

Trickle Down

950 words

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I was researching a guy on the computer at the Manhattan Beach library, trying to explore what I could do to him. It seemed smarter to use library devices than personal ones. This guy was a drunk driver, crossed over a two-lane north of Ukiah in 1997, killed someone I knew and didn't pay a price.

The reference librarian asks am I finding what I need and next thing we're having dinner at this Italian place up the hill next to the Arco station.

It turns out she's married, to a guy who teaches anthropology at Irvine, but they live separately in a side-by-side duplex in Torrance, she claims.

She drops it on me that sometimes if she had a bazooka she would shoot it off up his ass.

Whatever. She excuses herself to the ladies' room and I notice the paper place mats have coupons for local businesses. Tire place, taqueria, bookkeeping service, surf shop. There's one for a free 20-minute consultation with an MFCC in Santa Monica. Hmm.

I crease the therapist coupon to tear it off, but I figure better not, and she's back. When the waiter clears the dishes she notices the folds--doesn't miss much being a librarian--and she says what do you need to talk to one about.

I say no, there's this kid and his girlfriend in the apartment downstairs from me by the pool and the police have been there a few times.

Domestics? she said, if that's the case they typically apprehend them both and sort it out.

I say it didn't come down to that but pretty sure she sees through me anyway, so screw it, I rip it off.

The next day I call that office. The guy doesn't seem busy, gets me in pretty quick. I should have been more organized, I'm feeling the 20-minute pressure, so when he asks what seems to be the issue, I go with: What about inviting someone I just met to a high school reunion?

Of course he turns it around and says we can explore why you *wouldn't* want to.

It deteriorates and I get nothing out of it, other than asking at the end am I candidate for more and he says unequivocally. I'm not so sure.

I do invite this person--Emma--and she says yes she'll

fly up the day of, but she stops communicating great and I'm not expecting her but then boom she's at the Oakland Airport asking what now.

She said she missed me--so the early hotel room works out pretty well, and I'm feeling okay walking into the reunion, maybe even show her off a bit.

The music starts and I lose track of her for a couple minutes. I'm saying hello to some guys from JV football and Jeez one guy'd had part of an arm amputated, so that slows you down.

I spot Emma at the bar talking to this dude, and then they're on the dance floor. Guy named Snoeake, worst possible scenario. I had a situation with that guy and we didn't speak since about 10th grade. Guy looks decent, he's taken care of himself, lost some weight, thick head of hair with a man-bun. They're both smiling.

Took a song and a half more and they walked out of the room together.

This kid I barely remembered says to me if it's any consolation . . . yadayada.

My junior-year girlfriend is giving me a finger wave from one of the tables, but nah.

A guy tells me join us on the 7th floor after, they've got a poker game and he'll be getting major payback

tonight.

I stick it out a few more minutes until they give the award to the person who has come the farthest, and someone came from Madagascar and the class president wants to know more, and I go down to the hotel bar.

Sports highlights are on and the guy next to me says he has a better college playoff system, and it's actually not bad. We shake hands after a while, he's a salesman from Cincinnati.

I check out the 7th floor. There's a lot of action, doors are open and music is blasting and one room's got the furniture jammed sideways and a poker table in the middle. The other players have healthy stacks of chips but my payback guy only has a handful and looks in bad shape.

I'm ready to get in the car and drive home to LA, smooth sailing middle of the night. But there's an ad in the elevator for the breakfast buffet and they hook you so I go back to the room.

I flip around and find *Melvin and Howard*. The Melvin guy helps who he thinks is a bum but is Howard Hughes--who writes him in for an 8th of his will. Naturally when the lawyers get involved it's struck down.

But Melvin's got a sunny outlook. He thinks back to picking up the bum on a dark stretch of road and getting the bum to sing a song he wrote. He lets the bum drive for a while even though it makes him nervous.

The best scene is the give and take when he drops the bum (Hughes) in the back parking lot of Hughes Aircraft and they say goodbye but neither one quite wants to leave. Hughes gives him one final test--ya got any money--and Melvin shakes his head and forks over what he has.

I re-ran that scene a bunch of times, and each one got me the same. When I was done with it I fell asleep solid and might have slept 12 hours except for the early garbage truck.