

Chapter One

They may say, "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas," but that certainly is not true for Savannah because what happens in Savannah gets blabbed all over town, and in some cases it even makes the front page of the *Savannah Morning News*.

That's how everyone in Savannah found out about Ruth Maxwell's dirty little family secret. Page one, big bold letters: HUMAN BONES DISCOVERED IN STATE STREET BASEMENT.

On Sunday morning, after the discovery, Ruth met her three friends for brunch at the Plantation Club in the exclusive gated community, The Landings on Skidaway Island, where she and her exclusive friends lived.

They sat at their usual table for four by the window overlooking the first tee box on the golf course.

Ruth did not go for the buffet, but instead ordered her customary Eggs Benedict, bacon, fruit, and coffee. Lindsey ordered the apple crepes, and Helen chose the buffet. Dotty had to be different from everyone and ordered a club sandwich off the lunch menu.

Lindsey, Helen, and Dotty had talked about Ruth behind her back to each other, but they were hesitant to be the first one to inquire about her business. They would be polite. They would wait for Ruth to tell them what they so eagerly wanted to know:

Whose bones were in the basement?

Ruth talked about the new workout machines at the fitness center and she talked about her husband's golf

foursome winning the latest tournament. She talked about the weather and she talked about how her cat would only eat one brand of cat food which was almost impossible to find.

Lindsey was growing short on patience. All this polite Southern dancing-around-the-issue was a waste of time. She was from New Jersey. They did things faster in New Jersey and they talked funny. She said things like *wooder* instead of water, *cawfee* was her word for coffee, and *wadever* meant whatever.

Lindsey wanted Ruth to get to the good stuff, the details. Who? What? When? And why the bones were in the basement? She wanted to hear *wadever* as she had her *cawfee* this morning, but Ruth was being deliberately evasive about providing details.

Unlike Lindsey, Helen knew how to do the two-step-around. She was a Southerner from Charleston, South Carolina, and she could dance with the best of them. She asked Ruth respectful questions about her fitness schedule, her husband, the weather, and her cat.

Dotty tapped her fingers on the table and remained silent, for now.

Dotty was from Maine. She always complained about the Georgia heat. When she stepped out of her house at 7:30 a.m. she would break into a sweat. She kept their house a comfortable Maine-chilling 50 degrees all year long.

The server placed a basket of bread and pastries on their table, poured coffee in their cups, and went away.

Two new club members, Melinda and Bradley Davenport, walked into the dining room. Ruth waved a greeting. Melinda waved back. They knew each other

from the book club.

Melinda Davenport glided across the elegant dining room with practiced grace. She was from Pennsylvania and true Southern style did not come naturally to her. The only Confederate flag in Pennsylvania was flying over the Gettysburg Battlefield. Melinda Davenport would always be considered a *Yankee*.

Southern style and grace came easily to Ruth. She had been born and raised in Savannah. She had married Don Maxwell one month after they both graduated from the University of Georgia. Don took over her father's real estate company and they made a fortune buying and selling property in Savannah. That's how they could afford to live in The Landings.

Ruth wished they had sold the building on State Street, but it had been in the family since before the War of Northern Aggression (the American Civil War) and her father refused to sell it.

Her father and her husband also refused to spend a lot of money to fix it up. As the years passed the brick building fell into disrepair and became an eyesore in Savannah's Historic District.

The clothing store, which had occupied the downstairs storefront last month, chose not to renew the lease, and in fact was suing them for damage to merchandise caused by a water leak.

The tenant in the one-bedroom upstairs apartment was a student at the art college. She was smart enough not to complain. Her rent was cheap and the location was close to where she attended most of her classes.

The server brought their food and went away.

Helen dabbed the corner of her mouth with her

napkin. Being from South Carolina, she used the word *fix* as a verb. Helen was always *fix'n* to do something. She stood up and said, "I'm *fix'n* to go to the buffet table now. Y'all behave while I'm gone."

She returned with her western omelet, hash browns, and sausage neatly arranged on her plate. She sat down and was just *fix'n* to eat when Dotty blurted out, "Ruth, why don't you just tell us about these bones they found on your State Street property?"

Dotty was from Maine, and maybe in Maine *you can't always get there from here*, but they sure knew how to get to the point.

Ruth did not flinch. She added sugar to her coffee, took a sip, set the cup back on the saucer and said, "It was Rydell who found the bones."