

Chapter Twenty-seven

The dinner with Gordon and Margaret Beauchamp was particularly poignant for Bitsy, in that she didn't know if she would ever return to Dallas and see her long-time friend again. We joined them at El Fenix Mexican Restaurant. I love Tex-Mex food and knew it might be a long time before I would taste it again.

Gordon was a successful obstetrician who knew every doctor joke that had ever been written. I liked him for his good humor and for his obvious fidelity to Margaret. He was affable and easy to get along with. She, on the other hand, had an opinion on every subject in the universe and didn't hesitate to make them known. She looked like a former cheerleader should, cute. And like the song, '*her hair hung down in ringalets.*'

Gordon said, "So, why New York? I can think of a dozen more romantic places to go on a honeymoon. A cruise in the Mediterranean, for instance."

Margaret interjected, "Or San Francisco. It's absolutely beautiful there, in spite of the politics. Or you could go south of the border. Gordon and I took our wedding trip to Mexico City. So romantic. Of course, we wrote it off on our taxes since Gordon attended a medical conference while we were there." She looked at her husband archly. "You're so smart, dear."

Bitsy said, "Duncan's daughter, Elizabeth, lives in New York. She has a young daughter and that makes me a grandmother, so we thought we'd get a visit in, see some shows and then take a trip across Canada by rail."

Margaret said, "Oh, that does sound wonderful I hope you catch *Spamalot*. I hear it's a riot."

We talked about our trip to the Caymans and Bitsy told the story about Captain Red Shirt. Gordon laughed uproariously. The waiter cleared the table and I ordered after-dinner drinks.

Avoiding discussion of the disaster in Houston was impossible and broaching it caused a somber mood at the table. Gordon said, "I've believed all along that we should be fighting the war on terror, but it always seemed to me to be somehow removed from me personally. I didn't know any of the 9/11 victims. But that's changed now. I knew a dozen or more of the people killed at the Brown Center. It seems almost too horrible to contemplate. One was Walter Gaston, a cardiologist with an office in my building. His wife died, too." He gestured toward me. "Duncan, I believe that if given the opportunity, I could kill the person responsible for the bombing. I haven't felt that way since I was in 'Nam. Working in the 95th Evac hospital at Monkey Mountain near DaNang, I saw so many of our kids come in with the most horrific wounds, many obviously fatal. Increasingly I became more and more angry. At first it was the Viet Cong I hated. Later, I realized it was LBJ and McNamara that really had me pissed. I guess I was just mad because I wanted to be an OBGyn and there I was, cutting off limbs and stuffing intestines back into body cavities. The men I saved, or tried to save, over there had a hard time understanding the mission. So did I. But you know what I'm talking about, Gordon. You were there."

Margaret said, "Come on. dear. Lighten up."

I said, "Sure. However, I was too busy trying to avoid being in a situation that would lead me to meet you or any of your colleagues to worry about the political aspect of the war. When people ask me now if I had been in the Vietnam War, I'm not sure

whether to tell them I had been in it or whether it had been in me. In retrospect. it was a damned surreal experience.

Gordon laughed cynically. "I understand. One of the most popular graffiti signs I saw over there was the one that read 'Yankee go home.' I suspect that most of them were painted on walls by our guys. You and I were lucky. We eventually did make it back."

Bitsy asked, "What happens now with Chet Bascomb's congressional district?"

Margaret said, "I hear the governor is calling a special election for sixty days from now. Janet Granbury, his first assistant, is rumored to already be the frontrunner. If it's true, I think I'll help her. I've always liked her and she certainly is politically correct. Of course, Duncan, if you were to throw your hat in the ring, I'd back you in a minute."

I said, "Not even a remote chance, Maggie. When I slid off the bench, I hung up my running shoes forever. Besides, I'm a newlywed. Romancing voters would almost be adulterous."

Margaret laughed and said, "Never thought of it that way. Bitsy, you're not the jealous type. Why don't you encourage him to run?"

My wife looked at me as she said, "No way. We have other plans." She feigned a yawn and continued, "Some of which are plans for tonight."

I took her hand and said, "Yeah, I'm ready to hit the sack."

Margaret said, "You two are as randy as a couple of kids. Gordon, what's the matter with us? Maybe we need a trip to the Caymans ourselves."

Gordon shrugged. "Could be, Babe. Could be."

I said, "This has been a delightful evening. I hope we can do it again soon. When we get back we'll call you."

I felt lousy when I said it. The chance that we would have another evening like this was pretty slim. As we walked out to the parking lot, Gordon said, “Duncan, you seem somewhat preoccupied. More than being a newlywed would cause you to be. Are you okay? Medically, I mean.”

“Never better. You’re very perceptive. Someday I’ll tell you all about it.” We shook hands as the women hugged their goodbyes. Our life was being changed in ways we would probably regret, but we didn’t know to what extent. It wouldn’t have made any difference. We were already past the point of no return.

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