Chapter Eleven

"We'll be right there," Mary Hughes had said in her League of Women Voters' voice. "Horace has just come in. It shouldn't take us more than two hours to get there."

By ten o'clock they were there, walking into the house with their air of tight-lipped efficiency as if they were hiding something. It always struck Mrs. McBee when she hadn't seen Mary Hughes for some time just how much she had got to looking like her husband.

Perhaps it wasn't so much looks as it was ways. Horace Toole was completely bald now except for a neat
little dark brown fringe that bordered the back of his head like a mistake. Mary Hughes's hair was cut short, each hair brushed to her head in an immaculate set as if not even a wind would dare disturb it. Now, however, she had put some color to it. And it had an unnatural reddish-blond cast which hid nothing and only tended to make her face look tired, strained. Or maybe it was the reducing diets she was always going on.

But the two were the same medium height and they both wore glasses and had that air. Cockiness. Managers. Mary Hughes had always had some of this. Prissy is how Mrs. McBee used to refer to it. There wasn't anything the girl didn't claim to know and if she didn't know, which was surprisingly seldom, she said she knew anyway. Mrs. McBee had always been a little afraid of Mary Hughes, though she would never have admitted to such a thing.

She had been a rather pretty child with a face as innocent as a cauliflower. She would have had a kind of appeal had one merely looked at her from afar. But one word from her, and the bossiness and the prissiness took over, just like her clipped way of speaking. Through the years she seemed to have gathered more steam. And now at forty she was president of the Lawson, Georgia
League of Women Voters, co-chairman of the AAUW and one million other things she claimed were bringing "good government" to the world. Mrs. McBee had wished Mary Hughes had taken more of an interest in flowers, art and antiques, all the things that interested most normal women.

Still, Mary Hughes was a good girl, a little careless about writing letters perhaps, but a good girl all the same. And you couldn't ask for everything.

"You can't have everything," she was always advising her friends who were having trouble with their children. And in this she took her own wisdom. Partially.

"We hurried as fast as we could," said Mary Hughes, embracing her mother and then standing back with that quizzical frown on her face.

"Hello, Mother," said Horace, pecking Mrs. McBee on the cheek.

Mother. Just like an insurance salesman. Mrs. McBee wished Horace could think up some other name to call her. She had thought of suggesting something, but she was afraid it might hurt his feelings. Horace's own mother had died shortly after he and Mary Hughes
were married, and it was Mary Hughes who had suggested 
the name: "Mother McBee is your real mother now." At 
least he wasn't calling her Mother McBee anymore. That 
was worse.

"Now you take the bags upstairs, Horace," Mary Hughes 
said. "Second room to the right."

Already taking over, thought Mrs. McBee.

"Now, Mother, you and I can go in the living room 
and you can tell me what this is all about," she said, 
taking Mrs. McBee by the arm. She glanced back at 
Horace, who was struggling upstairs with the two over-
night suitcases. "Hurry up, Horace, Mother is going 
to tell us all about it."

Mrs. McBee started to say she didn't think Horace 
would be too interested. She didn't like putting down 
John Bedford in front of Horace.

"Be right down," he called back.

Horace and Mary Hughes sat side by side on the 
settee regarding her with intense concern. Looking 
at them, Mrs. McBee thought she was seeing double so 
identical was the look from behind their twin round 
spectacles. For a moment she regretted her decision 
in calling them. They appeared so healthy, sure, even
formidable. And impatient, she thought, seeing Horace's crossed leg swinging to and fro.

"Well, shoot the works, Mother," Horace said in his salesman's voice. "We're here, and if there's anything bothering you, well, Hughesie and I have solved a few problems in our lifetime." He glanced at his wife. "Wouldn't you say, honey?"

Mary Hughes did not bat an eye. "It's about Jawn Bedford, of course," she said.

"Well, yes and no." Mrs. McBee wished the lights had been dimmer in the room. She looked down at her hands and began rubbing the back of her left hand with her right. When she looked up the two pair of eyes were frowning at her, gazing as if they were impatient for the show to get on. It was unnerving, and in her state she began to pour out everything, hodgepodge. In the back of her mind she had some odd sense she had to make everything good since they had made such an effort to come.

"...I'm not well and he's been bringing Negroes to the house, and last night he had an attack and nearly scared me out of my wits. It was worse than the telephone operator, and he drinks martinis all the time,
not too much, but he does drink and he's written down things about me and--well--the Flemmings are trying to--

"Whoa there," Horace broke in. He was grinning and his teeth looked exactly like a squirrel's. "Now--just-slow-down a minute--"

"No, now, Horace, just let her go on," said Mary Hughes still frowning and staring from across the room at Mrs. McBee as if she were trying to decide something. "She wants to talk. Just tell us anyway you like."

"Tonight we were just innocently sitting on the porch and all at once he began shouting things at me and--"

"Jawn Bedford shouted at you?" said Mary Hughes.

"No, now, Mary Hughes, we must have some patience with him. I knew he was upset because his manuscript came back."

"What manuscript? Came back from where?"

Mrs. McBee sighed. "That's something you don't know about. But he's trying to be a story writer and--"

"Doesn't he have a job yet?" asked Horace.

"Yes, at the college, but it's just one night a week."

"One night a week?" cried Mary Hughes, aghast.
She got up. "Where is he?" She stalked out in the hall. "Jawn Bedford, you come down here right this minute!"

Mrs. McBee slumped over in her chair. She should never have called them. She heard Mary Hughes going up the stairs.

"He's not up there," she said weakly to Horace. And she began shaking her head.

"Come back down, honey," Horace called. "He's not up there."

Mrs. McBee reached for the handkerchief underneath her sleeve and began twisting it. They were making her nervous, the calling back and forth, the unaccustomed voices and their staring at her as if they were looking for signs of something.

"Perhaps we can go into all this tomorrow," Mrs. McBee said to Horace.

"Whatever you want, Mother. Now if it's a matter of money."

It was like him to bring up money, as if there could possibly be worries that didn't involve money—the lack of it. Just two feet out of the cottonpatch, she was thinking. All dressed up in a business suit but still just two feet out of...
"I'm doing nicely that way, thank you," she said, not looking at him. "I just think we'll be able to see things a little clearer after some rest."

Horace reared back with his lips pursed as if he were pondering the wisdom in this. "All right," he decided. "Probably not a bad idea."

Mary Hughes came back in the room and stood with her hands on her hips. "Where is he?"

Mrs. McBee looked down at her hands again, then up at the girl's searching eyes. She sighed, and in a strange high voice that was foreign even to her own ears she said: "He's--he's dancing." And she raised both hands in a facile gesture of hopelessness.

Mrs. Flemming had told Mrs. McBee about the Last Chance:

"Sin hole. The thangs I hear tell goes on in that place wouldn't be fit even for no devil's eyes," was the way she had explained it. Prior to that she had "suggested" more than once that John Bedford was spending much of his time there.

Mrs. McBee had told her she knew he went there on occasions. Which was a lie, of course. She never knew
where he was. "He goes there to get atmosphere—for his stories," she had tried to explain.

"Sin hole," was all Mrs. Flemming had to say about that.

Mrs. McBee had been inside the Last Chance only once and that was one Saturday afternoon when she was returning from arranging the altar flowers and the taxi had given out of gas just two feet from the place. The driver had told her she could wait in the cab while he phoned a garage but Mrs. McBee didn't like sitting alone on the highway. You couldn't be sure what might come along, and, too, she was curious to see just what, if anything, went on in there. It would be "a little lark," she told the driver. She wanted to reassure him that was exactly what it was, "a little lark," and that by no means was she a regular habitué of road houses.

There wasn't much to it, as far as she could see. The inside smelled of frying grease, and there were only one or two men hunched over a counter drinking beer. A good cleaning wouldn't hurt anything, she decided. But while the driver was making the phone call to the garage she spied the back room. Rather she heard it.
Double doors led to the sound, and just as discretely as she knew how she decided to investigate. She opened one of the doors and peeked in. The room was larger than she would have imagined from the outside, a long dark room lined on each side with tables covered in red and white checkered oil cloth. A record machine with colored bubbles going up and down inside had been placed at the far end and atop the ceiling was a large Sears-Roebuck crystal chandelier that caught the lights from the bubbles, apparently there to lend a touch of elegance.

The machine was enormous and it was turned up full blast. From it a man's cracker voice mournfully moaned out a tale as to how he had been in many cities and met a lot of "big people" but there was nothing as fine as "those wonderful nobodies from small towns..."

Two couples were sitting at one of the tables. The man furtherest from the wall, a rather wasted-looking individual with cropped dark hair and a potato-pale face, was reared back in his chair singing along with the record, seemingly moved by those "wonderful nobodies."

The other three, their heads lowered in apparent reverence, stared hollowly at the myriad of brown beer bottles covering the table in front of them.
All of it sounded like a baying hound to Mrs. McBee, the man from the record player and the man at the table. But then the record changed and the sound of an angry shouting Negro with drum beat and saxophone startled the group into action. Without a word to each other both couples immediately rose and began to stomp and shake in time to the beat. The whole floor shook and their faces had an earnestness, seriousness that was almost arrogance.

"Bay-bee, yew better git rat! Yeh, yeh, yeh," shouted the Negro from the colorful bubbles and at that the couple nearest Mrs. McBee parted further and then half-shaking stomped back toward each other again. The man was more agile than the woman. His thin frenzied legs twisted and turned like an acrobat's while the woman, buxom and heavy with pale bruised legs, moved her shoulders twitchingly and stomped back to him like an awkward bear.

The Negro screamed from the record player: "Ahahahahah-eee. Beat me! Whup me! Bay-beeee!" and the couple shook in frenzy, their faces dead-panned. Once Mrs. McBee had seen an itinerant preacher underneath the courthouse tree in town. He had yelled and screamed and jumped and twisted and finally his whole
body shook with such a tremor and fervor that Mrs. McBee was sure he had been taken by a fit.

The dancers were so reminiscent of all that she wondered if there was not some basis for the relationship, one a cry to God, the other to man. Or were they the same? What strange things the South had fostered on the world, except now its eccentricities were being admired, paid for.

The dancers stomped back from each other again. The sight was so embarrassing Mrs. McBee left the room. She felt as if she had been witnessing some private orgy. But the man behind the counter merely glanced at her, stubbed out his cigarette and went on talking to the other two men. Evidently the stomping, shouting was as routine as another glass of beer.

But Mrs. McBee was never able to erase the picture from her mind. And now whenever she thought of the dancers she saw John Bedford stomping and shaking toward some up-country cracker and the image always brought her hands to her eyes as if she could erase the image. For what else was there to do in that low-slung unwashed building?

"He does that sometimes," was all she had said to Mary Hughes.
Mrs. McBee went straight to John Bedford's room first thing the next morning. She wanted to warn him, tell him to try to be patient with his sister because they all wanted to have a nice "family-time." That was what she had decided to tell him, that Mary Hughes and Horace had come "just to have a nice family time," for nothing else.

She had thought it all over last night and convinced herself that calling Mary Hughes had been a mistake. It wasn't fair to put down one child to the other. Even as little as she had said last night had left her with a sense of guilt.

But in its way it had helped, too. And that was something else sad. There was not one other person in the entire world she could call on for help. No family. No one. Friends would only gossip. Everyone else was dead. There was no one. She had to make a telephone call all the way to Lawson, Georgia if she wanted to discuss even the slightest family business.

She tiptoed into the room. John Bedford was huddled beneath a sheet, fetus-style. He was sound asleep, and when she peeked at him he had an odd, sweet smile on his face, one that sent a lump straight to her
throat. It was the same smile he had had as a baby.
Looking at him now she was convinced the smile was his
true nature. She regretted even more having said any-
ting critical. He looked so innocent.

Sheets of yellow paper were spread haphazardly
about the floor. She began picking them up. At least
he could wake up to a tidy room. She placed the papers
in a neat pile on his typing table. Idly she picked up
the last sheet: "...therefore really to stick to
Christianity a man must be brought to madness by suffer-
ing. Most men, therefore, will be able to get a real
impression of Christianity only in the moment of their
death, because death..."

She stopped reading. She wished John Bedford would
concern himself with something important. Just typing
nonsense like that wasn't getting him anywhere. If
only he could think up something like SO RED THE ROSE
or GONE WITH THE WIND. He'd be a millionaire now.
Margaret Mitchell didn't have anything over him. And
he had more brains, besides.

She replaced the sheet of paper. The McBee family
was something he could write about. Of course there
wasn't anybody like Scarlett O'Hara in it, but he could
think up something. She would just have to put that bug in his ear.

"John Bedford," she rehearsed to herself, "I've got a little bug-"

"Leave my papers alone."

Mrs. McBee gave a little cry and turned toward the bed. "You frightened me." He was sitting up in the middle of the bed with the same shirt he had worn last night still on, the one with the short sleeves. His eyes were half-closed, and he ran his hand over the top of his head.

"I was just tidying," said Mrs. McBee. "Nobody likes to wake up to a messed-up room."

"I do," he drawled.

Mrs. McBee tiptoed to the end of the bed. "You were sleeping so soundly, had the sweetest smile on your face, just like when you were a baby." She stood back. "Now, it's all gone."

"I wonder why." He yawned and began buttoning the middle button of his shirt.

Mrs. McBee clasped her hands together. "Guess what?" she said happily.

John Bedford said nothing.
"Mary Hughes and Horace are here!"

"Well, hallelujah," he drawled, frowning out at the white-bright morning, "the second coming."

"They've come all this way just to have a nice family time. We're such a small family we have to stick together, you know."

He rubbed his hand over his forehead. "That's just what families ought not to do, 'stick together'; they ought to unglue and get out of the way as soon as possible." He yawned again. "A sad state of affairs. Yes, a very sad--"

"I'm not going to argue with you now—when everyone else is so cheerful." She opened the door. "Hurry up and dress and have breakfast with us—even if you have been dancing." She just thought she would put that in, let him know she wasn't born yesterday.

He did not have breakfast with them, which was just as well as far as Mrs. McBee was concerned. Mary Hughes had depressed her so with one of Horace's "suggestions" she couldn't have been cheerful for anybody, much less John Bedford.

When she got downstairs Mary Hughes in her efficient
way had already prepared breakfast. For two. Horace was still sleeping, she said; they had sat up half the night talking.

"About what?" Mrs. McBee eyed her suspiciously.

"Let's finish our coffee in the parlor," Mary Hughes suggested.

Mrs. McBee followed her into the living room. She had called it living room all the time she was living in the house. Now it was parlor. The "parlor" was a better place to talk, she said.

"Now, number one," said Mary Hughes, sitting bolt upright in the wing chair, holding her cup and saucer straight out in front of her, "we've got to do something about you."

"Mary Hughes, I don't like what you're doing to your hair nowadays. It looks fake." The morning light made it look brassy.

"You're not listening, Mother. Did you hear what I said?" She touched her hair with her left hand.

"You're just not listening."

"I heard you. You want to do something about me. There's nothing wrong with me you have to do anything about."

Mary Hughes put down her cup and saucer on the
end table near the chair. "Well, Horace and I think there is. You've just got too much on you—Jawn Bedford and his neurosis or whateveritis—this house, the business, and at your age you should be slowing down instead of taking on more."

Mrs. McBee pressed her fingers to her lips. Just like her. As if she didn't have enough to run at home, now she was going to try to run this life, too. Mary Hughes should have had a dozen children. That was what was wrong with her, no place to put all that energy. "I'm perfectly capable of managing things." She looked about the room.

"I didn't say you weren't. But the additional worry of having some grown, thirty-two-year-old son on your shoulders, supporting him, I mean, I think that's just asking too much. Now Horace suggested last night—"

Mrs. McBee moved impatiently in the chair. "What if John Bedford had written GONE WITH THE WIND? What would you and Horace have to say about that?" She nodded her head emphatically.

Mary Hughes appeared momentarily confused. "Mother," she leaned forward, "Jawn Bedford is not going to write GONE WITH THE WIND and, if you want to know the truth,
anything else for that matter."

Mrs. McBee shook her head. "You don't know. Besides, he's not well."

"Not well? He's as well as anybody I know. There's not one thing wrong with him except he's lazy—a dreamer and lazy." Her eyes popped. "And the idea of his bringing a Negro girl to your house, humiliating you and the girl; well, it's just plain stupid."

Mrs. McBee gazed out the window. "He thinks he's doing right. He doesn't like seeing people persecuted."

"Who does?" cried Mary Hughes. "Anyway, that's beside the point. He sees himself as this great martyr, the good man out-of-step with the village, persecuted. He's persecuted, not the Negro. Jawn Bedford is a phony, the biggest phony I know." She gazed at Mrs. McBee as if she were studying her, her reaction. "And do you want to know the truth? He's got a Jesus complex."

Mrs. McBee blinked her eyes and looked away. She had never thought of such a thing. He had written all those funny things about Christianity and death and being locked in and out of rooms. But nothing so far about Jesus. She turned back to Mary Hughes' hard gaze. "I do wish you and John Bedford could get along," she said thinly.
"We get along."

Mrs. McBee frowned and shook her head. "No you don't. No you don't."

"Who could get along with that?"

Mrs. McBee looked up at the ceiling. "Calm your voice. He'll hear you."

"I don't care whether he does or not. Selfish. That's all he is. Just plain right down selfish."

"All young people are selfish," said Mrs. McBee. "They have to think about themselves."

"Mother, Jawn Bedford is a grown man, almost middle age."

"I know that."

"Just because he never got along with anybody around here, wasn't elected king of the May or something, he hates the place and will do anything in the world just to be different." Mary Hughes shook her head. "His so-called concern for Negroes and people like that isn't a real thing. It's learned, studied, his way of getting attention. He wants to turn everybody in Ashton into a carbon copy of himself." She raised her hands. "And the way he's treated you. He's just gone out of his way to make life miserable. If he's miserable he wants everybody else to be."
"You don't know everything, Mary Hughes," said Mrs. McBee, and she purposely made her voice sound as mysterious as she could. She was thinking about the bell. Just last week she had told Mrs. Flemming that if all of a sudden she saw her house burning down, in flames, the one thing she would want to save was the bell. In a way it would be like saving John Bedford himself.

She had first seen the bell at that shop in Ashton, the one run by Miss Ruby Merriweather. Usually she just passed right on by the shop because she knew Ruby for what she was. Ruby didn't know an antique from Grand Rapids and Mrs. McBee had all but told her that once. Ruby Merriweather was the most talented liar Mrs. McBee had ever known.

But that morning Mrs. McBee did pause at the shop window. The bell stood out in the arrangement of vases and junk like the one perfect apple. Mrs. McBee was sure it was old, genuinely so. The patina of the silver was worn smooth as velvet and on the tip of the handle two small bird's wings flared in graceful flight, the craft of a true artist. Mrs. McBee stared at it for a long while, then on sudden impulse went into the shop.

Ruby with her dyed red hair was rumbling around in the back of the shop.
"How much is that thing in the window there, Ruby?"

Mrs. McBee called to her.

"What's that, Letitia?"

"That bell?"

Ruby immediately got that sorrowful look on her face. "Isn't that something? You won't find anything like that ever again. Just luck. I just happened to luck onto it."

"How much is it?"

"Two hundred dollars."

Mrs. McBee stepped back. "Ruby Merriweather! You oughtta be shamed. You know that thing isn't worth two hundred dollars."

Ruby sniffed at her. "We're sure it's a Hester Bateman."

"With wings on it? Hester Bateman never put wings on anything in her life."

Hester Bateman or not, she wanted that bell. For what, she did not know. All she knew was she wanted it. And one of her visions came to her. She saw the little bell placed on a reproduction sideboard in one of the new-rich houses in Ashton. And the disgrace of its being there was almost pain.

"Well, good day, Ruby," Mrs. McBee said, giving
the bell one last glance. "I haven't got two hundred dollars for any fake antique bell. Good day."

She had merely mentioned the bell to John Bedford. Once. Only once. And that was way back in January. And, wouldn't you know when her birthday came along in April there was the bell on the breakfast room table. The table was already set and John Bedford was standing behind his chair grinning from ear to ear for all the world to see.

Nothing had ever made her happier and the fact he had spent practically all the money he had made at the college for it--for her--was just too much. She had polished the bell every day and it sat between them at every meal, never ringing, just sitting there, a reminder of something very fine.

"We have our ups and downs," she told Mary Hughes now. "Ups and downs. Lately, I guess they've been mostly down." She frowned down at her hands.

"Well, he's not the main thing anyway." Mary Hughes sat up straighter. "You are. And Horace came up with the most sensible idea last night."
"We get along."

Mrs. McBee frowned and shook her head. "No you don't. No you don't."

"Who could get along with that?"

Mrs. McBee looked up at the ceiling. "Calm your voice, he'll hear you."

"I don't care whether he does or not. But that's not the main thing. Now." She sat up straighter.

"Horace came up with the most sensible idea last night."

"What?" said Mrs. McBee and the word sounded like a thud.

"We discussed it for hours last night, and it's the only sensible thing to do."

Mrs. McBee said nothing.

"Horace thinks--well, he thinks you should sell this place; the sooner, the better." She waved her hand in the air. "Just get rid of the whole thing in one big sweep. The property isn't what it used to be--"

Mrs. McBee could feel her heart begin to gather speed. She just gazed at the girl.

"Sell it to a contractor, anybody, those people next door, the Flemmings or whatever their name--"

"Now, Mary Hughes, you don't--"
"No, now wait," said Mary Hughes in her calm, precise way. "Just hear me out. Sell it, and Horace said—honestly he can be so imaginative sometimes—you can come and live with us."

Mrs. McBee felt her heart sink like a leaden bucket. "Over our garage. You can live over our garage. It'll be all private and everything and—"

Mrs. McBee had one of her images: She saw the garage, a white clapboard affair with tall steps leading up the side to a second story. She saw herself pushed and crowded into the two rooms, put away like an old shoe, never coming out, no one ever coming in. Mary Hughes had no garden or grounds to speak of, just a cracked concrete drive and a bit of ground where a diseased mimosa tree dripped leaves and worms all season long.

She felt the heat rise to her face.

"No, now, hear me out," said Mary Hughes. "Horace would fix up the rooms. You'd love it. No worries about keeping up this big house. And the main thing. Jawn Bedford would have to do something then, be on his own. It's the only answer." Mary Hughes leaned forward, blinked her eyes at Mrs. McBee, then apparently
satisfied with something, leaned back in the chair. "I thought it was terribly nice of Horace to suggest it. That way, you see, you wouldn't be bothered by us, our coming and going, and you could have your own life."

Mrs. McBee drummed her fingers on the chair. "I see," she said.

Mary Hughes appeared to relax. "I knew you would. The place will be terribly cozy. You can have your own hot plate up there, fix whatever you like. Of course, you couldn't use all your things." Her eyes gave a quick search of the room. "But we have plenty of room. We can take the furniture. Horace loves antiques."

"I see," said Mrs. McBee again and she knew her face was fireball red. The girl had it all figured out; she would get her and her things into her house and after she was dead there would be nothing for John Bedford. Scheming. Mary Hughes had always schemed. It was not she the girl wanted living over her garage, it was her things.

And me shut up like an old hen.

Mrs. McBee jutted out her chin. "Well, let me tell you one thing: there's plenty of steam left in this old engine yet. And nobody's going to send Letitia Graham
McBee to any chicken coop, not yetta while."

Mary Hughes pinched her lips. "I think that remark was entirely uncalled for."

"Maybe so." Mrs. McBee rose from the chair. "Now, if you will excuse me I have work to do."

She left the room, walked blindly through the hall, and pushed open the back screen door. Once outdoors she put her hand to her mouth. She glanced once at the greenhouse and quickly looked away. Mrs. Flemming might see her and call out to her. She couldn't see anybody now. She began to walk. She walked with her hands clenched, down the road to the highway. Half way she turned off into a path through the pine trees. The path led to the creek. The creek was dry, and she stood there looking down at the red mud and rock.

So that was the way they saw her: a sick old woman, ready to be locked up.

"Well, I'm not sick and I'm not old," she said to the dry creek. She clenched and unclenched her fists. "And I'll show them. I'll show everybody!" In her mind she was seeing the greenhouse; hundreds and hundreds of people were coming down the highway, all coming for McBee flowers. The place would be the largest,
most productive farm in the Southeast. She would buy out the Flemmings. Fifty workers would be there to help her. John Bedford would be assistant manager, and on the side write another GONE WITH THE WIND.

"And then let them talk about locking somebody up!"

She reached down, picked up a dried twig and broke it into two. The tears were blurring her spectacles. She removed them and wiped them on the edge of her skirt. She had called Mary Hughes for help and what had they done but cast her aside like a rotten turnip.

She looked up at the tall pines. Above, the sky was morning blue. "I'll die heah!" she called to the sky. But only silence answered her, and she stood gazing at the tops of the pine needles, green and motionless against the sky. Then as she continued to look something seemed to speak to her, something out of the stillness, and she knew she was right.

After a while she turned solidly and made her way back to the road on determined feet.

She didn't even care when she saw Horace bringing the two overnight bags out to the car. Pouting, she
said to herself. Just because things aren't going their way.

She strolled up to the car. Mary Hughes was already seated in the front.

"You're leaving?" she said coolly.

Mary Hughes nodded.

"Good-bye, Mother," said Horace happily as he gave her a peck on the cheek. He seemed almost jubilant.

"Think over our offer."

Mrs. McBee folded her hands in front of her.

"I'm perfectly content here."

"Well, let us know," said Horace as he half-swung his leg into the car.

Mrs. McBee looked straight at Mary Hughes. "I didn't know you would be leaving so soon."

"I think we've done all we can here," said Mary Hughes, looking past Mrs. McBee.

"Well, it was nice to see you."

Mary Hughes nodded solemnly.

Mrs. McBee put her hand to the side of her neck. It wasn't nice for people to leave angry, especially family. After all, they had come when she called them. They had even rushed. She went to Mary Hughes's window
and putting her hand on the door she smiled sweetly. "Did you get to see John Bedford, have a little visit with him?"

"Who's that?" said Mary Hughes, shooting a glance at her.

Mrs. McBee dropped her hand to her side. "Now, Mary Hughes, just because--"

"I think we'd better leave," said Mary Hughes to Horace.

Horace waved. "Well, so long, Mother."

And Mrs. McBee watched as the car bumped its way down the parched road like an angry bug.