

Gravity

Parker Blue said to the woman, who he knew by now as Polly, “Welp. I *think* we got it right. At least I hope.”

“We may not have,” Polly said.

“But?”

“You still seem convinced there’s a but,” she said.

This was getting weird, and he figured whatever. It was rough enough wasting three days on a jury, you didn’t need to clarify anything now, much less argue. Bottom line, they’d let the guy go.

They were around the corner from the courthouse in the designated lot. Blue thought about it-- should I, shouldn’t I-- and said, “That’s my car.”

“So?” Polly said.

“So we’re done. It’s been real.”

“You’re *not* going to ask me to get a bite then. I was building up to should I risk it.”

“Jeez. *I* was building up to, do I want to get bossed around.”

Polly said, “You’re kinda strange.” Standing there.

Blue said, “Okay I’m getting in. When I look to my right as I’m backing out--which as you can see it’s a bit tight with that pole--you’re either there or not.”

“You’re strange *and* an ass,” she said, but she got in.

Blue said, “My *dad* used to play with a guy, can’t remember his name, I think Marty something. He was colorful.”

“Excuse me, but you’re comparing that to *this*?”

Polly said. They were in an Irish pub in Novato called the *Harp In* and the Australian Open tennis was on.

“My dad’s guy,” Blue said, “he had this procedure on his serve. He’d get his arms gyrating like a couple vertical pistons, and then he’d wiggle his hips. This is all before the toss went up.”

Polly said, “I like how *he* wiggles his hips better.”

Looking at the tv, some tall skinny lefthander with an eastern European name having just fired off an ace.

“Nah, see, you’re mixed up. Fine, the result just then was good, but *these* guys, it’s all about an economy of motion.”

“Open-minded women notice wiggles,” she said, “even if chauvinist pigs don’t.”

“Whoa Nellie,” Blue said, convinced now he should have trusted his original instincts and gotten the hell out of there nice and simple.

Polly said, “When you asked the judge to re-read the particular part of the testimony, what on earth was *that*? We’re all rolling our eyes. You could tell, obviously, and you seemed to relish it.”

When the jurors first convened and were instructed to name a foreman, for whatever reason they decided on Blue. So toward the end of the trial, with the jurors deadlocked like a bunch of idiots, he figured he had the right to get testimony read back, what was the big deal.

Blue said, “It wasn’t the judge, it was the court clerk who re-delivered it. A judge isn’t going to stoop to that level.”

“Listen to yourself,” she said. “Out of a dozen individuals we had to sit there and listen to, it was interesting you picked that part.”

“Uh-huh. And you think you might be overreacting, just a *tad*? . . . Meanwhile pretty brutal actually, how

they pin you in there, when all's you're doing is your civic duty. The bad guy almost has more rights.”

Polly was watching the tennis again, the players having switched sides, the other one serving, a nice looking dark skinned guy Blue placed from Spain or Argentina. “You agree?” he said.

“Well,” she said, “it’s amusing you call him the bad guy now. Since we unanimously decided he wasn’t. Eventually.” She pulled out her phone and started tapping around and Blue hoped he was off the hook on the read-back critique. Polly put the phone away and said, “Or *was* it unanimous?”

“It *probably* was,” Blue said. “What, you feel some of them came around simply to conclude matters? Against their better instincts?”

“Likely so. Especially since it was clear you and the African-American gentlemen Rico weren’t going to budge, even if we drove a Mack truck over you . . . I *didn’t* think much of the one cop though. That I will give you.”

“The third one?”

“The second one. Please don’t fool with me, I’m not in the mood. And you’re not very funny, I’m learning.”

Blue was thinking if I’m that bad what are you still doing here . . . but there she was, signalling the bartender for another. It was admittedly a cozy place, so her sticking around may have nothing to do with him. There was an old-fashioned fireplace going and other tv’s spread around, one of them featuring a rugby match that was drawing a lot bigger crowd than the dumb tennis.

Blue said, “The women’s matches, I can sometimes get into. Depending who’s playing.”

Polly managed a slight smile. “You’re all over the place. And *still* an ass.”

“The third cop,” he said, “I had an encounter with the guy one time.”

Polly considered it. “*That* officer made the most sense. The second, as I say, his tone didn’t ring true, not to mention his timeline . . . and even the first, he was a bit mechanical, like they may have propped him up.”

“The first was a rookie cop. That’s how he’s taught, guy was going by the book, disseminating his information. Nothing wrong with that.”

“Perhaps . . . but clearly you dangled your loose end to get me to ask you about it, so hey, go for it if it makes you feel better.”

Blue, in his conscious mind anyway, hadn’t thought about sleeping with Polly when they’d sort of hit it off in the little vending machines hallway halfway through the trial. Polly had been carrying on about a hike she’d taken in Mendocino on newly preserved coastal land. Blue peppered her with a few questions and decided she might be fun to have a drink with when this thing mercifully got wrapped up.

Now, hard to pinpoint, but her laying on the sarcasm--he was starting to feel it, the sleeping with her part.

“Fine, since you ask,” he said, “That guy gave me a ticket once.”

“How come I should have known,” she said. Playing it cool, but he had her attention.

“A non-moving violation, but the circumstances pissed me off. I was parked in front of--you know that real estate office on Center Street, right? Next to the deli? There was road construction going on, they were laying a new sewer line, and I couldn't angle into the spot quite tight enough. A parallel parking deal.”

“So he did the right thing, citing you. Get over it.”

“He only cited me because the construction screwed *him* up too, with all the backup, and he wanted to blame it on someone. So he picked me, even though my sticking out a couple extra inches had nothing to do with the traffic issue.”

“Human nature,” Polly said.

“I came out of the real estate office as he's putting the ticket under my wiper and I calmly point out that my vehicle is not the problem.”

“What did he say?”

“He didn't say anything, he finished his business and started getting back in the squad car. So I added, if he's having a bad day--such as if his girlfriend didn't cook his eggs right--don't take it out on ordinary citizens minding their own business.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. So the mope, he does an about-face and comes back and cuffs me. It was all for show. There was nothing he could charge me with. But he made me stand there on the sidewalk, paraded me around a bit, getting a kick out of it--and in no rush, with the road work grinding forward progress essentially to a halt.”

Polly said, “Well Gee, hard to argue with *that* logic. Why fight traffic?”

“Then naturally I’m greeted by a few people I know. One of them a client. Not a normal, *hey howya doing* type thing, as it unfolded.”

“Wait. You do something where you have clients?”

“Used to . . . Make a long story short . . .”

“Please. Spare me the suspense.”

“A couple years later I join a fitness place. The one up on Nave Drive, it’s changed names a few times. But *you* know, like all the doofuses after Christmas, the 15 pound spare tire, the resolution . . . So I’m on a machine, leaning back, I got a personal trainer holding a clipboard going through the motions, the free session they give you when you’re new. She gets me changing

positions to the left, and on the machine next to me, grunting up a storm but not accomplishing much, is the cop . . . Ron, I found out was his name.”

“Wow. Did he recognize you?”

“Not even remotely. You need to understand, a guy this full of himself, there’s no room for anyone else. And no, he didn’t recognize me during the trial either.”

“Hold on now,” she said, “that form they make us fill out--where they list the witnesses and ask if we know any of them?”

“Yeah?”

“That makes it sound like . . . you lied under oath.”

“Whatever. I could always say I didn’t know his last name. Which I did happen to find out, asking around at the front desk--Jorgensen--but that’s irrelevant.”

Polly said, “Hmm. So is that the punch line? You paid him back today by dismissing the case? So he doesn’t get credit for an arrest, or however they reward them?”

“Sure, why not,” Blue said.

“Uh-oh, there’s more.”

“A bit. Nothing earth-shattering, if that’s what you’re looking for, but I managed to drop a barbell on his mouth.”

Polly had swung 90 degrees sideways by now on her barstool. “You have *got* to be kidding.” The tall lefty was still firing off aces but the Australian Open was off the radar at the moment.

“It was around the time Trump was whining about the size of his inauguration crowd . . . And don’t worry, I won’t ask about your personal politics . . . By this point I have Ron’s routine down, that on the even days-- Monday, Wednesday, Friday--he does upper body work, and finishes it off with those bench presses where they lay on their back.”

“You can ask about my politics, I don’t mind,” she said.

“Anyways, guys *spot* other guys when they’re benching. Meaning the lifter is typically okay on his own the first 6, 7 reps . . . but if he’s going for 10, those last three can be dicey without a little assistance. You can picture the drill, I’m sure, the other guy standing there holding part of the weight--or at least *ready* to hold it.”

Polly didn't say anything.

“Needless to say,” Blue said, “I worked my way into the loop. What I did, to make things cleaner--and have the idiot trusting me--I spotted him a few sessions first, *correctly*, prior to the one where I let the thing slip . . . Ron had stepped it up some too, was trying to bench over 3 that day--3 hundred--which he shouldn't have been attempting, the fitness level wasn't there.”

Polly took a minute. “You're saying,” she said, “it was his own fault then.”

“Exactly right. We all need to understand our limitations.”

“And stay within the parameters.”

“Uh-huh . . . But on that other thing, that you're hung up on why I had 'em re-read the testimony from?”

“Okay let's hold on here. What happened with Ron exactly?”

“What was the *upshot*? Well, my guess is he was sore for a while. A fair amount of blood and so forth. May have lost a few teeth in the process . . . It was hard to tell, when he was on the witness stand, were any of those current ones replacements, or what.”

“And . . . he never bothered you? Followed up in any way?”

“Nah. After all, it was an accident . . . Though at that point it did seem reasonable to stop going to the gym. The truth is, I can fool myself with those machines, but nothing replaces an actual *sport*.”

Polly considered it. “You know something, is this the liquor talking? Or did this really happen?”

“It did,” Blue said. “I’m not proud of it. Necessarily . . . What it sort of is, a buddy of mine, he got a terminal diagnosis. Fortunately thank God it was false, they screwed something up in the lab, or otherwise in the medical chain. But when he was out of the woods he announced it was a wakeup call--not to let shit go.”

“I *see*. So you embraced the same principle.”

“Somewhat, yeah. Made sense . . . But listen, once and for all on that other deal, what *was* wrong with the read-back of the defendant’s friend’s statement? I saw it as relevant to the mental state of the perp. The *alleged* perp.”

“Right,” Polly said. “Experiences at strip clubs--replete with colorful descriptions--are solid grounds for making legal determinations.”

“We’re laymen, don’t forget,” Blue said. “Every little piece of the puzzle helps.”

A friendly waitress asked if they were hungry yet, or still good with the drinks. Blue said thanks, they’d let her know in a minute.

“So?” he said to Polly.

“What’d you have in mind?”

“Well--and it normally wouldn’t be the case--but I have a little time-share at Bodega Bay. It’s not much, but this is my month.”

“Is that so . . . You’re not in that fancy neighborhood? With the golf course that doesn’t belong?”

“Yeah. Not that fancy. The good thing about the golf course, when you think about it, it could be worse. Less housing this way.”

“Ah. And what were you going to ask me about out there, as opposed to here?”

This was a slight curve ball, and Blue tried to come up with something semi-logical without stumbling around. “Well, work, for one,” he said. “Your job history and such. I’m guessing that could take a while.”

“Curious choice,” she said. “How about you start us off then?”

“Sure, if you insist . . . Well, the *best* job I ever had hands-down was being a bike messenger. Every day was different, no one looking over your shoulder, your walkie-talkie crackling with activity. Plus all that exercise. You were in a sweat all day long.”

“Sounds interesting,” Polly said. “I’ve had a few, but if you pin me down, the *all-around* best would have been the dog walker position, in Bel Air, for a sports agent. There were perks.”

“Gee. Such as?”

“Well, a bi-product was I got to meet star athletes. Some college ones, but mainly NBA and NFL players. No need to throw out names but you’ve probably heard of a couple of them . . . Of course this was a few years back.”

“You . . . *met* these folks?” Blue said. “Or . . . it went beyond.”

“Went beyond. You know, now and then.”

Blue took some time. “Actually then, no need to go all the way out to Bodega Bay. *Here’s* fine, for continuing the discussion.”

“You’re not telling me,” Polly said, “you’re intimidated by my past.”

“Me? Not at *all* . . . See now you’re projecting.”

“Really,” she said. “I was debating it internally--is this guy going to try something--and am I okay with it if he *does*.”

“Hmm. And the verdict?”

“Inconclusive.”

“Yeah, well,” Blue said.