

# Erudition

## 1500 words

Roy's friend Mike had access to a cabin in Mendocino County and they were up there for a three-day weekend. Mike and his relatively new girlfriend Penny, and Roy and someone he met at the gym a few days ago, Tina.

They were down a dirt road and it was remote, and you didn't have the internet. You could pick up a couple TV channels the old-fashioned way, sort of, but that was about it for modern entertainment, so they were sitting around at night playing cards and board games. It was semi-refreshing.

They'd pulled out Pictionary and there was a clue involving a body part, and when the round was over Mike said to Roy, "Remember the guy in high school with the intimidatingly . . . large situation?"

Penny giggled and Tina didn't make any noise but she seemed to sit up a little straighter.

“No,” Roy lied, “I don’t. And that was a long time ago.”

“Not that long,” Mike said. “What do we got,” . . . and he was counting it off on his fingers . . . “like, 18 years now?”

“Around that,” Roy said, hoping to divert the subject. “Tell you one thing, they’re hammering us for reunion donations, lot of emotion in their appeals . . . You get those, right?”

“Oh yeah,” Mike said. “I gave ‘em money once, the 10-year, and they stepped up their pace. Big error.”

“Me too,” Roy said. “Did you *go* to the 10-year, by the way? I don’t remember you there.”

“I don’t remember *you* there either,” Mike said. “Anyhow . . . new round.”

“That’s it?” Penny said.

“What?” Mike said.

“Well you . . . intrigued us, is all,” she said.

“You did,” Tina said, speaking up for the first time.

Roy hadn’t gotten anywhere with Tina yet, and wasn’t sure if it was going that direction. The cabin had two bedrooms plus a sleeping loft, and he’d explained

that to Tina when he invited her, which was likely the difference-maker.

“Well, since you’re not leaving it alone,” Mike said, “reason I bring up this guy--Cragin--I ran into him at Costco a couple weeks ago.”

“Oh,” Penny said. “How was that?”

“You mean, how did he look, was he in shape and so forth?” Mike said. He was smiling, clearly enjoying this.

“That’s an odd name, Cragin,” Tina said. “What was this individual like back in high school?”

Roy thought that was kind of an odd *question*, was the personality supposed to fit the name?

“He was a bit of a character when you got to know him, but overall kind of quiet,” Mike said. “Sort of a hippy. We were with him in JV football.”

“Oh that guy, yeah,” Roy said, figuring he couldn't avoid it.

“I thought you didn’t remember him,” Mike said.

“No, but the name now, I’m placing him . . . backup quarterback, didn’t get on the field much.”

“Skinny dude,” Mike said, “not real athletic.”

“Oh,” Tina said.

“Well did he remember you at Costco?” Penny said.

“Sure, and it was good catching up. It was early enough too, you know what I mean, before they start shutting down the sample stands? So I was taking care of a freebie dinner, killing two birds at once.”

Tina said, “You’re trying to tease us. Aren’t you?”

“Dang,” Roy said. “You’re more direct than I realized.”

“No, it’s just, if someone starts a story--they met an old friend,” she said, “why keep detouring from it?”

“He does that,” Penny said. “He blurts stuff out--the shock factor--and then hangs onto it.”

“It’s not holding anything *back*,” Mike said, “but it’s like, what’s the rush? . . . But fine, Cragin lives in Santa Cruz, was in town helping his folks. Does something in tech, has a wife and a couple kids, another on the way. Said he surfs down there in his free time.”

“Skinny guys I think have an advantage at surfing,” Roy said. “Any of you ever tried it?”

“I tried it once at Club Med,” Penny said. “I never got up.”

“That’s why they start you on the sand, the good instructors,” Mike said. “If you can’t stand up, no point going in the water.”

“Is your friend Cragin still thin?” Tina said.

“Seemed to be,” Mike said. “One of those fast metabolism guys . . . Though the first time I see him in the locker room, after practice, I tell him there may not be a lot of room left for the rest of us in here.”

“Ah Jesus,” Roy said.

“Gosh,” Tina said.

“Really,” Penny said. “What was his reaction?”

“You know, he was embarrassed,” Mike said. “I was being a jerk.”

Roy said, “Can’t quite place it, but pretty sure I heard that *room* line in a movie, or book. Not *original*, the point being.”

“Anyways,” Mike said, “*now* we ready for another round? How about I make some coffee, and Babe we got any more of those Vienna Fingers?”

“Well is that his *first* wife, and such?” Tina said.

“The mother of his children?”

“That I don’t know,” Mike said. “I mean we didn’t hover in place there forever, plus he was asking *me* questions too.”

“What did he want to know?” Penny said, “and no, we’re out of the cookies. Of course there’s liquor.”

No one refused and they did resume Pictionary and they did get a little sloshed, and a half hour later the subject swung back to Cragin.

Tina said, “It’s just a bit surprising . . . someone like that . . . that he’d settle down so definitively.”

“Right,” Penny said, “so young. Not *now* so much, but when he started his family.”

“You ladies are funny,” Mike said, leaning his chair back, a cigar added to the mix. “What you’re driving at, he didn’t pleasure enough women . . . Relative to his advantage.”

Roy said, “I’m feeling the booze, but that’s the first somewhat reasonable comment you’ve made tonight.”

“I see,” Mike said, “so you’re agreeing with them. He *should* have played the field more thoroughly.”

“No,” Roy said, “the way you *presented* it was reasonable. Calling someone’s unusual--object--an

advantage. That's not bad . . . Or maybe even nicknaming it, *The Advantage*. That's better."

Penny and Tina were smiling. Mike said, "I didn't mean it that way. Reinterpret it as you like."

Roy said, "Remember the old porn star, John C. Holmes?"

"Oh yeah," Mike said.

"So, that guy pleased hundreds of women," Roy said, "I mean you would assume. And he ended up on cocaine or heroin, that whole scene, and he died early . . . It was a little more complicated, I'm thinking now, organized crime might have been involved. They did a Dateline on it, *one* of those shows."

"There you *go*," Penny said. "Your friend Cragin made the admirable choice."

"Or the safe one," Mike said. "I don't know . . . have to say, if it was me, I'd be playing the field. Just the reality."

"Me too, I'm afraid," Roy said.

"Thanks a lot," Penny said to Mike.

“Okay let’s don’t start World War 3 here,” Mike said. “All’s I’m saying, someone’s got a freakish luck of the draw, maybe they run with it a while.”

“A God’s gift,” Tina said, and she looked pretty serious, it wasn’t a joke . . . and Roy wondered how he’d ever match up, the bar being set ridiculously high, if it came to that.

Penny said, “I had a boyfriend who was intimidated by other men.”

“Which one?” Mike said.

“Not one of the ones I told you about. Dale . . . Which was pretty weird, since Dale was a very attractive man. In the Adonis category, literally.”

Now Mike was looking a little stiff, but he kept his mouth shut.

“How was intimacy?” Tina said.

“Ooh boy,” Roy said.

“Well,” Penny said, “since we’re in full disclosure mode, and sort of loopy from the wine . . . great.”

“But there was a problem,” Mike said, sounding like he was clenching his teeth.



“He was beautiful,” Penny said, “he was endowed, he had manners, he was caring.” She started to kind of stare off in the distance.

“We get it,” Roy said. “What happened?”

“We were at an Oakland A’s game,” she said, “and the A’s rallied in the bottom of the last inning and people were standing up, so Dale and I did, and a man behind us told us to sit down. That made me more determined to keep standing up, but Dale sat right down.”

They were quiet for a minute, and Tina said, “I’m not connecting the dots.”

“When we got home,” Penny said, “I demanded we go in the bedroom right away.”

“Okay I can see that,” Tina said, “you needed his manhood reinforced. How did that go?”

“That part went fine,” Penny said. “We broke up the next day though.”

Mike and Roy looked at each other.

“Who else was on that JV team?” Mike said.

“You know something, that’s a good question,” Roy said.

