

The Old Maid and Her Old Goose

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Cast of Characters

Marilyn – an old maid

Valencia – a young girl

Pippi – a housemaid

Colonel Bessie Tavern – a dashing rogue

Trampus – a farmer

Setting

A manor house in the country.

(A home on a lone hill. VALENCIA, a teenage girl in a ball gown, sits still on a chair. Her aunt, MARILYN, sits nearby wearing an older, dowdier ball gown. Stillness. VALENCIA opens her mouth to speak. But before a word is released:)

MARILYN

Valencia, what class is this? Advanced Techniques in Waiting. Is speaking in the curriculum? No. Do I allow you to gab during lessons? Hardly. Am I disappointed in your performance? Mightily! Will I hold it against you at a later date? If I must!

VALENCIA

But Aunt Marilyn I am cramping!

MARILYN

Cramping is your body's way of saying, "I am very happy."

VALENCIA

But sitting so long hurts.

MARILYN

It is of the highest import that you learn how to wait, Valencia.

VALENCIA

Why?

MARILYN

Because it is only while waiting that you may see the full buffet of life without gorging on the complementary cracker snacks called "now." And if you have not mastered waiting, I cannot in good conscience take you to your first Fancy Ball tonight.

VALENCIA

It's just a stupid party.

MARILYN

There is no such thing as a "stupid party." "Stupid" is incongruous with "party." Like thunderstorms and picnics. Women and pants. Waiting without getting what you want. If you don't go to the Fancy Ball, you may never fall in love.

VALENCIA

I don't want to fall in love.

MARILYN

Who doesn't want to fall in love? Perverts, that's who! Filthy perverts. And a pervert you'll become, unless I am able to teach you to desire love above all else. I know, we must practice our Pining.

VALENCIA

Not Pining! I hate Pining!

MARILYN

“Pining all day keeps the perversions away.”

VALENCIA

Oh, Aunt Marilyn, please no pining.

MARILYN

Pine, Valencia, Pine!

(VALENCIA reluctantly looks with pained yearning into the distance.)

MARILYN

Such a lovely desperation decorates your face. It reminds me of my own. But your youthful countenance flowers, while this old cow pasture is overrun with rocks and thistles. How long before the wicked weeds of time choke out all the blooms? Before I am left without a stem of beauty? Before I am too old to love? Oh. Excuse me, Valencia. I must practice Weeping Over Lost Time While Locked in the Bathroom.

VALENCIA

Might I have a recess?

MARILYN

No. Keep Pining.

(AUNT MARILYN exits to the bathroom.)

VALENCIA

But Aunt Marilyn!

(PIPPY, a servant, enters.)

PIPPY

Poor Valencia! Is your aunt making you practice Melancholy At Being Ignored During A Party again?

VALENCIA

No, worse: Pining. And I fear I must do it all afternoon. Another day lost to practicing-behaviors-for-parties. Oh Pippi, you are so lucky to have a profession.

PIPPY

Being the plucky maid to that Old Maid is more hateful curse than lucky profession. I cook. I clean. And whenever I go outside I'm attacked by the goose. Beak and feather: this

morning he drew blood. You're the lucky one. You get to attend the Fancy Ball. You might fall in love.

VALENCIA

I don't wish to ever fall in love.

PIPPI

But you'll become a pervert!

VALENCIA

I don't care. I've always wanted a profession. Like criminal psychologist.

PIPPI

You? A criminal psychologist? Pardon me while I mockingly titter.

(PIPPI titters.)

VALENCIA

Why can't I be a criminal psychologist?

PIPPI

Because it requires intuition. And you are least intuitive person I have ever met.

VALENCIA

I am not.

PIPPI

What am I feeling right now?

VALENCIA

Exuberant. No. Cordial. Fancy-free? You're fancy-free.

PIPPI

No. Disgusted. I am disgusted. Because I am thinking of you becoming a criminal psychologist while I stayed here, a servant, alone, with your old Aunt, that awful goose, and letting the little wiggle I have left in my hips go to waste because I have no one to love. And the very prospect disgusts me.

VALENCIA

That was my next guess. And I do have a very keen intuition for detecting criminality. Just the other day I felt my cat, Whiskers, had evil intentions. And this morning I found he filched the last of the milk.

PIPPI

I gave Whiskers that milk for his breakfast.

VALENCIA

But I required it for my morning oatmeal.

PIPPI

That means Whiskers didn't get anything to eat today.

VALENCIA

Pippi, do you really want to feed a beast with evil intentions?

PIPPI

If you're concerned with evil intentions, it's the goose you should worry about. He chases me around the yard, rides the cow, and honks suggestively at the chickens. He's possessed with a demon.

VALENCIA

There's no demon. He's just senile.

PIPPI

A senile goose?

VALENCIA

Yes. Can't see, can't hear, farts when he walks. He's incredibly old. Been in the family for decades.

PIPPI

Then mark this plot: it's past time we got goose for supper.

(MARILYN enters.)

MARILYN

Pippi, you pimped unprincipled helpmeet, how dare you threaten my wedding goose!

VALENCIA

Wedding goose? What is a wedding goose?

MARILYN

When I was a little girl I specially chose a young gosling to be roasted and served at my wedding. And this household will care and coddle that gentle creature until that day.

PIPPI

But he's already the oldest goose in Christendom!

MARILYN

You low-born looby, interrupt our lessons again and your goose is cooked.

PIPPY

But I came to announce a visitor.

MARILYN

A visitor? Like a suitor? Is it a suitor? Do I have a suitor?

PIPPY

It seems so.

MARILYN

I knew it would happen! Valencia, let this be a valuable lesson: waiting works! I have waited my entire life knowing a suitor would approach, if only I waited long enough for him.

PIPPY

Her. It's a woman who's at the door.

MARILYN

Me with a woman? Well. I always suspected as much about myself. Is it a Carol? I always thought I could love a Carol. Or a Candace. Or any name. I'm not picky.

PIPPY

It's a Bessie. Your long-sought love is Colonel Bessie Tavern.

MARILYN

How quickly love crosses our radar and fades to lost.

VALENCIA

Do you know this Colonel?

MARILYN

If I know anything, I know Bessie Tavern. Pippi: you rattlesnake. You headless chicken. You long-toothed feather duster. The woman at our gate is not my long-awaited suitor, but my long-avoided sister!

VALENCIA

Your sister? I have another Aunt?

MARILYN

And may you never meet the fifty-tailed scorpion named Bessie Tavern. Pippi, inform the foamy-mouth beast Besse that I am gravely ill. And contagious. With uncontrollable excretions fountaining out of my body in many and all directions at once.

PIPPY

On my life and worth as your housemaid I will not allow this plated beast named Bessie through your gate. May failure strike me low, snorting, and porcine!

(PIPPI exits.)

VALENCIA

You never told me I had other relatives. And she's a Colonel! How thrilling!

MARILYN

Bessie Tavern is anything but thrilling! She is the worst kind of person with the lowest kind of morals. She has spent her entire life indecorously warring and whoring. She is not a person I want anywhere near our delicate sensibilities.

(COLONEL BESSIE enters.)

COLONEL BESSIE

So this is what Marilyn looks like when she's shooting globules of contagion from all ends.

(PIPPI follows.)

MARILYN

Pippi! Why didn't you halt her!

PIPPI

I made a tremendous blockade at the door, but your old goose appeared from the rafters, his mighty beak cocked to cleave my corpse in twain! I barely escaped with my bonnet unbloodied.

MARILYN

Such terrors from my goose will seem small scares indeed, if you don't currently quit the terrible rage hardening my hands into towering twin beaks of death!

(MARILYN raises her hands like two goose heads to strike. PIPPI squeaks and exits.)

MARILYN

Apologies, dear sister Bessie, but it is surely best if you leave. For I must retreat to the sick ladies' room. Pippi made me eat egg salad. This will not be pretty.

COLONEL BESSIE

That's fine, I'll entertain myself with this lovely creature.

VALENCIA

I'm Valencia. Your niece.

MARILYN

Valencia, we don't talk to strangers.

VALENCIA

She's not a stranger. She's family. And we get so lonely in this secluded house on a hill without any visitors.

MARILYN

She's not a visitor, she's an invading barbarian horde with a woman's visage.

COLONEL BESSIE

Is that a ball gown on your person, Marilyn?

MARILYN

No. These are fashionable pajamas that I wear when deathly ill and cannot receive visitors. Please leave.

VALENCIA

We're going to the Fancy Ball tonight.

MARILYN

Valencia!

COLONEL BESSIE

Marilyn is still attending the Fancy Ball?

MARILYN

Yes. Proudly.

COLONEL BESSIE

Do you still stand silently at the side, waiting for something to happen?

MARILYN

Waiting happens to be my all-time favorite activity.

COLONEL BESSIE

At her first Fancy Ball she spent so much time at the snacks table, people thought she was a sandwich.

MARILYN

No one thought that.

COLONEL BESSIE

She was dipped in hollandaise on four separate occasions.

MARILYN

That was a thoughtful gesture by four exemplary gentlemen. It is well-known in the higher echelons of society that I very much like hollandaise.

VALENCIA

Colonel Bessie, you have not said what brings you to our isolated corner of the world.

COLONEL BESSIE

At your birth, Marilyn and I were charged with overseeing your formative years. I have been in the trenches fighting my own battles, but today I have declared an armistice to train you for the fight of your life. A war so great that few can ever extract themselves from the field and none can avoid its influence.

VALENCIA

What thrilling conflict have I found myself involved?

COLONEL BESSIE

It is your endless battle for love.

VALENCIA

Oh, that battle. Yawn. Snore.

MARILYN

Valencia already has a highly skilled mentor in the realm of love. And now's the perfect time for us to practice Ignoring Undesirables.

COLONEL BESSIE

I have been in love thousands of times and married no less than twenty. To men, women, and everything in between. What love have you had?

MARILYN

I have been waiting for the right person.

COLONEL BESSIE

Love is a city with an iron spire to the sky to be invaded and won. Not a barren continent waiting for a conqueror.

MARILYN

If we all ran around making love like an invading army do you know what we would be?

COLONEL BESSIE

Content? Satisfied? Victorious!

MARILYN

No, alone.

COLONEL BESSIE

Me? Alone? Hardly!

MARILYN

Every invasion ends the same: an army alone in a foreign land. Surrounded by strangers. Nursing wounds. Cradling disease. And an unceasing resentment for those you've conquered. Love is not a military campaign. Love is long-sought season we wait to arrive. The one that breaks the endless winter. An eternal spring that arrives without warning or precedent, that cannot be forced or forecast, requiring only our hope that it will come in a blaze of light to warm our bones, fire our heads, and melt our hearts no matter how cold and brittle and strange a creature we have found ourselves become.

VALENCIA

Personally, I don't really want to fall in love.

COLONEL BESSIE

I should have known you'd raise a pervert.

MARILYN

She didn't get that from me.

VALENCIA

Love seems like too much work for a lot of nothing.

COLONEL BESSIE

I have won wars, Valencia. Toppled kings. And stood upon a pile of bodies while armies from three nations screamed my name. But these triumphs have meant but little. My history rides upon the lips I kissed. The thighs I caused to quiver. The smell of spring cherries on a rumpled bed. Love is a lot of nothing. But it is the most thrilling piece of nothing you'll have in your entire life.

MARILYN

Oh.

(MARILYN looks regretfully into the distance.)

COLONEL BESSIE

What's she's doing?

VALENCIA

Lamenting. Be quiet or we'll all have to do it.

MARILYN

Oh sad, long life: Is my terrible sister, that horrible Bessie Tavern, right? Should I have hunted love? Mounted my horse, released my hounds, and found the thicket where the thrill of passion lies quarried? I have waited with the patience of a polished stone, but was all that time wasted? Has my life passed? Have the sweet fruits of possibility, opportunity, and hope rotted upon their vine? Am I now forever alone?

(PIPPY enters.)

PIPPY

Marilyn!

MARILYN

Pippi, how many times must I remind: Don't interrupt when I'm Lamenting My Life!

PIPPY

But a gentleman has arrived looking for the lady of the house!

MARILYN

A gentleman. Arrived. For me. I long suspected that I was better suited for a man. And could it be: all my waiting has not been for naught?

COLONEL BESSIE

A conquest? I am armed.

MARILYN

But Bessie, did you listen? He came for me.

COLONEL BESSIE

That's never stopped me before.

VALENCIA

Why don't we decide with a contest?

COLONEL BESSIE

A contest?

VALENCIA

Yes! Whosoever wins the gentleman's heart is my one true mentor for the Fancy Ball.

MARILYN

But I don't compete. I'm not a fighter. I'm compliant. Agreeable. Pleasing.

COLONEL BESSIE

Would you like a snack table to retreat behind?

MARILYN

But this once I will cast the quiescent, complacent mask of Marilyn into the raging cages of my heart and conquer you. As well as this man.

VALENCIA

How thrilling! I'll retrieve the gentleman.

(VALENCIA exits.)

COLONEL BESSIE

And I shall freshen my cannons for the assault.

(COLONEL BESSIE exits to the bathroom.)

MARILYN

Pippi. What have I done? I'm too old for this kind of battle. This morning I found a gray hair. On my chin. If can't fight that, how am I to fight for anything at all?

PIPPY

Do what you've always done.

MARILYN

But it has never worked!

PIPPY

He's here for you. He practically begged for your presence.

MARILYN

I haven't the beauty to hold his gaze. Bessie will take him by ambush while he's looking at me and I'll be alone for all my life.

PIPPY

By my soul, Marilyn, I will save you from that lonely fate.

MARILYN

I can't marry you, Pippi! Though you are good at games. And look good in bonnets. And seeing as we already live together. Yes, Pippi, yes! I will! Let's marry!

PIPPY

I meant that I will distract the Colonel so that you may meet the visitor alone.

MARILYN

Yes. Of course. I knew that. What distraction do you intend?

PIPPY

When I was young, I found if I moved my hips briskly to and fro I could conjure attraction and distraction in sober and sanguine persons alike. I commit to using the little wiggle left in these hillocks to entrance the Colonel Bessie Tavern long enough for you to win the stranger's heart.

MARILYN

Oh Pippi, how can I ever repay you?

PIPPI

Watching you gobble down that goose at your wedding will be payment enough. Come hips, to the brink we go!

(PIPPI starts her hips like a gas lawnmower and exits into the bathroom.)

MARILYN

Courage, Marilyn, courage. For once in your life, courage.

(VALENCIA enters with TRAMPUS, a man who looks slightly askew.)

VALENCIA

Here is the gentleman caller, I'll leave, but will return immediately upon your calling.

(VALENCIA exits.)

TRAMPUS

Mighty virgin of the hill.

MARILYN

Marilyn. It's Marilyn. My name is Marilyn.

TRAMPUS

Marilyn, mighty virgin of the hill.

MARILYN

Just Marilyn.

TRAMPUS

My name is Trampus.

MARILYN

Trampus? That's a name. Are you sure it's not Viceroy? Or Tavian? Or Delacroix?

TRAMPUS

No. Just Trampus. And I am a pig farmer.

MARILYN

Pig farmer? You're not a ship captain or a firefighter?

TRAMPUS

No. I farm pigs.

MARILYN

Oh. How lovely.

TRAMPUS

And I've come begging the forgiveness that legend tells only an old virgin may supply.

MARILYN

Yes. Forgiveness. I guess we must be forgiving of the glowing faults we see in others. Especially when we reach a certain age. And our options are sparse.

TRAMPUS

Yes, grant me forgiveness for my sins, virgin. Last night, I found my wife in bed with a troll I formerly called my brother and before I could say "nay, that is my wife," or "ho, that is my brother," two devils grappled control over these puppets I call hands and ripped my brother's ears off his head, then a dark fairy transmorphed my mouth to a direwolf's jaw and I devoured his throat and all his screams down my gullet, whereby a red bellied, crook-nosed witch on a black broom swept through my tender heart's cage overtaking my will and making me stand over my treacherous wife and wheel back these shapely tree trunks I call legs and kick her head off her body, through the window and into the horse tank. But twin murders would not satiate these fevered incarnations overtaking my soul! For a cavalcade of laughing spirits took hold of my body making me and my ax their unwilling marionette, slaughtering my parcel of swine and making me twirl about in their salty blood until the morning sun rose in fiery glory. *(TRAMPUS kneels in front of MARILYN.)* And now I come to you oh wise virgin, so that you may exorcise the legions of demons coursing through my veins!

MARILYN

I am caught with fear and know not what to say, except: Valencia!

(VALENCIA enters.)

VALENCIA

Marilyn! Do my eyes deceive or does the suitor already go to a knee?

(PIPPY and COLONEL BESSIE appear from the bathroom.)

COLONEL BESSIE

What has happened while I was in the bathroom transfixed by those hips?

VALENCIA

It appears the suitor is proposing a marital union!

PIPPY

He is! He must! With Marilyn!

TRAMPUS

I have heard that a new marriage may erase the misdeeds of a former marriage. What say you, virgin?

COLONEL BESSIE

Sister, after all these years have you finally bested me?

PIPPI

Oh, she reddens from trepidation!

VALENCIA

Tell him yes, Marilyn.

MARILYN

I find I cannot speak.

PIPPI

Her years of waiting meet a moment of perfection where all hangs in the balance.

VALENCIA

Just say yes and let those waiting times cease!

TRAMPUS

Agree to marrying me and united we'll clean up my farm.

PIPPI

Farming together!

VALENCIA

What romance!

TRAMPUS

I have so many pork chops we can grill.

VALENCIA

And he cooks!

PIPPI

I'm swooning!

TRAMPUS

And I'll let you throw my old wife's head to the vultures.

(An awkward silence.)

MARILYN

I see in your eyes the end of my life.

PIPPI

Oh. That's so romantic! I'll go prepare the goose!

(PIPPI exits.)

BESSIE TAVERN

I hereby use my military rank to bestow the title of husband and wife to this coupling.
Have you a ring?

TRAMPUS

Oh yes.

(TRAMPUS pulls a woman's severed hand from his pocket with a ring on it.)

VALENCIA

Wait. I sense something off about this man. He's a criminal. Like my cat Whiskers. We can't let Marilyn go alone with him.

MARILYN

Hush, Valencia, hush.

VALENCIA

But Aunt Marilyn, he's going to kill you.

MARILYN

You don't know that.

VALENCIA

I'm going to be a criminal psychologist. I can feel it in my bones.

COLONEL BESSIE

And he's got a severed hand.

VALENCIA

Why yes! That too!

TRAMPUS

It's really very innocent. A purple demon commanded me—

MARILYN

I don't care. I don't care! Isn't it better to end up with the likes of him than collapsed alone by the snacks?

VALENCIA

Aunt Marilyn.

MARILYN

Let's go, gentle Trampus. Lay down that old hand and take my old hand.

TRAMPUS

Why is it that whenever I get married all my wives sprout horns and spines atop their brows?

MARILYN

Please, my dear, please try to keep it together. For at least a little while. At least for the night. Make me believe the wait was worth it. Farewell, Bessie. Goodbye, Valencia. And tell Pippi, I'm sorry, we couldn't wait for goose.

(MARILYN and TRAMPUS exit.)

VALENCIA

Aunt Bessie, we need to stop her.

COLONEL BESSIE

She's old enough to make her own decisions.

VALENCIA

But she's marching to her funeral.

COLONEL BESSIE

We're always and forever marching to our funerals. Only at the end of life do we see we took the long way or made a detour. But to our deaths dutifully we march.

VALENCIA

But why would she enjoin herself to such madness?

COLONEL BESSIE

I spent my life playing at games of war. And this thing I know best of all: love and war are both desperate improvisations, where dangerous decisions made recklessly in a moment last us forever.

VALENCIA

That sounds awful.

COLONEL BESSIE

It is awful. And thrilling. Absolutely thrilling. Now you'll have to excuse me, I have my own wars to wage in the fields and bedrooms of this and other countries.

VALENCIA

But what about my lesson. For the Fancy Ball tonight.

COLONEL BESSIE

Marilyn has given you a far better lesson and a far better warning than I ever could. Good day. Happy life.

(COLONEL BESSIE exits.)

(PIPPY enters.)

PIPPY

Oh Valencia.

VALENCIA

Pippi, what's the matter?

PIPPY

I have never seen such gore!

VALENCIA

Oh Aunt Marilyn. Why couldn't I stop you?

PIPPY

It's not Marilyn. It's that old goose. I went to chop off his head and found him already dead.

VALENCIA

How?

PIPPY

It was your cat, Whiskers. Whiskers killed the goose. Because you took his breakfast!

VALENCIA

What a tragedy.

PIPPY

Truly. Now what will we have for dinner tonight?

VALENCIA

We haven't time for dinner, Pippi.

PIPPY

Why?

VALENCIA

Get your best dress and your softest eye. We're going to attend the Fancy Ball.

PIPPY

But why would we do that?

VALENCIA

Because we've got to try. Your hips may break and my heart may melt. It may end awfully. But maybe it won't, Pippi. Not for us. Maybe it won't.

END OF PLAY