once you knew. Anyway, the Ku Klux Klan was scheduled to meet up here the next week and I called Timney and said, "Ku Klux Klan's gonna meet up here and they're gonna meet in the courtroom". He said, "Listen, I got connections. The Ku Klux Klan ain't meeting anywhere unless I know about it". I just said, "Excuse me, I didn't realise that". So, on the appointed day, at 7:30pm, I was at the courthouse waiting around and here they came. Two or three Cadillacs from Alabama came first and then the pick-ups and the usual crowd. They crowded into the courtroom and they carried on. It was at night and court wasn't in session, so they got the use of the courtroom.

About two-thirds of the way through the Klan's meeting, here comes Timney, the editor from Valdosta, screaming at me, "My God! Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "I called you, but you said it couldn't happen". And from then on, he and I were friends. Timney left the paper business here and moved to South Carolina and I never heard from him again.

Since Geunie and I had a newspaper, we decided that we might as well do the best we could with it. In December of 1961, nobody bought it, so we moved in there to help them run the paper. Everybody laughed when it couldn't be sold, but in April of 1962, we finally bought it and we also commenced to get a lot of flak from our editorial enemies, but until 30th June 1966, we got three first place awards from the Georgia Press Association and five second and third place awards. We wrote our own stuff and I had a column called 'The Focus On...' and Geunie had a column called 'Blast-Off Blaster'.

We covered things like racism and resistance to desegregation and were the first paper in the state to endorse Carl Sanders for governor. We wrote for and performed in the George Press Association Cracker Crumble from 1962 to 1975. My brother Geunie died on 20th July of that year. The Cracker

Crumble was an annual fund-raiser for the GPA in our first album on Judge's Chamber.

The thing that put us out of business was the political structure here was very much opposed to us and they took away from us the legal advertising which is the lifeblood of a weekly paper. You can't survive unless you can get the legal ads. We were called 'race mixers and one Barren County a bad name and they refused to indict the four men who attacked us that night. All we were trying to do was tell them that the civil rights movement was right. We can't have a whole country full of second class citizens, but they didn't like that. We closed up *The Herald* and were replaced by little paper now that doesn't print anything controversial.

In 1967, the Hyatt Regency hotel opened in Atlanta. They had a big party and Geunie and I wrote and performed a spoof at the Cracker Machine called 'Nobody Rides In My Riding Machine'. It was funny how that came to be. We were at the hotel for the rehearsal. They had just opened and it was really beautiful and Glen McCullough, who was executive director of the Press Association, and his friend were headed up to the beer association. They wanted to get on the elevator and go to the top floor. The operator said, "I'll have to see your key", and they said, "We don't have a key, but we want to ride the elevator" and she refused. The entire episode was funny to Geunie and me, so we wrote the song, 'Nobody Rides In My Riding Machine' and it was the elevator operator singing the song. We wrote it right then and performed it at the Cracker Crumble that day.

I married Major Hugh D. Alderman in 1952 and my daughter, Galen, who was named for the famous Greek doctor, was born in 1955. She was also known as Penny and was smart as a whip. Long before home schooling was the watchword, I decided not to send her to public school. At the age of seven, she was writing a column (Penny Pitch) for *The Herald*. The country school superintendent came to *The Herald* office and threatened me with jail if I didn't send Penny to public school. So I sent her. Eventually, Penny went to Emory University and to the University of Georgia law school. When she got out, she went right straight into the office with Miss Mama and they practiced law together.

In order not to be left out, I enrolled in the police academy so I could be their investigator and to know what the other side was doing. I was less than 2% below the first in the class to graduate and I was the best pistol shot and the best driver. I worked with Miss Mama and my daughter for twelve-and-a-half years as their investigator, running down the miscreants and going to the jail to see 'em.

In 1997, I self-published a poetry book called 'Lost Loves Don't Count'. It got an award from *Writer's Digest*, but I never thought much about that, one way or another.

I wrote a novel called 'Family Man' in 1998, as by Annabel Alderman, the name I legally changed my first name to. It was set in South Georgia about a long haul truck driver named Wheeler Boone who was everything a faithful husband should never be. I finished the book, published by Mercer University Press, in thirteen days. And I just completed a book of what I choose to call 'Dirt Road' poetry called 'Redneck Ties'. I'm trying publishers for this one, along with two more novels that I've written in my spare time.

I've had a great career. Maybe it's not a matter

of skin colour, but I think my soul is authentic black!

Thanks and appreciation to Galen Mirate for her assistance, to Ray Astbury and Chris Bentley for setting events in motion to allow Miss Peaches' story to be told and to Ralph Shurley for research assistance.



5043 Grayfield Place North  
Valdosta, Georgia 31605  
March 25, 2011

Mr. Daniel P Kochakian  
8 Limewoods Drive  
Saugus, MA 01906

Dear Dan:

Please permit this letter to confirm the message that I sent you earlier this week by way of my daughter, Galen Mirate. It is my desire and my intention that you act as my agent and my representative in regards to the marketing of my original manuscript, entitled "Miss Peaches Café de Lite." I am giving you full authority to market and attempt to sell this manuscript, and to negotiate on my behalf, using your best judgment.

With warmest personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,



Annabel Alderman

April 9, 2011



## Annabel "Miss Peaches" Alderman (<http://valdostadailytimes.com/obituaries/x56424206/Annabel-Miss-Peaches-Alderman>)

The Valdosta Daily Times (<http://valdostadailytimes.com>)

VALDOSTA — Funeral services for Annabel "Miss Peaches" Alderman, who died on April 7, 2011, were held on April 9, 2011 in the Chapel of Lovein Funeral Home in Nashville. The Reverend Nancy Mills, priest-in-charge at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Thomasville, officiated.

The late novelist, poet and newspaper columnist will be remembered for her wide-ranging contributions to the literary world, and for her long years as a stage performer. She appeared as a political comic under the stage name of "Miss Peaches," offering monologues and songs in concert with her piano-playing brother, Geunie Griner. To her great delight, their 1954 recording of Callin' Moody Field enjoyed more than 50 years of popularity.

In a departure from their performing world, the deceased and her now late brother published the prize-winning newspaper The Nashville Herald, a now defunct weekly publication, from 1962 until 1966. During those years, she and Geunie wrote for and performed in the Georgia Press Association's annual extravaganza, The Cracker Crumble, and continued so doing until her brother's death in 1975.

After their newspapering experience, the brother-sister team returned to stage work and began recording their performances for RCA Victor. Besides the comedy material, they contracted to record their family gospel music group, The Holy Notes, for which Annabel doubled as lead singer and lyricist.

Born in Nashville on July 15, 1924, she was named Elsie Higgs Griner Jr. at birth, a name she kept throughout her performing years. In 1985, she petitioned the court to change her given name to Annabel and thereafter, she re-assumed her husband's surname. Annabel lived in her hometown until 1966 when she relocated to the Atlanta area. She returned in 1979 to work with her mother and daughter, who practiced law in Nashville.

She graduated from the Georgia Regional Police Academy in February 1983, and took her place as investigator for the family law firm. She later turned her attention once again to the written word. She published her first book of poetry, Lost Loves Don't Count, in 1996, and Mercer University Press published her first novel, Family Man, in 1999. The latter work was nominated in the Georgia Author of the Year 2000 competition, as well as the Townsend Prize for Fiction 2000. During 2000-2001, her political column, Right About Now, appeared in The Valdosta Daily Times.

Poems, essays and short stories penned by Annabel have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, including O Georgia, Kennesaw State University's Golden Age of Poetry, Flint River Review, Valdosta Magazine, Mercer University's Crossroads and many other widely-circulated publications. In her 81st year, a long-time ambition was realized by the inclusion of her biography in Who's Who in America.

The deceased was baptized at Nashville's First Baptist Church at age 13, and later confirmed in the Episcopal Church at All Saints' Church in Atlanta in 1968. Christ the King Episcopal Church in Valdosta was her final church home. Annabel was a longtime member of the Mensa Society. Too, she maintained membership in Southeastern Writers Association and Georgia Poetry Society.

Her husband, US Air Force Major Hugh D. Alderman, to whom she was married in 1952, predeceased her in 1973. Also preceding her in death was her mother Elsie Higgs Griner, who died in 2002 at age 106, and her brother, Geunie Griner, who passed away in 1975.

She is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Galen and Donald Mirate of Valdosta, a grandson, Milo Mirate, also of Valdosta, a virtual son and daughter-in-law, James C. and Brenda Knight of Nashville, and a host of other beloved relatives and friends.

Annabel's body was cremated. Her ashes will be scattered on the outgoing tide off the Georgia Coast on a day that seems right. — Lovein Funeral Home, Nashville

---

Valdosta Daily Times 201 North Troup Street Valdosta, GA 31601

# *Miss Peaches' Café de Lite*

A Novel by

Annabel Alderman

In Collaboration with

Dan Kochakian

Copyright 2024 – Dan Kochakian

*Let those who were there, marvel at the truth in re-  
telling ~*

*Let those who were not, marvel at the fantasy...~*

*Annabel Alderman  
At Nashville, Georgia  
10 February 09*

# *Miss Peaches' Café de Lite*

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# # #

*Miss Peaches' Café de Lite*

*A Novel*

*By*

*Annabel Alberman*

*For my unforgettable, blues piano-playing brother,*

*Gennie Griner*

# *Miss Peaches' Café de Lite*

A Novel

*by Annabel Alderman*

*in collaboration with Dan Kochakian*

## *Prologue*

"China? No, sir, Daddy. I don't believe I want to go to China." That's what I said to my father, the intrepid missionary. The year was 1947, and I was 14.

He and my mother had spent most of my childhood seeing about God's business in distant lands. I did go along on one of their earlier jaunts to Malaysia, but I was only five months old when we left the USA and was not quite three when we came back.

Even then, armed with the infantile wisdom inherent in one recently arrived from the Other Realm, I knew then that my destiny did not lie with my parents' chosen profession. Instead, I clung rather desperately to my mother's baby brother, confirmed bachelor and man-about-town, until my mother and father surrendered to my choice and made alternate arrangements for my upbringing.

Making sure I'd be safe and properly schooled, Mama and Daddy engaged the services of Jasper Heathrow Winningham and his wife, Florence, retired missionaries, who moved into our house and assumed responsibility for me. I called them Uncle Jazz and Aunt Florrie, and tried to go about my childhood business as if they weren't there.

Still, both of them made the effort. Aunt Florrie had been a school teacher before she started working for the Lord, so she started me early on reading and spelling and the like. She made certain I went to school every day whether I liked it or not.

She and Uncle Jazz never said a word against my chosen associate, but I got the message that they considered him fast, not the sort they would have picked to enjoy my undying loyalty.

Mommy and Daddy got regular, hand-written reports from them on my progress in the educational realm, and they seemed satisfied that I was in good hands. On their brief, bi-annual visits, they bragged a lot on both my keepers and me.

So, here they were again, in the summer of 1947, home to see if they could interest me in soul-saving work. Even as I understood and admired their zeal, I knew for sure it was not for me.

Why, I reasoned to myself, should I run away from paradise?

#### *How I Spent Every Summer Vacation I Ever Had*

Running a small-town print shop out of a rented, one-story, stucco building that backs up to a feed store might not cause any backbends on Wall Street, but it does keep the printer abreast of social trends that shape a community. I keep remembering those brilliant days when I thought the universe turned on my kingdom in a mini-town at the swampy, bottom end of Georgia. My print shop was really founded by my mama's baby brother, George Maryland Conover 'Connie' Caslin, upon whom, as a toddler, I hung the name, "Uncle Mary." He started the enterprise as a playpretty and also to print high-class stuff he couldn't get done this side of Jacksonville.

By the time I was eight years old, I had spent five of my years hanging behind Uncle Mary and playing in the shop. Naturally, I mimicked all he did, so working the equipment came almost as second nature to me. I much preferred the shop to home, to school, to church, to anywhere my earnest guardians thought I ought to be.

Unknown to my staid substitute parents, Uncle Mary taught me to drive his 1941 Ford pick-up as his gift for my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. We bucked up and down the dirt back roads of Kyle Corbett County for about a week there, me practically standing up behind the wheel, beaming, and Uncle Mary yelling, "Don't strip 'er gears, Jake, my boy!" and "You got to let out 'er clutch e-e-e-easy." I never loved anything in my young life like I loved Uncle Mary's pick-up, whose name was "One-Eyed Pete." Uncle Mary's shop sidekick, Holo, named the thing because one or the other headlight was always non-functional. Uncle Mary and I didn't give a righteous rip about that.

Only much later did I learn that Uncle Mary and whatever current lady friend he was entertaining had used that rough-riding old rattletrap as their Batmobile. With it, they (especially he) stayed current with everything everybody was up to. I can hear him now, advising me, "Boy, you got to know your territory."

School, now, was something else. In fact, it was a dread appendage to my otherwise glorious existence, but I hung on as best I could, dropping by the schoolhouse every time it was convenient. The arrangement lasted pretty well until I was 15. That was the year Uncle Mary met Viola Marie Newhouse Chesterfield Hearndon, a raven-haired vixen who, between divorces, was visiting her cousin outside of DuPont.

He courted her for about three weeks and they were so mutually smitten that they decided to run away together, back to her daddy's ranch in West Texas. Phillips Petroleum had struck oil there a few years earlier, making Old Man Newhouse so rich that he couldn't find enough ways to spend his money. Viola could wisely see that Uncle Mary could help along those lines.

So, Uncle Mary is waiting for me that October afternoon when I get in from grappling with the edifying principles laid out in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade algebra book. That's when I hear the big news about the impending elopement.

I can tell at once that we're in some kind of emergency situation by seeing how Uncle Mary is dressed. No shop jeans and denim shirt and brown loafers that day. He's wearing his off-white linen suit pants, a bottle green monogrammed shirt, a paler-hued green tie embellished with tiny caramel-colored sunbursts and his new, tan-and-white wingtips. His suit jacket awaits on a wire hanger on the door where we generally sling our raincoats.

His dark, curly mop has been tamed somewhat by a generous application of Lucky Tiger, and it's obvious that his shave is no homemade, hit-and-miss job. No, sir. That velvet cheek had come direct from Chester "Snowman" Middleton's fragrant emporium. His big, square hands bear no trace of printer's ink, and he's sporting his diamond-dominated Masonic ring on his right hand.

"Boy, I've decided you can have my little ol' house down yonder since I ain't planning to live there no more," he begins. He hands me a folded piece of legal-looking paper which, in my shock, I don't even unfold. I just lay it down on the work bench and stare at him.

"I'll send after my stuff in a few days," he says, "but mostly my books. I ain't gon' need that furniture, so it stays where it's at."

I keep expecting to wake up, but it doesn't happen. Then he hits me with the big news: he's giving me his shop! Before I can swallow that, he finally reveals the secret of the thick, ornately-bound book he has kept locked up in the middle drawer of his desk. It is his private notebook with its title, '*Coochee Chronicles*', grandly embossed on its cover. Therein he has recorded everything of value that has happened in Tallulahcoochee in the preceding 10 to 15 years.

"Call this book your insurance, boy," He instructs me, adding his trademark admonition, "It'll he'p ya." I couldn't know then what a treasure that book would prove to be; that I would come to know Tallulahcoochee and its inhabitants in detailed ways, second only to The Deity.

Having now virtually committed to memory many of those carefully-

wrought passages, I feel qualified to tell about things that happened before I ever made my debut on earth.

Uncle Mary's good right arm was a guy named Homer Josiah "Hojo" Higgins, a tall, muscular, laconic black guy who, from my teenage perspective, was as old as God's dog, but who was really a twenty-something swinger. He sort of came with the shop. During Uncle Mary's giveaway performance, Hojo sat sideways on a layout table, one foot touching the floor, watching Uncle Mary, watching me. He grinned when Uncle Mary waved a hand in his direction while advising, "You be good to Hojo now 'cause he's the best man you ever gon' find." Then he hands me a bill of sale and says, "It's all yours, my man. You have a good time, you hear? That's what I'm planning to do."

With that, he eases into his suit jacket, saunters out to the curb and slides behind the wheel of his brand new 1949 green Buick Roadmaster. He puts his head out the window and hollers back to me, "Truck key's on that nail by the new Linotype!"

With that final divestment, he gives me a thumbs-up and rides off into the sunset, bound for Odessa, Texas, by way of DuPont. Except for one picture postcard around Thanksgiving of that year, saying, "Being rich is the most fun I ever had," I seldom heard directly from him again. Some locals that go every year to visit some of their kids out in Kermit, Texas, which is close to Odessa, always bring back news of Uncle Mary and Aunt Viola's latest outrageous purchase, along with second-hand greetings from them to me. I don't guess he's ever had much time to write, but then, I don't have much time to answer either.

Being a businessman at 15 takes the edge off teenage hijinks, but that didn't worry me. I had already been living in Elysium, and now I owned it.

Nevertheless, if I may skip ahead in this recounting, I did contend with high school until the very end, counting all my eleven years as a guest of the state as penance for unspecified sins. What viler scourge than to assign a hapless delinquent such a dreary diversion? To bar him, for daily hours on end, from the

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unalloyed bliss that reigned, perpetually and uncircumscribed, in Uncle Mary's (how my) print shop?

I ought to mention that I was scared nigh to death of the school principal. That kind of stark trepidation does tend to make a person tractable.

#### *Where Do I Go From Here?*

After Uncle Mary had gone, I stood there in the door of the shop for a long time trying to get a handle on what was happening to me and what I meant to do about it all. Hojo eased out to stand beside me after awhile, giving me a sympathetic eye now and then. I appreciated it, but it didn't do much to settle my mind. What was I gonna tell my proxy parents? I knew they would have a big fit and say that Uncle Mary was irresponsible and careless of their substitute son's future. I was braced for them to scoop up my deed and my bill of sale and put them in their lockbox at the bank until I reached the age of 35.

Looking out over the narrow street, visited by the terrors of uncertain exultation and ill-defined teenage angst, I cried tears in a gushing cascade. I hugged my thin rib cage and moaned, "Oh, me! Oh, me..." Hojo laid a strong brown arm across my shoulders and comforted me with, "Le's me an' you go on down t' de café an' git us a beer." I'd never noticed before how Hojo talked. He pronounced "café" with emphasis on the first syllable; he said "de" for "the" and his cadences were born of an inherent rhythmic back-beat. Imagine. And I'd been hearing him talk since I was three.

What did he say? Beer? I'd hear it sternly referred to as "an adult beverage" for so long that I assumed it was forever out of my reach. Here he was telling me, a callow teenage dunce, that he and I were about to share a dram or two of that forbidden nectar. Things were moving faster than I could keep up. Still, Hojo was my lone hope in a scrambled world.

"Okay," I brazened, "why not?"

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Hojo stepped back into the shop, snagged the truck key from its nail and came back out. He placed the key in my hand, favoring me with a conspiratorial wink as he suggested, "You drive."

I had never once set my young foot in Miss Lula's Café, though I knew that Uncle Mary and various of his buddies could have been considered regulars there. Miss Lula, herself, was not a stranger; she came by the shop now and then to order work such as party notices and funeral programs. So it wasn't as if I were in completely alien territory.

When we opened the double screen doors and stepped inside the cool, dimly-lit café, I was enveloped in its easy atmosphere. The jukebox was playing some John Lee Hooker artistry, two or three couples were dancing and Miss Lula was leaning behind the bar, drinking an Orange Crush in the brown bottle and keeping time with a pink fly swatter. Seeing me, she put down the bottle and the fly swatter and hustled from behind the bar in welcome. "Who dis you got wid you, HoJo?" she inquired, winking at me so I'd know she was teasing.

"Dis gon' be my boy from now'r on," HoJo told her. "I 'magine he needin' a draf'. As well as me."

All the while, he was pressing me towards a stool at the counter. Before I could assess the situation, two cold glasses filled with the golden brew were set on the damp, rough-grained surface in front of me and my new, self-appointed guardian, HoJo.

That was one time I didn't embarrass myself. We touched glasses briefly and I drank my beer slowly, but without a grimace. It tasted like something I might go on enjoying for a long time.

After that, I was able to worry down a side of Miss Lula's pit-cooked barbecue ribs, a crockery bowful of home-grown turnip greens drowned in pepper sauce and a couple of slabs of hot cracklin' bread with hand-churned butter. I got

up the nerve to walk over and pick a number on the jukebox which carried almost all of my favorite music, including some Jim Reeves and Eddie Arnold right there alongside Count Basie and Fats Waller and Bea Booz.

It was after 8PM when One-Eyed Pete and I jounced in at the gate to my yard, not even remembering that I'd left my bicycle at the shop. Aunt Florrie and Uncle Jazz might as well get used to it, I said to myself, 'cause I might be an hour or so late every night from now on.

\* \* \* \* \*

It's funny how you never notice the unique, priceless traits of your near and dear until it's too late to appreciate them and worse, too late to study them with any degree of sufficiency.

Not until I opened '*Coochee Chronicles*' did I realize that I'd been grandly tutored by a Shakespeare/Saint Paul/Will Rogers triumvirate. I had to marvel that these mighty passages had come from the pen of a classically-educated but style-conscious womanizer with the taste buds of a strong-draught connoisseur.

Uncle Mary headed up each episode with an original, often sublime commentary on the material that would ensue. Not only did he recount with unerring accuracy, he apprehended the implications of those events and identified the motivations that drove them. "Lucid," I began to believe, should have been Uncle Mary's middle name. At least. How had I overlooked such erudition?

It appears that, from his journal's inception, he had addressed the subject matters in *Chronicles* with a thoroughly mature eye. There is no evidence of his having "grown" anywhere in there. He just started off thoughtful, balanced and most of all, right.

The first thing I memorized out of that book was the sagacious comment that presaged the first entry. He wrote, "When real to us beyond dispute, our dearest dreams have become reality for all the world to see. It's a cosmic principle." Every time I call it to mind, I can't help wondering what it was that Uncle

Mary dreamed. And hoping he got it.

That first night that I read from his journal marked my whole life's most critical milestone. It was liberating, but somehow sad. In fact, I cried. "Oh, Uncle Mary," I yearned through my tears, "come back. I'm gonna need you."

#### *My Tiz*

In Uncle Mary's estimation, a lot of things would have been different for everybody if it hadn't been for that momentous morning when Loy DeFord "Slaw Dog" Button's sister first step foot upon the elegant Farber compound.

"God always says 'Yes' to his earnest servant. And He smiles when He says it."

Early in 1935, the Farbers' long-time retainer, Wydelia Dobson, became enmeshed in a two-way amorous fervor with a visiting Chrysler leather cutter from Detroit and summarily departed Tallulahcoochee, leaving Nellie Farber to "do" for herself and her husband. Nettie's domestic skills could be exhausted in something under 20 minutes. What was a moneyed couple to do?

Thus, said Uncle Mary, began a procession of decidedly incompetent scullery maids, none of whom could at all fathom what should be done at the Farber mansion. Nettie finally despaired of finding suitable household personnel and tried not to notice the constant botch being made of her house.

Uncle Mary's notebook observations on Nettie's plight waxed passionate and poetic. He wrote of "the dismaying tactile countermark of lemon oil having been slathered across the keys of her Steinway grand, the desperate echo of transparent European porcelain as it wriggled from an inattentive grip and dashed itself against the parapet, clothes line stains on the mister's rough-dried dress shirts and the crash of draperies being brought down by an out-of-control vacuum cleaner, not to mention the inedible victuals that were slung daily upon her board.

It was not easy."

Four years into a kind of unrelieved disarray, according to Uncle Mary, a young woman seeking domestic employment appeared at the Farber door. She was neat, mannerly, and articulate. To her strange comfort, Nettie could see herself at that age in the person of this slender, coffee-colored youngster. Everything about her was restrained, yet not cold. Her name was Mary Magdalene Button.

She said that she had graduated on the previous day from George Washington Carver Academy as the class valedictorian. "That's the Negro public school," she explained with earnest pride. She presented her diploma and her final report card, the latter documenting her status as a straight "A" student with an unblemished attendance record.

"I'm not trained in housekeeping," she explained, "so I will come and work without pay until I can master the work and the schedule that you would like."

*God is good,* thought Nettie. To the young lady who stood before her, she was instantly reassuring.

"Oh, no, my dear. I cannot allow you to work for no money. You will begin at my present housekeeper's regular salary. When can you start?"

"I'm ready now."

"Ah, well. Ah, yes. Well, why don't you go on home and have some lunch and come back this afternoon around two?"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you. I'll do that."

So quickly, so gracefully, she was down the steps and gone.

Nettie hurried to the kitchen where Carborine, her current manor

house terrorist, sat, balancing her considerable heft on the two back legs of a breakfast room chair propped against the refrigerator door. She was reading a ragged edition of *Race Escapades* while a pot of rutabagas, boiled dry, sputtered and burned on the stove. Her shoes had been shed early in the day and she was beating an intermittent tattoo on the tile with her long toenails.

Reluctantly, Carborine raised her eyes from the page when the lady of the house interrupted her. "Wuz you wantin' sub'm?"

Nettie turned off the stove and slid the scorched utensil to one side. Smiling broadly, she turned back to her kitchen reader. "Yes, I wuz wantin' sub'm," she mimicked. "I want you and your stray shoes and your raunchy magazine and your obnoxious toenails out of my house before I count to ten. One, two..."

Whoa, now.

"My work day ain't did 'til fo' o'clock."

No answer.

"Whachu mean? You wantin' me t' leave NOW?"

"Three, four, five..."

Carborine grabbed her magazine and set off in search of her shoes as Nettie continued to count. She wasn't exactly off the premises by the count of ten, but it was not many seconds longer before Carborine had disappeared like mist before the morning sun.

At 2 o'clock that afternoon, Mary Magdalene Button rang the rear doorbell. One time. Life was truly on the upswing at the Farber estate.

Once inside the house, Nettie's new minion quickly settled two age-old questions with, "My friends call me 'Tiz' and I turned sixteen last Christmas

Day."

It wasn't long, Uncle Mary noted, before Nettie Farber could be heard at church, at the bridge club, at the drug store, speaking with smug propriety of "my Tiz."

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### **Show Me the Way to Go Home**

I could tell that Uncle Mary liked Nettie Farber, as well as Tiz, because he spent a lot of words on the two of them. Come to think of it, Uncle Mary did admire virtue in anybody. Of this scene, he wrote, "When a pure heart surrenders to Fate, the angels sing."

When Tiz took the job with Mrs. Farber, what she got with it was a problem she identified to herself as homelessness.

She was still living with her Aunt Gracie and Uncle Tarver, but it had been understood from the start that, as soon as she finished high school and got settled in a job, they were pulling out for Philadelphia. Their several children had already quit the South for Philly, and they wanted to join them.

Tiz need not have worried. Just a few hours' work at the Farbers' house had convinced Nettie that here, at last, was the live-in person she'd sought ever since Wydelia left.

She broached the subject to Tiz on the third day.

"I was just wondering, Tiz, if you wouldn't find it more convenient to ah, maybe live here with us -- ah, as it were, on the premises . . .

Nettie tried to make it sound casual, but her own heart was thudding, braced for a turndown.

Tiz snapped to attention. Had she heard this woman right, or had her imagination slipped a little?

"Here? Live here? You mean, live right here?"

Control was about to desert Tiz, so drained as she was by the anxiety she'd been experiencing about a place to live. She started to cry.

"Oh, my God, what did I say? Tiz, why are you crying? You can just tell me 'no,' and I'll understand."

"No, no, no," was the response she got. This time, Nettie was the one who turned tearful.

"I wasn't trying to be overbearing, Tiz," she sobbed. "You may live anywhere you like."

"No, no, I mean, yes! I mean, yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am, I can move in here. I sure can. When?"

Then came the choices: in the ground-level basement waited four, spacious rooms, tastefully furnished, that opened onto a moon garden. Then, there was the guest house, also well appointed and much roomier, but a right smart farther away from the main residence.

Tiz had no trouble picking; like me and Uncle Mary, she was interested in everything happening around her. She wouldn't have had much of vantage point from the guest house. Right inside "the big house," as she privately called it, she'd be in the catbird's seat.

She had her Uncle Tarver lugging her steamer trunk and her mama's cedar chest over there right around sundown. And after supper, she skipped down to her new home, fell on her knees and prayed thanksgiving 'til daybreak.

The next day, she turned out more work than she had in the previous three days as Mrs. Nettie Faye Farber's lowly servant. Under her breath, all day long, she murmured, "Thank you, Jesus!"

**Doctor, Doctor**

As my philosopher-uncle saw it, when Royce Morris foresaw his destiny as the only all-purpose physician within a 50-mile radius of a Georgia tank town by the name of Tallulahcoochee, he never envisioned Lorelei Cato.

"We get some strange players in our lives," noted my private historian, "but who's to say they aren't there by divine design?" Uncle Mary was almost obsessed with examining the startling turns life can take. Some indication can be found in the words he used to open this rondeau: "Remember, my children, to take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow could re-configure your destiny."

With that, he set out to spin a tale of true romance and, since I like the way he did it, I just copied him, word for word. He related:

"Lorelei Cato -- gorgeous, educated, good-humored and damn well rich by reason of having been born into a family where astounding wealth was taken for granted -- most likely never considered operating her life from a corner lot-situated mansion on the fringes of the Okeefenokee Swamp.

"Royce LeFevre Morris was fourth or fifth generation South Georgian, never having contemplated any kind of life outside a medical practice amongst his own kind. His daddy was a doctor, as was his daddy's daddy. But both of them practiced their

considerable skills in Valdosta, a little city that's more than 40 miles - not to mention a whole world away - from where we were.

"Everybody here knew both 'Old Dr. Morris' and 'Young Dr. Morris' and, for a lot of years, any kind of disease, distress or discomfort would send wild-driving relatives to Valdosta, loved one writhing on a pallet in the bed of the pickup, for one more Morris Miracle to restore their ailing kin.

"You know how it is with these doctors' families - there's always another little doctor coming along to take up the eventual slack. That's how it was with the Morrises, but we didn't really keep the progress of the new medical generation at the forefront of our consciousness.

"Still, he must have gone right on to med school, and must have done all that stuff that's required of pre-doctors. Because one day he drove into town, rented some office space and hand-lettered his own sign that said, 'Royce Morris, M. D., No Appointment Necessary.'

"I readily concede that he was a right good-looking young man - tall and slender, red-headed, like his forebears, with a loose-jointed walk. You never could imagine his being very badly disconcerted about anything. There was something about his expression that was open and just a tad inquiring. Or maybe, sympathetic.

"I well knew that the women in this town would cotton to the new medicine man like they hadn't taken to any of the quacks that

had drifted in and out over the years. Anyway, as long as there was a Dr. Morris of some kind on the planet, the others could come and go without anybody even noticing.

"Without doubt, it was the hand of a benign and generous fate that set the doctor's little rented office building just across the street and down the block a couple of hundred yards from *Miss Lula's Cafe*.

"Royce probably shared that sentiment the longest day he lived. Which, I guess, when you think about it, was not nearly long enough."

That last paragraph of Uncle Mary's made me more than a little bit apprehensive. At the time he wrote it, absent second sight, he would not have known the tragic end of Royce Morris.

**One Dear She**

He was a romantic, Uncle Mary was. The care with which he told of love made me realize it most definitively. "Let naught of men's affairs occupy the mind of one in love; rather, rush to meet rash Cupid and wrest his arrows from his grasp, lest his aim go astray." With that, he fell right into young love with his usual, keen eye for detail:

"Royce hadn't been practicing his art more than a couple of weeks when Miss Lula, herself, showed up at his office, mindfully escorting the loveliest woman Royce had ever laid eyes upon.

"She was dressed in a soft, silk dress of ethereal pink, high-heeled, pink pumps with roses shyly blooming at the toe, and a broad-brimmed, rose-encrusted, floppy-brimmed, Panama hat. A discreet, little silk handbag swung from her absolutely perfect, creamy white arm.

"'Say, Doc, you wanta take a look at thi'shyunh lady's faininguh?' asked Miss Lula. 'She got herse'f a splintuh frum th' bar ovuh t'my cafe.'

"Did he want to look at her finger? My God, he wanted to look at as much of this angel as he could manage without losing his license. He caught himself in time to keep from behaving like a total fool.

"'Oh, of course. Do come right on back, ladies. Let's see, now - splinter, is it? Sit right here.' He indicated a high stool in his examining room.

"'I'm Lorelei Cato,' noted the patient. 'I've been over at Miss Lula's Cafe, renewing old acquaintances. When I was a little girl, my granddaddy used to bring me here to see Miss Lula, and we always had such a good time.'

"The sound of her - never mind what she was saying - was a celestial symphony to Royce Morris. True, he had the tiny splinter out of her beautiful finger in briefest moments, but he continued to hold that sweet, marvelous hand. It should be noted that Lorelei Cato made no effort to disengage it from the doctor's gentle grasp.

"'Are you visiting friends here in town?' he finally found his voice to inquire.

"'Well, yes and no. I didn't let Miss Lula know I was coming, but she's invited me to stay overnight at her house. And I intend to do that. Maybe I'll stay on a few days if it's all right with her.'

"Miss Lula's eyes and ears were taking in every word, every nuance, but her expression was as bland as if she'd not noticed. She knew, long before he spoke, what Royce's next move would be.

"'Inasmuch as you're kind of a stranger in town, why don't you join me for supper at Miss Lula's Cafe tonight? This town has a reputation for being hospitable, and I wouldn't want to miss a chance to prove it.'

"Then, 'It's really the best place to eat on the most special of occasions.'

"He's talkin' mor'n he need to," thought Miss Lula. "Lordy mercy, them educated peoples be's funny -- seem like they fergits theyse 'ves jes' time they gits insid'a one 'a them collidges."

"Walking back to the Cafe, Lorelei, still clinging to Miss Lula's arm, asked, 'He's not married, is he?'

"'Naw, he ain't marr'et.'

"'Thank God. I couldn't have borne it if he had been.'

"Royce Morris and Lorelei Cato were married three days later at the Courthouse in Harlow, where Miss Lula, Princess Amy and her little 11 year-old granddaughter, Peaches, as well as Cool Poole, alto sax man extraordinaire and leader of South Georgia's premier musical group, the Frigid Airs, Sheriff Lige Timmons, Mrs. Garland Sweigart, president of the Southeast Georgia Woman's Alliance, and Cherry Ann Sikes, wife of the Baptist minister, stood in respectful witness.

"Strangely enough, neither bride nor groom notified their respective families of the impending nuptials.

"Miss Mabel Ellarene "Shush" Jenkins, whose unyielding soprano voice was in great demand for festive occasions even before she founded her singing school, sang Ramona, Pagan Love Song and I'll Be Loving You Always, a capella, and Slaw Dog Button played Glow Worm on his harmonica.

"It was all Princess Amy could do to keep Maybelle Tybee 'Tisket' Lightfoot from singing her best song, I Gotta Right to Cry. Instead, she and her sister, Hazelene, sang Let Me Love You

Tonight, causing the bride to blush and the guests to applaud softly. The groom grinned broadly and the rev took a renewed interest in his prayer book.

"Immediately following the ceremony, the wedding reception at Miss Lula's Cafe commenced. It was never accurately reported how long the celebration lasted. Persistent rumor has it that the newlyweds had returned from a leisurely honeymoon before the Cafe ever stopped rocking."

I could envision Uncle Mary's smile at the re-telling.

### ***Visionaries on the Verandah***

"Take heart, young lover, for more heavenly surprises are in store." That's how Uncle Mary fell into this segment of l'amour. I felt myself blushing at some of his romantic prose, and decided that safety lay in paraphrasing. I hope it doesn't detract from the accuracy of the story.

It came as a huge stunner to Royce Morris that his lovely wife had a trainload of money at her command. In fact, he didn't find out until three weeks after they returned from their honeymoon.

Being the conscientious chap that he was, Dr. Morris had spent much of the brief interval between the meeting and the marrying of his adored Lorelei in seeking proper living quarters for them.

His mother had taken care of his own housing arrangements before he ever got to Tallulahcoochee. Her old school chum, Mrs. Nettie Faye Cameron Hazlitt Carnegie Farber, was enjoying her generously-financed widowhood in an opulent, Italian-style, three-story, stone structure that her recently-late third husband, Reginald Dumbarton Asquith "Reggie" Farber, the financier, had had designed and built for her in 1934. Why there? Well, it was Nettie's hometown.

It was there that Royce was welcomed as a "roomer," and his elaborate suite was abundantly sufficient for his needs at the

time. However, with a wife and - please God - some beautiful Morris children, he knew he must find appropriate living quarters. Nevertheless, it was to Mrs. Farber's domicile that he took his bride, endlessly assuring her that it was only temporary.

To his amazement, Lorelei and Mrs. Farber were instant confidantes, and the new Mrs. Dr. Morris whiled away not a few hours with their hostess, sitting on the broad, shady porch and drinking cinnamon rose tea laced with apricot brandy.

Tiz Button, Nettie's indispensable live-in maid, steadily plied the pair with such delicacies as chilled cucumber soup topped with herbed sour cream, watercress finger sandwiches and creamy, hand-churned, fresh peach ice cream, the better to overhear all the news by way of her practiced, discreet eavesdropping.

### ***Surprise, Surprise, Surprise***

Uncle Mary was on a roll. I could feel his elation as he wrote this item. Which he thoughtfully headed up with, "When riches begin to manifest, there's never an end to the opulence." He meant that thing, as you can see from what he reported.

It was a Thursday afternoon in mid-June when Royce got the second shock of his life, the first having been the appearance of his eternal love at his office. Once again, it was Lorelei who simply took his breath away.

To lead up to the shock, here's what went on in their quarters on Monday evening of that same week.

"Royce, my beloved," she began, "do you like this place? This house? I mean, do you think we could be comfortable here if it were ours - if we owned it?"

Bless her little heart, he thought, I need to tell her that I won't be making that kind of money for years. Oh, how I hate to disappoint her - I didn't know she envisioned our having a place like this.

Aloud, Royce tried to be clear without sounding stingy; nor, worse, remonstrative. Too, without showing how ashamed he was that he couldn't buy everything his angel wanted.

"It would be wonderful, darling, but you know, this house would cost more than I can afford now. Probably more than I can ever afford.

"Besides, I found us a little house out by the river that seems about right for us. We can rent it and move in next month if you like it."

"But you do like this place, don't you?" she persisted.

"Of course, sweetheart - I love it. But," with a nervous little laugh, "we can't buy it."

"Okay. I just thought I'd ask."

Royce thought the subject was closed, especially by the lingering smile she gave him when she answered.

Three days later, Walkman Mincey brought a manila envelope to Royce's office and waited until he could deliver it in person to the doctor.

"What's this?" inquired Royce of his messenger.

"I don' knowsuh - I wuz jes' tole t'braing it."

Eyes steadily fixed on the ceiling, Walkman pocketed his tip from Royce and limped away without another word.

It was a warranty deed made out to Royce LeFevre Morris and Lorelei Cato Morris, describing a three-acre, fully landscaped plot of earth in the Town of Tallulahcoochee, situated at the northwest corner of the intersection of Maxwell and Viceroy Streets and having located thereon a three-story, stone residential structure, a two-story, stone guest house and a three-car garage. All furnishings were included in the transaction. The consideration was recited as being "One Hundred Seventy-five Thousand and No/100 Dollars, cash in hand paid at the signing and

delivery of this instrument." Thereupon, in a spidery, Spencerian script, the signature of Nettie Faye C. H. C. Farber had been affixed and duly acknowledged by requisite officialdom as genuine.

His wife was alone on the porch when Royce got there.

"Where is - where is, uh, Nettie Faye - uh, Miz Farber?" was his fumbling opener. He appeared to be trembling.

"Oh, she just left with her sister and brother-in-law for Atlanta. She's taken a suite at the Cox-Carlton Hotel, where she's been wanting to live for a long time."

"Lorelei, darling, I tried to tell you I can't afford this house. How do you think I'll ever pay for it?"

"It's paid for, Royce. What's the point of my having all that money if we don't enjoy it?"

"What money? Please, dear, what money?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? My grandfather left me millions of dollars, and I never really bought much of anything with it -- not anything that matters. Until now."

\* \* \*

"I've told this story several times," wrote Uncle Mary, "and the same old question gets asked every time, which is, 'How does some gritty, hard-favored, job shop operator just happen to know all the details?'

"It's like this: Tiz Button - you know, Mrs. Farber's housekeeper - she's sweet on Homer Jeremiah 'HoJo' Higgins, who helps me at the shop. She tells him and he tells me. That's not

all of it - Stanford 'Snapper' Tison does the yard work over there, and his grandboy/assistant gardener, Gideon 'Glass Eye' McConico, is tight with HoJo. So the news can't help but travel in my direction.

Any details I might miss get filled in by Noble Commodore "Walkman" Cusack. He got his nickname from walking everywhere he goes.

At the beginning of the war, he got stationed at Moody Field that's about 17 miles from Tallulahcoochee, and he walked here every Friday night. Then, he walked back to the base on Sunday night.

That funny limp is what he got from napping on the Coast Line tracks one night when the midnight train came through. Right after that, the Army Air Corps gave him an honorable discharge and the railroad laid some heavy pocket change on him. How lucky can a guy get?

Anyhow, being close to the ground gives him a keener insight than most folks can manage, so I know I'm getting the inside straight if it comes from Walkman.

"One of my girlfriends, Joyful Victoria 'Joy V.' Brewster, says I'm a busybody, but that's not it, not at all. I just like to know what's going on. And what's the good of knowing if you don't get to spread it around?"

That's the best part of my inherited traits that I know, good and well, I got from Uncle Mary.

### **And Babies Make Four**

The other thing that Uncle Mary liked, next to romance, was baby children. I hope he got to play with the Morris kids; you could see he wanted to. Before the recounting of their early lives, he wrote, "Hold him gently and gaze tenderly into that inscrutable countenance. Realize that he yet remembers the Wondrous Land from whence he came." See what I mean about the embarrassing beauty of Uncle Mary's words?

On the first anniversary of their marriage, Lorelei presented Royce with their eagerly-awaited offspring -- not one new Morris to brighten the world, but two! Two, mind you, one of each gender.

So arrived Horace and Dorace Morris, twin apples of their doting parents' eyes.

"Sweetheart," said Royce, when the twins were four days old. "Princess Amy came by the office yesterday for a little talk. She's got the break she's waited so long for - she and her USO troop are finally booked for an overseas tour.

"The only hitch is that she can't take her 12-year old granddaughter, Peaches. Do you know, that child has spent almost every day of her young life on the road with the Princess?

"Anyway, Princess Amy thinks she needs to learn something about regular, every day, family life - you know, keeping house, cooking, taking care of little ones - and she needs to be in

school. So she's offering to let Peaches come live with us while she's gone, and help you with the babies.

"See, sweetheart, she could stay in that suite off the nursery - it's just sitting there, empty, anyway - and we'd have the whole Summer for you to show her what you want done before school starts."

He waited while his adorable wife mulled his announcement. Presently, she smiled her bewitching smile at him and asked, "Is Peaches that little girl who was with Princess Amy at our wedding? If so, I think I'd really like to have her here. She almost stole my heart away in that short time I saw her. I suspect Tiz could use some help, too."

Much relieved that he could provide strong help and agreeable companionship for the mother of his children, Royce rejoiced with, "I knew somehow you'd like that, my dearest! I'll go tell Peaches to come on in out of the car."

Tall, lanky, adolescent Peaches, wearing a long, green taffeta dress, red, high-heeled pumps, a man's fedora hat and carrying a purple velour valise, alighted from the doctor's 1941 French blue Buick phaeton and minced up the front walkway. She was giggling just a bit, not at all sure of what life was about to hand her.

Once inside, she was met by a dignified, but welcoming Tiz, who took her valise and inquired if she'd had breakfast.

The beauty, the expanse, the finery that met her eyes rendered her momentarily speechless. Recovering somewhat, she responded rather cautiously to Tiz's hospitality.

"I awready had some toas' 'n a choklit milk."

Belatedly, she added, "Thank ya, though."

With awkward timidity, she removed her hat and her shoes, setting them neatly by the front door. Tiz watched, shaking her head slightly and mentally starting a list of what she would necessarily teach this girl child about a lady's conduct when she's going on the job.

Done with arranging her shed cloathing, Peaches straightened, ran both hands across her close-cropped head, lightly brushed the front of her long, party dress and whispered, "Where my babies?"

### ***Moving In, Moving Up, Moving On***

New beginnings always intrigued Uncle Mary, so Peaches' total re-arrangement of life at the Morris manse was something he watched with great interest. "Pause and look ahead with fear and trembling at every crossroad," he counseled, "lest the wicked path seem right." Maybe Uncle Mary should have been a preacher.

Peaches' arrival at the Morrises' place threw the household in a state of high excitement. It wasn't anything in particular that she did, it was just that she, herself, seemed exciting. That's an odd thing to say about a 12 year-old girl, but it was the truth.

Tiz took her to the nursery where Lorelei was trying to meet the needs of both babies, and feeling rather inept at the job. Peaches looked over the situation, tied a neat, side knot in her long taffeta dress, and reached down for Horace, at the moment screaming his lungs out.

"Aw, you doesn' had nuthin' t'cry about, chile. Peaches is ri'chyunh. Yeah, you gone be awright. Ummmm-hmmmm. You sho' is. Yessuh. Oo, ain't he pretty? Anh-hanh, tha's my li'l'e boy."

All the time, she was swaying slowly, easing him along as she moved to one of the rocking chairs. By the time she'd sat down, Horace Morris was beginning to simmer down. Soon he was asleep, nestled against the bosom of his child-nursemaid.

Meantime, Lorelei, copying Peaches' soothing motions, had equal success with Dorace, who also drifted off to sleep.

"How did you do it, Peaches?"

"I don' know'm. Chirren likes me, I reckon."

Lorelei, elated at Peaches' obvious, natural skill with the little ones, sought out Tiz.

"Royce suggested that we put Peaches in the suite next to the nursery, and I guess we'll need to help her get moved in. This all happened so fast, but I know we can depend on HoJo to give us a hand."

"Miz Lorelei, don't worry about it. If HoJo needs some help to get her things placed, we can get Snapper."

Tiz felt that she needed to shield Peaches from blame for any initial discomfort she might cause in the Morrises' lives, so she sought understanding from the bosslady.

"I see the child needs a little supervision, Miz Lorelei; but I really like her, and I'll be giving her guidance as we go along. I mean, if she doesn't live up to your expectations right away, I'd appreciate it if you could give me some time to work with her."

"Tiz, she couldn't be in finer hands than yours. From here on, you are in charge of Peaches."

Walkman, who'd been hired by Princess Amy to do the heavy lifting, brought a leather-covered steamer trunk and two huge, leather traveling bags to the suite that evening, and Peaches became an official member of the Morris Twin Baby Team.

To her credit, Peaches didn't cut up when Princess Amy came to tell her good-bye the next morning before she left for Europe. She just stood in the driveway a long time, waving at a car that had been gone for half an hour.

When she came back in the house, she breathed a ragged kind of sigh, wiped her eyes and slipped quietly into the nursery. She had work to do.

After the babies were fed and put down for as long a nap as they would take that night, Peaches went to her new living quarters to settle in. Before long, she was joined by Tiz, offering to help. Mostly, she wanted to see that Peaches conducted herself correctly in the Morris household.

"Peaches, child, you can't go to work barefooted. Neither, in a long dress."

She said that as she watched Peaches unpack her extensive wardrobe of clothes from the trunk and the suitcases. Trouble was, all the things she brought out, while quite pretty and no doubt expensive, seemed to be things one would wear on very special occasions.

"Dis all I got," explained the child. "Gram'mama jes' wanted me t'look good, just lak she did when we wuz out on d'road." I n'used t'had me some ovah'halls, but Gran'mama made me th'ow 'em away."

"Well, we'll see about all that as soon as we can. But you try on my slippers and, if they'll in any way fit you, you wear them tomorrow."

Peaches' face lit up.

"You gon' lemme wear yo' shoes?"

"Yes," Peaches. It looks as if you're going to be my little girl for awhile."

Tiz couldn't stand it. She went back to her apartment long before Peaches finished unpacking.

Upstairs, Lorelei was telling Royce about the day -- how that child, Peaches, could do anything with the babies, and how she caught on to doing things so quickly. And how Tiz seemed glad to have her here.

"She told me she'll try to help guide her upbringing."

"Wasn't she barefooted tonight?" asked Royce, "Not that it matters, I guess."

"Yes, but I'll see about that as soon as we have time. She came in the house wearing high-heeled shoes, you know, but it's hard to tend to babies like that."

Lorelei seemed ready to forgive anything in Peaches, and Royce sensed that. Still, he couldn't help asking the one question that had bothered him some.

"Do you suppose our children will talk like Peaches?"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"Well, I mean, ah, well, 'colored?'"

Lorelei burst into laughter.

"Royce Morris, you kill me! I hope they do. I love to hear her talk -- it's like, like, well, like caramel . . ."

"Caramel? I can see it, sweetheart -- the caramel-flavored Morris twins."

And they both laughed. This Peaches thing was going to turn out all right, after all.

### **The Law of Tiz**

As you can see, Uncle Mary was a stickler for details.

Between his own insight and Hojo's reporting, not much escaped his keen eye and even keener perception of reality. He even reported what went on behind closed doors at the Morris place, and I'm glad to pass along the minutest happenings. I hope Uncle Mary knows I didn't leave anything out. Not even Tiz's strict education of her young assistant.

Tiz looked in on her new ward later that evening, hoping they might pray together before they slept. She found Peaches prancing around the bedroom in the slippers she had given her. They were too big, as Tiz had feared, but the youngster seemed delighted with them, just the same.

The remarkable thing was the rest of the outfit Peaches was wearing: a pair of magenta, satin pajamas, a matching peignoir and what was surely ten pounds of gold jewelry around her neck. On her head was a yellow, broad-brimmed, organza hat with a swirl of ostrich feathers looped around the brim. She was turning this way and that, eyeing her reflection in the mirror and adjusting her hat, smiling.

"Excuse me, child. I didn't know you were, were, uh, rehearsing."

"Oh, I wuz jes' thinkin' 'bout Gram'mama. This's one 'a her stage hats she gimme t'play wid. It's purty, ain't it?"

Overcome with unnamed and unaccustomed sadness ~ maybe some sense of grief for her own plain, stringent childhood -- Tiz broke into tears.

Peaches looked stricken.

"I sho' didn' mean t'make you cry, Miss Tiz. I didn'. Is it d'hat? Y'want yo' shoes back? Wha's d'matter?"

Tiz put her arms around this thin child, hiding her face from the one she'd planned to "supervise." The supervision was on the other foot right then.

Tiz reached for the glorious hat, gently removed from Peaches' head and took the child's face in both her hands.

"I didn't mean to cry, Peaches. The hat's mighty pretty, and I know your grandmother is proud of you. Just the way I'm going to be, all the time you're here. You wear your nice hat all you want to. It's pretty, just like you are."

Then, reverting to her old self, Tiz suggested, "It's time for bed now. The babies wake up early."

The talk wasn't over, though.

"Miss Tiz, you gon' be a servant all yo' life?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you gon' jes' wait on rich folks all d'time? Be somebody's servant? Ain't you never gon' have nuthin' 'a yo' own?"

This girl was full of surprises. But what better time to explain life to a rambunctious 12 year-old?

"Peaches, I wish you hadn't ask me that right now, but since you did, I'm going to tell you something you'll need to know all your life. Why don't you sit down?"

A wide-eyed Peaches, uneasy that she's asked a question she didn't really want answered, sat.

"Do I look like I'm hungry or mistreated or suffering from anything at all? You know I don't, just like I know I don't. The reason is that I'm young and strong and happy, and I live as good as anybody in this town.

"You look at my apartment! As nice as you can find anywhere. I have lights and running water and an indoor bathroom as good as the Morrises. I have my own car and, if I were to get sick, Lord forbid, I have a doctor on the premises. My clothes are all nice -- not like yours, but nice -- and my friends and my pastor can come to visit me any time I want them here. Every day I eat the same expensive food that the Morrises eat, and I can have all of it I want.

"Can you think of something I don't have?"

"Well--ll, you still somebody's servant, ain'cha? Da's what I wuz gittin' at."

"Peaches, everybody's somebody's servant. If I had a factory job, I'd be the foreman's servant; if I had my own business, I'd be servant to everybody that came in the door. You can't go through life without serving somebody, nor without having somebody serve you.

"Here's how it is with this job, Peaches: I get the benefit of all this fine, expensive property -- the house, the furniture, that beautiful kitchen -- and all the other good things that the Morrises have. They pay for all this fine stuff, and then pay me to help them enjoy it. So I don't know exactly who is whose servant.

"It's a big bonus that I love them, and I believe they love me, too. But see, honey, even if they didn't love me at all, it would still be all right."

Tiz was not accustomed to delivering long speeches, and she certainly had no experience in explaining her philosophy. Out of breath, she sat down on the bed next to Peaches and patted the child's hand.

"Do you see what I'm trying to tell you?"

Peaches looked down at her borrowed slippers, shame-faced.

At last, she raised her eyes to Tiz.

"Yes'm. Thank you, ma'am. I reckon we better git t'sleep."

Back in her apartment, Tiz got ready for bed, prayed and lay down for awhile. Presently, she slipped out of her bed and on her knees for another word with her Master.

"Lord, please don't ever let me lead that child astray. She's so young, yet; she hasn't learned what a comfort it is for somebody to need you like Ms. Lorelei and Dr. Royce and the babies need me. And like HoJo needs me. But she's one I have to be real

careful with, God. I just wanted to remind you that I don't have all the answers. Amen."

She slept the innocent sleep of the just until dawn.

Uncle Mary had to wonder if God thought that was a mighty grown-up prayer to be coming from a nineteen year old.

HoJo, ever the realist, told him the next day he wished Tiz had told Peaches that waiting on rich folks do beat waiting on pore ones.

*War Was Hell Then, War Is Hell Now*

The year was 1943. Uncle Mary, dismayed at his rejection by the armed forces, raced headlong into patriotic printing at the shop and scanned every horizon for ways he could contribute to the war effort. One of those ways was to keep careful records of local warrior-heroes and the consequences of their many sacrifices. I can't help noticing that he did seem most concerned about the Morris clan and their various wartime sagas.

Of course, doctors were needed in the worldwide fray, but they were also needed at home. One might think that married doctors with children would have been routinely exempted from military service. Such was not the case, especially for the ones who had gained the rank of colonel in their college R.O.T.C.

Royce got his notice to report on his third wedding anniversary, which coincided with his twin children's second birthday. He had 30 days to get his affairs in order and depart for the New York and thence to Europe.

Lamentation marked those few days. Peaches called on her regal, between-tours and still-famous grandmother to come to the Morris household and assist in the wailing. Which she did with enormous strength and enthusiastic, righteous indignation.

Wailing to the contrary aside, Dr. Royce Morris took leave of his loved ones in due season, vowing eternal love and devotion, and assuring them that he would soon return, unscathed, to their corner of Paradise.

Three weeks later, two uniformed Army Air Corps persons strode up the front walk at the Morris household. When Peaches saw them, she closed the door to the children's room, hurried to the front of the house to preclude their ringing the doorbell, and flung open the door as they mounted the steps.

She looked from one to the other, then again. And again.

"He's dead, ain't he?"

It was not much of a question -- more of a statement.

The older of the two nodded. The other just looked uncomfortable and kept his eyes on his shoes.

The three of them stood there, in place, for a long, long moment. There wasn't much else to be said, but Peaches finally came to herself and asked, "Won't you gen'lemen come on in d'house?" They came in.

Lorelei came up through the hall, carrying a basket of dew-laden flowers just gathered from the garden. When she saw the visitors, she set the basket very slowly, very gently down on the floor, brushed her hair back with one hand and extended the other hand to greet them. She even managed a small, questioning smile as she fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Her darling was not coming home, after all.

I detected real grief for the widow's plight as I read uncle Mary's tender recounting of that momentous hour.

### **Calling in the Big Guns**

He just couldn't quit with this sad event. Uncle Mary pursued it as if the news had been of his own catastrophe. There was a poignancy to his reporting that almost surpassed that of prior events.

Peaches, he wrote, stood just outside the double, sliding doors that separated the parlor from the hall, and heard them tell how Royce, in saving the lives of four comrades, had lost his own. She heard them tell Lorelei that his body would be returned to Washington, D. C. for burial in Arlington National Cemetery, and that a significant medal would be posthumously awarded.

They described the mode of escort for her and her two children, and promised to be in touch for further details. The only time Lorelei spoke was to exclaim, softly, "I can't go without Peaches and Tiz."

It likely took half an hour for their visit, but it seemed more like years to Peaches. At last, she ushered them out and closed the door.

She went to the parlor to find Lorelei staring, vacant-eyed, at Royce's picture on the piano. At Peaches' step, she tried to rise, but sank back, sobbing piteously, onto the sofa pillows.

Lifting her up, Peaches half-guided, half-dragged her up the broad stairs to her room, eased her onto the high poster bed and ran for a lavender-scented, witch hazel-drenched cloth. Once the calming poultice was in place across the grieving widow's

forehead, Peaches filed downstairs to look in on the children and to call her grandmother. Princess Amy always knew what to do next.

Halfway down, she met Tiz, who was just returning from the grocery store. She quickly related the tragic turn of events, and Tiz rushed upstairs to Lorelei's side.

Maybe more than Peaches, Tiz was grateful Princess Amy was in town.

Within the hour of Peaches' call, Princess Amy arrived.

Uncle Mary said she was turned out in a white linen caftan with a purple dragon embroidered down the back from neckline to hem, purple, spike-heeled pumps and a heavy gold Solomonic amulet, big as a silver dollar, swinging from a long gold rope chain around her neck. She was carefully handed out of the rear compartment of an gleaming, ebony Cadillac limousine, circa 1939, by a nattily-dressed gentleman who, Peaches soon learned, had been "discovered" in Paris during Princess Amy's most recent European tour.

His rank as a private in the U. S. Army had not diminished his allure in the eyes of a variety of French damoiselles, especially one high-stepper who operated under the cognomen of "Parley Vous Frances." Princess Amy had deftly appropriated him from under the collective noses of a clamoring herd of Continental wenches and returned to America with a mustered out and permanently-smitten Henry in her wake.

Peaches also learned that his name was Henry "Night Rider" Moses, and that he gambled -- quite successfully -- for a living.

After he had escorted the Princess to the porch for a tearful meeting with Peaches, Henry returned to his chauffeured vehicle where Miss Lula awaited a protective arm to conduct her safely to the house. She had accompanied them as a mourning friend of the Morris family and as the socially-required chaperone.

Peaches liked Henry on sight. She was enchanted by his dazzling gold front tooth with its 2 carat diamond inset, by his bottle-green brocade vest set off by a hefty gold watch chain, and by his impeccably-tailored trousers and waistcoat, his buffed shoes, his manicured nails.

I got a laugh when Uncle Mary quoted HoJo in telling about it. He said Snapper had been working in the side yard when they drove up, and he told HoJo, "That Mr. Moses is up town an' tore down."

Miss Lula, tall and heavy, wore a long, black, silk dress with six strands of pearls resting upon her goodly bosom and her Sunday wig -- a full, curly, honey blond upsweep, augmented by a single red rose riding just above the left ear. All eight fingers and both thumbs were importantly ringed. Her one accommodation to her capacious frame was her choice of shoes; on this day she wore silver, jewel-encrusted ballet slippers with her black fishnet stockings.

Once inside the house, all voices fell to whispers. Peaches recounted the events of the morning, stopping a few times to see about the twins, napping by then. They had been shielded from everything that happened during the morning, continuing to romp happily in their sunny playroom while the plan of their whole lives unraveled in the parlor. Two years old is sometimes the best age.

Presently, Peaches and her comforters adjourned to the kitchen for coffee and a generous sampling of Miss Tiz's fried apple tarts to keep their strength up, where they made plans for the inevitable trip to Washington and the impending funeral for Dr. -- or, more recently, "Colonel" -- Morris.

Princess Amy continued to remind all of them that she knew he would never come home on the day he left.

"I cou'd see it, plain as day," she noted, lightly touching her eyes again with her lace handkerchief. "Ev'ry time I looked at 'im, I cou'd see 'is ghos'. An' I cou'd hear God callin' 'im - - 'Raw-iss! Raw-iss!' -- I sho' cou'd."

Angling for recognition of her own pietistic powers, Miss Lula chimed in.

"Umm-hmmm. God do speak t' some uv us," she agreed. "He sho' do, Amy. Look like He tol' you, jes' like you say. Jes' like He spoke t'me dat day."

Then, her own participation in this drama came to light with, "You know, I wuz th' one God n'used t'git them two t'gether right

t'start wid. Sho' wuz. I cou'd see God, Hisse'f, wuz workin' th' plan. He sho' did -- God, Hisse'f."

Tiz had come in, clutching the extensive list of friends and relatives she had notified, and poured more coffee.

In concert with Peaches and Henry, Tiz displayed due respect for the sanctified pair who were so obviously close to God, as well as so sadly prophetic in the short, happy life of heroic Royce LeFevre Morris, now woefully late.

### **Friend of the Family**

January, 1945 was one of the coldest months on record in Tallulahcoochee. Uncle Mary complained that he just about had to close down the shop because his only heater wasn't working too well. Customers were so scarce that he didn't think anybody noticed.

It had its up side, though, because he and his current female sidekick could ride about and find out things they might not have known otherwise. They did happen to be trucking around that day when the official-looking blue sedan stopped at the Morris house.

As luck would have it, they rolled by in time to see an Army Air Corps officer get out of the back seat and go to the Morris front door. The driver, a tall colored guy who was also in uniform, had opened the door for the officer, who was white. Then he just got back in under the wheel like somebody does when he plans to wait but for a short while.

His sharp-eyed lady companion, looking through the back glass, saw Tiz come to the door and let the guy in the house. She said she could tell Tiz had never seen him before by the long time it took for her to invite him in.

About sundown, when that car hadn't moved, they went on back to the shop. HoJo was bound to come by when he got through work over there. And he did, but it was late.

It seems that the officer had been a med school classmate and close buddy of the late Royce Morris, and he had been out of the

Country in a war zone when Royce was killed. He had got back to the States in November, and blind fortune had decreed that he be stationed at Moody Army Air Corps Base, close to Valdosta. All he did was come to extend his condolences to Royce's widow, and to say how sorry he was to lose so good a pal. His name, said HoJo, was Audubon Appenzeller, which Uncle Mary thought HoJo was making up.

You got to remember that Col. Audubon Appenzeller had never laid an outsider's astonished eye upon Lorelei Cato Morris before that January afternoon. The watching contingent couldn't help but speculate on how he must have reacted to that uncommonly smart, entertaining, good-looking woman.

Anyway, the visit continued on until she invited him and his driver to stay for dinner, all out of Southern hospitality, of course. And HoJo says the colonel didn't take too long in accepting.

But here's the part of the story that gets thorny. Remember the driver? His name, according to HoJo, is Charlie "Cathead" Porter. Well, he comes on in and is introduced to the widow Morris who, in turn, introduces him to Tiz, who is serving pre-dinner drinks, and then to her four year-old twins and their nursemaid, Peaches.

In the years that Peaches has been part of the Morris clan, Tiz has put some effective effort into making her 12 year-old ward

into a downright presentable, almost 16 year-old lady. All her good work is suddenly appreciated by this Cathead stranger.

The worse part is that Peaches responds to Cathead's admiration with some of the same for him. Tiz has got her mouth mashed down in a straight line and her brow furrowed, seeing that things could very easily get out of hand.

After dinner, Tiz invites Cathead to the kitchen while she tidies up in there and, according to HoJo, she reads his beads for him.

"Sgt. Porter," she says, "Peaches has been left in my care while her family is abroad, and in the time she's been with me, she's been a fine, growing young lady. I'm sorry to tell you that she is only 15 and a half years old, and hardly prepared for the attentions of a young man.

"It was evident to me that you look upon her as a romantic possibility. You may dismiss that idea from your mind. Now. I am sorry to speak so bluntly to you, but any good soldier needs to know the truth of every situation."

Ol' Charlie, he just stood there, looking attentive, but kind o' ill at ease, and let her talk.

"You must understand that you are not Peaches' beau or her boyfriend or anything like that. Under the most lenient of circumstances, you may be called a friend of the family."

Then, when it was his turn, he acquitted himself all right, too.

"Miz Tiz," he says, "I appreciate every word you've said. You are right on all counts. I'm 22 years old, and I've been overseas in the war since I was 19. Peaches, I realize, is not old enough for me to court her yet. But I have to tell you that I'm a patient man, and I'll wait until she is old enough."

Tiz wasn't ready for Cathead Porter, either. She thought he might get mad or be insulted or something. Instead, he agreed with her. It wasn't turning out the way she'd had it pictured.

That's when she smiled at that boy and said, "Won't you have another taste of that rum cake, Charlie?"

HoJo bet Uncle Mary fifty cents that Charlie Porter would be back over there, sitting in the swing with Peaches by the Springtime, and he took that bet. Hojo, he decided, didn't know Tiz like he knew Tiz.

Pressing what he thought was his good streak of luck, HoJo then bet Uncle Mary a whole Dollar that Lorelei and the colonel would be married before August. My good, gambling kinsman said he hated to take advantage of a friend. But he did.

### ***Just Swingin'***

By the time mid-March got here, everything had begun to go to pieces at the Morris house. The twins had the croup, Peaches had the measles, Lorelei had a sprained ankle from falling down the stairs, the colonel went on temporary duty to Moses Lake, Washington, and Cathead got orders transferring him to a base somewhere southwest of Dallas, Texas.

Uncle Mary said he hated to go over there, things being so uncharacteristically dark, but you can't totally desert your friends. So, every day, he sent his best wishes by HoJo, who would come back by the shop every evening to deliver a late report.

According to that world-class source, HoJo, the colonel sent flowers every day and called on the telephone every night. In the meantime, Cathead, remembering which side of his bread was buttered, phoned Miz Tiz every night to inquire after her health, and the health of the household which, of course, included Peaches.

About the third night he called, Tiz broke down and told him how worried she was about "our little girl," telling him that Peaches was very sick. With some foreboding, she asked Cathead if he would like to come to see the sick person. I reckon you know what the answer was.

The next evening, says HoJo, Cathead shows up with a bouquet of roses, and he sits with Tiz at Peaches' bedside for half an hour or so. One time, he even held her hand for a few minutes, but Tiz got up about then and said it was time for him to go so Peaches could rest.

April brought Spring to Tallulahcoochee in that heart-breaking way that Spring usually does, and my dear uncle and his temporary sweetie spent a lot of time roaming around in that old pick-up. They just happened to be in the neighborhood one Saturday afternoon, and they passed by the Morris house in time to see Peaches and Cathead sitting together in the swing in the side yard. Damn. There went Uncle Mary's fifty cents.

Six feet away, Tiz reclined stiffly in a lounger, looking up from her needlework from time to time to eyeball the swingers.

Uncle Mary's cohort declared that she smiled at them every time, but he claimed he didn't see that, himself.

+ + +

"I know I'm getting ahead of my story," said Uncle Mary, "but I might as well own up to losing my Dollar, too. On July 31 at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, me and a good-looking lady and about 40 other friends watched Lorelei Cato Morris exchange wedding vows with Col. Audubon Beldon Appenzeller (U.S. Army Air

Corps, Ret.), M. D. It all happened at the gazebo in the side yard of the Morris house.

"As classy an event as it was, and as much fun as we had at the party afterwards, I took away from there a lifetime lesson: gambling is for losers."

**"There's Nothin' Good About Good-bye." Jerry Lee Lewis**

"There is a parting worse than death," wrote Uncle Mary, "and that is the parting of lovers whose only sin is they love too much. Such is the peril in giving one's heart away." I could tell he was truly grieved by the turn of events.

The next day, Cathead came back to town in time to escort Peaches and Tiz to Tiz's church, and then they went on back to the house for that famous Sunday dinner that Tiz sets out. It was Cathead's last day in these parts.

About 3 o'clock, pretty soon after that elaborate meal, he said he had to go. He and Peaches and Tiz and HoJo were all in the kitchen, and HoJo said he was taking pains to pay attention to everything.

Cathead says to Tiz, "Miz Tiz, I don't know when I can get back, but while I'm gone, do I have your permission to write to Peaches?"

He said that with Peaches standing right there, listening. Tiz, she's got it all worked out.

"I imagined you would ask that, Charlie, and you have my permission to write this child no more than two pages every ten days or two weeks. Your writing will be only of the highest type, and there will be no mention of 'romance.'"

She put the quotes around "romance," indicating what a low opinion she had of the same. That HoJo, noted Uncle Mary, he laughs and rolls his eyes when he tells that part.

Well, sir, Cathead just smiles big right back at her and agrees.

"You can depend on me, Miz Tiz. This child is too young for anything like that."

Then, "Would you mind, Miz Tiz, if I kiss her good-bye?" Pore ol' Tiz, she felt hemmed in, but she quickly recovered. "Why, certainly, Charlie. On the cheek, please."

That's how it ended: 22 year-old Charlie "Cathead" Porter, standing in the Morris kitchen in the middle of a Spring Sunday afternoon, planted a chaste kiss on the cheek of 15 and a half year-old Peaches, smiled down at her and whispered, "Grow up soon, my baby . . ."

And he was gone.

Peaches and Tiz both cried all night. Uncle Mary said he thought it might have been for different reasons.

It didn't quite end there. From Texas, Cathead wrote two picture postcards to Peaches before it was done.

The first one arrived about a week after he left. On the message side, he'd printed: "Dear Peaches, I enjoyed being with you and Mrs. Tiz. Thank you for your friendship. This base is a

lot different from Moody. They say we won't be here long. Best wishes, Charlie Porter."

Peaches carried it around in her apron pocket and, when she had a moment, she'd take it out and read it some more. She took to saying to herself, "Some day, me and Chahlie . . ."

The second postcard pretty much wound up that fantasy. It seemed to have been hurriedly written, and it read: "Dear Peaches and Mrs. Tiz, I am on my way to Europe. It's a place named Wiesbaden, Germany. It looks like I will be there for a long time. I hope both your lives turn out good. Best wishes, Charlie Porter."

Peaches took the first card out of her pocket and put it in her bottom dresser drawer, along with the second one. She didn't mention Charlie any more to Tiz, and Tiz didn't mention him, either.

But Tiz did think, now and then, that she and Peaches had both been wrong about Charlie Porter. But, you know, I think Uncle Mary was the holdout.

### ***End of the Chronicles***

Uncle Mary's journal did not end abruptly. He had written the last entry especially to me, under date of his day of departure. It was brief:

"Go where your heart leads, my boy, and angels will hold your hand. Never dismiss the rich tapestry of the past. Rather, give due regard to all that has gone before, and to all those things that I have set down herein for your understanding. These are my best gifts to you."

Lord, I missed him, and I hoped with great fervor that he was happy.

One night, without warning, the deeper mystery came clear. I finally understood more about Uncle Mary than he might have intended.

I was absorbed once more in the study of the *Chronicles* when I realized how much there was within the text about the beauty and the wonder of Mrs. Dr. Appenzeller; how many achingly tender phrases described all that she did; how often she played the starring role in complicated events. How did she manage, I began to wonder, to escape any description of appearance or demeanor short of perfection?

Oh, me! Then I remembered how Aunt Viola looked -- a dead ringer for Lorelei Cato Morris Appenzeller! Uncle Mary, realist and philosopher, you were in love with Lorelei!

Out of deference to my dear kinsman, I choose to omit the passages wherein his yearning for the unattainable is so clearly documented, and acceptance so bravely borne. His secret is safe with me.

I made a vow to myself to follow Uncle Mary with my own observations when I felt sufficiently grounded to take it up. And I did, but it took a while. In fact, it not until the Morris twins were almost 15 years old. That is, it took me 7 more years to grow up.

All along, I meant to call my journal '**Coochee Reprise**', which means -- to me, anyway -- "Heart of my heart, play it again."

### ***End of An Era***

I couldn't tell if Uncle Mary's absence caused the settling down of Tallulahcoochee, or if the next few years were just ordinary times in an ordinary little town.

Pretty soon after he left, though, there was one flurry of events, dominated by an Appenzeller party, and I was able to understand Uncle Mary's delight in that family and its ways of doing things.

The romance between Tiz and HoJo bloomed, and I -- along with Walkman, Glass Eye and Snapper, amongst others -- stood with them to get married in the same gazebo that had seen the wedding of Audie and Lorelei. Dorace and Horace Morris were six years old, Peaches was 18. I was about to turn 16.

The Morris's wedding present to the beloved couple was the guest house on the premises, and Peaches moved into Tiz's former quarters in the main house, moon garden and all.

Time wore on, and I got out of school -- Thank God! -- when I got to be 17. My business was running along, thanks to HoJo's unflagging efforts to keep me in line, and I became pretty much a regular at *Miss Lula's* Cafe. I was only trying to follow in Uncle Mary's footsteps as best I could.

*One-eyed* Pete was my number two prized possession, second only to the shop, and I stayed on the road as much as I could, taking in the sights in and around my sweet old home town.

The girls I chose to ride the roads with me were, like Uncle Mary's, good-looking and fun to be with, and I reckon any one of them would have been okay to marry. Until one day when some of Uncle Mary's angel friends brought me one named Marcelene. But that comes later.

I was too busy for long-term relationships, anyway, moving into Uncle Mary's house - finally - and seeing Uncle Jazz and Aunt Flo off to Minnesota, where they retired again. Too, I had to take time to sell Mama and Daddy's house and wrangle with the bank about sending the proceeds overseas. But I got it done.

While I was otherwise occupied, the Dr. Appenzeller family went steadily about its high-toned business, the doctor, himself, calmly dispensing the means toward the restoration of health, the lady of the house caught up in the general betterment of the community, the twins relentlessly growing up. Peaches and Tiz were deftly guiding the family through it all.

In the Spring of 1951, Dolly Frances Carlton was with me when I went to see Peaches take her leave of the Morris-Appenzeller family. Her grandmother, the famed Princess Amy, had finally relented and agreed for the by then 20 year-old Peaches to join her band of performing artists on the road.

The farewell party at the mansion was a genuine, unique, one-time-only spectacle, and I am confident that Dolly Frances has never really got over it. I know I haven't.

Of course, Peaches vowed to the grieving Morris twins that she would return some day soon, and would never leave them again. Horace, especially, felt that his world had come to a bitter end. He could see nothing save a lonesome trudge through a dreary life, never knowing another easy hour. Peaches, after all, was his "mama," and she would always be. Life is hard when you're eight.

Nevertheless, the going away party was an extravagant thing, marked by music and food and drink such as I, personally, had never encountered. It lasted all night, and took me a good 30 days to stop re-living it. Lord, they knew how to put on a throwdown. I'll have to say that it took my mind off missing Uncle Mary. Temporarily, at least.

Anyway, our Peaches was gone from Tallulahcoochee, and she left an enormous empty space. Even HoJo seemed to have been subdued by her leaving, and Tiz, he said, was inconsolable. My God, they acted like she'd died.

Little did they know that she would return and that business would pick up when she got back. Lacking Uncle Mary's flawless insight, I didn't suspect it, either.

### **Horace Morris**

When he was close to 15 years old, Horace Morris gave up on school altogether. His eighth grade teacher, Miss Margola Collins "Snookie" Frankel, and Horace's mother, Lorelei Cato Morris Appenzeller, exchanged some definitive and fairly harsh words relative to his unwillingness to do the eighth grade for the third time. Horace won.

Neither Miss Frankel nor his mother mentioned -- not in Horace's presence, anyway -- that Horace's twin sister, Dorace, had sped past her brother quite early in their academic careers, and was even then leading the pack of 10th graders in every subject.

Lorelei later told Dr. Appenzeller, Horace's stepfather, that she made the "quit" decision when Miss Frankel proved her incompetence by blundering, "The decision rests with he and his parents."

The next day, Horace practically took root on the last counter stool at Miss Lula's Café and, in the intervening years, has probably drunk a tanker truckload of beer. His stringy, elongated frame slouches in a perpetual "S" at his chosen vantage point, from which to hail fellow drinkers with a wry, gold-embellished grin and a toss of his long, straight, whitish-blond mane. Nothing goes unnoticed by his darting, slightly upward-slanted, silver eyes.

The only other thing he knows besides beer-drinking is words, bolstered by a curious bent for calligraphy, and not worth a middling damn for anything else. Not so far as anybody could tell, there at the beginning. Truth to tell, he was blessed with an astonishingly soothing, fairly deep voice. Everybody liked to hear him talk. I didn't notice for a long time that he sounded a whole lot like Peaches.

There was another thing about Horace Morris to which I, proud descendant of an ever-alert Uncle Mary, was slow to assess any import: between sips of beer, he was pressing pen to paper in the notebook that was so much a part of his get-up that it was almost an appendage. When his invitations to Cafe events began to show up in my print shop, I decided we had a first class fiction writer on our hands.

### **Tradition Revisited**

"She's back!" That's how an obviously overjoyed HoJo greeted me that morning, and I didn't need an explanation of who he meant. Peaches had retired from the road and come home, ready to take her place in the community as a businesswoman. She meant to become the new owner of *Miss Lula's Cafe*, established in 1927.

You could see the place needed work. The new owner was often heard to say in those days, "Me, I'm buyin' twelve hundred dollars' worth of tradition." Tradition was about all of value that remained of the original structure. What could you expect by the year 1958?

Peaches' eight years with the Morris-Appenzeller family and the following seven years as a back-up singer with Princess Amy's traveling cortège had not only brought a measure of worldly wisdom to the new cafe owner, it had also enabled her to create a reputation for stylish living. Her clothes were the envy of the town's jet set, as was her racy mode of transportation -- a purple cream puff of a 1937 Dodge convertible with a rumble seat.

In short, Peaches had consistently enjoyed what her quite respectable wages had afforded. Which is why she could rely on but a meager nest egg to get her business going. Still, she poured what she had into the cafe project with happy abandon.

The old, listing structure was shored up and got its very first coat of paint; the porch was mostly re-built, the bar was

re-arranged and the small "ballroom" area was enlarged a bit to accommodate the growing number of dancers who frequented the cafe.

One icon from the old place proved particularly dear to Peaches -- it was Miss Lula's treasured, four foot-long, wood plaque into which some local artisan had painstakingly inscribed with a burning pen, "No Cussin In This Place." It hung over the bar, warning all comers that this was an elegant establishment.

The new barbecue pit was another costly item, but she banked on serving the best food, and it could not be done without proper equipment. Too, a parking area had to be laid out -- paving would have to wait -- and Lord, have mercy, the Café had to have some indoor restroom facilities.

When Peaches bought out Miss Lula, you might say Horace Morris was listed as one of the cafe fixtures. In her estimation, he was the very best thing she got with the cafe; he'd been her beloved "Baby" since he was four days old.

She wondered if he was ever embarrassed by his nickname, and if he considered it a racial slur. But she never did ask him. But Horace Morris, who, early on, had become known around the Cafe as "White Boy," was merely convinced he'd died and gone to the Summerland.

In all, her "over-doing" of Miss Lula's Café swept away Peaches' money in a few weeks' time, and she'd come up pretty

short for operating expenses. Nevertheless, Miss Peaches' Café de Lite opened in great celebratory style.

Saturday nights at the Cafe became better attended than in the old days, and the daytime customers through the week helped a lot to keep the business together.

Well, there was one dissenter in hollering distance -- the operator of Dink's Diner, located in downtown 'Coochee. Dink Hadley, brother of town councilman Radley "Rad" Hadley, spat contemptuously as he adjusted the sign on his screen door just above the Right White Bread Company pushplate. The top line crowded, "Open seven days a week!" Centered under that rode the diner's holy boast, "CLOSED ON SUNDAY."

He had one foot back in the diner when he whirled around, took a Magic Marker out of his shirt pocket and scrawled yet a third line which fiercely admonished, "No drinking aloud."

### **Inside Track**

Princess Amy and her well-heeled companion, Henry Moses, tried many times to ease Peaches' financial situation, but she staunchly refused to involve them in the Cafe.

"It might be a loser deal, but you ought not to lose because I don't know how to deal," she would say.

On those days when she felt stricken at the thought of shutting the *Café*, she would exert herself to sound brave and carefree. She'd smile big and quip, "Anyhow, I can go right on back home to Ms. Lorelei any day I want to -- she can always use another maid."

Wear and tear on the old building proceeded apace, and in the sixth year of her struggle, Peaches realized she would be obliged to close the place before a strong wind took it down. It would take more money than she could ever hope to make to turn the premises into what you might call a competing establishment. She talked to Horace Morris about writing a farewell to her customers, and he wept as he tried to compose a suitable goodbye.

*If she really were to close, he thought, where the hell would I go from here?*

One thing Peaches never noticed was what went on in Washington, D. C. Never one time since she watched the hero's funeral of Royce Morris in 1943 had she granted the Nation's

capitol a passing thought. What, for instance, was the Civil Rights Act to her? She didn't realize that government had suddenly plunged headlong into an unbridled spending orgy with unlimited taxpayers' money, and that tons of it could be had for the right kind of asking.

Too, she had not reckoned with her savvy, Atlanta-based sister-in-law -- one Louvenia Cottondale, black separatist, political activist and hard-driving star of stage and cabaret. And she surely never dreamed that Louvenia knew how to milk the federal cow.

Louvenia hit the Café late one November night, exultant over her newly-discovered ability to do something meaningful for her broke sister-in-law. With the almost frantic participation of Horace Morris, Louvenia persuaded Peaches that the Café was a noble cause that she, Louvenia, could help to salvage.

Thereafter, she personally sponsored Peaches in a few rounds with the Office of Economic Opportunity and other generously-funded, federal agencies. Being a founding member and executive director of the freshly-organized "Benevolent Atlanta Congress for Black American Conquest" (BAC-BAC), she was able to switch the government money spigot to a perpetual "on" position for the benefit of her sister-in-law's emporium. Not to mention the concomitant enrichment available for herself.

The only other noticeable change in Tallulahcoochee that came about with the Civil Rights Act was the sign Dink Hadley positioned prominently in his fly-specked front window. It read, "If you are a Innerstate Traveler, do not ask for Service. NO X-CEPTIONS. The Managgemint."

***Lord, I Wish't I had It like My Sister-in-Law***

Like any successful entrepreneur, Louvenia turned every event to her own money-making advantage. Drawing on the adventures of Peaches as she plodded through the federal money maze, her shrewd kinswoman promptly abandoned her torch singer image and emerged, full-blown, as an accomplished political comic.

She dazzled many a rapt audience with her somewhat condescending song, *Pore in Style*, in which she tracked the progress of our Tallulahcoochee club owner in her quest for government funds.

Louvenia, wearing a purple lame' dress, red satin gloves to the armpit and a feather headdress, has often stood in an artfully-staged pool of silvery light and -- lapsing into a kind of down-home, black, street idiom -- worked enchantment on her hearers with her comic versions of an innocent on the trail of D. C. bucks.

Well, that's classic Louvenia, mining the mother lode.

To the casual onlooker, Peaches' continuing close relationship with Louvenia was downright odd. You'd think they would be a lot less than bosom pals. Maybe even understandably hostile.

Pretty soon after Peaches bought the cafe, she married Louvenia's much older, no-account half-brother, Royal Tambourine

"Roy Boy" Cottondale. His sole mission in life seemed to center around running his fat hand into the Café till and coming away with a fistful of green.

The ink wasn't dry on that divorce before Louvenia got crazy and married Miss Peaches' much younger, half-cracked step-brother, Abel Roscoe "Radio" LaSeine. Self-styled technician that he was, Radio then moved to Atlanta with a two-fold purpose: to make his home with his assertive bride and to seek a commercial outlet for his audiophonic inventions.

Within the first 30 days of his city sojourn, he found Outside True Love with a television weather girl who had just accepted a better position at Pistol River, Oregon. Radio had hit the road with Miss April Moonlit Meadows, forsaking his loving spouse and closing the door on any possible reconciliation. A speedy, long distance divorce turned Louvenia back into a single woman, but she kept the collateral kinship with Peaches.

When specifically asked about her undiminishing fidelity to Louvenia, Peaches would explain, "She might be my sister-in-law-twice-removed, but she ain't never gone quit being my some kind of sister-in-law."

To one persistent quizzer, Peaches retorted, "What you imagine she ought to be? -- my 'sister-outlaw'!"

### **Dorace Morris, Scholar**

About a year after Horace renounced the confines of the public school, the subject of education reared its presumptuous head in the Appenzeller household again.

Dorace Morris came home from her school stint one afternoon with a note from her faculty advisor, seeking an audience with the student's parents. Miss Trudie Copeland "Buster" Acworth wished to confer with the good doctor and his missus on that very evening in her office at the Tallulahcoochee High School.

They went, naturally.

They huddled for about an hour, and the upshot was that Miss Acworth wanted them to take Dorace Morris out of high school and send her on to college. She was pretty adamant about it, saying Dorace Morris's mind was ready for expansion in ways that high school just couldn't accommodate.

The Appenzellers went home in two conflicting modes: sure, they were glad their little girl was smarter'n hell, but was she ready to leave home?

They need not have worried. Not only had Dorace known for several weeks about Miss Acworth's concerns, she'd already selected the college that she meant to attend. Lorelei was not prepared for the choice her child seemed to have already made.

"Oh, Dorace, my darling, baby girl, not all the way to Michigan!"

She made "Michigan" sound like it was located in another solar system.

Then, "What kind of social life can you have up there with all those Yankees? -- They won't understand you."

"Mama, I'm not going for the social scene. I'm going to learn something. Anyway, I thought you were over that 'damn Yankee' business, since you did marry a Yankee, yourself, the second time. If Audie is a sample Yankee, I'd like to marry one of them, myself."

"Oh, you know what I mean, dear. Audie's different."

"Yes, but, Mama, he's a wonderful Yankee."

It turned out that Dorace Morris left home a few days later, bound for Hillsdale College in Michigan, just like she'd planned. Politely but firmly, she declined her parents' persistent offer to drive her there, opting instead to ride the train.

Tallulahcoochee is laid out in a thin line, with the railroad tracks running east and west through the middle of town. The railroad station lies just south of the tracks. South, across a broad expanse of land, the commercial part of town runs in the same direction. City Hall is the corner building on the east side, set back a little from the grocery store that fronts the main thoroughfare, Mama Gladys Boulevard. There's a diner next door and then a hardware store. The drug store, wider than its neighboring enterprises, is next in line.

The paved, two-lane, main highway in and out of town runs east and west, north of and parallel to the railroad tracks. Between town limits signs, the road widens to about twice the distance between the ditches, so going somewhere -- as well as getting back -- is just as practical as anybody could want.

There are about fifteen places of business in that long block, ending with the Bank of Tallulahcoochee. I've always thought it was laid out right convenient. The feed store and print shop is located east of that layout and faces west, giving me a pretty good view of all that goes on. Nothing gets in the way of my view unless you count the big, vacant building that looks east, on the opposite side of the narrow street in front of my shop. It's set enough to the north that I don't miss much.

Oddly enough, I just happened to be at the railroad station that morning when they all came down to see her off. Marcelene, thanks to good timing, had stepped out the front door of the Delacroix Drug Store where she worked and just happened to walk over to the station about the time I got there. Coincidence is funny, the way it keeps helping you run your life.

We stood there together, watching this carload of well-wishers and their goodbye girl pulling up to the station. They were traveling in Audie's 1956, pearl gray, Cadillac limousine -- the one with the jump-seats -- with the good doctor, himself, at

the wheel. Lorelei sitting up there beside him, and Miss Acworth, Dorace Morris and Tiz were in the back.

Our new Cafe owner, Peaches, had just driven up with White Boy, and we saw them climb out of her Dodge and start walking toward the Cadillac riders.

About that time, Walkman and HoJo rattled up in HoJo's 1949 Ford pickup from the direction of the house, followed pretty close by Snapper and Glass Eye on Snapper's clattering, old, worn-out motorcycle. I reckon they thought they were entitled to see her off, too, and who am I to say they weren't right?

I wonder if Dorace Morris ever knew that the yard crew called her "Baby Sustuh" behind her back.

### **I Wanta Go Home -- But Not Now**

The very day that Dorace Morris got to that college, she wrote home. Her letter was a nerve-jangler. In her quietly dignified way, she notified her family that she had decided not to come home until she had finished school.

The way she had it doped out, if she didn't waste all that railroad-riding time, all those laughing hello and tearful goodbye torments and just stuck with her books, she could whip that thing in something under three years.

She renewed her vow of faithful love for all of them, and begged them to understand that this was merely a lonesome and unfortunate -- but necessary -- chapter in their lives.

Oh, she was a convincer, all right. Damned if they didn't all fall right into the plan, some of them acting, now and then, like it had been their idea.

Truth to tell, it wasn't quite all connected with scholarly pursuits, such as we had envisioned. At least, not toward the end. When she finished fighting her way up to the rank of senior, she began to realize that she'd not had a real boyfriend since she's been stricken with a mild case of callow love at 'Coochee High. It seemed a serious lack in her 19 years, but the men she met were just not her style.

Her style came along, though, like it does sometimes, when she met Glenn Marriss Morris. It took both of them a long time

to come to terms with their sharing a surname, but that's how reality had laid it out.

"I didn't come all the way to Michigan to find another Morris!" Dorace Morris exclaimed to Glenn Morris.

They both laughed, yet the suspicion developed that they were being overseen by invisible forces with an unrelenting agenda. Unwilling to fly in the face of a rather generous fate, they agreed to marry. And so they did -- married on the way back to Tallulahcoochee, right after graduation.

They considered stopping in Xenia, Ohio, for the ceremony because the town name was appealing, but they didn't feel strongly enough about it, so they kept driving south.

Chillicothe, West Virginia, was another good town name, but for one reason or another, they couldn't make that work, either.

Sometime fairly late in that first afternoon, not searching quite as seriously as before, they came upon an outskirts-of-town VFW Club where the sign out front announced the night's guest band. The music makers were identified as Preacher Cecil "Rocking Horse" Mohawk & the Civilizers. It looked like a good place for supper and maybe a couple of dances.

They had supper, all right -- good, straightforward, thick steak and home fries. Then came the entertainment.

Preacher Cecil unabashedly opened the event with prayer. What? They quickly discovered that Rocking Horse was the Justice

of the Peace in the next town and, as if directed by some Higher Voice, they asked if he could marry them. But, of course.

There on the stage at the VFW Club -- exactly where on the map, they never knew -- right after the first set, *Rocking Horse*, who played slap bass fiddle, sanctified their union. That's how our brilliant lady, Dorace, became Mrs. Glenn Marriss Morris (or: Dorace Morris Morris) and Glenn Marriss became one more exceedingly fortunate Morris.

That Tiz, she can keep all the details straight, and HoJo can pass them on, almost verbatim. For which I'm exceedingly fortunate, myself, come to think of it.

### ***Return of the Literati***

Me and Marcelene just happened to be riding around up close to the county line the day the highly-educated newly-hitched came roaring down the highway in the mister's red Oldsmobile convertible, top down and hair flying.

Luckily, I had a siren on my pickup that Sheriff Shanklin had authorized in case of emergency. The 'Coochee P. D. used to have one, but it had been out of service for several years.

Seeing as how we were right there, it seemed the neighborly thing to do to precede the Morris-Morries into town with a touch of class. Which is what we did. The sheriff told me to use my judgment about the emergency element.

When we pulled up in front of the Morris-Appenzeller house, the whole family -- and lots of the neighbors and townspeople -- were assembled, laughing and hollering, and some of them already drinking. I happened to know about the four-color, canvas "Welcome, Home, Darlings" banner draped across the front of the house, since it had been carefully prepared at my shop. We'd had to take it down and add the "s" on "Darling" when we got the news about them getting married on the way home.

Anyway, the crowd rushed down to the car and began to pull both of them out, kissing and hugging, and dragging them up onto the porch. It seemed like a really happy bunch of 'Coocheeans, and we got out and joined them.

Lorelei didn't waste any time in explaining the plan.

"Oh, my dear children, we've waited so long for this day.

Tiz and Peaches and I have opened up the east wing and made it ready for you to move right in. HoJo and Walkman cleaned the carpet and moved all the furniture around, so you'll be totally comfortable."

Then, "HoJo, why don't you and Walkman take their bags on up for them? We'll let them go and rest soon."

Dorace Morris turned to Glenn Marriss Morris, seeking some clue as to his wishes in the matter. But he was already immersed in the ambiance, and all he could do -- or even wanted to do -- was to agree with whatever his new family had to say.

"I think it's wonderful, darling, that your sweet family had already prepared us a place. And I must say, this is the loveliest house I've ever seen. You didn't tell me anything about this place, nor about your family. Really, I didn't know what to expect when we got here."

Dorace Morris ducked her head in that shy way she used to have when she was a little girl, and squeezed Glenn's hand.

"I hated to brag," she said, kind of like she was apologizing.

So. The party lasted long into the evening, and I'm here to tell you that we ate a lot, drank a lot and had a helluva good time.

It's like I try to tell Marcelene, "First of all, you need to pick the best friends you can find. The rest of it'll take care of itself."

### **Down to Business**

Dorace and her new husband had rolled into town on a Saturday, so the next day was one of required low-key activity. They went to church with Lorelei and Audie, of course, and met the whole congregation. It looked like socializing to Marcelene and me, but I later found out that the two of them were also looking over the crowd for customers.

Monday morning brought that realization when I saw Dorace and Glenn pull up in front of that big vacant building right across the street from the feed store, and go in, carrying a tape measure and a clipboard.

They came out pretty soon and walked on over to my shop. "We need a sign," says Dorace, and Glenn says, "One to go all the way across that white building over there."

"That's what we're here for," I say back at them.

Me and HoJo spent the rest of that day and most of that night, getting the sign done, and the next morning we took our ladders and hammer and nails and set that thing in place. It said, *WE PARTY.*

In smaller letters right under that, it added, "Weddings Our Specialty," and gave a phone number. It looked good, I'll have to say.

We had to work around the carpenters and painters that were swarming over the place, sawing and hammering and drilling and

knocking out walls and setting in plate glass. The whole crew was new to me and HoJo, but we could see by their trucks that they came from Valdosta and Tifton and Albany. How the two Morris-Morrises got them all there on such short notice will always be a mystery to me.

When the sign was set to our satisfaction, we went back across the street. We could see it all better from the front of the feed store, and it was cooler in there.

Anyhow, we had to get started on their business cards. Hers said her name was "Dorace Morris Morris" and his was "Glenn Marriss Morris." Right then is when I decided to call both of them by their whole name. It was kind of like my little private connection to the family.

Marcelene came by after work to look at the cards before I delivered them, and she pronounced them perfect. When a job pleases my baby like that one did, I almost hate to charge for it.

### ***The Lure of Fashion***

It wasn't more than three weeks after we put up the **We Party** sign before they put on a grand opening that shook the rafters of Tallulahcoochee.

One thing for sure, if I hadn't gone against my best judgment and bought some new equipment the year before, we could never have handled the printing business for **We Party**. And if I hadn't been able to depend on HoJo, I would have worked myself into early retirement in the skull orchard.

I never saw so many big cars from out of town on my street, nor so many dressed-up women being escorted by bewildered-looking husbands. Who would have thought that weddings and other social events took so much planning and fixing, not to mention money?

Anybody should have known, though, that Dorace Morris Morris wouldn't mess with a losing proposition. She was born to win every hand.

That day, she was, herself, a vision. Although she and Horace did look a right smart alike, you never would have thought about them being twins that day. That pale blond hair that's common to them both had been dressed in a sophisticated up-do and her 5'6", slim but curvaceous self was decked out in one of those simple, long dresses that tells you at a glance that it was prohibitively expensive. It was scarlet linen, long and somehow

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GQ started as a trade publication in NYC in 1931, and became available to the public in 1957.

Not sure if it would have been available at all in Valdosta

shaped; I can't say how I know, but whoever cut out that garment had to be an artist.

Of course, handsome Glenn Marriss Morris was looking like a page out of *Gentleman's Quarterly*, a little magazine that I pick up in Valdosta now and then to show Marcelene how I'd look if I had the money.

Our work for the opening being done, me and HoJo took us a couple of folding chairs to the front of the feed store and there, armed with a coolerful of our favorite beverage, we enjoyed the whole thing.

"Take a look, HoJo," I says to him, "that's where our meat and syrup is gonna come from for the next 20 years."

He couldn't argue with that.

Just about dark, when we were getting ready to lock up and go home, Glenn Marriss Morris strolled in, all smiles.

"I hope you have time to print us a few little things," he says, rattling a handful of orders.

Turns out that "few little things" amounted to full employment with overtime for us for the next 30 days. So I sit right down to go over the details with him. He's like Dorace Morris Morris, he likes it all done perfect.

I noticed he seemed to be holding one of those orders back, and we went on taking care of the rest of them. That done, he whips that last one out to me with a flourish.



"This is the one you won't believe," he laughs, and I take a look.

He was right. I didn't.

The order -- right extensive, at that -- was authorized by Mrs. E. E. Tutu from Ty Ty. It said her daughter, Lulu, was planning on marrying C. C. Bobo. The maid of honor was named as Bebe Tutu and the best man went by D. D. Bobo. The groom's parents were Mr. and Mrs. T. T. Bobo, and the preacher's name was A. A. Double. The wedding was to take place at *Twin Oaks Church*. By then I was just about rolling on the floor, but the reception site broke the spell: it would be held at the *Lone Pine Golf Club* on One Rose Lane.

I didn't know until then that the printing business could be such a hoot.

### ***Expanding Job Market***

Mid-morning at the Cafe is one of my favorite times, and I try to make it down there every day for coffee and a bite of something sweet, fresh from the kitchen. Peaches does a lot of her own cooking, and you can tell she learned from somebody who didn't count the cost of ingredients. That would have been Tiz, of course, in the Morris-Appenzeller kitchen.

So here I was that late Summer day, enjoying a puff pastry and a cup of hot coffee, when Dorace Morris comes strolling in. I had been seeing her and Glenn Marriss Morris down there in the evenings, but daytime was something new.

She waves at me, gives her brother, Horace Morris, a little hug as she passes him there at the counter and walks on back toward the kitchen.

"Peaches back there?"

"Yep," says Horace Morris. I notice he looks interested in what his sister wants with Peaches.

In a few minutes, she and Peaches come out and walk around the counter to join Horace Morris at the bar.

Peaches opens with, "Baby, you reckon we could let your sister be our business manager? She says we won't have to mail all them figures to that group of folks in Valdosta every Monday because she can do all that."

"Well, Baby Sister, who would've thought you'd join us in this fine enterprise? I'll vote for you to move right in and lend us a hand."

Dorace Morris Morris smiles back at both of them, but you can tell she had come to do business.

"All right. I've been thinking about all this, and here's the way I see it: we can fix that second room off the back hall for my office, and I can come every morning and stay until noon. I can do all the paperwork in that length of time, and then go to the shop in the afternoon and help Glenn. Since we hired that smart young woman from Alapaha, I don't need to be there all day. "Just one thing, though -- I refuse to take any pay for this job. Let's call it my contribution to the family business.

"Oh, something else -- why don't we turn that first room into a kind of 'cooler.' When somebody gets his swearing box turned over, we can put him back there and lock him in until he's come to his senses. Peaches, I know you love that sign behind the bar; and once we set a rule, we ought to stand by it or scrap it. Can't have it both ways."

Peaches and White Boy were both nodding assent, and danged if I didn't catch myself nodding right along with them.

Then, "I'm going back to the shop, but I'll see y'all tomorrow morning."

That's all there was to it. I thought what a pleasure life would be if all business were conducted so smoothly. I finished my pastry, and went on back to my own shop. It would soon be lunch time, and I had my heart set on some of Butterball's famous ribs from the Café's barbecue pit.

By the time I made it to the Café the next morning, Dorace Morris Morris already had office furniture moved in and was putting her little kingdom in order. Walkman and Glass Eye, along with Snapper, had been at the moving chore since daybreak.

Rodney "Cajun" Starling had worked his artistry on Dorace Morris Morris's door which now bore the legend, "Business Office, D. M. Morris, Mgr." and was busy applying gold leaf to the other door. It would read, "Cussin Room." I took a moment to appreciate Dorace Morris Morris for keeping the spelling consistent with that of the sign.

The new manager was wearing what would become her Café costume -- sleek, coffee-colored jodhpur pants, beige silk, western-style shirt, ostrich-hide jodhpur boots. I noticed a flat-crowned western hat in a nice shade of burnt caramel hanging on a rack in her office. One thing you had to say about that group of people, they injected style into everything they undertook. Me and Marcelene talked about that a right smart and, in a way, I really envied that about them.

I went back to work feeling good about my favorite spot.

With a woman like Dorace Morris Morris on the premises, the Café would go on forever.

### **Harman Jarman**

Being Tallulahcoochee's only playboy might be a harder job than you'd think, off-hand. Ours had just come back from the South of France where he'd gone "for the season," as he told us over at the print shop on this particular day.

He'd been "appalled," I believe he said, at the "gauche, unsophisticated, hamburger-demanding, American barbarians" who had laid waste his Stateside pride and discolored his French holiday. To hear him tell it, the "knee-shorts-with-dress-shoes, pink-hair-curlers-and-drug-store-flip-flops crowd" had deliberately timed their visit to coincide with his.

It's a shame what crafty barbarians will do to bring down a genuine, 18-carat, Georgia libertine.

But here he was, steering his bright orange, boat-tailed Auburn right up close to the door of the Café', and "alighting," as they say across the pond. I watched him brush a nonexistent speck from his handsome, British-tailored jacket and take a peek at his reflection in the side mirror before he turned away.

To begin with, there ain't one, single, infinitesimal particle out of the speck universe that would dare invade his space. That's what I told Marcelene, while also telling her how much that garment cost.

"Just think, sweetheart," she comforted, "if you didn't insist on living out of your income, you could have one just like it in a little less than six months."

That Marcelene, she knows sometimes what a feller needs to hear. This was not one of those times.

"Everwho thought to give a pore, little, squawlin', just-borned young'un a goddam name that rhymes oughta be strung up."

It was his way of answering the greeting from Horace Morris, lounging at the Cafe counter.

"Aw, come on, man. All I said was, 'Hey, Harman Jarman.'

Yore switch turns on mighty easy today."

"Yeah. Well, if you had the same damn weaslin' skinflint of a daddy as me, you'd holler, too. All I can hear out of him is 'Harman, yore cars cost too much. I get good service out of my Chevrolets -- had one a while back that I put 92,000 miles on, and it was still running good when I traded it.' And 'you know, son, you could get some nice clothes from Little Jack Lofton's dry goods store if you'd just go look. I bought the suit I got married in from Little Jack, and I'm still wearing it.' That penny-pinchin', nickel-nursin', butt-headed, heavy-handed, cold-hearted, old multi-millionaire! Can't you just see me in some of that off-the-rack sharkskin?"

"Watch it, Harman Jarman. You know Peaches don't put up with cussin' in the café."

"I ain't cussin' that damn, penurious bastard," snapped Harman, "I'm describin' 'im. And I ain't even mentioned the, 'What do you need a vacation FOR? Vacation from WHAT?' Hellblast that old maggot!"

Mayo Munch, head of Café' security, materialized from behind the counter.

"Harman Jarman, you just can't learn. You're gonna have to go to the Cussin' Room if I hear another one of them words."

"Aw, shit! Ain't y'all got another damn thing to do besides censor a customer's language. You're a real pain in the ass!"

Mayo grasped Harman Jarman's upper arm and began guiding him to the Cussin' Room, betraying no indication that he was hearing the stream of profanity pouring from his prisoner's mouth.

"I'll let you out an' you kin have a beer in 10 minutes."

When the door closed, Harman Jarman grabbed up a chair, already broken by one of his predecessors, and flung it against the wall, turning up his vocal volume as he wrought destruction.

"That old bald-headed, money-worshipping jackass. Damn his hell-fired time, all I ever ask him for is a little pocket change, but do I get it? Why, hell no! Not without a lot of insulting, meddlesome lip!"

The door flung open and Dorace Morris Morris stood there, glaring.

"Would you mind, Mr. Jarman, to conduct yourself with some dignity? I'm trying to work in the next room, and hearing you shout profane denunciations of the nice old gentleman who happens to be your father is not my idea of ideal working conditions. From what I hear of you, you wouldn't be satisfied if we were to hang you with a new rope."

Harman Jarman was taken aback. When did all this come about? He thought the Dorace Morris he used to know was probably living in New York or Palm Beach or somewhere, but she did say she was "working" here, didn't she?

He was shocked into a mortified silence. If he wanted to describe his obscenely rich, male parent, he guessed he might as well go get in his car and ride around to do it.

### **Talkin' the Blues**

Louvenia, despite her being almost 12 years younger than Peaches, had developed an eye for commerce that made her cafe-operating crony's business operations look downright simplistic.

For instance, she didn't make a move on a stage as a political comic without securing the proper trappings. In this case, it was a piano player and a sufficient repertoire to fill up a whole performance. She told Peaches that she could see a kind of duet instead of just background piano music. Good thinking, if you ask me.

Soon after Peaches had made her first trip to the OEO, Louvenia had looked for – and found – what she wanted.

Naturally, she brought him to the Café. They drove up late one December afternoon, right after Marcelene and yours truly had danced up to the bar and ordered us another couple of beers.

Knowing her advertised disdain for the white race, I didn't realize that the white guy she was walking in with was her new partner. She told us all, standing right there with an arm draped over his shoulder, that this was her new piano man. She'd found him over around Nashville, I think, and she said his name was "Stuffy."

We looked him over pretty carefully, since it sounded like she meant him to be around for a pretty good while. I'd say he was close to six feet tall, weighed about 170 and had a plumb

wild mop of dark curls on his head. I reckon I ought to mention that Marcelene said he was handsome -- hornrim glasses and all -- and that his hands were, in her words, "just beautiful."

Louvenia, laughing, excused her choice with, "He's the only cat I could find that can make a piano sweat."

With that, he went over to the old upright and sat down. He looked at the keys for awhile, then limbered up his fingers by lacing them together and bending them back and to, and then, Lord have mercy, he played that thing.

The whole Café stopped. I don't ever remember a time before that when every soul on the place was paying attention to the same thing. He had us hypnotized.

After about 15 minutes of playing the blues, he quit and turned around on the bench.

"Is that what you want?" he asked. The piano wasn't the only thing sweating. Louvenia threw him a bar towel.

"Yes, baby!" she exults, "And plenty of it!"

Horace Morris chimes in with, "Somebody draw that man a beer."

"Anh-anh, you don't," says Louvenia. "He don't drink alcohol. Ain't you got a milkshake in this place?"

Well, that was our afternoon, as well as our evening: Stuffy picking that box right on up off the floor and Louvenia singing, as well as showing off parts of her newly-created "telephone"

skits, and the milkshakes shaking. I have to say that there was a right smart of beer being swilled as well.

It was almost eerie the way she would talk -- "in B flat," as she described her speaking voice -- with the backbeat, and the piano would seem to be talking, too. She would "ring up" political figures on her gold telephone and tell them about themselves and, while they were "answering," the piano would move in and keep the beat going. Louvenia hadn't just found a piano player, she'd located her soul brother.

The next day, me and HoJo were competing with one another to see who could remember all the words to their show opener that they called Fool Number One. Remembering the melody was a snap. It went:

"Am I Fool Number One? That's what I want to be to you;  
I just don't want to be your fool number two;  
I suppose it makes you wonder, and I hope it makes you smile  
When I say Fool Number One is more my style.  
If I had a choice, I'd be standing here with you;  
I'd be using up my voice, even knowing, when we're through,  
You might never buy my record to play on your  
phonograph,

But remember I'm the fool who made you laugh.

Let me be your Fool Number One, that's what I want to be to you;

I couldn't stand it being fool number two;

I hope that you'll stick around while I make one phone call,  
And then tell me I'm the biggest fool of all."

I'd never seen anything like that, and neither had Marcelene. We kept on clapping after every number until White Boy had to shush us.

Everybody on the place pronounced their act a winner - an all-time, stomp-down, ready-for-the-big-time winner. I sure was glad me and Marcelene had been there for their debut.

***The Medium & the Message***

The latest business-enhancer from Her Entrepreneurship, the same having been one more of White Boy's contrivances -- and, I might add, produced by yours truly and his number one associate, HoJo -- was multi-paged and set up like a personal letter. Each one had been folded and inserted into a #10 envelope addressed to "Party-loving Friends of Miss Peaches' Café de Lite." It read:

Miss Peaches, Herself

at

MISS PEACHES' CAFÉ DE LITE

On the Left Side of the Road

Either Way You Come in Town

Tallulahcoochee, Georgia ZIP

In Recent Times

Dear Cafe Regular:

Mark your calendar NOW for the next First Saturday so you don't miss the opening stagery of our upcoming new series of live performances featuring local artists from Tallulahcoochee's Secret Art Colony, frequently referred to as "The Unsung Among Us."

These elevating expositions, under the umbrella title of "Coochee Capers," will serve to remind our regulars of the rich milieu in which they have their being, and to incite the irregulars to a more committed level of loyalty to the café.

Opening night will showcase the most recent graduating class from *Miss Mabel's Sing-or-Bust School of Music & Vocal Attainment*, featuring both solo and chorus work by the 19 not-busted warblers who made the grade. Newcomers will be awed to discover that Miss Mabel's student singers are chickens. They range in breed, color and origin -- in strictest accordance with equal opportunity guidelines -- from voluptuous, home-grown Rhode Island Reds to the lesser-endowed White Leghorn pullets liberated through the side door of the Tyson Plant in Millwood, and even to a black, Barred Rock loner who was rescued, post-trauma, by an alert sheriff's deputy from a feather-redundant Highway 82 encounter with an 18-wheeler.

Pvt. First Class Henry "Night Rider" Moses, (World Citizen and Brave Ol' Soldado) will enliven the festivities with a window-rattling fly-over in his World War II surplus B-17, Armandene "Princess Amy" Petite, *That Veiled Enchantress From the Egyptian Nile*, at the co-pilot controls. Later, this daring doublet will perform in person at the capers with demonstrations of French dance steps, including the latest Continental craze known in these environs as "The Bun Buster." During our several intermissions, Princess Amy will read palms and demonstrate the esoteric aspects of the lost art of phrenology.

"Corporal Punishment," a comedy skit, will star an elite cadre of enlisted men from Moody Field, the punishing colonel

played by West Indian native Shasta (Stalker) Harkins, and the hapless, unarmed play victims -- the "corporals," of course -- appearing pursuant to a cautiously-worded, non-culpability agreement with custody-transfer codicil appended, the same having been executed by and between official Capers sponsors and the Kyle Corbett County Sheriff's Department.

Genuine Kraft "Mayo" Munch will occupy his usual, premier watchstation, from which vantage point he will execute his Mundane Magic, should such Mesmeric action prove necessary. That is, he will deftly orchestrate the disappearance from the ranks of genteel revelers those select individuals who might prove unruly;

On no account should we forget to announce that Mister Charles Atlas (911) Hutson, our resident hypochondriac, will be transported to the party in his usual two-ambulance motorcade, attended by his faithful assortment of emergency medical specialists, consultants and hands-on practitioners who will follow in a matched trio of specially-equipped, resuscitation-ready limousines.

Southeast Georgia's renowned "sweat-drenched dance band," officially billed as Cool Poole & The Frigid Airs, will erupt in booty-bouncing blasters at unscheduled intervals throughout the evening, as well as after the conclusion of the program's formal presentations. Cool, well and widely publicized for his engaging

accoutrement, reputedly plans to wear his original, battery-powered cuff links and his diamond-encrusted nose ring.

Other acts designed to flummox and flabbergast will follow on succeeding First Saturdays, and will include many highly-acclaimed luminaries presently taking refuge in our artistic backwater.

Be prepared to stay on your feet until dawn, when a high-calorie, non-fat-free, soul breakfast, prepared under the watchful eye of Head Chef Willie "Butterball" Burroughs, will be served on the premises.

In keeping with our policy of dispensing notions along with all other popular potables and comestibles, please note: if you take a notion you want a drink of whiskey, we can send down to the still after it.

In the interest of Public Safety, Tallulahcoochee's own Ransom "Marblehead" Rhoden, eagle-eyed executive director of the local chapter of the National Gun-toters Association, will be on hand at the door to take charge of firearms and other instruments of an intrusive nature (specifically, cross-bows, switchblades, screwdrivers, straight razors, utility knives, church keys, conque combs, hat pins and assorted, portable accessories of similar species), which items will be available for guaranteed intact return to their rightful owners at noon on the following Monday or either Tuesday, right here at the Café.

With elaborate good wishes and ardent envisionments for livelier, longer-lasting, local throwdowns, I am

Auspiciously yours,

*Miss Peaches*

Miss Peaches, Herself

Walkman Mincey was already making his rounds before nine o'clock, and I casually cut by the Café for coffee and a homemade fig newton. Life is good in Tallulahchoochee.

+ + +

Marcelene likes to rag me about smiling like I do, but that's the only way I know to react to the everyday happenings in my delicious life. In fact, I know, sitting there in the cool of the morning and eating Peaches' homemade pastries, that I'm smiling again.

Mostly, it's about the latest party notice. Well, all the Café invitations, really. Unbeknownst to the uninitiates, none of those fictional promised acts is going to show up. The patrons named in the invite are expected to be on hand, though. Being singled out that way carries an obligation to take the stage on the appointed evening and explain how come his or her

particular act didn't materialize. Then - and this is the good part - to make up for the loss, the celebrity so named has to buy a round of drinks for the mock-disappointed crowd.

See, it's a code. Being named in one of White Boy's exuberant fantasy announcements is considered an extravagant compliment. One round of draught is a small price to pay for the adulation that comes with the fame of a mention.

I guess it sounds like a goofy kid's game, but small towners have to make up their own entertainment. Some are more creative than others.

**"Do You Have Any Invitations Left?"**

Every time we got out a new party announcement from the Café, we had a few dainty, society ladies stopping by the shop to inquire about buying some extras. They must have kept a list of out-of-town friends and relatives who waited for news of Miss Peaches' famous enterprise.

Of course, most of the recipients of those carefully-wrought messages kept theirs in a scrapbook, ready to be brought out and showed to visitors so unfortunate as to have not got one. A prosperous few had the things framed.

Understand, a mere machine copy would not do. Peaches ordered the best paper stock we could lay hands on - anything for her Baby.

When this particular First Saturday rolled around, I got to the Café early and saved a place for my sweetie, Marcelene, so we wouldn't miss a thing. There's a storage cabinet built into the wall that runs perpendicular to the stage, and from there you can take in the whole Café. Marcelene always brings us two cushions, so we can enjoy in comfort.

Cool Poole & the Frigid Airs amble on stage right after eight o'clock and mill around for a few minutes. If you didn't know, you would think they forgot what they came for.

The drummer, Ralston "Rooster" Moffett is slowly and carefully turning up his britches legs to the knee and whistling

through his teeth; Bobby Lister "Shag" Mizell is looking at his trombone as if he's expecting it to bolt, and Roy Clyde "Kitty" Kirkland is shaking his electric guitar, "Miss Pickett," in an effort to retrieve the pick that he never uses.

Waymon "Toogie" Robinson is sitting cross-legged on the floor, caressing his clarinet and humming off-key, intently watching Russell "Brother" Sessions wrestle his bass fiddle to the stage. The trumpet man, Slidell "Pinkie" Holbrook keeps touching his instrument to his lips as if he's ready to work.

After awhile, Cool blows a little easy *Mary Had a Little Lamb* on his alto sax, like he's practicing. Then he looks around at his sidemen, raises an eyebrow, and they tear out on *I Hear You Knockin'*. The place comes alive.

They get busy with *Honeysuckle Rose*, of course, and then turn to St. James Infirmary Blues, which Cool sings. Then, it's that Nellie Lutcher classic, *Fine Brown Frame*, followed by *I'm a Good Man, But a Poor Man*, calling to mind the late Cecil Gant. They rock the Café with Wynonie Harris's *Baby, Come Back*, and by the time they're around to Reconsider Me, ~~and take me home~~, ~~Farney~~, it's nine o'clock.

That's when Miss Peaches steps up on the stage and tells us how glad she is we all came, and reminds us that the Café's renowned barbecue is available in plates, sandwiches and side dishes, and that beer is cold and plentiful. Then she turns the

program over to White Boy, who has been standing there, grinning like he's holding the Bolita number.

Here's where the night begins to take on a kind of glamour that the movies can't touch.

White Boy slanks up on the stage, and by now he's laughing.

"Miss Mabel, won't you come up and get this night's entertainment off to a startling beginning?"

Miss Mabel, tall, hefty, also smiling, takes her red silk-clad bulk to the stage and greets her audience by vigorously applauding and whirling around and around for about 15 turns. When she's through with her dervish routine, she peers out into the gathering of devotees and begins her recital.

"Me an' my chickens been practicing all day on our annual concert at the Methodis' Church - we're doing the *Hallelujah Chorus* -- add them poor old two-legged things were so worn out, I just couldn't ask them come down here tonight. But they all sent them best crow!"

"So now, thr next round of something to drink is on Miss Mabel's Singorr Bust School of Music."

The crowd roars. The band spins a little Bolera, and Miss Mabel shows us a comic bump-and-grind, removing her floor-length, beaded vest as she twists off the stage to wild applause.

Didn't I tell you it was wonderful?

White Boy comes back and presents Private First Class Henry "Night Rider" Moses for a word about his B-17 and the promised fly-over.

Night Rider comes on as his elegant self. He's wearing a bronze nylon flight suit, chocolate brown boots to match his felt beret and a long, white silk scarf looped around his neck. He's carrying leather gloves and his sun glasses as he mounts the stage with a purposeful gait. He's the man not smiling. He looks, well, fiercely official.

"Good evening, ladies an' gentlemen," he begins. "Due to circumstances past my control, my plane was not ready tonight. Them jocks at the airport laid down on the job, an' they didn't get my B-17 serviced up like they should have, and so I had to scrub the flight.

"This being the case, the next beer will be on that 'World Citizen an' Brave Ol' Soldidado,' Henry 'Night Rider' Moses."

He gives us a thumbs up as he concludes with his trademark admonition, "Keep 'em flyin'!"

Need I say it? Henry's recital is greeted with stumps and whistles and deafening applause, and Princess Amy beaming at her hero.

We all turn out for another round.

Cool Poole changed the tempo with a few dance tunes and most of the crowd hit the floor, swinging. Me and Marcelene climbed

down from our perch and joined them. There's nothing adjusts your heart rate like dancing to a backbeat.

Poole's group seemed to be in a sentimental mood that night, going back to old wartime numbers like *I'll Be Seeing You* and *I'll Never Smile Again*. One we really enjoyed was *Sentimental Journey*, and then he wound up that set with a fine, if ancient Fats Waller number, *Do You Have to Go?*

Life just don't get any better than that.

### **Totally Cool**

Harman Jarman got to the party kind of early, surely aware that his midnight blue tuxedo would draw a lot of attention.

Which it did, of course. From the top of his salon-dressed mane to the tip of his patent leather dancing shoes, he portrayed the very essence of male high fashion.

He swept through the rest of the early arrivals and over to the bar, where he ordered "a draft with a twist." Mayo Munch headed his way, mouth smiling genially, eyes hard as granite.

Mayo, as we all knew, had pulled some hard time in Reidsville for having interfered with the health and wellbeing of a couple of guys who he said had insulted his sister. Credit bad Karma, one of the two was still in the hospital when Mayo's parole came through. It's just that Mayo doesn't take kindly to opposing arguments, and we were all willing to give him that.

"Harman Jarman," Mayo begins, "We're gonna be partying down to the bricks in here tonight, and we'd like to give you a pass on the cussin' this time, since you're a good customer.

"Hot damn!" says Harman Jarman.

"But look here, I don't want to see you out here asking no men to dance with you. The Café ain't ready for that, and I can bet money that 'Coochee ain't either."

Harman Jarman's eyes widen and he grins big at Mayo.

"Don't sweat it, man -- I'm totally, goddam cool!"

"Don't be pressing your luck," warns Mayo, adding, with menacing emphasis, "boy."

I have to say that Harman Jarman knows how to behave like a gentleman. He danced at least once with every woman on the place, including Marcelene, and she can't say enough good about his mannerly self.

Mostly though, he showed off with Princess Amy, and they were give up to be the best dance couple on the floor that whole night. Both of them knew all the latest Continental moves, and they were gracious - as well as patient - in showing them to the rest of us.

As far as I'm personally concerned, Harman Jarman is pretty much an okay guy. What do I care who he dances with in Europe?