



Seneca

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When Mavis pulled into the driveway near the kitchen door she slammed the breaks so hard all of her packages fell beneath the dashboard. The figure sitting in the garden's red chair was completely naked. She could not see the face under the hat's brim but she knew it wore no sunglasses. A mere month she'd been away and for three weeks of that time couldn't wait to get back to the house where Connie and Mother lived which for two years now she considered her home as well.

Something must have happened. To Mother. To Connie. At the squeal of the brakes the sunning figure did not move. Only when she slammed the Cadillac door did the person sit up and push back the hat. Calling out "Connie! Connie?" Mavis hurried toward the garden's edge.

"Who the hell are you? Where's Connie?"

The naked girl yawned and scratched her pubic hair. "Mavis?" she asked.

Relieved to learn she was known, spoken of, at least, Mavis lowered her voice. "What are you doing out here like that? Where's Connie?"

"Like what? Inside."

"You're naked!"

"Yeah. So?"

"Do they know?" Mavis glanced toward the house.

"Lady," said Grace, "are you looking at something you never saw before or something you don't have or you a clothes freak or what?"

"Blessed! Blessed! Blessed one!" Connie came bounding down the steps, her arms wide, toward Mavis. "Oh how I missed you!" They hugged and Mavis could not help loving the thump of the woman's heart against her own.

"But who is this and where are her clothes?"

"Oh, that's little Grace. She came the day after Mother died."

"Died? When?"

"Seven days now. Seven."

"But I brought all the things. I have it all in the car."

"No use. Not for her anyway. My heart's all scruntched but now you back I feel like cooking."

"You haven't been eating?" Mavis shot a cold glance at Grace.

"A bit. Food the women brought. Olive. Esther. But now I'll cook."

"There's plenty," said Grace. "We haven't even touched the...."

"You put some clothes on!"

"You kiss my ass!"

"Do it," said Connie. "Go, like a good girl. Cover yourself we love you just the same."

"She ever hear of sunbathing?"

"Go on."

Grace went, exaggerating the switch of both of the cheeks she had invited Mavis to kiss.

"What rock did she crawl out from under?" Mavis asked.

"Hush. Soon you'll like her. That's all that's left. Liking. In the end, that's all there is."

No way, Mavis thought. No way at all. Mother's gone but Connie's okay. This house is still my refuge. With that girl here, all my peace is gone.

They did everything but slap each other and finally they did that.