

An excerpt from...

FAMILY LINEN

By Clarinda Ross

Based on the novel by Lee Smith

INT. ONE-STOP FAY'S ROOM - DAY

Nettie comes in and hands Fay some junk food. Arthur waits in the doorway. The room is dim, the television flickers, a televangelist preaches.

NETTIE

Fay, listen. Elizabeth's bad sick.
I gotta go down to the hospital.

Fay says nothing. The preacher prays.

NETTIE (cont'd)

Pay attention, Fay. Our sister is sick. Fay, you hear me? Elizabeth is in the hospital. I'll be back as soon as I can.
C'mon Arthur.

Door SLAMS. FAY'S POV; Through her window, she watches Nettie and Arthur climb into Nettie's truck.

TV EVANGELIST

Friends! Are you troubled?

FAY

Elizabeth's sick. Listen Fay, pay attention. I'm listening.

TV EVANGELIST (O.S.)

Call us now. We'll say a special prayer for your loved one.

FAY

Don't worry... I'll take care of it.

Fay picks up the phone.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Don, Myrtle and Sybill enter through the sliding glass door.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY

Elevator doors open to reveal; a hallway, rows of molded plastic chairs, a Nurses' station, the large window and door of Miss Elizabeth's private room. Through the glass, the interior of Elizabeth's room is visible. Inside, DR. CHEUNG, (40's) Asian, handsome, fit, is at Miss Elizabeth's side.

Don, Myrtle, and Sybill step off the elevator. Candy greets them.

CANDY

Sybill, you got here so fast. I just left you a message.

SYBILL
Where is Mother?

CANDY
Right there, but you can't go in
now.

Dr. Cheung steps out of Elizabeth's room as Sybill,unseen by Cheung goes past. Miss Elizabeth lies motionless hooked up to machines.

DR. CHEUNG
She's had a severe stroke. If she
wakes up we can better assess the
damage. Have you noticed any
premonitory symptoms?

CANDY	MYRTLE
I don't understand? What does that mean premonitory?	What does that mean IF she wakes up?

DR. CHEUNG (cont'd)
Clumsiness, dizziness, blurring of
vision.

MYRTLE
The other day she hesitated a long
time on the stairs. But, she never
complained.

DR. DON
Well, you know she wouldn't.

Sybill steps back out into the waiting area.

SYBILL
Doctor? When will she wake up?

DR. CHEUNG
As I was explaining, the next few
hours are critical. All we can do
now is wait.

DR. CHEUNG's pager goes off.

SYBILL
But she has to wake up. I HAVE to
talk to her. You don't understand.
I...

DR. CHEUNG
Excuse me. I have to answer this.

DR. DON
 (walking away with Cheung)
 Thank you, George.

MYRTLE
 (whispering to Sybill)
 Where are your manners? He's trying
 to help Mother.

SYBILL
 But, I have to talk to her.

MYRTLE
 This is just like you. It's not
 about what you want Sybill. Mother
 is...Mother may be...

Myrtle cries. Candy hugs her. Don returns.

CANDY
 Y'all let's don't fight. Let's just
 try and get Mother through this.

DR. DON
 That's right, let's think positive.
 We all want the same thing; a
 speedy recovery for Miss Elizabeth.

The elevator doors open. Arthur and Nettie step off the
 elevator. Candy rushes to hug Arthur then straightens his
 clothes.

CANDY
 Oh, honey.

MYRTLE
 Hey, Aunt Nettie.
 (letting out a little sob)
 Arthur.

DR. DON
 (a firm handshake)
 Arthur, Nettie.

ARTHUR
 Bummer of a birthday, Sis.

SYBILL
 Oh, great. You're drunk.

ARTHUR
 Yes, I am! And true to form,
 Sister, you are uptight.

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE - DAY

A PARTY in full swing. MUSIC blares from a giant jam-box. A group of TEENS are partying, among them Sean and APRIL RIDLEY (18), a red-neck. Kids swing on a tire out over the water and drop. SPLASHING. Sean and April make-out. MORE SHOUTS. LAUGHTER.

TEEN BOY

Hey, April, get a room!

April flips the boy a bird without stopping their make-out session. Karen pulls up to the swimming hole.

KAREN

Sean, get over here!

SEAN

(sauntering to the car)
What?

KAREN

You ass-hole. I've been looking all over for you.

SEAN

Not my problem.

KAREN

Oh great. You're high. That's just great.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - DAY

Sybill, distraught, sits with Miss Elizabeth whispering in her ear.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - LATER

Myrtle and Sybill sit outside Miss Elizabeth's room. Myrtle looks through a magazine. Don's jacket is draped on the back of a chair. Arthur nods off. Nettie smokes. Don is visible through the window, he sits beside Miss Elizabeth's bed holding her hand. The evening news is on.

TV ANNOUNCER 2

Good evening, it's Friday June seventeenth. More tension between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.

(MORE)

TV ANNOUNCER 2 (cont'd)
An accounting of the number of
nuclear warheads...

Sybill uncharacteristically bites her nail. Myrtle reaches up and swats her hand out of her mouth.

MYRTLE
Lord, Sybill, what is wrong with
you?

Sybill shakes her head.

MYRTLE (cont'd)
Oh, for God's sake. What could you
possibly have to talk to Mother
about that is so urgent?

SYBILL
It's personal, about Mother's past.

MYRTLE
Personal? I am her daughter too.

SYBILL
It's about Jewell Rife.

MYRTLE
Jewell Rife? You've lost your mind.
He must be long dead, there's
nothing urgent about him.

Candy approaches with coffee. Don joins them in the waiting area. Candy hands him a cup.

SYBILL
I can't believe she's had a stroke.
Not now, when I need to talk to
her.

MYRTLE
For goodness sake, Sybill. You act
like Mother had a stroke to
inconvenience you. I'm sure if she
had her druthers she'd be talking
with you right now.

Candy gives Sybill a coffee, and pats her on the shoulder. Sybill quickly gets up and walks away. Myrtle slams her magazine shut.

MYRTLE (cont'd)
Though with you acting so crazy I
don't know why she'd want to!

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - LATER

Karen and Sean sit with Arthur. Arthur gives Sean a look of recognition. Sean is still stoned. Television plays, shots of Cape Canaveral and the astronauts. Nettie smokes a cigarette.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM

Sybill puts her face on the pillow right next to Elizabeth.

SYBILL

Wake up, Mother. Why did you do it?
You have to tell me. Did you kill
him? Wake up! Please wake up.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - SAME

Through the glass, Myrtle, Nettie and Candy watch Sybill.

NETTIE

What's got in to her?

MYRTLE

She's lost her mind. Some nonsense
about Jewell Rife, if you can
believe that.

Nettie looks at Myrtle surprised.

NETTIE

What about him?

MYRTLE

She says she's had some dream or
memory or some such. Of course she
won't say what. Says she has
questions only Mother can answer.

Nettie walks to the back of the waiting room and looks out the window. The sun is going down over the mountains.

CANDY

(indicating Sybill)
Look at her.

MYRTLE

Unbelievable, it must be menopause.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - NIGHT

ANGLE ON, the clock above the Nurse's station, it's 9:30 p.m. Don speaks to a NURSE. Across the room the family waits.

DR. DON
They'll only allow one of us to
stay tonight. So why don't you all
go home and get some rest.

Sybill rises abruptly goes into Elizabeth's room. Don shakes his head and the others disperse.

INT. HOSPITAL MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - LATER

It's late, the lights are low. Sybill, Candy and Myrtle sit at Elizabeth's bedside. Candy chuckles as she watches television. Myrtle reads. Sybill sips coffee and watches her mother intently. There is a knock on the door. A pretty big-hipped nurse, MRS. PALLUCCI (40), a New Yorker steps in.

MRS. PALLUCCI
Excuse me, ladies. I'm Lana
Pallucci the Nurse Supervisor. Only
one family member is allowed
overnight, so who's it gonna be?

Myrtle and Candy look at Sybill, note her look of determination, and gather their things.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sybill's fallen asleep with one arm across her mother.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - DAY

CANDY-STRIPERS and hospital STAFF gather breakfast trays and chatter to each other. Don talks to Dr. Cheung, their expressions are serious. Myrtle fresh and smartly dressed, talks with Miss Elva, Miss Lucy, and THE PASTOR. Nettie and a profoundly hung-over Arthur sit at the back of the waiting area watching television footage of Sally Ride.

TV ANNOUNCER 1

Sally Ride, a Ph.D. in Astrophysics, included on this mission for many reasons, among them her special knowledge of the mechanical arm.

Mrs. Pallucci walks by. ARTHUR'S POV, he watches her shapely bottom move under her starched uniform. Karen and Sean arrive. Myrtle greets them speaking loudly. Don speaks to the family, telling them of Dr. Cheung's dire assessment.

The fluorescent lights BUZZ overhead. Arthur watches as Dr. Don orchestrates the final parade of good-byes. Sounds increase, VOICES, BUZZING lights, the room spins.

Arthur puts his head in his hands.

ARTHUR

Can we turn off some of these lights, please?

TV ANNOUNCER

T-minus four minutes, all systems are go, this is a built in hold. All flights...

DR. DON

(patting his shoulder)
Arthur, do you want to go in there? They're afraid she's breathing her last.

ARTHUR

I can't stand to see it, Doc.

Don goes to escort Nettie in the room. Mrs. Pallucci walks by with her raincoat and purse.

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Excuse me M'am these fluorescent lights are doing precious little for your good looks or mine.

Mrs. Pallucci laughs.

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Could you please cut off some of these god-damn lights.

She switches off a row of lights.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
 (getting up)
 Forgive my language, Ma'am, could I
 ask you one more favor? Would you
 like to take a little spin with me?
 Go out for a drink, perhaps?

MRS. PALLUCCI
 (laughing)
 I don't think so.

NETTIE
 (overhearing)
 God-damn it, Arthur. You ought to
 be ashamed of yourself.

ARTHUR
 (following Mrs. Pallucci)
 I'm not myself. Perhaps some other
 time.

MRS. PALLUCCI
 For future reference, the name is
 Mrs. Pallucci.

ARTHUR
 How do you spell that?

Mrs. Pallucci gets on the elevator, laughing.

ARTHUR (cont'd)
 (doors close in his face)
 Death is a desperate hour.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - DAY

Sybill sits with Miss Elizabeth, above her the television
 plays.

TV ANNOUNCER
 Here we are at the ready. T-minus
 three minutes.

A LOUD BEEPING NOISE. A NURSE rushes in.

SYBILL
 What's happening?

NURSE
 Could I ask you to step outside?

SYBILL
What's going on?

NURSE
I'm sorry, but I need you to step
aside.

SYBILL
No wait. She can't die!

NURSE
Ma'am please, step back.

SYBILL
She'll get better. She has to tell
me, I have to know.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY

Candy gets off the elevator, wearing a raincoat, shaking her
umbrella. ANGLE ON, the television.

TV ANNOUNCER 1
A crew of five astronauts embarks.
Among them, the first American
woman in space, Sally Ride.

TV ANNOUNCER 2
What's going through her mind right
now?

SYBILL (O.S.)
(In Miss Elizabeth's room)
I have to know if she did it.

TV ANNOUNCER
The crowd here is excited, many
relatives of the astronauts are on
hand.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - DAY

Don, Myrtle and Candy crowd into the room. Everyone tries to
calm Sybill down. Sean and Karen peer in the window. Sybill
looks desperately from face to face.

SYBILL
(pleading)
I have to know. She's got to tell
me!
(Secretively)
(MORE)

SYBILL (cont'd)
 Don't you see? She killed Jewell
 Rife!

This revelation stops the commotion, producing jaw-dropping
 stares from the family.

SYBILL (cont'd)
 (losing it)
 I saw. I remember. She put Jewell
 Rife in the well. She can't just
 DIE!!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - SAME

CLOSE ON, Nettie her expression is tortured. Arthur sits in
 the molded aqua chairs. He hears Sybill scream his real
 father's name and straightens up with interest. Arthur turns
 and observes Nettie's expression.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MYRTLE
 For God's sake, ooohhhh...

Myrtle slides down the green-tiled wall in a ladylike faint.

DR. DON
 (taking charge)
 Hey, hey! Right here!

Sean and Karen rush into the room. The Nurse assists Myrtle.

SEAN
 Mama, Mama!

KAREN
 Mom?

NURSE
 Elevate her feet.

Myrtle is flat on her back with a huge stack of towels under
 her legs. Sean and Karen, make human shields, protecting
 Myrtle from Sybil.

SYBILL
 She can-NOT do THIS to ME!!

ANGLE ON, the television, the rocket engines FIRE, white
 clouds of SMOKE billow as the rocket ROARS into the air.

SYBILL (cont'd)
 I saw it, I saw his face. She
 killed him!

Candy grabs Sybill by the shoulders and shakes her hard.
 Sybill continues screaming. Candy slaps Sybill.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - SAME

Nettie reacts. Miss Elizabeth's friends see the slap and rush
 towards the elevators with the Pastor.

MISS LUCY DEE
 Ooh, ooh, oh my goodness.

MISS ELVA POPE
 I have never!

They wear hats and gloves and carry umbrellas. They waddle
 out, looking like little penguins. Arthur laughs out loud,
 despite himself.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DR. DON
 Sybill, you hold your tongue.
 (sitting Sybil down)
 Get a hold of yourself. Myrtle?
 Honey? Are you all right?

Sybill moans. Myrtle is coming around.

SYBILL
 I have to know. How can we find out
 now? How can I ever know?

ANGLE ON, Miss Elizabeth's face in the hospital bed.

TV ANNOUNCER
 BLAST OFF!

SYBILL
 No Mother, no!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ARTHUR
 Hey, Nettie, get a load of Sybill.

NETTIE
(wheeling around)
Arthur, you hush.

SYBILL (O.S.)
She did it. I saw it.

ANGLE ON, Nettie's stricken face.

BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - DAY

ANGLE ON, Miss Elizabeth's slack face in the hospital bed.

TV ANNOUNCER
Lift OFF!

TV ANNOUNCER 1
We have lift off of the Shuttle
Challenger.

On the television, the crowd at Cape Canaveral CHEERS.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY

Nettie looks out the window watching RAIN splash against the glass. Same 1940's underscoring MUSIC from the original flashback. Nettie closes her eyes remembering that stormy night.

INT. HOSPITAL - MISS ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TV ANNOUNCER 2
Go, Sally, Go!

TV ANNOUNCER
It's a beautiful sight!

Sally Ride's ROCKET ascends. Miss Elizabeth's monitor FLATLINES. Sybill's screams rise.

SYBIL
No! Nooooooooooooooooooo!!

CUT TO BLACK