

~Excerpt from Miss Virginia and the Sweet Sisters~

For a hot day in early June, I felt adequately dressed in pink-and-white floral-patterned shorts; a white, sleeveless, straight-hemmed shirt; and dirty white Keds. If it wasn't for the zit in the center of my forehead, I at least was presentable. As I pouted and stared at the front door, Mom's pecan pie, which she'd made for this occasion, was cooling in my hands. Pecan pie was Mom's specialty, and this made me think a doily made from my macramé kit would've been a nice gift for me to bring. But since I knew nothing about the inside of their home, it was probably best I hadn't made one.

An uneasy feeling crept over me merely thinking about the rumors of what went on inside that house. But the talk of voodoo practices and witchery was something I didn't want to dwell on just then. Aside from seeing the sisters walk to and from the store or on errands, no one ever saw them once they'd gone inside. Even Miss Greene, who occasionally threw big parties, never saw them. And she lived almost directly across the street!

This thought added to the puzzle of why my mother insisted I visit ladies we hardly knew. I took a deep breath and walked up to the green-colored screen door. I could see the front door was open on the inside, but before I could knock, a voice from inside said, "Come on in. The door's open."

I stood dumb, then slowly opened the screen door and stepped inside.

It took time to adjust to the darkened space from the sun's glare. A nice breeze blew through the house to cool the inside. The room had a cozy feel, and the shelves were full of trinkets with beautiful pictures on the walls. I thought a doily or two would've been proper to bring after all. In poorer families that couldn't afford a larger house with an extra bedroom, it wasn't unusual to see a bed smack-dab in the center of the room. With a lot of children, a makeshift bedroom was typical. But this bed was huge and took up almost the entire room. Placed between the bed and the two front windows was a rocking chair, where the slower of the Misses Sweet sat. Because she was on the other side of the windows, she might have seen me standing in front of the house looking like an idiot.

"I-I-I heard you, you come up the stairs. So nice, so nice," she said.

She seemed to look past me as if I wasn't there. Because of this, I thought she was blind, but I couldn't be sure. The way she said stairs in a slow Southern drawl, "sta-uhs" made me smile. Not everyone in Kentucky spoke this way, but to hear her words in a different kind of accent from others was unusual. Some Kentucky accents had long a's or i's, which could sound exaggerated and twangy, but hers were soft and sweet with a lift at the end. I liked it. I thought her stutter might be due to nervousness, so I hurried with introductions to put her at ease. But my mouth went dry. I tried to get more spit but swallowed hard instead. How I got the words out, I'll never know.

"Hi, I'm Lindsey Hollis, Miss Janie's daughter from across the street? Most of my friends call me Linney, though, but you can call me whatever you like. Mom made this pie for you to enjoy. I hope you like it. I didn't make anything to bring because I wasn't sure what you might like, but maybe next time I can bring something if that's okay?"

I was breathless after saying all this, and while catching my breath, she continued to smile without looking at me. I shifted from foot to foot, standing just inside the front door, not knowing what else to do or say. Finally, I smiled, but it wasn't my best because I could feel it mimicking the crazy smile of this lady with the vacant stare.