

## Chapter 12

*Further misfortunes of the old woman*

Frank found another piece of litigation pertaining to Eleanor Grace Gomes. In 1975, she had developed acute appendicitis. Thankfully, everyone knew what that was, and what to do about it, so there should have been no problem. But in 1975, nobody knew what dyslexia was, so when her nurse mis-recorded her name as Elaina Garcia Gomez, things became complicated. Her abdominal surgeon prided himself on his generous and compassionate nature, and in a profound act of personal sacrifice and bonhomie performed two surgeries for the price of one, removing Eleanor's uterus in addition to her appendix.

In court, the surgeon had raised his hand to God and sworn on the Holy Bible with an air of solemn dignity that when he had performed Eleanor's unnecessary, involuntary hysterectomy, he had no idea that she had access to the legal system. He explained that the Tulsa phonebook already registered enough Gomezes for his liking, and held forth on the virtues of his generous and compassionate solution. Thus did he beg the court's forbearance, and received none. He was stripped of his credentials, and opened a charter fishing business in Aruba.

Here the trail grew thin, indeed, but Frank's curiosity had become piqued. He was able to accumulate a rough narrative from his delving search. Traumatized and barren, Eleanor had struggled in the dating scene. She worked as a barmaid in Tulsa, Dallas, Moab, Santa Fe, San Diego, Portland, Missoula, and Detroit. In Detroit, she met a young evangelical preacher on a mission.

There were pictures. They were sweet. Frank could tell, no one had needed Eleanor Grace Gomes as much as that preacher did, not for a long time. Sometimes, she had the same look she wore way back with her popular movie star. She had followed her new beau on the long road of the stump-preacher, and had been a trustee of his church in Houston from the day it was founded.

Frank closed his laptop and stood, making a fuss about it to warn his companions that he was coming. He sat where he could talk to them.

"Eleanor Grace Gomes." Frank made to look her in the eye, and when she looked back the hospitality-face was absent. She wore an expression with just a hint more curiosity than terror, and met his gaze.

"I searched you."

Snap! There it was. Hospitality face shone firm as ever. "What did you learn, dear?"

"Enough." Frank tried to see her as the woman in all the pictures. When he looked at her that way, the hospitality face melted and Eleanor came out. Frank asked, "Why do you do it?"

"Do what, dear?"

"Help my wife, who stole your boyfriend; or me, who will surely be prosecuted for his murder, though I never meant to kill him. Why do any of it? Why get up in the morning, why put on the great big show day in and day out?"

Hospitality face flashed in for a moment. "Frank, if you want to know something, you oughtta ask just as plain as can be."

Frank smiled, and blushed. The words came out awkwardly. "Have you ever thought about suicide?"

The old woman snorted, one big goober-grinder that echoed from the windows of the cabin. Frank could tell Missile-Tits was trying not to giggle. Eleanor laughed heartily, then rejoined Frank. "I've grown old in poverty and shame, with no uterus, always remembering that I'm a President's daughter. I've wanted to kill myself a hundred times, but I still love life. That ridiculous weakness is perhaps one of our most pernicious inclinations. What could be more stupid than to persist in carrying a burden that we constantly want to cast off, to hold our existence in horror, yet cling to it nonetheless, to fondle the serpent that devours us, until it has eaten our hearts?"

"Everybody I've ever met has thought about killin' themselves, but only fifty or sixty I can recall have ever actually gone through with it-". Eleanor's voice hitched, and her expression misted over in a manner that caused Frank to look away out of respect.

She took that moment to herself, and put her mask back in place. "Best not to speak of such things, truly. Now. We're gonna need our rest when we get to Iskend'run!" Her smile said "GO AWAY!" louder than a bullhorn.

Surprised by the revelations from their conversation, Missile-Tits made the rounds of the other mercenaries and their valets, near the front of the plane. She asked if they had ever hated life so much they sought to end it, and returned looking hang-

dog. Eleanor gave her an inquiring look, and Missile-Tits responded. "Seven said of course they had, and the other five just stared at my tits and said 'not right now'".