

Down By The Berry Patch

"Who Will Sleep with Trina?"

Rita Luks

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Nobody else had parents like mine, so nobody else ever had big sleep overs like I did. Unlike my friends, our home was open to everyone. I could have one or two friends over any time, but if I wanted to have a big sleep-over, I had to ask first. It was really just some kind of a formality because I can't remember a single time the answer was no. I did the planning and the cleaning up before and after the party and that was pretty much it. They came; we spread out in three of the four bedrooms upstairs and had a great time. It was no big deal. Except twice.

Once, when I had a pajama party and thought everyone was sleeping, I heard Marilyn and Donna talking outside my bedroom door. They were making snide remarks because my [sister's](#) recently worn wedding dress was hanging on an extension over the door. I heard them saying that only dirty people would leave a wedding dress hanging out like that. I was crushed that they would say something so mean and worried that my parents could also hear what they were saying from their bedroom.



The other time was really a bigger deal, but in a way, they were kind of tied together. [Mother](#) was going over the list of names I had given her so she would know who was coming to my latest pajama party. She got half way down the list, looked up and asked, "Who will sleep with Trina? "

"I will," I shot back. Her question angered and confused me. Trina had been in Mother's Girl Scout troop for years. Her family lived out in the country and Trina didn't have a way home if she didn't go on the school bus. Mother gave her a ride home every week so she could be in the scouts. She never showed anything against her before this. I was thinking I'd rather sleep with someone kind, like Trina, than mean spirited Marilyn and Donna and if Mother had heard their remark about the wedding dress she might not have just skipped over their names on the list. What made Mother decide to single out Trina? Was it OK to be her friend but not OK to sleep with her?

I started thinking about something that happened just a couple of weeks before. Mother came home from her District League of Catholic Women's meeting and said she had told the Bishop off and probably wouldn't be president of the board much longer. After driving the 20 miles from Bay City, she was still angry with him. The secretary of the board was showing off a picture of her son and new daughter-in-law. Her son had married the girl when he was stationed in Japan and they had just come back to the

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Photo Caption: Stairways leading up to the four upstairs bedrooms in Rita's childhood home.

states. The bishop condemned the interracial marriage and went on at great length to lecture about such sinfulness.

"When were you appointed God and given the power to make such judgments?" Mother had demanded from him. It was difficult to imagine this coming from Mother who would go out of her way to avoid controversy. Maybe this struck such a raw nerve because she had experienced something similar when she married someone from Poland. Yet, here she was, judging Trina because her family was Mexican.

There was no more discussion about the list, and there was no objection to my response. I knew our home was open to all my friends and was left with the realization that it was also open to those who Mother might feel were less than welcome. It was unheard of that anyone would ever be rude to a guest in our home. People were treated with respect.

Mother was very guarded about who those people were. She was gracious and kind, but not forgiving. [Babusha](#) rarely made the trip to our home, but every time she did, Mother relived their early relationship. The first time [Daddy](#) took her to meet his family, Babusha ignored her. The second time Daddy took her to spend time with his family in Grand Rapids was after she had converted to Catholicism. According to Mother, it was on this second visit that Babusha fawned all over her and said, "Al, why didn't you ever bring this lovely girl home with you before?" She never forgave the insult that implied she was only acceptable as a Catholic. Her actions when Daddy's mother was in our home never betrayed the resentment she harbored, but her retelling of the story as each visit neared sent a much different message.

I sat at the sewing machine in front of the dining room window admiring the sweet cherry tree Mother insisted remain on our property when the land around it was sold to [Uncle John](#) and labored over a stylish lavender shirtdress; a color I'd never worn before. Mother took me to Bay City to pick out the fabric. When it was finished, she told me it looked beautiful on me. She said she never wore that color, and never chose it for my sister or me, because [her mother](#) always told her purple was a "nigger color." I laughed and told her it was a lot prettier than her favorite colors that she always referred to as pee-green and shitty-brown! She didn't tell me that because she wanted me to feel bad. She was just telling me what had influenced her for all those years.

Not long after that, Mother bought herself a new lavender print house dress. When she died we dressed her in a soft lavender lace dress that set off her white, white hair. What my Grandma had said to her no longer mattered. I looked at her and thought about how much my mother had been influenced by her mother just as I am influenced by mine.

I thought about the time she had asked, "Who will sleep with Trina?" and what I heard was no objection to, "I will."

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