

Truth Or Consequence - 3

by J. Mykell Collinz

Sue and a small group of friends were watching a post-debate discussion on TV when Gertrude arrived home with Ron.

A talking head looked out from the TV screen, saying: "It's about time we had someone with her intelligence stepping forward."

A second head appeared in a separate window, and said: "She isn't a candidate. She's the moderator. You can't say she won the debate. She took advantage of her position and she was wrong in doing so. It's just another example of liberal-leaning academic elitism."

The first head reappeared, and said: "She challenged the candidates to think for themselves. That's liberal elitism?"

A third head appeared, and said: "If she can keep this up, continues to generate interest, mark my words, she will be in a position to make waves at the convention next month."

"This is insane," Gertrude moaned: "I'm a teacher not a con artist. How do I put my life back together again? I was happy, now I'm miserable. It's turning into a nightmare. "

"Wait until you've had more time to think about it," Ron replied: "This is all happening so fast. Don't let it throw you. It can work to your advantage. Be patient. Have fun with it."

"Fun?" Gertrude shouted: "This isn't my idea of having fun, Ron. This is madness. What does it say about our political process when I could pick students at random out of any of my classes who would do better than the actual candidates. That scares me. What's happening to people? How did we get here?"

Sue interjected: "Why don't you introduce us to your friend?"

Ron stood from the overstuffed loveseat he shared with Gertrude, turned to the group, and said: "My name is Ron Rollins. I'm pleased to meet you all. I hope I'm not intruding. I live here in town but I travel a lot. I'm covering the election for a book. Gerta and I met yesterday at the open forum. I immediately thought she would make a great candidate for political office. President seemed out of reach,

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of course. But now, oh my, how things have changed. She communicates so strongly on television, it's amazing. She could have a new career tomorrow."

"That's nonsense, Ron," Gertrude protested; then, closing her eyes, she fell back into the loveseat. Events were unreal, she thought, and Ron, it seemed, had something to do with it. She could feel his presence beside her and she wished they were along. Opening her eyes, she sat up, and said: "Let the chips fall where they may. I'm a teacher, I did what I thought was right. That's all there is to it."

"Take a look at the video," Sue suggested: "It will fine tune your attitude."

"No, I don't want to see it," Gertrude replied: "Just turn the damn thing off. Listen to some music. Open a bottle of wine. Light up a fatty. If I get busted for marijuana possession will that end my political career? Good riddance."

"Someone has to do it, Gertrude," Ron countered: "They're winning and we're losing because nobody on our side wants to bother with it. Tonight, you walked into the spotlight, and you supplied the missing ingredient, an honest perspective. Your presence, and your clear thinking, captivated a world audience. Don't run and hide. Give them more of the same."

"What are you asking her to do?" Sue interrupted: "They're already coming at her from every direction. Why make it worse?"

Ron turned to face Sue and responded: "If political trends continue unopposed, it won't be long before your university's curriculum will be determined by a multinational corporation interested in maximizing its profits. You won't like that. So why wait for it to happen without doing something? Gerta did something about it tonight. She insisted upon meaningful answers. Her performance was magnificent."

"Drop the subject," Gertrude said, getting up and switching off the TV: "What's done is done. It's time to move on. Push these chairs aside and roll up the carpet. Give me some skanky music, I wanna dance."

"Yez mizz president," Sue drawled.

"Stop that," Gertrude snapped, and then, laughing, executed a suggestive dance move in the middle of the room.

Ron expressed surprise at the level of debauchery which followed and Sue informed him: "This is standard procedure around here on a Friday night."

"We've got somebody inside the house right now," Agent Clark informed his partner: "I'm getting noisy chatter on the audio feed, but take a look at this video. That could get her busted."

"We can't use this as court evidence, Monty, you know that. Plus, we're not going to bust her for smoking pot. We want bigger things than that. And you'd better not leak any of this to the press. The director would know exactly where it came from. Let him decide what to do with it."

"He'll probably give it to the president," Agent Clark chuckled.

Gertrude awoke the next morning in a fog. As she moved from her bed to the bathroom, she had the feeling of being outside of her body, hovering next to it, objectively observing it, sensing its mortality. Automatically, she glided through her usual routine before entering the shower. With hot water pouring over her body, she began to feel grounded in the physical world again, her mind started working, and the previous evening's events came rushing into her consciousness. "Oh, god," she groaned, reaching for the soap.

She went directly to her office without eating breakfast. The dean wanted to see her, immediately.

"This is not going to just away, Gerta," the dean said: "We need to do something about it. The morning shows and all the papers are full of stories about you. Blogs go on and on about you. Your email space is over capacity. I think you should take a leave of absence from the university."

Gertrude accepted the decision without protesting. Yet anger and resentment overwhelmed her as she packed her office material. The

university bending to political pressure, not supporting her, sent a stabbing pain through her heart.

When she arrived back home, Sue and a few other friends, including Ron, were cleaning up the house from the night before.

"Maybe I'll take a trip outside the country," she muttered, thinking aloud as she opened a new bottle of wine.

"I'll go with you," Sue chimed in, holding out her glass to be filled.

"Why don't you all come along," Gertrude responded: "Ron can write a book about it."

"That won't solve anything, Gerta," Ron replied: "This next election has global implications. Get involved. You have something to offer."

"Something?" Gertrude snapped: "You're always talking about 'something,' Ron. Please be more specific. What do you want me to do? Go from talk show to talk show, haranguing the candidates? That sounds like fun, doesn't it? No! More like a nightmare. I don't even want to think about it anymore. I have research in progress, books to read, letters to write, music to learn, places to visit. I haven't got time for politics. Or any interest in it. I've been living my life according to a personal plan and I have no intention of changing that now."

Ron bit his lip to prevent himself from speaking. He had never seen her look more beautiful. While her eyes were fixed on him with an inquiring stare, he savored the experience, spellbound; and, when she finally looked away, he realized how infatuated he had become. Just being with her seemed more important than anything else.

"Here's my take on this Ron Rollins guy," Agent Clark remarked to his partner: "He knows we're watching him, so he's attempting to surround himself with distractions. Meanwhile, he's still out there recruiting, looking for new followers to infect with his subversive ideologies."

"He picked a tough cookie with the lady professor, Monty," Agent Heck replied.

"You've got that right, buddy. She did a number on those candidates. And right after meeting master Ron? How coincidental is that? There's something very suspicious about the whole thing."

"According to the dean, Monty, she wasn't even chosen as moderator until less than an hour before the debate and she had never done anything like it before."

"What the dean doesn't know could fill volumes. Drugs and alcohol? 'No, the professor always came to work sober.' Yeah, right."

"She's protecting the lady professor, Monty, we know that. Never mind the homeland security implications. Undermining the credibility of our nation doesn't bother her. Liberals are all alike."

