

# ⑧ TILLIE, JOHN, MARY

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Todd Kreidler

**TILLIE.** But whatever you think of Mr. Drayton, don't get your mind set on him yet.

**JOHN.** It's very clear to me who that man is.

**TILLIE.** It wasn't but a month after he lost his son that my mother died. I was too scared to fly on a plane and it was Mr. Drayton . . . The same Mr. Drayton you met today who rode the train all the way home with me. Imagine the two of us together on that trip. Tried to teach him to play whist on the way but he don't have a head for cards. Rode all the way to Atlanta on the train with me and he was with me when I buried my momma. That's Mr. Drayton.

*(MARY enters from the parlor.)*

**JOHN.** How is he?

**MARY.** Ready to leave. I need to talk with you— If you can stand my dead weight.

**JOHN.** It's not you, Ma, it's him. The man's been rolling over me since I could walk.

**MARY.** The only weight he ever laid on you is love. Whatever burden you feel— Thanks to your father that weight's a generation lighter. He still carries you on his shoulders, Little Brown.

**JOHN.** The man doesn't know me anymore.

**MARY.** I don't know you anymore. You have never been disrespectful to your father.

**JOHN.** I'm sorry.

**MARY.** Tell that to your father. And while you're at it, tell me what's happening here?

A white girl, John? You've never been reckless with your heart.

**JOHN.** Since the accident— My heart, Ma . . . My heart's been buried in my work, buried with Faye and Anthony. But look at me now . . . Try and see what's happened to me. When Joanna and I met, started having lunch, our conversations so effortless, so easy, we weren't expecting anything to happen between us. Then she started popping up in my head when I thought of something funny, when I discovered something new. One day she came to lunch, her hair tied back with a piece of blue rubber from medical supply.

**MARY.** A piece of blue rubber?

**JOHN.** Yeah, Ma . . . Her hair tied back with blue rubber . . . she looked so goofy . . . beautiful. See? . . . I noticed her hair, the piece of rubber. Since Faye's been gone, the women I've dated— I couldn't pay attention to their lives, I didn't care about their details— Details were

for my research, details were for my memories of Faye, memories of our son. And Joanna understands that part of my life too. But now . . . Ma, I've stopped crying at every child I see. Don't you see this means the possibility of another grandchild? I have only been reckless—by not telling you the whole truth when I called. And by asking the Draytons for their approval to marry.

MARY. John, what are you going to do?

JOHN. Grab Joanna, get the hell out of this house.

(JOHN exits up the stairs. MARY is hesitant to return to the parlor. TILLIE enters the dining room, humming/singing "Run Home Children.")

MARY. (Hums along with TILLIE then:) I must have been a child the last time I heard my mother sing that song. Miss Binks . . . Is your family from the South?

TILLIE. My mother grew up in Meridian, Mississippi.

MARY. My family's from right near there, in Livingston, Alabama.

TILLIE. Song's been passed around.

MARY. Reminds me of doing chores. Seemed nobody had to work as hard as we did. When my mother sang that from the porch you ran home and get straight to work on your chores or she'd come looking for us with her switch. I hated that damn song.

(CHRISTINA enters from the parlor.)

CHRISTINA. Mrs. Prentice . . . I do wish we had met under different circumstances.

MARY. How? How else do you think we would've ever met?

CHRISTINA. Yes . . . But I mean—

MARY. Mrs. Drayton, you don't know our lives. I can count on one hand how many times I've said anything to white folks other than "Here's your change. Thank you. Have a good day." We stay away from you as much as you stay away from us.

CHRISTINA. Then I take it then you don't approve either.

MARY. I've come to understand there's no way to control how we get introduced to things in life. How we're introduced to one another, introduced to love or to hate and yet we all have a funny idea no matter how smart we are—like my son—that we can plan for everything. You know that saying you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. This certainly was not the plan. Especially after all my son's been through.