

Extension

Boggs said to Jessica, “Remember the time we were lounging around your pool and the fat guy went off the diving board backwards?”

“No,” Jessica said, “no recollection whatsoever.”

“You don’t? Jeez, we sort of laughed about that for years, I thought . . . at the minimum weeks, days, something.”

“You’re going to refresh me *anyway*, so go ahead.”

“Well, someone’s daring him to trick dive. He does have a way about him when he gets up there, works that wheel with his foot.”

“Adjusting the tension. *I* did that.”

“So . . . you were athletic *too*. Point being, this guy probably clocks in at 275 but he’s still a player, taking the issue seriously.”

“What are you talking about, *issue*? It’s a condominium. You can hear the shuffleboard pucks loud and clear, even underwater.”

“Everyone’s taking it easy, you’re saying?”

“That’s the idea.”

“It’s discs, though.”

“What?”

“The proper name of the equipment. Not pucks . . .
What are the sticks called?”

“How should I know. *Not* sticks obviously now.”

“Cues. I lived in Florida for a while. I’m sure I told
you about that.”

“Well whoopee,” Jessica said.

“Our guy though, he’s all set, toes on the end of the
board, and then it’s like an afterthought, he reverses it.
His back to the water.”

“Unh-huh.”

“Guy sticks his arms out parallel, closes his eyes,
looking like a Zen deal now, buckles the knees and
springs up beautifully, high, you almost can’t believe it.”

“Uh-oh,” Jessica said.

“Yeah. Some kind of twist in the air, you had to give
him credit there. But on the way down--*just* about clears
it--but clips his chin on the board.”

“Wow.”

“Or mouth. Either way, there’s blood . . . he takes it
out on the guy in the cheap seats who *suggested* the
dive.”

“Wait. Is that when the two fellows got in the bear hug?”

Boggs said, “So why’d you make me tell the whole thing?”

“I didn’t remember the first part, what precipitated it.”

“You need some Vitamin D or something. Jog shit loose in the back of the cortex.”

Jessica didn’t say anything and Boggs felt bad he went too far, probably touched a nerve. She had mentioned one time a relative had Alzheimer’s toward the end, maybe an aunt.

He said, “Anyhow, you got the concept, so we’re good.”

“Concept of *what*? See now this is the kind of thing that irks me.”

“Loose ends. They don’t always cinch up neat and tidy . . . I told you about the guy in San Francisco, right? With the diagnosis? *His* version of loose ends?”

The cocktail waitress came by and Jessica put up a finger for another daiquiri. “Roy you’re an idiot,” she said.

“Fine, you put a gun to my head, I suppose the reason I conjured up the diving board incident is because I had some words with a guy in my neighborhood today. Or more like he had words with me.”

“That would be a first,” she said, and Boggs couldn’t always tell when she was being sarcastic, but at least she was smiling. The booze kicking in probably helped. Jessica lit a cigarette, which you could still do in Vegas casinos. “Finish the pool story. I’m fuzzy on what happened after the bear hug.”

“Now you’re pulling my leg,” he said. “Testing me.”

“Could be. You’ve been known to embellish.”

“So . . . or lemme rephrase it. The *Millenials* are always starting stuff with *so*. You notice? I hate that . . . Our guy and the opponent--not *as* big but matches up reasonable--they get into, like you say, the Sumo lock, belly to belly, and then teeter-totter toward the edge of the pool.”

“One or two people started screaming, I remember.”

“I don’t recall that part. Bottom line, they plunge into the water. They’re under for about as long as you

reckon they should be, and just when you think this isn't good, our guy pops up, the diver. And unfortunately, the unthinkable. He drowned the lighter guy . . . which admittedly points out, for all that's wrong with being a fat guy, it doesn't hurt to be one in an underwater fight."

"Okay fine," Jessica said, "you're a regular comedian."

"My deal though, shifting gears back to that. The guy who read me the riot act today. I'm trying to gauge first of all, did I do anything wrong."

"What did you do?"

"Threw some pop flies to a couple kids in the cul de sac."

"That seems harmless enough. What's the second thing you're trying to gauge, *after* did you do anything wrong?"

"Is the guy Mob."

"That *could* play a role in your future interactions," she said. "The pool thing though, some people dove in, right?"

“They did. One of them an older guy, out here minding his own business, laying in the sun reading the Atlantic Monthly.”

“Really? You remember the actual magazine?”

“I’m just saying. That *type*. Well-off enough individual, likely owned a vacation unit. Catching some R&R in the desert.”

“And so . . . it got broken up, correct? No harm no foul.”

Boggs said, “Weird expression coming out of *you*. Where’d you get that from?”

“Listen, I have to meet Sharon. Are we still on for that movie?”

“Hey why not,” he said.

When he got home there was no sign of the neighborhood kids, and that made it easier, no decisions at the moment.

Finishing off the pool business in his head, re-running it, yeah the out-of-town guy went in but it was a half-effort, him staying out of the way as two younger dudes plunged in right behind him and broke it up

pretty easily and a few seconds later everyone's heads were back above the surface.

And it may not have been as dramatic as all that . . . the diver and the guy who dared him to do it did have each other locked up but they were probably in shallow enough water where they could have stood up and saved themselves. But stories always told better when there was a threat of somebody perishing.

The follow up, the more juicy part, was the two battlers instead of *thanking* the rescuers *turned* on them for interfering, and there were words and someone from the management office which overlooked the pool area slid open a door and told everyone to cool it . . . and the young guys got out of there.

So now you had--forgetting the Atlantic Monthly guy--the two bozos who got into it in the first place lounging around the pool together like nothing happened, and Boggs wondered if there was ever a sequel to the whole shebang.

It would have been interesting to stick around a little longer and find out, but back then he had to get to work, he was dealing cards at the Tropicana, second

shift. It wasn't terrible, when you stacked it up against other jobs he'd had, but your feet did bother you when you got off.

Now he didn't have to do that any more, work for someone else. On account of that very gig, dealing the 21, and Boggs didn't believe in karma, but whatever.

One night you had a guy, plenty of enthusiasm, laying a green chip on two hands at once, occasionally upping it beyond that. The guy was having fun, and he went up 4 or 5 hundred, and Boggs watched him a little more carefully and was convinced the guy didn't know how to card-count but was at least playing the basic strategy you could memorize out of a book. When to hit, stand, double down, split pairs--all that.

That table, Boggs was dealing out of his hand. Mostly on the Strip it was shoes by then, 8 decks, and the shuffle was a pain in the ass. This is before they went automatic.

Still, every casino kept a few tables going the old fashioned way for whoever might prefer it. It was more fun for sure working out of your hand, and you could

flash a few moves here and there as you delivered the cards.

Card counters--the real ones--wouldn't touch a game dealt out of the hand, since they knew the dealer could cheat you, and Boggs wouldn't disagree with them on that.

One way was you'd deal seconds, which involved subtly peaking at the top card and if it wasn't favorable--meaning the customer might win the hand--then you flipped him the second card instead.

You could even take it a step further, deal *thirds* if the second card wasn't the greatest.

Now and then a player would pick up on it and yell out as the dealer was raking in his bet, 'Hey, that guy just dealt me the wrong card!' and a pit boss would come over trying to look concerned and he'd check with the dealer, and the dealer would raise an eyebrow and tilt his head like what can you do, another nutcase at my table, and the pit boss would say something cordial enough to the player and that would sort of diffuse it.

Boggs hadn't cheated anyone in a while, didn't enjoy it, and didn't see why you needed to with the house

always having the edge. If a player got on a hot streak the idea was keep him happy, keep him there as long as possible until the odds came back to reality and eventually the guy went limping off.

This night though, with the upbeat guy at the table betting pretty large and ahead the 4 or 5 hundred, there were three other players. Two of them were together, a man and woman speaking what Boggs guessed was Russian. They were playing 5 dollar hands, the table minimum, no big deal.

But the other player was a middle-aged woman Boggs had dealt to before, and he pegged her as a degenerate gambler who frittered away her weekly paycheck in here. She was always pleasant about it, even tipped him sometimes, which was tough to take. She'd introduced herself once as Shirley.

Tonight even though the one guy was winning, the cards weren't falling for Shirley, and she was down to about 50 bucks in chips. And Boggs was afraid of this since she'd done it once before, and now she shoveled it all forward, letting it ride on one final hand.

You figured it wasn't going to matter, even if she won and managed to pull herself away from the table tonight and went home, that she'd blow it soon enough anyhow, but still . . . and Shirley drew a king and a 2 and asked for a hit, and Boggs couldn't help it, he peeked at the top card in his hand, and it was a 10 so he bypassed it and dealt her the second one which was a 5, giving her 17, not that great but Boggs had 14 and hit it with a 9 and busted.

Sure enough Shirley picked up her chips and got up and said goodnight, and a few more hands went by and the Russian couple was gone and it was just the one guy left, and the guy asked Boggs how did the breaks work, and Boggs said it could vary by casino but here they worked 60 minutes and got 20 off, and that they weren't allowed to check their watches but he could feel a break coming on, and where are you from, and how's your night going otherwise?

They didn't want you over-conversing with the customers but it wasn't a busy shift and they weren't going to fire you for small talk, and the guy said fine,

he's in Vegas looking at some property actually, you got a nice town here, and how's yours going.

Boggs said good enough, and then a fresh dealer did appear, young gal named Kim who he'd wondered a couple times could you put the moves on, and anyhow they made the transition and Boggs told the guy to stay safe.

The Tropicana back then featured a snack bar, mostly designed for employees, but the public was welcome too, if they happened to find it. Not much to the place, no glitz at all, some high round tables to eat at after you ordered at a counter. But it was quick and the tamales were dang tasty, as good, at least, as any of the taquerias Boggs had tried in Vegas.

Which is what he was working on now, a couple of those babies, dipping them into a red sauce they gave you, when the guy from the tables showed up.

"Mind if I join you?" the guy said, sitting down, not waiting for an answer so Boggs didn't offer one.

The guy looked around and said very quietly, "I seen what you did . . . helping us out . . . that one hand."

Boggs said, "And you're mixed up my friend."

“Or more accurately,” the guy said, “helping her out. The gal. Or trying to .”

Boggs didn't say anything. What you sort of did want to ask the guy, if you could admit to it, was had he done any good for Shirley in the end, even a smidgeon's worth?

“You have a good heart,” the guy said, “you demonstrated that. Plus a little nerve. You should get into flipping houses, it's a less time-consuming effort than what you've got going, currently.”

Boggs wondered what having a good heart or nerve had to do with success in the real estate business, and he still didn't say anything, and the guy pulled out a business card and handed it to him and said give me a call sometime, and winked and said to have a good rest of the evening.

Boggs fingered the card for a minute or two, fingered it for a couple weeks at home on the couch watching TV, and finally called the guy. The guy, Toby, remembered him right away, and said first thing would be he could use some bird-dogging help in Vegas, since he himself lived in Oklahoma City . . . and one thing led

to another, and 18 months later Boggs found himself sufficiently in the real estate business to where he could quit his job.

Bird-dogging it turned out meant digging up potential deals for the guy, specifically houses in various stages of foreclosure where the numbers made sense. Boggs was a quick-enough learner, and pretty good at zeroing in on the right ones and not wasting time with the marginal deals, and a month later he'd thrown some possibles Toby's way, and Toby ended up closing on one and dropped a 5 thousand dollar finder's fee on him. Boggs decided bird-dogging had potential.

After a while he started making his own deals here and there, and Toby had no problem with that, and meanwhile Toby had picked up a dozen properties in Las Vegas mostly thanks to Boggs, and he hired Boggs to manage them.

As a bonus--and you had to give the guy props for generosity, though Boggs figured Toby looked at it as a two-way street, that you keep people happy it's good for business--Toby told him to go ahead and move into the

one on McFarland Place, and don't worry about the rent for awhile.

This one needed rehab, but nothing earth shattering, you could live there fine, and Boggs moved in a couple months after he quit his job at the Tropicana.

And things had worked out all right there for several years, Boggs keeping a modest profile in the neighborhood and continuing his various partnerships with Toby, who didn't live in Oklahoma City anymore but had moved to Tampa--but same deal, he was an out-of-state landlord and Boggs being local made the difference.

Last week Boggs came home one afternoon and two of the neighbor kids that you'd see playing sports or skateboarding or riding bikes around--Billy and Matt--were in the cul de sac playing catch with gloves and a hardball. Boggs went inside and watched them out the kitchen window for a while and figured what the heck, and he dug up some old tennis balls and went out there and told them we can't use the hardball for this, but who can catch these pop-ups . . . and the kids got real

interested and took it as a challenge and Boggs started off easy, letting his arm loosen up, and then started throwing the ball higher, until ten minutes in when he really started cutting it loose, putting those things way up into the stratosphere.

Not quite, but the kids were the right age where that's how they saw it, and Billy and Matt would stagger around under ball after ball as they came down and rarely be able to make the catch, and the activity drew a few other kids as spectators and when Boggs finally conceded that his arm was hurting and that'd be it for today, Matt, or maybe it was Billy, said that was the coolest *thing*, and when could they play again.

Boggs said he'd try, and he went inside and he figured he better ice his arm and he was glad he did because it was hard to sleep that night, there was pain radiating out of the shoulder into the meat of the tricep and you couldn't get in a satisfactory position, and he figured if he *hadn't* iced it he might be in for a doctor visit.

But the arm rebounded and the next afternoon he resumed the high-fly competition, and more kids joined

in, and Boggs hammed it up by describing the action out loud like a play-by-play announcer.

This went on 5 or 6 days in a row and it seemed harmless enough--in fact Boggs was starting to get into it, feeling pretty strong out there, challenging himself to top his previous throws, turning back the clock a bit--until the guy from #49 McFarland came out of the house and got in his face.

This was 10 in the morning, the kids were in school, and Boggs was in the driveway hosing down his car. If it was cocktail hour that would have almost been better, because you maybe chalk it up to liquor getting the better of the guy and him overreacting. The guy was about 35. What he simply said was don't do this any more, you're causing trouble around here.

Technically he said *no more--don't do this no more*--and the accent did sound New York and the guy looked pretty dang Italian if you had to place him, which was why Boggs had brought it up that way to Jessica . . . his *second* concern, given the reality of Vegas--after was I doing anything wrong and didn't realize it--was the guy might be Mob.

Boggs wasn't sure what connection if any the guy had to the kids. You didn't want to ask around and you sort of didn't want to know. Especially if he was a dad or uncle of one of the ones who'd been having the innocent fun chasing the fly balls.

That was in the Silver Dollar, not on the Strip but on Fremont Street—old Vegas--where he'd gotten together with Jessica yesterday and told the diver story and mentioned the neighbor. He liked it there because the smoke wasn't as bad as most of the other casinos, who knows why, maybe the configuration of the place.

The Silver Dollar had a comfortable little sports book as well, and today he stopped in again and laid a few bucks on UCLA to cover this weekend, then did a couple errands downtown, had to look something up in the courthouse involving one of his rental properties, and hit Trader Joe's for some organic burger as the last stop.

Hanging the left turn off Concordia onto McFarland, Boggs could see a bunch of the kids ahead, riding bikes and goofing around, and you were going to

have to make a decision here pretty quick . . . and when he parked, some of the kids came over and one of them asked is now a good time to throw us some high flies.

What were you going do, it wasn't a perfect analogy but Boggs thought of a bunch of puppy dogs waiting for a biscuit, who hadn't done anything wrong in their whole lives yet.

He said give him a couple minutes and he went inside and got the tennis balls and stretched his right arm out good--by now he had a routine which worked pretty well, using a high shelf for leverage.

There'd been a situation a few years back, a typical deadbeat tenant deal that unfortunately escalated into threats against Boggs and Toby when they proceeded to evict the people, and then a guy showed up and spoke to the tenants and they stopped the threats and moved out. Toby had sent the guy, and he was a felon on parole it turned out, a tough customer, and Boggs asked Toby about it and Toby said you don't like to have to go there, but you need a hole card if you ever do.

This was a new side of Toby, a slightly scary one, but Boggs couldn't help thinking now were you going to need to go there yourself.

He finished his stretching and he came back out, ready to fire the ball into the stratosphere once more.

He got the thing going and the ball was flying high and you still had the original kids Matt and Billy circling around out there plus the 3 or 4 others who'd become regulars, and Boggs had to delegate whose ball the next one was so they wouldn't crash into each other . . . meanwhile keeping an eye on #49.

It got to be dinnertime and the game dispersed. The guy waited until it was over, kind of like Boggs figured it would happen, and the doorbell rang and the guy asked him if he didn't understand English.

Boggs hesitated and said, "You want to come in for a second?" Not sure where he was going with it, but it seemed better than the alternative.

The guy was starting to answer when another man's voice called his name, *Frankie*.

It was Mr. Munroe standing there, the older guy who lived a couple doors up from Boggs at #27, and

Frankie turned and Munroe said, “Be a good boy and go home now.”

Frankie stared at him for a minute and then scrunched up his face but did as he was told, and Boggs and Munroe watched him go back down the block and disappear into his house.

“Young folks,” Munroe said.

Boggs was trying to put it together, were Mr. Munroe and Frankie related somehow, or have a history, or what. He’d never seen the two of them socialize in the neighborhood before, if that counted for anything.

Boggs had learned by now it wasn’t always worth it, it was easier just to go with stuff.

He said, “Well I guess you never know, what can hit a nerve.”

“Nah, you don’t,” Munroe said.

