

More Gold

Even the pandemic hadn't stopped the neighborhood gossips. It turns out that anyone and everyone could learn to use Zoom if wine and gossip were involved. When the pandemic first hit, many people chose to quarantine with their elderly relatives. I was quarantined with my uncle, Mickey. It was during one of Uncle Mikey's Zoom and wine sessions that I found out that Mary DeLuca drove away in the family's Cadillac, leaving her husband, Giovanni. Apparently, the quarantine was the breaking point in the DeLuca's almost fifty-year marriage. This was scandalous in the neighbors' cataract plagued eyes. But the biggest scandal wasn't that Mary was gone. It was that Giovanni DeLuca did not seem to miss her.

"What is he eating?" Mrs. DeVito wondered.

"Did you see he just purchased a new Cadillac as if the old one hadn't even mattered?"

Mrs. Morelli said.

And then the gold golf cart arrived. The neighbors including me peered out from behind our curtains to watch as a shady looking guy unloaded the gold golf cart into the driveway.

"Why would he buy a golf cart?" Mrs. Morelli screeched over Zoom. "For Christ's sake, we live in the Midwest not Florida."

"No wonder she left. He's clearly lost his mind," Mrs. Bucci said.

And the golf cart sat there for days, and everyone in the neighborhood waited and watched. Finally, Giovanni emerged from his home dressed in a gold shirt, a gold mask, a pair of black slacks, and perfectly shined black shoes.

He slid into the golf cart and rode around the neighborhood like a kid with a new toy, unfazed by any of the spectators. Giovanni was living his best life. And I was jealous, insanely and irrationally, jealous of an old man in a gold golf cart.

I immediately searched online for used golf carts. I could just purchase one, I thought. But that seemed like a waste of money. I could get Uncle Mickey to buy one. Nope, he thought Giovanni's gold golf cart was a sign of dementia. It was then that I decided to pay Giovanni DeLuca a visit. I hide my motive in the guise of being concerned that he wasn't eating enough, the old Catholic casserole ruse.

Giovanni answered the front door in a gold speedo and the gold mask.

"Hey, Mr. DeLuca," I said, trying to look anywhere but there. Maybe, I thought, after getting a peek, that the gold golf cart was an old man's version of big dick energy.

"You ain't here to give me food," he stated grumpily.

I tried to protest.

"What is it? Money, the Cadillac, or you just filing a report with the nosy neighbors?"

"I want the gold golf cart," I blurted out. "I mean I don't want to steal or own it, but I ..."

I tried to think of the right word. "I covet it."

He laughed.

"I mean you look so happy. Your wife left you. You're in the middle of a pandemic, and yet you look so darn happy in that golf cart."

"Her leaving was the best damn thing to happen to me. That woman had me by the balls for years."

Don't look at the Speedo, I thought. Don't look at the Speedo.

"So, you feel free?" I asked.

"Got me a new Cadillac, a new hot tub, and a golf cart. I can spend my money how I want. I begged. I mean begged her to travel. I said Mary we're not living forever. But nope had

to save for our old age. And here we are old and the COVID could get me any minute.” He snapped his fingers “Any minute. So, I’m buying things that make me happy, and by God, if I live through this, I’m traveling to all the places I ever wanted to go.”

“Where?” I asked, realizing it was awkward just to stand there on the man’s front porch asking him to give me the secret to his newfound joy.

“Italy, maybe France.”

My heart leapt. I had always dreamed of visiting Paris, and I told him this.

“Well,” he said, “Maybe I’ll take you with me.” He winked.

I stood stunned, staring at him, and he burst into laughter.

“Weren’t expecting that. Were you? That’s the benefit of everyone thinking that you lost your mind. You can do or say just about anything. And you ain’t half bad looking if you clean yourself up.”

I awkwardly realized that I was a thirty-five-year-old woman in Disney princess pajamas. My hair was piled high on top of my head in a messy bun. I’d let myself go, and I was being assessed by a man in his 70s, and he found me lacking.

“I have to leave.” I moved to go into my uncle’s house and hide under the covers like an awkward teenager.

He laughed again. I was scurrying away when he shouted, “You clean yourself up and meet me here tomorrow at noon, and we’ll take a spin in the golf cart.”

I looked at the golf cart. It was a thing of evil, luring me with its fool’s gold color, but I wanted to ride in it. I wanted so much to be free, to have Mr. DeLuca’s ‘fuck it’ attitude.

The next day, at noon, I stood in Mr. DeLuca’s driveway dressed like I was going to a major event: gold sandals, oversized gold sunglasses, a gold mask, and a sundress. My hair was

styled and blowing in the summer breeze. If Mr. DeLuca had big dick energy, I had big tits power.

“Well, well,” Mr. DeLuca said, appearing from his house. “You clean up nice. Come on,” he said. We climbed into golf cart. “By the way,” he said as we drove down the street. “I can’t remember which one of Paula’s kids you are.”

I laughed. He didn’t even know my name. Here I was done up like a second-rate mob wife riding in a golf cart with an old man, and he didn’t even know my name. “Gemma,” I said.

“Ah, the middle one, the shy one.” He nodded as if trying to remember something. “Mary said you are a lesbian.”

I opened my mouth to say something.

“But now I think she got it wrong. Didn’t she?” He winked at me again. Ordinarily, a seventy-year-old man winking at me was creepy, but there was something charming about Mr. DeLuca’s wink. “I love this thing,” he said, patting the golf cart. “It’s so much fun. And it pisses off the neighbors.”

We rode around the neighborhood, and I felt like a gold-plated queen. He told me stories about the old neighborhood. And he dropped me off at Uncle Mickey’s front door. Uncle Mickey was waiting at the door for me like I was a teenager. I giggled.

“Bye, Giovanni,” I said as I rushed into the house. I ran to my computer. I was working remotely and had to get back to work because my lunch break was over, but later, I would definitely order some more gold accessories from Etsy.

Later that evening, when I went downstairs, I heard the neighbors on a Zoom call with Uncle Mickey.

“What is she thinking? Encouraging this behavior,” Mrs. Morelli said.

“She does know he’s a married man, and he’s ancient compared to her,” Mrs. Bucci said.

“Mickey, you have to do something about this. She could give him the COVID,” Mrs. DeVito said.

“What am I going to do? Ground her? She’s not a kid.”

“How long is she staying at your house?” Mrs. Morelli asked.

Uncle Mickey sighed. “I’m an old man. I need her here. What if I get sick? And I’ll go nuts alone in this house, not being able to see anyone. Besides if she had the COVID, I’d have it.”

“Gemma always was a bit odd,” Mrs. DeVito said

Every day for the next two weeks, I spent my lunch hour riding in that gold golf cart with Giovanni. And every day, I got a little more gold. I dyed my hair golden. I wear my new gold accessories and gold clothing.

On the Saturday of the second week, Giovanni invited me into his house. I could feel the eyes of the neighbors on us, but I went anyway because by the second week I was falling in love with my seventy-year-old neighbor. Or maybe I was in love with the way he was in love with life. He was quick to laugh and make me laugh. This was July, and we were four months into the pandemic, and everything seemed hopeless to everyone else, but nothing seemed hopeless to Giovanni.

The next day, I heard Uncle Mickey’s Zoom conversation.

“She went into his house, Mickey. Into his house,” Mrs. Morelli said.

“You don’t think they’re...” Mrs. DeVito said.

“Stop,” Uncle Mickey said.

“I wonder if it’s true about his...,” Mrs. Bucci said.

“Stop, stop,” Uncle Mickey said.

I walked over to the Zoom meeting. There were probably 30 people on the call. I leaned over Uncle Mickey’s shoulder. “It’s true,” I said and walked away, laughing. Giovanni would get a laugh from that.

Giovanni and I went on happily being lovers until September, and then one day, when I arrived at his house in my gold bikini ready for hot tub fun, I found him at the kitchen table, staring at his hands.

“Giovanni,” I said. I could feel a wave of panic moving through me, making me sweat.

“She wants to come home.”

I found the nearest chair to sit in. I knew the ‘she’ was Mary. My golden world was disappearing before my eyes.

“My kids are insisting that I take her back.”

He couldn’t look at me.

“What do you want?” My voice sounded soft and childlike.

“I made a vow. I wouldn’t have started any of this if I knew she would come back. I took a vow. I’m a loyal guy.”

It was then that I realized I had never really been in love before because I never knew until then that heartbreak was actually a physical pain that radiates from your chest and reverberates through your entire body. I wanted to cry. I wanted to scream. We weren’t going to Italy or France or anywhere we talked about. And I left his house, crying. And I cried when

Mary came back, and I cried when the gold golf cart was taken away by Gio, Giovanni's nephew.

Two weeks later, I heard another Zoom call.

"I told you that she would give him the COVID," Mrs. Bucci said.

"Horseshit," Uncle Mikey said, slamming his fist down on the table. "She hasn't seen him in two weeks. Mary bought it back with her. Don't you dare blame this on Gemma."

I ran to my room to hide and cry some more. Giovanni had COVID, and there was nothing I could do. I could not see or speak to him.

My phone rang. I didn't recognize the number, but I answered it anyway. It was Giovanni's nephew.

"Hey, Gemma, this is Gio."

I cut him off. "How is Giovanni?"

"That's why I'm calling. He wanted you to know it's just a mild case, and he's fine." Gio chuckled. "But it's true. Isn't it? You were banging my uncle."

I bristled at the word bang. "We were in a relationship." In spite of myself, my voice cracked with emotion.

"Geez, Gemma, I'm sorry, but you know Uncle Giovanni is old school."

"Yeah, yeah," I said, cutting him off again. "He told me all of that."

I stood up and starting pacing back and forth. "He told me a lot of things like we were going to Italy and France." And then I let go of all of my anger and screamed at Gio about how unfair it was, how his uncle broke my heart. "You and your family and everyone in this neighborhood can go to hell," I shouted just before I hung up the phone. I was breathless and crying, and I saw myself in the mirror. I was back in my pajamas with a messy bun. I missed

golden Gemma. I wanted her back. I wanted to be her again. I picked up my phone and texted Gio.

An hour later, I stood in the driveway in my best gold dress with my hair and make-up done although you couldn't see that under my gold mask.

Gio unloaded the gold golf cart. "I know you wanted to buy it, but he said it's a gift. He won't take your money," Gio said from beneath his black mask.

I hesitated and then shrugged. "Fine. Give me the key."

Gio laughed and handed over the key. "You know Gemma when I was about 12 I had a huge crush on your older sister, Teresa."

"Great story, Gio," I said, climbing into the golf cart.

"Anyway, my uncle noticed, and he pointed at you and said that's the one you want, the smart one. I rolled my eyes 'cause frankly you were going through that awkward junior high phase."

I clicked my seatbelt. "Does this story have a point?"

"Uncle Giovanni said you would turn out to be the prettiest sister. I think he was right."

Gio winked at me. It had the same charm as his uncle's wink.

I started the golf cart. "You coming or not?" I said.

He laughed and climbed into the golf cart.

"Rule number 1, piss off the neighbors. Rule number 2, you definitely need more gold," I said, gesturing toward his clothes as we pulled out of the driveway.