

Two Degrees of Hon Separation

By Kimberley Lynne

Colby, an upper class matron in her late thirties from the Roland Park section of Baltimore is seated in an uncomfortable plastic chair in her dentist's office. She is reading a six-month old Martha magazine. She is wearing a brightly colored suit and pearls. Her nails are perfect. She sighs and looks at her gold bracelet watch. The two chairs on either side of her are empty. Herman enters, shuffling, and sits in the empty chair to her right. Colby doesn't like sitting that close to Herman. Herman is a bus driver in his late fifties with an impacted wisdom tooth. His stomach rumbles a lot. Gladys enters. She is wearing tight stretch pants and a Ravens sweatshirt. All of her jewelry is plastic, but her nails are perfect. She sports the classic beehive complete with covering scarf. She is carrying several blue plastic supermarket bags full of oddly shaped objects.

GLADYS

(Has a heavy Baltimore accent.) This seat taken, hon? *(Pause.)* I said, this seat taken?

COLBY

(Lowering magazine.) Uh, no.

GLADYS

All right, then. I thought maybe you was in the wrong doctor's office and really needed to see somebody about your clogged ears. My first husband Ernie had terrible clogged ears, all that wax, it's genetic, you know, but I really think that he didn't do nothing about it cause he didn't like hearing my sister Doreen talk about all her boyfriends.

COLBY

I can hear perfectly well.

GLADYS

Then you got clean ears. You coming to get your teeth cleaned or are you in pain?

COLBY

This is my biannual cleaning.

GLADYS

Cause I wasn't gonna talk to you if you're in pain. You're bi what?

COLBY

Annual. Twice a year. Cleaning. I'm in a little pain.

GLADYS

Oh, twice a year, I thought you meant something else with that bi-anal stuff. Cause I didn't know Doctor Shuba did that. My second husband Worth, that was his first name, a family name, Worth, liked giving me an occasional back door cleaning, if you know what I mean, he was that kinda man. I don't much go for that sorta thing, but you never can tell with people. And he came from tons of money. Well, he didn't have it but his people did. You wanna magazine? I'm gonna go up to the rack and get me something to look at.

COLBY

I am reading a magazine.

GLADYS

Oh, yeah, that lady, she's something else. Do you watch her show? I don't cause I'm not much one for doilies and flowers and such around the house but my hair stylist Marco he reads her like religion. Cooks all those fancy dishes with vegetables and all and paints the furniture to look like it came outta the Civil War and all that. I don't get why anybody would wanna try to make something look old. I mean, people don't wanna look old. *(To Herman.)* You want a magazine, hon?

HERMAN

(Through clenched teeth.) No, thanks.

GLADYS

You sound like you're in the pain, well, I hope the doc gives you some painkillers but you gotta be careful. My son, Truman, from my second marriage, he takes way too many of those codeine pills, says they take the edge off the day but what they really do is bind you up something fierce. He says his visits to the john are like what birth was to me. Course I had so many that the last two slipped out like greased seals. Gotta do that to keep up with Social Services, one every five years. I told him to eat more fast food; Mickey D's will grease that track. *(She and Colby stare for a moment.)* You ever see them seals on them nature programs?

COLBY

Were you going to get a magazine?

GLADYS

Nah, Doctor Shuba, he really don't carry my brand of magazine, my stories, so I end up looking at pictures of football players and oven-baked pies. Do you know anybody who has ever made a pie that looked like them in those magazines? The crust just so, all golden like. Well, maybe you would. You from around here?

COLBY

I am reading a magazine. I mean, I was reading a magazine.

RECEPTIONIST

(Offstage.) Mr. Kaufman? Mr. Herman Kaufman? *(Colby frowns, remembering. Herman pulls himself up and ambles offstage. Colby watches him exit.)*

GLADYS

You don't have to be all huffy, I was just being friendly-like. Don't you people talk to strangers? Guess not. I mean, I don't feel like anybody in Baltimore is really a stranger, not if we all live here. Where you from?

COLBY

(Still watching after Herman.) Baltimore.

GLADYS

Well, there you are, and we go to the same dentist. You married?

COLBY

Why do you ask?

GLADYS

Well, you're getting a cleaning, but you said you was in pain. You seem married but you're not wearing a ring. Men are about the only thing that causes me real pain. Well, them and those monthly visits.

COLBY

(She doesn't know why she's telling Gladys this.) I'm about to be divorced. I filed Monday.

GLADYS

So you're the one doing the leaving.

COLBY

Yes.

GLADYS

I left my second husband, Worth. Now, my first and third husbands, they left me, but I left Worth, so I can't hold anybody to blame.

COLBY

How many have you had?

GLADYS

Four. I married Ronnie last year. He's all right so far, but he leaves big chunks of hair in the sink. How many you had?

COLBY

One.

GLADYS

First one's tough. I couldn't imagine life without Ernie. I went on a slutty binge that really shoulda killed me, but life went on and then one night, one starry night, I met Worth Braxton outside a Royal Farm Store on Belair Road. (*Colby looks shocked.*) He had a flat tire, and I helped him change it. It was love at first crank. We couldn't wait, you know. I sure did like the way he tasted, if you don't mind me saying so. His people got money, loads of money, but they didn't talk to him after me and then what he had ran out. Then he started hitting me. Tying me up and hitting me. Threw a TV at me once, but it was only a black and white.

COLBY

Thurston had relations with our eldest son's lacrosse coach. Parker, that's our son, found them in the equipment room at Gilman.

GLADYS

It was a boy coach?

COLBY

Yes, a boy coach. Relations is the wrong word. He fucked him.

GLADYS

Another back door man. I don't know what they see in it.

COLBY

Then I found out about the unclaimed funds. Thurston worked for Legg Mason, and he wasn't reporting unclaimed funds to the state. He wasn't reporting them because he was depositing them. That's illegal. They've re-possessed the cars. We're selling the house. We've sold the timeshare in Vail. I don't know if I have enough to keep the boys in private school. I love Vail, all the little chalets right next to the mountains.

GLADYS

Well, don't you worry none about that school part. I'm a proud product of the Baltimore City School System.

COLBY

How reassuring. Does Doctor Shuba always run this late?

GLADYS

You never been to him before?

COLBY

I had to switch from my PPO to an HMO plan.

GLADYS

Well, he's slow, but his dental hygenists are real thorough. You should see what they pull outta my mouth.

COLBY

I'm sure.

GLADYS

Don't your family got no money?

COLBY

I married into money. Thurston's family had the money.

GLADYS

Can't they help you?

COLBY

They won't talk to us. We're outcasts. Thurston got caught. Braxtons break the law, but they don't get caught. The boys can't touch their trust funds until they're 21.

GLADYS

Just like me and Worth. What was I thinking, marrying a man named Worth? And his family, whew, what a cold bunch they were. Butter don't melt in their mouths. His mother scared me to death, and I don't scare easy. Did you say Braxton?

COLBY

Yes. Worth Braxton is my husband's, I mean, my soon to be ex-husband's, third cousin once removed.

GLADYS

Get out!

COLBY

I believe I am.

GLADYS

You mean we're blood?

COLBY

No, hardly, "once removed" means a cousin related by marriage, not lineage. I think it's third. I think he's the grandson of Thurston's grandfather's brother's son. Thurston's much older than me. I was his trophy wife, his doll. I think Worth was the one who my sister caught snorting coke at my wedding. I know that Worth's the one who came by, begging Thurston for money after he married you.

GLADYS

Did you give him any?

COLBY

Thurston wouldn't. I slipped him a couple hundred. I hid it in a copy of The Baltimore Sun. He sat on the porch and cried for a couple of hours. It scared the children.

GLADYS

So your boys are related to my Truman.

COLBY

Distantly.

GLADYS

Well, maybe we could come to one of those lacrosse games, if Parker still plays. I gotta say this don't surprise me none. This town does this to me all the time, and it don't surprise me no more. My sister Doreen bonked my hair stylist's housemate for a year before me and Marco figured it out. I met a man yesterday who was in Ernie's graduating class at Archbishop Curly. Course, Ernie didn't graduate. Well, I gotta tell you that it makes me feel real good about this town. Maybe I shouldn't wait a whole year to get my teeth cleaned next time. See, I'm a nail artisan, so I gotta lean into people's space, you know, so I'm real concerned about my dental hygiene.

COLBY

I always liked cutting hair. I cut the boy's hair all their lives, and they never complained. I used to cut Thurston's hair until I nicked his ear when he was turning his head. He could never sit still. I always found an odd sort of peace cutting hair, isn't that strange?

GLADYS

Your hair looks real nice. Real simple. Classy. You do it?

COLBY

Yes, I'm afraid so. My hair stylist was one of the first luxuries to go.

GLADYS

Well, maybe I could talk around the beauty community in Hamden and see if I could rustle you up a job. Do you need a job?

COLBY

Oh, that's not necessary.

GLADYS

Well, you gotta put food on the table. How old are those boys?

COLBY

We'll get support from Thurston. If he's not in jail first.

GLADYS

See? And there'll be those lawyer bills to pay. Bills pile up.

COLBY

I'm finding that out.

RECEPTIONIST

(Offstage.) Mrs. Braxton? Mrs. Colby Braxton?

COLBY

That's me. It was nice talking to you.

GLADYS

You too. My name's Gladys.

COLBY

I know. *(She stands.)* Oh, and my aunt, my mother's younger sister, had a life long affair with a Herman Kaufman, who never married her and she died an old maid. I think he was a bus driver. Or a plumber.

GLADYS

Who's Herman? . . . You mean, the smelly guy who was next to you?

COLBY

Couldn't be.

GLADYS

Nah, couldn't be.

The End