

Quasi

2000 words

Pete was taking a surfing lesson today, and halfway through he was thinking this was the dumbest idea I ever had.

The concept was shaky to start with, trying to learn a somewhat hairy water sport at age 42, but he'd let a couple people talk him into it, that something *fresh* and *in nature* would be beneficial . . . and okay fine, they meant well.

His big mistake though was booking Tammy as the instructor.

Tammy could surf her head off and she seemed to have a nice personality--until now--and she'd looked perfectly presentable in her shorts and tanktop as well, when the waitress introduced them officially in the *Crow's Nest* last night.

So Pete got duped, and here he was.

There were other instructors if you researched it, but the two most visible ones were an old guy like him, and a kid who was probably in high school.

Neither seemed as appealing to spend 90 minutes with as Tammy, but Pete was re-thinking that entirely at the moment.

They were halfway into the lesson and Tammy had him on the sand, they hadn't gone *near* the water yet, and Pete was on his chest on top of an old-style huge surfboard and she was making him stand up and lie back down.

Going on like 500 times now.

His stomach muscles were in spasm and his knees where all chaffed up and his wrists felt like they'd both been sprained, and even his chin was taking a beating from repeatedly having to contact the board.

Pete said, "I'm starting to think of it a different way."

"Well that's your first mistake," Tammy said, "trying to apply thought to the core fundamental of the sport."

"Yeah, well," Pete said. "*My* thought, was do you have a bikini on underneath that stuff? If you did--or

maybe it doesn't even matter, you can leave on your full attire--but how about I watch *you* demonstrate for a while?"

"You're wasting time," Tammy said. "We'll never get into the water today at this rate."

"I didn't even think about it, but are those yoga pants? Lot of cross-over these days."

She said, "You ask a lot of questions. You need to be more single-minded if you expect to prosper in a new pursuit."

"You're getting formal on me," Pete said. "Which tips your hand, that you're not local. Originally."

"That's an interesting take. If I was going to place you, I'd say you're from Tarzana."

"I don't even know where that is," he said. "But I'll make you a deal. Let's knock this stuff off, and go have lunch."

Tammy said, "And? . . . I'm waiting to hear how that's a deal."

"I'll figure it out on the way up there," Pete said. "Then you'll see."

Tammy said, “Well you’re becoming uncooperative, that much is obvious.”

“That’s *your* interpretation. I’m shot here. I haven’t been worked this hard since junior high school.”

Tammy suggested finishing off the session with some easy jogging in that case, pointing out that Pete could lose a few pounds in the mid-section, which would definitely help with the standing up and maintaining your balance on a surfboard.

Pete said, “I like that place up past the sunglasses shop. *King’s Highway Grill*, I think it is?”

“The fusion one?”

“See, you didn’t change the subject, so I can tell you’re interested. When’s your next lesson?”

Tammy said she didn’t have another one today so she supposed she couldn’t back out of it, the offer, and they thankfully left the beach and headed up the hill, though walking on cement, he felt *different* body parts hurting now.

They started with a couple of tropical drinks with the little umbrellas sticking out of the glasses and Pete

said *Cheers* and thanks for putting up with a poor student.

Tammy said he wasn't a poor student, just an indifferent one.

"What happened to the surfboard though?" he said. "You just leave it there?"

"Yeah."

"Too big and heavy, you mean? No one'll steal it?"

Tammy laughed. "That's the hope. Though I do lock my door at night."

"You're saying," Pete said, "don't underestimate the wealthy? They're unpredictable like the rest of us?"

"I'm saying," Tammy said, "you don't hear of a lot around here, but I make it a policy to watch my back, wherever I am."

"Oh yeah? Where's that *been*, you're referring to?"

"I was born and raised in Cleveland," she said. "But getting back to what you were saying--what did they do to you in junior high, that you pretend to be so traumatized by?"

"Ah, we had this PE teacher. Not worth going into the specifics. Bottom line, he tortured us for three years.

And every day you were afraid he was going to embarrass you, on top of it.”

“We had one of those too.”

“Nah, not *this* guy you didn’t. He’d be in jail today, probably. Or at the minimum, bankrupt from all the lawsuits.”

“Gosh.”

“Times were different, and it wasn’t the worst thing to make it through that stuff. Even my friend Ray, who was very defiant back then, he says kids today have it too easy.”

Tammy said, “How did Ray turn out?”

“Not great. Ray’s on hemodialysis.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“But he’s had an eventful life, is my impression. I think he was in some trouble. Kind of matured his way out of it.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Good *old-fashioned* trouble . . . Not the light version.”

“What’s the light version? You mean drugs? And some petty theft tied in?”

“Yeah, none of *that*. The real thing . . . He got me a gun once.”

Pete watched for Tammy’s reaction, and he figured that should bring her down a notch, more to his level and hopefully lose some of the surf-instructor attitude.

Tammy said, “Wow . . . Tell me about it.”

And this was the thing. When something stalls or isn’t proceeding as smoothly as you like, throw in a gun.

Pete picked that tip up from a movie director, who made action-thriller type films. Pete saw the guy featured on TV, the local news.

He remembered where he was too--in a motel in West Lafayette, Indiana, when he was driving cross-country.

The director was a hometown boy made good and he was giving a talk that night at Purdue University, in town, and Pete didn’t have anything better to do so he went, and the guy was pretty entertaining.

And yep, his little gun philosophy made sense, and Pete figured you could apply variations of that to plenty of situations. You didn’t necessarily need to bring a gun *seriously* into it, you just needed some shock value.

“Just that he got me one,” Pete said to Tammy.

“Nothing real interesting beyond that.”

“Well . . . did anything . . . like, *happen?*” she said.

“Not a big deal. It seemed like a sensible idea, but I didn’t ending up requiring it.”

“Then that’s not a good end to the story at all,” Tammy said.

She was expressing some frustration now, and Pete couldn’t help wondering, in a more intimate setting, did she bring a similar approach to the table that needed to be resolved . . .

He was daydreaming, gravitating from Tammy to some business up in San Francisco that he’d been dodging, and she started looking at him funny.

“Sorry about that,” he said. “I was re-arranging a few things in my head . . . What was your question?”

Tammy said, “It was more of a statement. That your story petered out.”

He said, “When it comes down to it, I’m a chicken.”

“But *something* must have precipitated it. People don’t go up to their friends--as a routine matter--and

say, ‘Oh by the way, let me borrow your gun for the weekend’.”

“You’re loosening up,” Pete said. “If I asked you to come back to my place, what would you say?”

“I’d say no,” Tammy said.

“Well, that’s good then . . . In fact I respect you for it.”

“You seem slightly off,” she said.

“Not in the *worst* way though?”

“I don’t know. You’re interesting at least. And a little mysterious.”

“I just remembered something,” Pete said. “It wouldn’t work anyway.”

“What wouldn’t?”

“You coming back with me. I gave up my bedroom.”

“Now you’re losing me,” she said. “But the gun business . . . that really *did* just peter out?”

“Pretty much. Yep.”

“Hmm. Do you still have it?”

“It’s possible . . .”

“Can you at least give me a clue?”

Pete said, “Do you like dangerous guys?”

“Now you’re all over the place,” she said. “But maybe I do.”

“How about Lou or Ned Mancuso? He fit in there too?”

This was a guy, admittedly a colorful character, who Pete had met a few times and didn’t trust.

Tammy took a second. “I think I know who you’re referring to. I’ve seen him at the *Crow’s Nest*.”

Meaning, she knew him pretty well, would be Pete’s guess, but no point pursuing that.

“Anyhow,” he said, “yeah, there’s a guy and a gal, a bit down on their luck. I kind of underestimated their relationship, thought it was a negative, but now I see there’s something there. So I gave ‘em the bedroom.”

“I’m not following you,” Tammy said. “But it sounds *kind* of you, although that’s quite a jump. You’re saying you’re on the couch?”

“Yeah, that or the recliner . . . Amazing how easily you fall asleep in those things. You know what I’m talking about, the huge Costco jobs?”

“For how long?”

“As long as it takes to recharge the batteries. After what you put me through today, I’m gonna need extra.”

“I meant how long have you had the sleeping arrangement, letting the two people take over.”

“Oh. Just a couple days so far . . . But so I have it straight, *why* couldn’t we go in the ocean? Isn’t that what you do when you surf?”

“I think I explained it pretty clearly,” Tammy said. “Would you want to be Van Halen on stage before you learned your basic scales?”

“That’s a terrible example,” Pete said. “You need to come up with a better one.”

“Maybe next time.”

“See? I roped you in. At least enough to have lunch with me again.”

“Possibly.”

Pete said, “You have a good gig. And you do a conscientious job with it. It’s nice to be an authority figure.”

“What’s *your* deal?” she said.

He said, “I’m sort of a journalist, if you pin me down . . . and I pull out some fancy terminology to back it up.”

“Gee,” she said. “Now *I’m* impressed. I’m trying to get a blog off the ground. On women’s surfing. I’m looking for advertising, the whole nine yards. Do you think you could take a look at it, and give me some feedback?’

“Honestly, blogs may have peaked,” he said, “but I guess, if you need me to.”

It was better to finish things off with the upper hand, so Pete was glad he regained control there.

The throwing in the gun business, that was a lot more dicey these days, the political climate . . . you had to be careful and use that card selectively.

Some women *were* drawn to dangerous guys, that was a fact. You took that into account, rolled with it, and sometimes it worked.

More fun being a fake journalist though, you could make stuff up, embellish it. The hard-nosed act, you were limited, and you’d set the bar high.

