

The Good, The Bad, and THE CRAZY

By Dr. Mary Ann Duke, M.D.

Chapter 10

Forward to Seven Locks Jail and the Alleged “Killer”

On Thanksgiving Day, two days into jail, I finally reach Edward. One can only call collect and cell phones don't accept those, of course, and neither does his work phone, so I had to wait until after dinner when the phone is turned back on. The phone is only accessible a few hours a day; that's why it is so hard to get a chance to use it. I ate fast and sat by the phone so I could be first. During rehab I realized that I needed to break it off with Edward once and for all. I can not stay sober and watch him drink every night. But while I am locked up, I need him to watch my home, pick up my mail and the only way to reach Eloise is through him, so it certainly is not the right time to say “Sayonara”. I think he's just sticking around and not in love with me anymore either. Quite possible that he's just waiting for me to break down and finally give him “power of attorney” which he most annoyingly requests almost every time we speak.

I used to be so in love with him or so I thought, but now I feel nothing for him except that he is the father of our beautiful daughter. I remember I have to whisper to him or everyone in the room can hear my conversation, unless someone ups the shitty sound on the television. The rumor is Mark Fightson ripped the men's television right out of the wall when he was in Seven Locks. When he got out, Fightson bought them a brand new big screen. The men's television is great. Ours stinks. Edward finally answers and accepts the call.

“Hi.”, is all I can get out.

“Hi, how is it? Are you okay?”

“Sure, I’m F.I.N.E.” Edward gets it. “I sleep on a metal bed with a thin gym mat as a mattress. It sucks, big time. The food sucks, too. The best meal was the real turkey we had tonight. The rest of the time it is mystery meat; and they only give us dirty dishwasher-like coffee every three to four days. Otherwise, it’s powdered juice.”

“That’s a bummer.” Edward understands. He loves his Starbuck’s.

“All we do all day is read the paper, try to sleep, watch a really shitty, snowy pictured television with horrible sound or just talk and play cards. But today I did sit-ups and push-ups on my upper bunk.”

“You did?”

“Yes. I’m going to go nuts if I don’t work out a little. My feet were freezing, but a nice girl, who’s been in here before, was wearing two pairs of socks so she gave one of her pairs to me. Wasn’t that nice?”

“Yes.” Such a simple creature comfort as a pair of socks was a huge deal to me. Wow, and many rich Potomac women have a cow when they break a nail between appointments on the door of their Mercedes.

“Can I talk to Eloise?”

“She already went to bed. She was exhausted.”

“Oh.” I would have loved to hear her precious three-year-old voice. “I need you to do something for me. I can’t reach Dieter. I have tried numerous times and am always getting an answering machine, and I need to have him answer and accept charges because I can only call collect. It’s only sixty-five cents for a local call, I heard. Please call him and ask him to pick up.”

“I’m not calling him.”

“Why not?! I need to speak to my kids!”

“I’m not calling him for you.” I’m more than exasperated. I need to tell my children that Mommy is okay. I need to tell them that it’ll go by fast, and I’ll be out before they finish school. Yeah, right, the past 48 hours have felt like 48 days. Forty-eight days in Siberia in a closed space with an AIDS patient with a hacking cough.

“Well, call Jane and have her call him. Tell her to tell him I can only call collect!”

“Okay.”

“Okay, thank you. Do it right now, please! It’s getting late, and I want to speak to the kids on Thanksgiving. The phone is going to be forbidden soon and another lady wants to use it. I gotta go. I’ll try to call you tomorrow. Bye.” After the other lady finished her call, I try Dieter for the sixth time in two days. He finally accepts a call. I choke up immediately hearing my children’s sad, little voices. “Hi, Mommy,” says my eldest eight and one-half year old daughter, Marika.

“Hi sweetheart! I love you! I’m so sorry I had to go to jail. I’m so sorry I missed Thanksgiving with you, Honey! Please forgive me! It’s going to be okay. Time will go by fast.”

“Can I come to see you?” Oh God, she sounds so hopeful. I want to cry, and hate my answer, “No, Honey, I’m not allowed visitors here. But soon I’m going to be sent to a big new jail in Clarksburg, and you can come to see me there.”

“When do you go there, Mommy?”

“I don’t know yet. Women leave to go there every day, so I think it will be soon. I will let you know as soon as I know, okay?”

“Okay.” She doesn’t sound good at all. My poor baby sounds depressed.

“Mommy, I cried all night when Daddy told us you went to jail.” I choke up again but hold back bursting into tears.

“Please don’t cry anymore my angel! It’s going to be all right. Daddy will take good care of you and I hope he will bring you to see me soon.” A little pause then Marika asks me softly, “How is jail, Mommy?” What do you say to an eight year old little girl who’s worried about her Mom? It’s the pits? I hate it! I’m claustrophobic and going crazy? No. Not at all. I try to take away all of her worry.

“Well, it’s not anything like home; it’s a lot smaller; but Mommy’s going to be just fine. I’m in a pretty big room with a lot of nice women, and it’s really not too bad. Before you know it, I’ll be back home, and everything’s going to be all right.”

Yeah, sure, I think. I’ve lost my angels from heaven, been putting my over \$8,000/month mortgage on credit cards, still owe a boat load for rehab, and now am locked up for six months. I need to go to let another woman use the phone so I say, “Angel, listen, please forgive me for this. I will make it up to you. I promise. I promise I will make everything up to you that I have missed. Please, believe me, Honey, that I love you and your brother and sisters more than anything on this earth, and I promise to make it all up to you. Please, let me speak to James and Nadia, because I have to get off the phone soon. I will call you tomorrow. I love you very much.”

“Okay, Mommy, I love you, too.” I have very emotional conversations two more times with James and Nadia. James just turned ten and Nadia is only six. After that, I’m totally exhausted and just go sit on my slab and stare blankly at Peggy. She looks at me

and understands. She spoke to her kids a few hours ago and cried for half an hour when she got off.

I smile at her a little through my tears. “Boy oh boy, they must think Mommy’s a real piece of work, huh?”

“Yep.”

“I have to make this up to them somehow, Peggy, I have to.” Peggy pulls her blanket up to her chin and rolls over.

“You will, Mary Ann. You will, somehow.”

* * *

The local news is very scary the day after Thanksgiving. A young African American male was found shot to death on a sidewalk, multiple times, right in the face, twenty minutes from my home. His name is “John Doe”, because he’s unrecognizable, and apparently never been in trouble with the law before and finger-printed. “If anyone has any information, please contact your local police department immediately,” says the news announcer.

“Gross,” I whisper to Peggy.

“Yeah, real gross,” she concurs.

“Geez, right on Thanksgiving.”

Peggy answers, “Probably over some drugs.”

The good news of the day is that the guards finally took the forty-two year old with AIDS to the hospital. I couldn’t help myself; the doctor in me addressed one of the guards on Thanksgiving with: “Excuse me, Sir, but I think that woman has pneumonia”. At that very moment she was, yet again, spitting copiously into her

disgusting reused Styrofoam cup. The guard just looked at me. Maybe he knows I'm an eye surgeon, maybe he doesn't. However, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know it's not normal to spit up vast quantities of dark green sputum on a fifteen-minute cycle. Twenty-four hours after I commented to the guard, she developed a high fever and was finally taken to the hospital. Thank God.

“Duke?”

“Yes?” The guard is talking to me so I turn and look up from my tattered romance novel. The guard is doing his wall monitor check-in by my corner bed/slab and has never talked to me before. It shocks me a little.

“Do you have two jumpsuits on?!” he asks gruffly.

“Yes.”

“Take one off.”

I pause for a second, and then plunge on. “But I'm very cold, Sir.”

“You can't wear two jumpsuits.”

Why the hell not?! I bitch to myself. “Am I supposed to be cold?” No answer. Just a glare. I get up and walk to the bathroom. Oh, fuck it. It's laundry day. I was going to take off the medium underneath and get it washed anyway. I did my socks in the sink with hand soap a couple of days ago. I showered and had to wash my hair with the same limey soap bar. No shampoo or crème rinse in a jail “vanity pack”. I was told one can't send one's socks to the laundry, 'cause you'll never get 'em back, and I have to have my warm gift gym socks. Mom always said it's bad to have cold feet. All I need is to get sick in jail. Can't afford that, need all the strength I have just to cope. At least

they're giving me my antidepressant in the a.m. and sleeping pill, which doesn't help, at night.

I return to my gym mat of a mattress and proceed with my workout of sit-ups and push-ups to warm up with my wet head. No blow driers in the wall at Hotel Hell. Some of the women are staring at me. What? Haven't you ever seen a sit-up before? Or does it just look like an impossible feat? Go to hell if you think I'm crazy. Go straight to hell. Oh, how could I forget, we've already arrived.

Three nights in a row, the news remains hauntingly bleak, asking the same question, "Does anyone know who killed John Doe?" Even us jail birds are spooked. Who can kill an unarmed kid... shoot him in the face in cold blood so even his mother can't recognize him?

The Washington Post publishes the story a few days later. A twenty-two year old African American girl named Venice is charged with the crime of murdering the sixteen year old boy on Thanksgiving. Peggy was right; drugs were involved. There was a witness and/or accomplice. He turned her in. Venice supposedly told the two boys in the car with her to "Pull over here. I need to go to the bathroom". The witness said Venice went behind some bushes and came out holding a gun. She commanded the unarmed victim to get out of the car. She then shot the victim more than once in the face. Venice and the witness drove off. The witness said Venice looked back and saw the victim still moving.

I tell Peggy, "The poor kid was probably having a seizure before he died. I've never heard of anyone surviving multiple shots to the head!" Peggy nods quickly in agreement, not moving her eyes from the story. The witness in the car states he was then

commanded to drive back and get out and shoot the victim, yet again. Who knows who really fired the last shot, but now John Doe is definitely good and dead, has a real name, and his poor mom knows why he missed her turkey dinner. Peggy and I are still engrossed in the article when the new girl arrives.

“Boy, is she ugly or what?” Peggy hisses to me.

“What’s with the shaved head?” I whisper back. The new girl is at least 5’10”, close to 200 pounds with shaved head, big buck teeth, and overall too muscular and strong looking. Hope she doesn’t take the empty bunk above me. Nope. She picks the one above Glenda. That fits. Looks like there will be a toppling of the monarchy by the young rebel. Glenda, the eldest of us, is no longer queen bee. The new big girl seizes the crown.

I never in my life have met anyone quite like this girl. She talks too loud and is constantly interrupting other people’s conversations and basically taking them over to talk about herself. “I’s was doin’ this, and I’s was a doin’ that! And kin yous believes this?!” This new girl thinks she’s so bloody important. She’s pissing me off more and more by the minute with her self-centered speech. I think to myself, “She doesn’t even come close to speaking proper English and who cares how many drugs you’ve sold or consumed”?! I glance over at Peggy and she rolls her eyes in understanding. We both wish she would just be quiet and read a book. Then again, maybe she doesn’t know how to read. “Who gives a shit”?! I’m bitching to myself yet again, which I find myself doing more often than not since getting incarcerated.

There is too much adrenaline in my body, so I climb to the bunk above me and start doing my sit-up/push-up routine. I have to hurl my mattress onto the top bunk. I’d

bump my head if I tried to do my routine on the lower bunk. The new girl immediately looks up at me and yells, “Wudgee looks at that! It bes Janie Fonda!” She said it so loud that I’m sure everyone in our 20’ by 50’ jail box heard her.

Oh shit, she’s talking about me, bringing attention to me. The other women are used to my exercising and don’t stare anymore, don’t even look up. I ignore the comment, so she speaks even louder. “Looke there! We’s gots us a Janie Fuckin’ Fonda! Looks ats her!” I don’t stop my sit-ups, but decide to address the bold new girl, “My name’s Mary Ann, not Jane. What’s yours?”

“Venice. My Momma named me Venice.“ And she flashes her big buck-overly-sharp-toothed-grin. GOD HELP ME. It’s her, the alleged killer.

I’m not the only one who figures it out immediately. Even the dippiest dipshit in the room got it, obviously, because the room went dead quiet. I switch to push-ups, and Venice keeps on talking. Now she’s spilling her guts, telling her story. Her side basically is, “He’s was on my turf. He’s was sellin’ on my turf. No one’s gonna be dealin’ on my turf! But I’s didn’ kill him! He’s was a still movin’ when I left him. The guy that be tellin’ on me; he’s was the one be doin’ the killin’! I’s didn’ do no killin’! He’s was a still movin’ when we’s be drivin’ away!”

But there is even more. Peggy informs me after dinner without hesitation, “Venice is a dike.” Oh great. Perfect. A killer dike to go “night night” with. Why are they putting an alleged murderer amongst us? Shouldn’t she be by herself? Guess this is “standard of care”, Mary Ann. She may be charged with a crime just like you are, but she’s also innocent until proven guilty. I tell Peggy, “I’d rather be locked up with HIV positive Coughing Cathy.”

“Me too, plus she’s a dike,” Peggy whispers. Still it gives me the shivers, being locked up with an alleged cold-blooded killer.

Since I’m banned from two jumpsuits, I now walk around in my metastasizing blanket. But I’m certainly not the only one. It’s damned cold. The only time I warm up naturally is with exercise. The only exercise the other women get daily is taking turns sweeping and mopping the floor. We have to clean our “room”. And if your arms really want a scrubbing workout, clean the bathroom. We get inspected once a day like in the military. What’s to inspect? That my flimsy sheet and Mr. Burlap are tucked just right around my worse than gym mat-like mattress and puny plastic pillow? Inspection of the minus-5-star bathroom is pulling aside the blue plastic curtain and making sure the toilet isn’t plugged, the cinderblock shower isn’t green with fungus and the metal sink not dull with soap scum.

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I’m starting to go crazy by the end of a week. I need to get the hell out of here, or smother Venice. Her chatter is driving me nuts. On top of that, she’s even trying to sing. She can’t carry a tune worth a damn. I certainly can’t understand the words whatsoever, but Miss Venice thinks she’s “Some Kind of Wonderful”.

The holding tank, Seven Locks jail alias Hotel Hell, continues on as a place of transition. Some girls leave by finally posting bond after screaming at their boyfriends on the phone to “Hurry up and get some money!” The sweet faced prostitute is still waiting to be deported. Others are going to the “real” jail, to the new ninety million dollar facility in Clarksburg. And some of us are just hanging out, wishing we were staying anywhere but at Hotel Hell.

* * *

My nerves are frayed and body sore. I haven't slept or eaten well in a week. My gym mat slab of a bed is hard as a rock and I ask at least five different guards, during those every half an hour state required wall checks (which almost always wake me up), for ibuprofen. Finally, I was given some. (Begging is okay by me in jail. Absolutely.) My lack of REM (rapid eye movement), otherwise known as dream sleep, which one needs to cope with life and feel refreshed, is basically zero.

Also, no fresh air. It snowed a little outside and looked very cold, but I would have loved to run around in that small yard, even coatless and in cheap flip flops. I had to beg for another pair, because one of mine broke in five days. Peggy laughed at my hobbling around, before I got my nice new size 11s, way too big for me. We can barely walk right with our socks shoved back between our big toe and second toe in our oversized sandals, much less with me dragging around a broken one. If I gave them up and just resorted to only socks, though, my socks would be filthy in no time and my feet really freezing.

I'm laughing as I walk back from the bathroom and sit down next to Peggy, "I need to be issued new shoes. My uniform isn't up to par." Peggy laughs as she looks up over her tattered romance novel at my size L, wrinkled jumpsuit with crotch to my knees. "Ask for a new jumpsuit too. That color doesn't become you and looks a tiny bit big." Peggy and I try to chuckle, but it's really hard to laugh at all. We're in such a sorry state locked up with a bunch of "crazies", us included. Though luckily, we're not as crazy as some.

Venice wakes up one morning and paces around the room like a hungry tiger in a zoo. “I’s goin’ to wig out! I’s jus a goin’ to wig out! I’s gots to gets outta here!” I’m not exactly sure who alerts the guards, but I think it was Grandma Glenda. Bet she’s seen a “wig out” or two in her day. Before I can even figure out what’s going on, Venice is changing into a very bright red jumpsuit, being handcuffed and hauled away. Just like that. Venice just bought herself a one-way ticket to solitary confinement. Better late than never. I hope I never see that strange bitch again.

A few minutes later, the guard is back in our room yelling, “Duke!” I don’t move, shocked to hear my name. “Duke, come here!”

“Coming!” What’s up? I’m paranoid. What’s going on now? It’s not medication time. Oh, thank God, they’re not holding a red jumpsuit! For a minute, I thought Venice made something up and got me in trouble, and I was going into solitary, too! That scary girl has been making nasty faces at me like a second grader and picking on me and my “Janie Fuckin’ Fonda” workouts mercilessly.

“Yes?”

“Follow me.”

I’m led down a gray cinderblock hall with no windows into a very small room. A middle-aged, gray-haired man in glasses looks up at me from behind his desk.

“You’re Miss Duke?”

“Yes.”

“I’m Mr. Smerck. Please fill out these forms in the room across the hall, and bring them back to me when you are finished.” I pick up the pile of forms, and do as I’m told without a word, so relieved I am not in trouble.

But what is all this crap about? They want to know if I finished high school? Of course I finished high school. I was the valedictorian. I don't want to write that I finished medical school. Why should I? "Higher education, if any." Yeah, I've got higher education, Mr. Smerck, as high as you can go. But why do I have to tell you? I don't want to be an eye surgeon in jail, no way.

I'm too much in the minority just being white. The only way I would do eye surgery on anyone in Hotel Hell would be under general anesthesia. God knows what their drug tolerance is, so local anesthesia would be out. I wouldn't want any one of them getting anxious in the middle of a cataract surgery and want to bite me either. I'd end up with their retina in my now teeth marked hand, needing an HIV test. (I truly once had a big shot attorney wake up all of a sudden under local anesthesia, in the middle of cataract surgery with an open eye, and try to leave the operating room. Luckily his surgery came out okay, but I know my heart skipped a beat, and I'm sure the anesthesiologist's skipped, too.)

Oh, hell, I think. He probably already knows. He probably saw the psychiatrist's report. They made me see the "shrink" the same day I saw the blonde lady who admitted me to Hotel Hell, and I told him who I was. My bad knee was hurting in the cold, and I wanted him to make sure I got some ibuprofen. I also wanted a little respect from a colleague, especially after the blonde lady's matter-of-fact statement, "You're not a criminal."

So I'm as honest as ever on the forms. Mr. Smerck comes to get me and says, "I am from the Pre-Release Center in Rockville. You qualify to go there, but you have to get a job."

“But, I’m unemployed. I don’t have a job.”

“You can obtain one.”

“I’ve had trouble finding work. I’ve been repeatedly told “I’m over-qualified and too old. I can’t be an eye surgeon now, and that is all I know.”

Now Mr. Smerck is frowning at me, and I have no idea why.

“Do you want to go to Clarksburg’s jail?”

“Sir, I want to get out of any jail as soon as possible. I heard from the other women that there is a program in Clarksburg, something called J.A.Z. for alcoholics, and if you do that program and work in the kitchen, you get more “good time” and get out sooner.” He looks exasperated now and smirks at me.

“A job will get you out in the community from the Pre-Release Center. But if you do not obtain a job within a few weeks, you will be sent back to a cell in Clarksburg.”

I’m not understanding at all. I just want out of the whole damned system A.S.A.P., and the other girls told me the fastest way was through this J.A.Z. program. I repeat myself, “I want to do whatever I need to do to get out of jail as soon as possible.”

“Okay. I’m signing you up for P.R.C.” J. A. Z. or P. R. C., whatever, I think, just get me out!

Because my luck’s been lagging, I repeat my desire for good measure.

“This P.R.C. thing gets me out of jail the fastest?”

“Yes.”

“But I have to get a job?”

“Yes, you can go now,” and there’s that little smirk again on his face. Is he actually enjoying this? Or am I paranoid and just imagining it? (Nope. It’s just one of the many, many moments I will be forced to endure with this feeling as an incarcerated, white doctor/eye surgeon, that the person dealing with me is enjoying putting me down.)

How the hell am I going to “get a job in a few weeks” when it took almost six months to get two lousy ones that I either got fired from or quit? Oh dear God, I don’t know what the hell is going on anymore! I need my medical license back, oh, but I can’t add that to my other hundred worries right now like basic survival and not getting sick.

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