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# **Sweet and Deadly and A Secret Rage**

Written by Charlaine Harris

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**SWEET AND  
DEADLY**  
and  
**A SECRET RAGE**

CHARLAINE HARRIS



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**SWEET AND  
DEADLY**

# 1

She passed a dead dog on her way to the tenant shack. It was already stiff, the legs poker-straight in rigor. It had been a big dog, maybe dun-colored; with only a quick glimpse, Catherine could not be sure. It was covered in the fine powdery dust that every passing vehicle threw up from the dirt road in the dry Delta summer.

In her rearview mirror she saw the cloud raised by her passage hanging in the air after she had passed, a cloud dividing endless rows of cotton. But the road was too poor to allow many backward glances.

She wondered briefly why someone had been driving so fast on the caked and rutted dirt that he had not seen the dog in time to swerve.

A sideways look at the cotton told Catherine that it would make a sad crop this year. The heat had lasted too long, unbroken by rain.

This land was Catherine's, had been her great grandfather's; but Catherine rented it out as her father had done. She was glad she did as she recalled her grandfather's irascibility in bad years, when she had ridden with him across 'the place,' as cotton planters called their acres.

She didn't remember the heat of those dim summers equaling the ferocity of this one. Even this early in the morning, with dawn not too long past, Catherine was

beginning to sweat. Later in the day the glare would be intolerable, without considerable protection, to all but the swarthiest. To someone of Catherine's whiteness of skin it would be disastrous.

She pulled to a stop under an oak, killed the motor and got out. The oak was the only tree to break the stretch of the fields for miles. She stood in its sprawling shadow with her eyes closed, the heat and silence enveloping her. She wrapped herself in them gladly.

The silence came alive. A grasshopper thudded its way across the road from one stand of cotton to the next. A locust rattled at her feet.

She opened her eyes reluctantly and, after reaching into the car for the things she had brought with her, began to walk down the road to the empty tenant shack standing to one side of the intersection of two dirt roads.

The fields were empty of tractors and farm hands. Nothing stirred in the vast brilliant flatness but Catherine.

The sack in her left hand clanked as she walked. The gun in her right hand reflected the sun.

Her mother had raised her to be a lady. Her father had taught her how to shoot.

Catherine laid the gun on a stump in the packed-dirt yard of the tenant house. The bare wood of the house was shiny with age and weathering. A few traces of red paint still clung in the cracks between the planks.

It'll all fall down soon, she thought.

The outhouse behind the shack had collapsed months ago.

Under the spell of the drugging heat and hush, she made an effort to move quietly. The clank of the empty cans was jarring as she pulled them out of the sack and set them in a neat row across the broad stump.

She hardly glanced at the black doorless hole of the shack's entrance. She did notice that the sagging porch

seemed even closer to deserting the rest of the house than it had the last time she had driven out of town to shoot.

The dust plumed under her feet as she paced away from the stump. She counted under her breath.

A trickle of sweat started down the nape of her neck, and she was irritated that she had forgotten to bring an elastic band to lift the black hair off her shoulders.

The twinge of irritation faded as she turned to face the stump. Her head bowed. She concentrated on her body's memory of the gun.

In one motion, her head snapped back, her knees bent slightly, her left hand swung up to grip her rising right forearm, and she fired.

A can flew up in the air, landing with a hollow jangle under the steps rising to the porch. Then another. And another.

By the time only one can was left, Catherine was mildly pleased with herself. She dampened her self-congratulations with the reflection that she was, after all, firing from short range. But then, a .32 was not meant for distance shooting.

The last can proved stubborn. Catherine emptied the remaining bullets from the gun at it. She cursed mildly under her breath when the can remained obstinately unpunctured and upright.

It's a good time for a break, she decided.

She trudged back to the stump and collapsed, with her back against its roughness. Pulling a plastic bullet box from a pocket in her blue jeans, she set it on the ground beside her. She eased the pin from the chamber, letting it fall into her hand. She reloaded lazily, full of the languorous peace that follows catharsis.

When the gun was ready, she didn't feel like rising.

Let the can sit, she thought. It deserves to stay on the stump.

She was enjoying the rare moment of relaxation. She

laced her fingers across her stomach and noticed that they were leaving smudges on her white T-shirt. Her jeans were coated with dust now. She slapped her thigh lightly and watched the motes fly up.

I'll go home, she thought comfortably, and pop every stitch I have on into the washer. And I'll take a long, long shower. And then—

There was no 'then.'

But I'm better, she continued, smoothly gliding over the faint uneasiness that had ruffled her peace. I'm better now.

A horsefly landed on her arm, and she slapped at it automatically. It buzzed away in pique, only to be replaced in short order by one of its companions.

'Damn flies,' she muttered.

There sure are a lot of them, she thought in some surprise, as another landed on her knee. Attracted by my sweat, I guess.

That settled it. She would gather up the cans and go back to Lowfield, back to her cool quiet house.

Catherine rose and walked toward the dilapidated porch briskly, slapping at her arms as she went.

The flies were whirring in and out of the open doorway, creating a drone in the stillness. The boarded-up windows of the house and the overhanging roof of its porch combined to make a dark cave of the interior. The sun penetrated only a foot into the entrance, so the darkness seemed impenetrable by contrast.

She stooped to pick up the first can she had hit, which was lodged under the lopsided steps. The stoop leveled her with the raised floor of the house, built high to avoid flooding in the heavy Delta rains. As she reached for the punctured can, something caught at the corner of her eye, an image so odd that she froze, doubled over, her hand extended for the can.



There was something in that little pool of light penetrating the empty doorway.

It was a hand.

She tried to identify it as something else, anything else.

It remained a hand. The palm was turned up, and the fingers stretched toward Catherine appealingly. Catherine's eyes flicked down to her own extended fingers, then back. She straightened very slowly.

When she inhaled, she realized she had been holding her breath against the smell. It was a whiff of the same odor she had caught as her car passed the dead dog.

With no thought at all, she grasped one of the supports that held up the roof over the porch. Moving quietly and carefully, she pulled herself up on the loose rotting planks and took a little step forward.

A fly buzzed past her face.

The blinding contrast of sun and gloom lessened as she crept closer. When she reached the doorway she could see what lay inside the shack.

The hand was still attached to a wrist, the wrist to an arm . . .

It had been a woman.

Her face was turned away from Catherine. Even in the dimness, Catherine could make out dark patches matting the gray hair. She realized then what made the head so oddly shaped.

A fly landed on the woman's arm.

Catherine began shaking. She was afraid her knees would give way, that she would fall on top of the stinking thing. Her stomach began to twist.

She backed away, tiny shuffling steps that took all her concentration. Her arm touched a wooden support. She had reached the edge of the porch.

She turned to grip the support, then lowered a foot until it rested firmly on the ground.

She reached the stump and sat on its uneven surface, with her back to the tenant house. She stared across her land.

‘Oh my God,’ she whispered.

And the fear hit her. After a stunned second she scabbled in the dust for her gun.

Her eyes darted around her, searching.

Nothing moved on the road, or in the fields; but she felt terrifyingly exposed in that vast flatness.

The car. She had to make it to the car. It was only a few yards away, parked under the oak’s inadequate shade. All she had to do was cross those yards. But she was frozen in position like an animal caught in headlights.

The sheriff, she thought with sudden clarity. I’ve got to get Sheriff Galton.

With that thought, that plain plan, she was able to launch herself from the stump.

She opened the door and shoved the pistol to the other side of the car with shaking fingers, then slid into the driver’s seat. Shut the door. Locked it. She managed to turn the key in the ignition before her muscles refused to obey her. Her fingers on the gearshift were too palsied to put the car into drive.

She screamed at her helplessness. She covered her ears against the ragged sound.

But with that release, her shaking lessened. She could put the car in gear and start back home to Lowfield.

# **A SECRET RAGE**

# 1

Traffic noises and stinging smoggy air and men brushing against me. I marched through the stream of the city, looking purposeful, not meeting glances, in the style I had learned kept me safest.

Two blocks to go until I reached my apartment, two blocks to go until I could drop my street mask. I was wondering if I had any wine in my refrigerator when I saw the crowd gathered in front of my building. I was too angry to work my way to the back entrance, too anxious to reach my own place and indulge in some heavy self-pity. I waded through the crowd until I reached its center hollow containing the snag around which the debris had accumulated.

She was gray-haired and gray-faced. Her blood was still fluid and bright on the filthy sidewalk beneath her head. I had never seen a dead woman before.

‘Miss Callahan!’ a voice said at my elbow. My doorman was quivering with excitement.

‘What happened, Jesus?’ I asked. I tried not to look, but I caught myself flicking sideways glances at the dead woman.

‘Kid grab her purse, threw her off balance, she hit the sidewalk, *thunk!*’ Jesus’ English was not perfect, but it was graphic.

‘You call the police?’

‘Sure. They be here in a minute. Ambulance, too. I saw the whole thing, I was a witness!’ Then Jesus’ face altered from sheer excitement to dismay. He had suddenly realized the inconvenience of involvement.

‘Can you get me in the building?’

‘Oh, sure, Miss Callahan.’

Jesus gave value for his Christmas tip. He waded into the crowd, elbows flying: a little tug pulling a much loftier ship into harbor. I was at least six inches taller than my doorman, but my fighting spirit was diminished by the day I’d had.

I reinforced Jesus’ Christmas when I was safely inside the lobby doors, then began the stairs at a fast clip. I heard the sirens coming near, drowning out Jesus’ voluble thanks.

I always took the stairs instead of the elevator, for the benefit of my leg muscles; but I regretted it by the time I reached my apartment. Reaction hit as I fished my keys from my purse. I worked the keys in the locks with clumsy fingers. Once inside, and after relocking, I pulled my hat off and felt my hair tumble down my back. I’d just jammed it on any which way at my agent’s office; I’d been too upset to put it on properly. I took off my dark glasses (more protective camouflage) and headed for the refrigerator. Even my own apartment – everything in it beautiful to me, chosen with love, arranged with care – didn’t give me any comfort today.

The afternoon was overcast, so my living room was dark. I didn’t switch on any lights. The gloom suited my mood, and the wine suited my gloom.

I thought I would drink a glass, brood, and maybe cry a little; but my dark side drew me into my bedroom, to the waiting mirror. I sat on the stool before my so-aptly-named vanity. There I did switch on the lights. I took a second swallow of wine and then gave myself up to the mirror.

It was the same face.

Sometimes I didn't even feel I owned it. It had been grafted onto me. I lived behind it, and it earned my living. I took care of it; it took care of me.

My agent had just told me that it wasn't going to take care of me anymore. People were tired of it. There were newer, fresher faces.

But the face was still beautiful. I touched it with respect. Straight nose, high broad cheekbones, blue eyes, beautiful skin. Carefully drawn lips. Neat chin. Blonde hair to frame the whole assemblage.

And people were tired of this?

Yes, according to my agent.

'I swanny, Nellie Jean, some people shore are finicky,' I told my mirror. Then I turned away from it and buried my face in my hands.

At twenty-seven, I was overexposed and going down the other side of the hill. And I was lucky I'd lasted the years I had, my agent had told me today, shaking an elegant copper fingernail under my nose for emphasis.

'If you didn't have some brains, you wouldn't have lasted this long. Quit while you're ahead. I'm your friend.' ('Right sure, uh-huh,' I muttered through my fingers now.) 'Otherwise, I'd let you drag on and on and get every little cent I could. I'm doing you a favor, Nickie.'

I swung back around and stared into that mirror for five minutes. And I made myself admit she had been my friend and had done me a favor.

I was sick of my own vanity and how easily it could be wounded. It was what came of living off my face.

'You have other irons in the fire, Nickie,' my agent's voice retold me in my head. 'You're burned out on this business yourself; I know. I can tell. The camera can tell. And you can't tell me you love the camera like you used to.'

Before I turned from that mirror, I made myself admit that everything she had said was true.

So that was that.

I switched on a lamp in the living room and put on my reading glasses. I turned to my solace in times of great trouble – Jane Austen. I could open any chapter of any book of Jane’s and immediately feel more peaceful. Tonight, Jane worked almost as well as she usually did; but I had to put a box of tissues on the table beside the lamp. I caught myself wandering, thinking bitterly that at least the woman on the sidewalk had no more woes; and I slapped my cheek in rebuke. Melodramatic, foolish.

I buried myself in the troubles of Miss Elinor Dashwood, until I felt able to sleep.

By next morning my common sense had raised its head. I woke up with a mild hangover from crying, set the coffee-pot to perking, and did my exercises while I waited for it to finish. Since I was no longer a model, I treated myself to butter on my toast. I riffled idly through the morning paper to find a mention of the woman on the sidewalk, and found she had rated one brief paragraph. I wasn’t surprised.

Since I’d had more unbooked days in the past year than I’d cared to notice, I was accustomed to free time. But now that I knew that part of my life was over, I felt jangly, at loose ends. The once-weekly cleaning woman had done her job while I was gone the day before, so I hadn’t even straightening up to do. I scanned the titles in my bookshelves, trying to find something worth rereading; I had to save Jane for crises. Nothing seemed to strike a chord.

It occurred to me that I could try reworking one of my own novels again, but I felt too drained to be creative in a major way. My eyes roamed around the room for

something that looked fruitful. The only item that held instant appeal was the blank notepad I kept by the telephone.

I love to make lists.

A grocery list? Not sufficiently enterprising. After a thoughtful moment, I decided that this morning was a prime time to Count My Blessings. I sharpened a pencil and set to.

1. Nice apartment, good location; but lease due to be renewed
2. Money in the bank, money invested, and a smart (and reasonably honest) financial counselor
3. Two brilliant novels that have been unaccountably rejected by dimwitted publishers
4. Friends. My agent, a couple of other models, a photographer or two, and some bona fide beautiful people whom I suspected would prove to be in the fair-weather category – and, of course, Mimi
5. Furniture and books
6. Jewelry
7. Clothes
8. Brains, undisciplined

I hesitated. I wanted to make as long a list as possible, but I really couldn't include my mother among my assets. And the only male-female relationship I had going was casual to the point of boredom. I finally settled on:

9. Southern background
10. Fair education, as far as it went



Surely there was something else? But after a moment's brooding I couldn't come up with anything.

The list as it stood wasn't bad, however. I could be proud of achieving financial security at twenty-seven, right? Modeling had been good to me, if not good for me.

The phone interrupted my pleasant contemplation of my bank account. I reached for it absently, my pencil still tapping the list, itching to write 'I I.'

'Nick?' The voice had the remote buzz of long distance.

'Mimi? It *is* Mimi!' I said delightedly. 'Hey, I was just thinking about you.'

'It's me all right. Hey, honey, how are you?'

'Mimi, I'm so glad to hear your voice. Just talk for a while, and let me hear that accent.' Sometimes I felt I lived in a land of squawking blue jays. The sound of home gave my ears a rest.

'Well, I called to talk, so I might as well. Listen, Richard left me and divorced me. I mean, we're divorced.'

'Whoosh.' I made a hit-in-the-pit-of-the-stomach sound, an exact evocation of what I felt. 'Okay,' I said after a second. 'I've absorbed that.'

'Good,' she said, and started crying. 'I haven't. After one of those painting trips of his, he came home for one day, and he said – while I was changing the sheets, can you believe that? – he said, 'You know, Mimi dear, this just isn't working out for us, is it? If you aren't petty enough to contest it, I think I'll go to Mexico or somewhere and get a quickie divorce.'''

'Just like that?' I asked weakly.

'Nickie, I assure you. Just like that.'

'Has he come back to Knolls?'

'Oh no.' The temperature of Mimi's voice dropped to freezing. 'He's in Albuquerque. Since he needed some of the stuff he left, he wrote me. He's living with a *fantastic*

woman who makes her own jewelry. She's never in her life cut her hair. She can,' Mimi said venomously, '*sit* on it.'

My nose wrinkled. 'Good God, Mimi. That alone should tell you something about Richard. Never cut her hair? Yuck.'

'You won the bet,' Mimi said.

'What? What bet?'

'Remember the bet you had with Grandmama?'

'Oh. Oh, hell. How'd you know about that?'

'She told me while she was in the hospital. She was sort of weak and wandery towards the end, you know, but she still thought that was real funny. She told me that even if I got divorced right away, she owed you five dollars because Richard and I had stayed married more than two years. She told me to be sure I gave you your money.'

I entertained myself with a pleasant fantasy of stringing Richard up by his – toes. If he'd had the sensitivity of a table, he'd have realized he was dealing Mimi a blow on top of an unhealed wound. Celeste, Mimi's grandmother, had died only five months ago. I'd been very fond of Celeste; she had been my substitute grandmother, since all my grandparents were dead. Mimi had been especially close to Celeste.

'Well, I guess I'll be all right,' Mimi was saying unconvincingly. 'I just wanted to call you to cry on your shoulder. I expect I didn't love him anyway. He was really awful selfish. But good-looking, wasn't he? Oh, Nick, I feel so darn old! I've been married and divorced twice now, and I'm only twenty-seven.'

I was feeling pretty old myself, so I couldn't whip up the energy to give Mimi a pep talk.

'I've wailed enough now. How are you?' Mimi asked. 'Tell me you're raking in money from modeling, and some big publisher gave you a huge advance for your book, and

you're dating a beautiful man who's single and rich and good in bed.'

'Ho ho ho,' I said nastily. 'I'm washed up as a model; my agent dumped me yesterday. I have writer's block, following rejection by three major publishers. The only man pursuing me with any enthusiasm is my landlord, because he wants me to renew my lease.'

Thoughtful silence.

'Hmmm. Were you serious, in your last letter, about wanting to go back to finish college?'

'I've thought about it,' I admitted cautiously. 'Why?'

'Then why don't you come live with me and finish school at Houghton?'

I pantomimed amazement for my own benefit, staring at the receiver and holding it away. Then I pressed it close to my ear again, lit a cigarette, and quit fooling. 'Are you serious? You're serious.'

'I mean it,' Mimi said. 'I'm selling my house. I can't stand to live in it anymore, after two bad marriages. I'm moving into Grandmother's house, she left it to me. I had planned on selling it, but I just haven't been able to bring myself to actually list it with a realtor. Then I thought yesterday, "Aha! I'll just move into it myself!" I'll be a lot closer to campus, and I've always loved that house.'

'Me too,' I said, and the memories began to crowd in. The high ceilings, the large rooms . . .

'—but you know, it's real big. We wouldn't fall all over each other, and you could go to Houghton. I have furniture and you have furniture and we ought to be able to fill up the house between us.'

'What happened to all Celeste's furniture?'

'Oh, she left different pieces to different people: the great-aunts, Cully, Mama, and Daddy. After all, I got the house. Can I have the top story? I've lived in a ranch style so long. I want to be up in the treetops and climb stairs.'

'You can have whatever you want; it's your house,' I said unguardedly.

'Yahoo!'

What had I done? I couldn't possibly . . . I opened my mouth to retract, but then I snapped it shut. I pinched myself. I listened to Mimi's beautiful southern voice running on and on. I ached to see her. I imagined hearing only that accent around me – no more squawking blue jays. I thought of the old woman dead on the sidewalk. I imagined walking down the street *unafraid*. I remembered my agent's copper fingernail waving in my face. I thought of the heap of typing paper lying pristine in my top desk drawer, and I wondered if the discipline of study and the stimulation of reading other writers would give my writing a better chance of success. I thought of clean air, and space, and jonquils, and Mimi's laughter. Knolls, Tennessee.

I'd been desperately homesick, and I hadn't known it until this moment.

'Do you really mean it?' Mimi was asking anxiously.

'Why not?' I said, after one more second's hesitation.

'Oh, when? When?' she asked jubilantly.

'Let me get to work on it.' I ripped the list of my assets off the pad; it had lost its interest. I began a new one: lease, movers, Con Ed, Bell, post office. The pad was filling up even as I spoke.

Over all those miles, Mimi said accusingly, 'Nickie! Quit making one of your lists and give me a time estimate! I have to move my own stuff, too!'

'I'll call you back tomorrow,' I promised. 'Can I have that bedroom by the stairs?'

'You can have any room in the house.'

When I hung up, I was tingling with excitement. Out of New York. A complete change. I took a moment of peace before the scurry began, to think of how I would arrange

my furniture in my bedroom-to-be – the big one off the hall on the ground floor. It was difficult to visualize it empty.

When Mimi and I had spent the night with Grandmother Celeste, we had always had that bedroom off the hall. We'd slept in a beautiful four-poster. Every night we'd crawled into that bed we'd felt like princesses; safe and beautiful and destined for everlasting fame. In the summer, we'd switch on the fan and watch it circle against the ceiling. In the winter, there was a beautiful old hand-stitched quilt that Celeste's mother had made . . . Even as we grew older we still felt the same about that bed.

All those years and seasons.

We had met, Mimi and I, when we were fourteen – thrown together as terrified roommates at Miss Beacham's Academy for Girls in Memphis. I was from a small town in northern Mississippi. As our yearbook put it, Mimi 'hailed' from Knolls, Tennessee, east of Memphis. Her christened name was Miriam Celeste Houghton, which I decided was beautiful and romantic. I disliked my own, Nichola Lynn Callahan; I thought it sounded like my parents had wanted a boy.

Mimi Houghton had Background. In Knolls, there was a Houghton Street, a Houghton Library, and of course, Houghton College. Fortunately, I didn't know any of this until Mimi and I were already close friends.

Mimi had come to Miss Beacham's because her mother, Elaine, had gone to school there. I had been sent by my father, to keep me away from my mother, who was becoming an alcoholic.

I don't know if Father was right to send me away or not. My mother's drinking began to increase after I left home, as if my presence had been holding her in check. But I guess she would have accelerated her drinking in time anyway. I try not to criticize Father in hindsight. He

meant to protect me from ugliness. Then, too, the fights between Mother and me outweighed the pleasure he got from my company when I was home. He was a plain and straightforward man. He didn't understand that the bitter scenes did not happen because I didn't love my mother but because I did love her.

I suppose Mimi had explained my situation to her parents, Elaine and Don. They always made me welcome.

As my home gradually became a place to fear, a haunted house, I began to see my parents for only a couple of days each short vacation, maybe a couple of weeks during the long summer breaks. After my duty times at home, my father would drive me to Mimi's. At first we were close on those drives; but as time passed, a silence fell between us. We couldn't talk about the thing that most concerned us. He dreaded what he would find when he returned home. His hours at his law office lengthened and lengthened. He became well-to-do and far too busy. He probably suspected the condition of his heart, but he never mentioned it to me or my mother. Aside from making a will, he didn't prepare for the cataclysm at all.

When I was a senior at Miss Beacham's, my father died of a heart attack in his office. Six months later, my mother remarried. The tragedies were too close. I didn't absorb either of them for years.

I went home once following my mother's remarriage. I hoped she needed me despite her new husband, Jay Chalmers. The second day I was home, my mother left to attend some bridge-club function. Thank God the builder had installed sturdy doors with sturdy locks. I had to stay in the bathroom for two hours, until Jay passed out. (He drank, too.) It was mostly dirty talk, and a clumsy attempt to kiss me; but quite enough, from an older man, to terrify a seventeen-year-old. Though he hadn't managed to lay a

finger on me, I felt dirty and guilty; I was very young. That evening, I packed my bags and made Mother take me to the bus station. I trumped up a story about having forgotten some school committee meeting for which I had to return early. When Mimi came back from her own weekend at home, I told her what had happened. Then I threw up.

I'd always planned on going to Houghton College with Mimi. Since the college had been founded by her great-grandfather, naturally she had been enrolled from birth. But Mother and Jay were spending Mother's portion of what my father had left as if there were no tomorrow; and since I wouldn't inherit my share till I became twenty-one, I had no money of my own yet. His own shame and guilt having crystallized into hostility, Jay told me there just wasn't enough for Houghton's steep tuition. So I enrolled in an obscure, cheaper college, living carefully and earning a little extra from modeling for department stores and regional magazine ads, as I'd begun doing at Miss Beacham's.

One of the store buyers casually remarked that I should go to New York and try my hand at professional modeling. The idea took hold. I needed a change, and at that point college meant very little to me. I was about to turn twenty-one; and I'd be receiving a small steady income from investments my father had made in my name, plus a moderate lump sum.

I vividly remember calling Mimi in her dorm room at Houghton to tell her about my resolution. She was stunned by my courage. I was, too. It was the bravado of sheer ignorance. Even now, it seems amazing to me that the city didn't chew me up and spit me out.

For the first two months, my heart was constantly in my mouth. Where I came from, New York qualified as a synonym for hell. It had the glamour of hell, though.

Inadequately armed with a little money and a short list of names, I scuttled through the streets of the Big City.

Luckily for me, two of those names on my list paid off. A former fraternity brother of my father's helped me find a place to live, fed me some meals and some invaluable advice, and withdrew his hands when I shook my head. A connection of the buyer's steered me to a reputable agency who liked my looks.

And I caught on. Within a year, I was able to move out of the hole I'd been sharing with three other women, into my own place. I slowly acquired the most beautiful furniture and rugs I could afford: that was very important to me. I bought books. I began to write a little myself. I imagine I was trying to refute the 'beautiful but dumb' image that clings to models.

That year was a golden year. I was given up utterly to the mirror.

Toward the end of that year, which had been a big one for Mimi too, I returned to Knolls for her first wedding. The groom was a down-home good ol' boy she'd met at Houghton.

In a moment of absolute insanity, I picked an outrageous dress to wear to the rehearsal dinner. I was far too full of myself as a glamorous model. That dress was the most serious social mistake I had ever made.

I brazened it out, though I almost began screaming the fifth time I heard Mimi's mother murmur, 'Well, you know, she *is* a New York model.' (Elaine was defending Mimi, not me.) I realized that for years I would be 'that friend of Mimi's who wore that dress to Mimi's rehearsal dinner.' I knew my home ground.

I drank too much that night, rare for me with Mother's example before my eyes. And I alternated sulking with self-reproach all the way back to New York.

At Mimi's second wedding – the good ol' boy had lasted



eight months, Mimi's mother talked the marriage to death – I wore a completely proper, even severe, outfit. Even after the passage of two years, I wasn't *about* to forget my lesson. It did help a lot; I read that in the approving smiles and extra pats on the shoulder, the little nods the ladies gave each other. But my redemption had less exposure than my damnation, since this was a much smaller wedding, of course. It was 'solemnized' in the living room of Celeste's big house.

Since Mimi was coming down the stairs alone, having vetoed attendants altogether, I sat with Celeste. We skirted our fears for Mimi (we didn't like Richard, we had decided after a little conference) by laying bets on how long the marriage would last. Celeste bet on Richard's doing something unforgivable in the first two years. I laid my money on Mimi's pride and gave it three.

The marriage dragged on for almost four years; and when Richard decamped to Albuquerque, Celeste posthumously owed me five dollars.