

The Plight of Ms. Lola Princess Goodfellow

STANLEY SOLOMON

I

I WONDER WHO WILL BE THE FIRST FOOL to get on my last nerve today. The same line every morning: “How are you today, Ms. Lola? Did you sleep well, Ms. Lola?” The same stupid line—do they think I’m a child? If they knew better they would get out of my face and leave me alone to my thoughts. I got a good mind to cuss them out, but I am a Christian woman, and the Lord don’t like ugly.

Been here in this nursing home for nearly eight years. They call this dump Happy Valley, but they should have called it Hell’s Kitchen. Whoever built this place must have been on the run from the law, because it’s located way back off the main road. The only neighbors we have out here in Florida are the gators and them pesky mosquitoes. The food is so awful and it smells real bad. I think some old fart must have died in the corner and they left his body to rot. These people are always in my face. Can’t they just leave me be?

I miss my little cat, Mae; she always brought me such joy. If she was here, I know she would probably scratch this old witch’s eyes out for bothering me. She probably don’t even know my last name. Ms. Lola this and Ms. Lola that. My name is Ms. Lola Princess Goodfellow and I got drawers older than that witch, and all she knows is Ms. Lola. I got a good mind to hit her with my cane; maybe that will knock some sense into her knucklehead.

I just look her way and roll my eyes, and grin. Nurse Haddie has been working here since the day they broke ground on this old nursing home. She dresses like she just woke clean up and got out of bed and smell of old cat piss. I wish she would at least buy a new dress. The one she got is so old you can see all her business. That ain't too lady-like, cause a decent woman would want to keep all her business to herself. I hear tell she was married once and her snake of a husband ran off with her best friend, and ole Ms. Haddie ain't been right in the head ever since. But I just grin and keep my thoughts to myself, because I am a good Christian woman, born and raised in Elgin, South Carolina. Elgin is a quiet town where everyone minds their own business and keep to themselves. Not like this den of thieves. I can't even leave my room without someone peeping around the corner waiting to get into my things.

Yes, Elgin is a great place to live and raise children, all quiet and peaceful. Around here, I can't even take a good nap before somebody is slamming a door, or asking something crazy. I used to set on my porch and dream of faraway places of sandy white beaches and them there tropical drinks. I think they called them Pina Colados; all I've been told is that they taste right good on a hot day. But I'm a good Christian woman and alcohol don't sit too good with my teaching, but maybe a little taste won't hurt. With Jesus' blessing, that is. I miss my home every sunny day. One day soon, I'll see my little patch of land and sit on the front porch and just enjoy the sun on my face.

I might even get me a new beau. Even though I've been married three times, I think I still have some life in these bones, for the right fellow that is. In my day a woman had to get married right quick before her gray hairs started setting in. A full set of long black hair will catch a fella's eye every time. And I had the longest set of black hair in the neighborhood, right down to my behind. It's still kinda like that to this day. That's why I keep it pinned up; I don't want any of these old goats getting any ideas. They probably wouldn't even know what to do with a good piece of woman like me if they had the chance. I could bet on a good day that their plumbing don't even work. But I'm a Christian woman and I don't gamble or fornicate. And besides, I'm not studying them broke busters. The only thing they can do for me is take my trash out and they couldn't even do that without slipping and falling.

"Ms. Lola, it's time to git up!" I hear Haddie's big ole mouth over my

shoulder. Nurse Haddie must think I'm hard of hearing. She talks so loud like she's calling some hogs or something, but I just grin and look her straight in those sneaky eyes. I haven't spoken a word since that big ole police dropped my purse and me on the steps of this awful place. The last thing I remember them saying was that I hit someone with my cane, and they thought I was crazy living in that big house by myself. But I was fine, my cat Mae and I. I sure do miss my big house and my beautiful yellow daffodils and tulips as big, bright and inviting as cantaloupes on a hot summer day. I used to work in my yard for hours, just Mae and me. Mae used to run and chase squirrels all around the yard and come up to me afterwards as if she had run the race of her life.

"Ms. Lola, time for breakfast!" I hear Haddie shouting over my head. I got a good mind to tell her off just to shut her up. But I feel my pressure coming up on me. I don't want to get to upset on an empty stomach. I wonder what they are cooking me for breakfast this morning. Must be the same ole nasty grits and toast. I hope they give me a slice of that creamy butter this time. That's really the only thang I like about this place. That butter makes mighty fine hair grease. I still like to keep my appearance up just in case I meet my new beau or my maker in heaven, whichever comes first.

Lordy be, I thought I'd never get to the dining table. Haddie nearly killed me rolling me in this wheelchair from side to side. I think she must have it out for me, but Haddie is too scared the other nurse would catch her if she were to raise a hand to me again. The last time she waited till I was drowsy from sleep and knocked me clear to the floor. The only reason she had was she didn't like the way I was looking at her. But I didn't say a word because I think one day soon she's gonna make her move to cuss me out and knock me right out of this wheelchair. But I'm a Christian woman and I pray for all God's children no matter how evil their spirit. But if she tries that mess again I will beat her from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelations. Me being a Christian woman, I don't think the Lord would approve of me raising my hands to an ignorant soul. He might just let me get one good slap in, though, just to make her see those heavenly gates, even if she won't make it through them.

Breakfast is over and I steal the usual knife and fork and put them in my bag for later, because I think today I will try to pry that old door open and find my freedom. They will be surprised because they think I can't walk or talk. But they

will soon find out, I still have a little spirit in these old bones and a lot of schooling to boot. I'm trying to wait for the right time. I think it will be tonight. I hope I can still flag down a ride to the city. I think the time is right, because I'm getting old as each hour passes on the clock. Yes, tonight will be the night. I think I will lie down and rest a spell. I'm feeling a little tired this evening.

That clock can't be right. Looks like eight at night. I have slept clear through dinner and that witch Haddie didn't even wake me from my nap. That's all right; I will leave her a mean letter, and give her a piece of my mind. I don't have much time; tonight is the night I make my escape. I hope I can still muster the strength. If not, I know the good Lord will be on my side. He is the only one who knows how unhappy I've been since I've been in this dreadful place. I would not wish this place on my worst enemy, if I had any.

Where's that big bag that Bertha bought me last year? I can probably fit my whole life in it. Ole Bertha always knows how to treat her friends. She will be the first person I visit when I get out of here. One last check of the mirror and my bag. I'm ready for my travels: hairbrush, bible, stockings, underwear, and a change of clothes. Yes, everything's here. That fool Haddie even fell asleep and left the door open. She will be surprised to see me go. On second thought, she would probably dance a dance and shout Hallelujah. Goodbye all, I'm on my way to the life I left behind. Lord please guide my steps.

Lola, are you up yet? Lola, you hear me calling you. I must have slept straight through dinner here on this couch. These old folks get me so tired I don't know whether it's day or night. I better get up and check on things. Lola, time for bed. Lola must know she gets on my last nerve with her blank stares and her stupid grin. Every since the first day the policeman brought her here she's been nothing but trouble. Something just ain't right about her. Sometimes I wonder if she thinks she's a princess in a palace or even a queen. Always carrying that bible as if she's Jesus himself. Instead of walking on water, she should try to walk her way to the nearest tub and wash her backside. One day I'm just gonna leave this place and find me a good man to take care of me and retire. But before I decide to leave I'm gonna give that Lola a piece of my mind. Lola where the hell are you? I know you are here somewhere. I bet she has found her way to her room. I better check and see for sure.

II

No one here; where could she be; the room is clean. Someone left a note on the bed addressed to me; this should explain everything. Maybe the other staff took her for a walk or something. Let's see what this is all about:

Dear Haddie,

Just wanted to thank you for the worst years of my life. If I wasn't a good Christian woman, I would be standing over you and beating you silly. You have made my life a living hell. And I hope you find some God to forgive you for your sins. You are the worst excuse for a woman that I have ever met. In closing, have a nice life, and don't forget to cut off the light when you leave.

Ms. Lola Princess Goodfellow

Oh my word, she's gone. I have to go out and find her; she shouldn't be too far. That old hag could cost me my job. Wait till I find her; I knew she had something up her sleeves from the way she grinned at me. I will just drive out to find her and bring her back where she belongs.

The road is so dark; she couldn't have gotten far. I just have to keep my high beams on and my eyes peeled. I'm sure I will be able to find her with no problem; I just have to keep calm. I'll just stay on this road; she can't be too far in all this darkness. I can barely see through the window but I must keep driving. My job depends on it.

III

Lord, I knew I should have waited until morning. What's an old woman doing out on a night like this? I rather die out here in the dark close to my God than be in that old place of suffering. I bet Haddie is still asleep on the couch. I've made up my mind and I'm not turning back. Now if I can only find the highway. It's getting foggy and I'm getting colder by the minute. I know the road is out here somewhere. I should have packed my warm coat. Just a few more feet, I know I can make it. I see the highway and the headlights of an approaching automobile. If I can only make it to the middle of the road I know the driver will

see me and give me a ride. Just a few more feet, I think I can make it. I have to make it. I'm here. See me! Slow down! Slow down. My arms are getting tired. I feel the sweat building on my face. A sharp pain shoots through my body. Please stop. My body gives way, and the ground comes up to meet me. Please stop. You are going too fast. Please stop.

I hear a voice. Am I dead? Is that you, Haddie? Lola, I'm sorry I didn't see you in the road. I didn't mean to hit you. The road was foggy; I just couldn't see you. Please forgive me. Get up, Lola. Please get up. It's okay, Haddie. I'm home; I'm finally free and going to a better place. God bless you, Haddie. I'm tired and hurt bad. Just let me sleep; I just want to sleep. Don't cry; I'm a good Christian woman, Haddie, and I forgive you.