

GOOD GOLLY GERTRUDE

A GHOST STORY & MYSTERY

GOOD GOLLY GERTRUDE



MICHAEL PINKUS

“What’s behind the door?”

“Which one?”

“The one right in front of you, Bonehead.”

“Not nice Gertrude,” a third voice said.

We both turned. I was with my best friend, Gertrude Alvarez, we’d stumbled into an old house on our walk. We frequently went for walks and got lost in a neighborhood. We’d stumbled upon this old dilapidated house and decided to check it out.

The floorboards were creaky and the sounds coming from the house had that ready-to-fall-down vibe; but we ventured into the basement anyway.

At the bottom of the stairs we turned right and ended up in a long corridor with doors on either side, plus the one in front of us. The place looks like an old hotel with its beige industrial carpet and multiple doors. We had walked the length of the hallway without touching a thing. But that voice, how did it know Gertrude’s name?

We lived close to the Washington DC naval yard, people claimed the buildings around it were haunted; so much death surrounds the navy.

“Who’s that?” Gertrude says, peering into the darkness behind us.

How did it get so dark in here so quick?

There was no response.

We looked at each other. Our eyes met confirming that indeed we had heard the same thing.

“What do you want to do?”

“We’ve come this far,” Gertrude said. She was the braver of us. “Let’s find out where these doors go.”

We each turned and addressed the door beside us, me on the right her on the left. We quickly rotated the handles and pushed the doors open. Each room contained a cot, a metal table, a tin cup, and a footlocker. There was a steel cabinet in the corner, I assumed it was a closet for hanging stuff. We had indeed stumbled our way into a barrack house. If my geography was correct this old house backed onto the yard behind it.

“Gertrude, stop poking around,” there was that voice again.

I just stood in the hallway looking into my assigned room. Gertrude, on the other hand, had entered hers. She was certainly more adventurous than I. Probably why I liked her so much.

“Gertrude who’s talking to you?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to ignore it.”

Each bed contained a pillow and a folded wool blanket. I entered the room. Gertrude was in, feeling safety in numbers. I touched the blanket, my delicate soft skin would hate to be lying under that scratchy wool. How did they do it?

“Let’s see what the room at the end of the hall looks like,” Gertrude said. Never an ounce of fear in her voice.

“Don’t do it Gertrude,” that voice again.

“Screw you,” Gertrude shouted to the voice, walking briskly from the room and positioning herself in front of the door at the end of the hallway. I walked a little more timidly.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” I said.

Gertrude's hand was on the knob, she turned to smile at me. Her hand twisted. The door flew open as if spring loaded from the inside. It sucked Gertrude in and the door closed.

"Gertrude? Gertrude! GERTRUDE."

Panic set in. I never count myself among the brave, in fact, I'd be King Chicken Shit, if it weren't for Gertrude; but I squared myself up in front of the door, put my hand in the knob and readied myself to be sucked into the room too.

Fucking Gertrude, I thought as I screwed up my courage. Knob twisted. Door open. No ... Nothing. I stood in the doorway looking in at the grand room in front of me. Large four-poster bed, a chest of drawers made of dark wood, matching paneling along the walls, an ornate bathroom with the light on. How in the world did the place still have electricity?

Gertrude lay on the bed, splayed in an array of pillows

"What took you so long?" She said. "I've already been to pee and I'm back in comfort. This must have been the commandants room. Guy was living like a king."

"Don't touch anything, Gertrude."

"Whenever that voice is coming from, it better shut up," Gertrude said. She reached out for the lamp on the bedside table.

"Don't touch anything, Gertrude." The voice said again, more insistent this time.

"Fuck off," she said it in her sing-song voice.

Her fingers touched the chain hanging from the lamp. She pulled. The light in the bathroom flashed. I could smell something burning.

"Goddamn it Gertrude." The voice said.

The light cast from the bathroom shone upon Gertrude: eyes open wide, her hair splayed out among the pillows, her fingers black where she had touched the chain.

I could hear sirens wailing in the distance, getting closer. We must have set off some kind of alarm when we entered the place. After all, the house had been navy grounds at some point, probably still is. And that voice, where had it come from?

“God damn it, Gertrude.” It said again. I was surprised to learn it was mine all along. I need to learn to contain my inner voice.