If all the mornings for that old biddy to be ordering me around -- "I'll have my breakfast, as usual, in the dining room, please, ma'am" -- after what happened to her last night! Just taking her own sweet time, as usual, while ~~that~~ fellow who broke in us makes his get away. Not to mention the other.

I, for one, would have called the sheriff the minute ~~I came to help her~~ Miss Effie rented me. But no. She had to pull herself together, she said. ~~Get her~~ Take some rest. I have all ideas ~~that~~ she didn't know what to do. Because to my knowing -- and I would know -- she has never watched "911" or "Top Cops" ~~or~~ ~~AM~~ For the entire 2 years I've been living with her, I have tried to convince her ~~that~~ TV is educational. ~~She says~~ But she just says, "I think I'll read awhile." Real polite like that. Well, look where being polite got her last night with the meter reading man.

I step to the door of the dining room. "Miss Effie, we need to get a move on now."

She looks up from her oatmeal. "I'll have some more coffee, please."

I go over to the long mahogany table.

"Miss Effie, listen," I say. "I know it's hard--real hard--for you at your age, but we have ~~to go to the~~ sheriff." She'll be 96, next birthday.

"I'm not ready," she says, & blots her mouth with the white linen napkin. She won't use paper like everybody else. I have to iron them. Still, I'm sweet to her.

"Now, now, Miss Effie," I say, stepping into the sunlight by her chair. "You don't want that scoundrel doing to somebody else what he did to you. Now, do you."

She swallows. Her long sallow face turns away from me. She sips her orange juice. Her oatmeal ~~bowl~~ is half gone.

"I tell you what, Miss Effie." Sometimes I have to baby her. "I'll call the sheriff & ~~have~~ him come over here."

She yanks her ~~head~~ around. Her eye sockets are crinkled, bruised looking. "I'll tell you when I'm ~~ready to go~~ going. If I'm going."

"Alright, alright," I say & back off. "But like I'd know you ~~the going~~ have to go to the doctor."

"I'll have that coffee now," she says & spoons a ~~little~~ bit of oat meal to her shriveled mouth.

"Miss Effie, what if he has AIDS? What then?"

She ~~doesn't~~ looks at me like I'm the stupidest person on earth. Like she could hit me. Like one of them women on Jerry Springer. That kind of look. I pick up her cup & go for the coffee, talking back at her ~~through~~ from the kitchen.

"I still say you shouldn't of bathed last night, we should have gone last night. But what do I know?" No answer and I'm mad now. Mad & glad. ~~Glad that fellow didn't rape me. Said he wasn't interested in no old fat woman.~~ Just an old woman.

schoolteacher

how she dressed proper

I go back with the coffee, and Miss Effie is sitting straight as an arrow with her hands folded on the linen napkin in her lap.

"Miss Effie," I say & set the cup down. "Think about what he said about wanting to you know, what with an old old woman."

(window over looks school house where she taught forever)

She seems to be listening as she spoons sugar from the gold-rimmed white dish. Then pours cream from ~~the tiny~~ matching pitcher -- Wednesday special of the week, she can't fool me.

"Think about that ... man says he's done done it with a letter girl. ~~What next?~~ ~~Wanted to be~~

"Must you talk all the time?" she says & sips her coffee.

~~"Lester, Miss Effie,~~

"Okay! Okay!" I say. "Do you want anything else before I go to ~~the~~ the laundry room."

"Thank you, no," she says & stares out the window at the school buses lining up.

~~"I would like to say one thing more thing?"~~

~~I say holding to the door frame~~

~~"What?" she says.~~

What galls me is her high & mighty attitude with me. Like I work for attached ~~for~~. Truth is, I should ~~go to be~~ call the sheriff anyway, but I have a feeling I'll be out of a job

skin like old lace

wattle wrinkled flesh under chin

lace curtains

I go to Miss Effie's dim, musty bedroom with the dark ~~mahogany~~ cherry bed, & dresser & chest — an old tiny suit — and gather the ivory sheets she has stripped from her bed. Ivory towel & bath cloth on top of the heap.

I cannot help clacking my tongue at such ignorance. Such stubbornness.

Passing the black phone on the leggy dark table in the narrow white hall, I start to call anyway. If not the law, Miss Effie's lawyer son who lives in Valdosta. "You have to call somebody about something like this," I say out loud, to myself.

Miss Effie steps from the kitchen with her cane & eyes me. "Why?" she asks.

# # #

While the washer churns, I prop on the dryer & watch Penny Jones on the teeny-tiny TV on the shelf. "But I can't get my mind ~~on nothing~~ ~~but last night~~ Miss Effie not going to the sheriff. I have always believed she was a respectable, responsible Christian, but

Two women are fussing & carrying on because one stole the other one's boyfriend.

now I have my doubts.

When the spin cycle is done, I take out the sheets & towel & bath cloth, stick them in the dryer & turn it on. Turn off the TV & go into the kitchen. I can see Miss Effie in the living, just sitting there stiff.

The phone rings and I go up the hall to answer it. Hearing Miss Effie in back of me on the oak floor, "Don't answer it," she says.

"Miss Effie!"

"Don't."

"I have to."

"Why?"

"What if it's Charlie checking on you?"

"It's not," she says & turns, walking back to the living room.

~~She's my~~ She got that night. ~~He's my son~~ He calls once a month, and he called last Sunday. I follow her to the couch.

"Miss Effie," I say & sit facing her. I straighten the crocheted piece on back of the tapestry sofa. "Miss Effie, at least let me call Charlie."

"You call Charlie and you can pick up your last check."

I sit back, pick up the remote & flick on the TV. Jerry Springer. ~~I hear the~~ Two men & a woman shouting.

Miss Effie gets up & poker from the room, down the hall to her bedroom.

In my head, I go over the job possibilities for a 63 year old woman with a little weight problem & no education.

Knowing I won't leave until I have to, just as I know I'll tell what happened last night before the day is over.

"I'm going to the post office after the mail, Miss Effie," I call out.

I get halfway to the door and she calls me back. And it dawns on me that if I don't get her to tell, we could be locked up here till the Rapture.

# # #

She is eating tomato soup & crackers, in the dining room, staring out the same set of window overlooking the old high school auditorium.

I've decided to bear down on it.

No more being nice.

"Miss Effie, it pains me to say it, but you are shirking your responsibility by not going to the law."

She scoops soup from the top, eats.

I sit across from her, talking. "Don't think about what he did to you. What he said. How ugly & awful. A strange man like that, talking such a way."

"I taught him," she says.

I am making up my next sentence when she says that.

"You taught him?" I say.

She nods. "I taught him a long, long years ago. Knew he was bound for no good."

"Then you know him." I stand up. "Miss Effie, you've got to tell the sheriff."

"Sit down, Elda," she says loud in that cracked voice. I sit.

"A sorrier bunch you've never ~~seen~~ heard tell of," she says. "Several of ~~them~~ Crewes' boys going to school back then in the ~~farthest~~ better. He was the least one." She stares ahead, makes a snorting sound. "Had it in me, the principal because we would let him come & go as he pleased." She looks at me. "Back then, you could paddle children."

"So," I say, "you're making up to him for abusing him by not telling?"

"Abuse?" Not so." She pushes her bowl back & wipes at blots her mouth with her napkin, place it on the table, just so. "I'm not telling because there is nothing to be gained by telling."

"Miss Effie, he could..."

She holds out one ~~long~~ blade-like bony hand to halt me. "I'm not telling because in a little town like Cornerville the one who'll be hurt. I'll be remembered as the old lady who got raped by a heathen Crewe, and in this day & age, that's the image will be the one lingers. All my hard work & clean living will be forgotten overshadowed by the rape."

"But he's gonna get away with it, Miss Effie."

"Maybe." She places both hands down ~~on the~~ table as if she's ready to get up.

"He might even do it again," I say.

"Maybe", she says & does stand. "That's a chance we'll have to take."

"Miss Effie, I'll have to tell..."

"If you'd kindly wait a few months ~~to tell~~ -- after I'm gone -- I'd appreciate it," She leaves the room.

I was about to say, I'll have to tell you, I'll disagree.

(go back & have her not raped, just robbed, slapped around)

(perfect cool spring morning, hazy with ~~wild oats~~ turning yellow from drying seeds —

Story: (looks like more like fall after the first frost with the seeds drying — a yellow cast)

two women living together — Mr. Herndon,

Annie B. Smith - type — AB taking care of Herndon — Herdon could she's like a hell. Man breaks in rapes old lady — Annie B runs — says to get help later.

Start with morning of Annie Bell, who watches Perry Springer, trying to make Mr Herndon go to police. (man who raped her said he did it because she was the oldest woman he know — (he has seen her before) (reads the electric meter) he has already been with the youngest — — evil for evil's sake —

Annie B. has always resented Mr Herndon — says she thinks she's better than she is — Mr Herndon never watches TV with AB — likes her dinner served at the table (AB has bought two foldable TV trays — Herndon likes order & ritual — church visitors to sit in her garden (find place) — children don't come to see her anymore — grandchildren don't come