

# **THE GEOGRAPHY OF WOMEN**

**A Romantic Comedy**



**A Novel**

**JACK FRITSCHER**

***The Geography of Women***  
**Excerpt from the novel...**  
**by Jack Fritscher**

*A fiction partially based on the memoirs, but not the autobiography, of Mary Pearl Lawler Day, specifically her story of the return of her jilted fiance, Francis Devine. The narrator is a fifty-year-old woman telling of her life as a teenager living in someone else's home as a housekeeper in the autumn of 1963. The voice speaking uses the combined South Midland Dialect of both Mary Lawler Day and Virginia Day Fritscher.*

The autumn that year was a real late Indian Summer, right after Halloween an right before Jack Kennedy was shot. The afternoon was hot, so Mister Apple an Mizz Lulabelle [his wife] had a extra 7 & 7, which is 7-Up soda an Seagram's 7 whiskey, while the two little boys who, as I said, were all a four played out in the yard. I didn't mind, cuz a the heat an all, how late the supper was. I recall what we ate exactly: my beef stew with my Grandma's dumplins, which we sat down to eat aroun seven-thirty cuz the boys was gettin over-tired an over-hungry an cranky.

Mister Apple said Protestant grace an Mizz Lulabelle helped one a the twins eat an I helped the other. We were about halfway through when we heard footsteps comin up the porch steps.

"Are we expectin company?" Mister Apple said. He wiped his clipped black moustache with his white linen napkin.

"Not anyone I know," Mizz Lulabelle said. Excitement red-dened her cheeks. She adored company. Ask me. I cleaned an baked for em an washed up after em, then read in *The Canterberry Herald* that Mizz Smith an Mizz Jones paid a afternoon call on Mizz Lulabelle Apple an her twins, John an James, an angel food cake was

served with ice cream an lemonade. Mizzy loved publicity. Certain kinds. She wasn't like my Grandma who read in *Cosmopolitan* that a lady's name appears in the papers only three times: when she's born, when she's married, an when she dies. Mizz Lulabelle was her own best-born press agent, cuz *The Herald* never mentioned the vodka in Mizz Lulabelle's sweatin glass in the summers or the rum in her tea in the winters, and I, acourse, with never a mention, was Mizz Invisible... but, oh, yeah, she did love company cuz it gave her a chance to be grand in her family's fine ol house with her arm through the arm a her prosperous pharmacist husband who might run for mayor.

"Who could that be?" Mister Apple said as the screen door on the porch creaked open an someone just walked onto an across the porch. You could hear their footsteps, big as you please.

"Just somebody needs a prescription filled," I said.

Then came a knock on the inner door to the house itself, kinda polite at first, then harder. Mister Apple pushed his chair back from the table an placed his napkin next to his plate. He pulled down his vest an walked directly toward the door. He paused, cleared his throat with that nervous tick he always had, an opened the door.

There stood Wilmer Fox in the flesh, red hair an all.

Mizz Lulabelle could see perfectly well down the hall. She placed her palm to her forehead an said, "The heat is makin me faint."

Wilmer Fox was makin her drool.

I wanted to howl an laugh like I did with Jessarose, but I was on my own an had to behave myself. "Mizzy, get a grip on yourself," I whispered.

"I'll be perfectly fine," Mizz Lulabelle said.

"Fancy this," I said. "It's *High Noon*. You're finally starrin in a real movie."

She shook her white cloth napkin at me the way you would shoo a fly.

"Hello, Fox," Mister Apple said down the hall in the deepest voice he could command.

“Hello, Mister Apple,” Mister Fox said. He went straight to the point. “May I talk to Lulie?”

Mizz Lulabelle blanched like we was all hearin her called somethin more intimate n we were usta hearin.

“Really!” Mister Apple said. He blubbered an flustered an cleared his throat not like a man tryin to be mayor at all. “The nerve. Well! The cheek. Tch! The intrusion. Huff! Our supper. Puff! No appointment.”

“I got to talk to Lulie,” Mister Fox said. “I got to.”

Mister Apple stood his ground like this was some tricks-or-treater he’d rather trick than treat.

“Please,” Mister Fox said.

Somethin pitiful there was in his voice made Mizz Lulabelle stand straight up at the table.

The twins both stared at their mama.

It’s alright,” she said to everyone. She patted her hair with both hands, like she was exitin the *Titanic* with a concealed ice pick, an sailed real Princess Grace-ful down the hallway to the door takin her stand behind Mister Apple. “It’s alright,” she repeated near her husband’s ear.

Mister an Missus Apple were actin like both a em thought Mister Fox had a loaded gun on his person an they didn’t.

“It’s alright, Henry,” Mizz Lulabelle said to her husband. “Whyn’t you go an finish supper an I’ll have a word with Mister Fox to see what he wants. I won’t take but a minute.”

Mister Apple came back to the table where he an I both chewed away, like the world depended on our chewin, listenin to the voices risin an fallin in whispers on the porch.

Mister Henry sat through it all like somethin he had to endure.

Mizz Lulabelle was cool as a cucumber. When Mister Fox asked her about a baby that died, she called him impertinent. Then she denied there ever had been a red-hair baby boy, and wherever, Mister Fox, did you get a idea like that?

An then I heard her name.

Mister Fox said it first. "Jessie."

"Jessie who?"

"Jessarose Parchmouth."

I wanted to run to the door an ask Wilmer Fox where she was an was she alright.

Then Mizz Lulabelle repeated: "Jessarose? Where'd Jessarose ever come by such a notion? Nothin a the kind ever happened," Mizz Lulabelle said.

"I hope not, Lulie," Mister Wilmer Fox said. "It'd break my heart."

"You believe what you have to believe, Mister Fox. Excuse me," Mizz Lulabelle said, "but we're eatin supper. My family an I, my husband an our two children, his an mine, are eatin supper."

"Lulie?"

"Yes, Mister Fox?"

"I got to ask you just one question more."

"What's that, Mister Fox?"

"Lulie, are you happy?"

Silence landed thud on the house an nobody, not even the twins, made a noise for what seemed one a those moments that goes on forever waitin for the answer when the outcome for everybody's future depends on what a person says. Like in court under oath.

"Mister Fox," Mizz Lulabelle said, "I am happy. I am very, very happy."

"That's all I want to know, Lulie." Mister Fox looked straight into her eyes for what I figgered he knew was the last time an then without sayin anythin he turned an was gone down the porch steps an across the sidewalk into his waitin car.

"Mister Fox must be doin okay for hisself," Mizz Lulabelle said sittin back down at the table. "Baby blue, it was, his car. A baby blue Lincoln Continental."

"Are you?" Mister Apple asked.

"Am I what?" She knew full well what he meant, but she knew the game of women an men when they play wives an husbands.

“Are you happy?” he repeated.  
She smiled, forkin her stew....