

Quasi

1900 words

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I was taking a surfing lesson, and halfway through I'm thinking this is the dumbest idea I ever had.

The concept was shaky to start with, trying to learn a tricky water sport in your 30's, but I'd let a couple people talk me into it, that something fresh and in nature would be beneficial . . . and okay fine, they meant well.

My big mistake 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, when the waitress introduced us officially in the Crow's Nest last night.

So I got duped, and here I was.

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

Neither seemed as appealing to spend 90 minutes with as Tammy.

We were halfway into the lesson and she had me on the sand, we hadn't gone near the water yet, and I was on my chest on top of an old-style giant surfboard and she was making me stand up and lie back down.

Going on like 500 times now.

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

I 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," I 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 the actual sport for a while?"

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

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

“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,” I 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. 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. Then you’ll see.”

She 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 I could lose a few pounds in the mid-section, which would help with the standing up and maintaining your balance on a board.

I 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?”

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

We started with a couple tropical drinks with the little umbrellas sticking out of the glasses and I said Cheers and thanks for putting up with a poor student.

Tammy said I wasn’t a poor student, just an indifferent one.

“What happened to the surfboard?” I said. “You just leave it there?”

“Yeah.”

“Too big and heavy, you mean? No one’ll steal it?”

She laughed. “That’s the hope. Though I do lock my door at night.”

“You’re saying, don’t underestimate the wealthy? They’re unpredictable like the rest of us?”

“I’m saying, 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 mentioned--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.”

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

“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.

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

I remembered where I was too--in a motel in West Lafayette, Indiana, when I 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 I didn't have anything better to do so I went, and the guy was pretty entertaining.

And yep, his little gun philosophy made sense, and I figured you could apply variations of that to 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," I said. "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."

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

Then I was daydreaming, gravitating from Tammy to some business up in San Francisco that I'd been dodging, and she started looking at me funny.

"Sorry about that," I said. "I was re-arranging a few things . . . What was your question?"

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

I 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. If I asked you to come back to my place, what would you say?”

“I’d say no.”

“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. 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?”

I said, “Do you like dangerous guys?”

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

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

This was a guy, admittedly a colorful character, who I'd met a few times and didn't trust.

She said, "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 my guess, but no point pursuing that.

"Anyhow," I 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. 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, padded 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 . . . 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 clearly. Would you want to be Van Halen on stage before you learned your basic scales?’

“That’s a terrible example,” I 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.”

I 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.

“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, give me some feedback?’

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

It was better to finish things off with the upper hand, so I was glad I 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.