

Flotation Device

910 words

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“So the outfits, how they stay put, you figured it out yet?”

Chris’s afternoon coffee hadn’t kicked in and he wasn’t a fan of strangers talking to him for no reason, but this voice he knew.

“Ned-man,’ he said turning around not all that enthusiastically, “what’s shaking?”

Ned Mancuso put his palms out like where you been my long lost friend--big grin--and Chris supposed Ned was offering a hug but Chris wasn’t going there.

He met Ned 2 years ago right here, watching women’s beach volleyball and asking how the bikinis stayed on through all the lunging, jumping and diving, and Ned saying they didn’t always, and saying let’s get a drink.

Plenty of water under the bridge since. Chris liked Ned but still didn’t quite trust him. Ned had a big heart and was generous. Ned brought a dozen people to Indian Wells to watch tennis in a giant limo, took them out to eat after, wouldn’t let anyone spend a dime. Once when Chris got in some trouble outside Pierre, South

Dakota, Ned drove straight through from LA to give him fresh fake license plates.

Chris did reciprocate a bit. Ned woke Chris up once in the middle of the night, asking can you lend a hand, and Chris helped him dispose of a guy in a mudflat behind a business park in Santa Ana.

Chris would get in a similar jam, starting at a silver mine in Tonopah, and Ned came through even though he was sunburned bad and throwing up from making the mistake of going deep sea fishing.

Now Ned said: "I got a little situation."

Chris said, "What a surprise."

"This with my mom," Ned said.

"Yeah well, I feel your pain. Unless it's not like that."

"I moved her out here and it backfired. The old bird's not taking to it at all."

"Jeez. Kinda surprising you talk about her like that."

"Okay I'll say it out loud. I never liked the woman."

"Dang," Chris said. "I'm thinking of a guy I knew once-- Jewish kid from Brooklyn?--he said he never liked his mother because she favored the older brother, Auggie I think his name was. And that guy *was* a jerk, the one time I met him at the Carnegie Deli."

"Your friend, or the brother?"

“The brother. You’re not listening?”

“Auggie don’t sound like a Jewish name,” Ned said, “for what it’s worth. What were you doing back there?”

“Lived in Hackensack 6 months on a swap. Everyone said keep a baseball bat behind the seat in case. Luckily I never needed it, more dangerous out here.”

“My mom lived in Tenafly at an HOA deal, after my dad died. That’s what I ripped her away from.”

“The only positive,” Chris said, “okay *one* of the positives, my punch code to the gate doesn’t work one day? A fireman tells me try 911 or 1234, that those are built in for safety.”

“It work?”

“No. But I needed to open a gate later in Pocatello, Idaho and one of em did.”

“Ah.”

Chris said, “I may be mixing it up, the Brooklyn kid. He coulda been referring to other *women*, that he hated his mom for. He said he never found an attractive Jewish gal, because they all remind him of his mother.”

“I get that,” Ned said. “Something I’ve wrestled with as well.”

“Well what’s her problem out here?” Chris said.

“There’s nothing to do, she claims. I got her in the

tree section, prime block, you go up the corner you can see the ocean. *You* know where I'm talking. 7 minutes walking into town. 10 to the Strand. She's mobile no problem, but she don't want to go anywhere."

"Maybe she's depressed."

"Tell me about it. We're not talking just here."

"Well, can she bar tend at all?"

"Oh no, Jesus c'mon."

"Just a thought." You had the Crowe's Nest, a block and a half up from the beach. Divey little spot with a decent feel. Ned acted like a customer in there but Chris's wild guess was he owned the joint.

"She like water aerobics and shit?" Chris said.

"Probably."

"So, you move her into my place."

"Your *place*?"

"My *building*. Not much of a pool but that doesn't stop em, they do it every morning. Then later you got card games out there. Have to say, the social vibe has picked up compared to when I moved in."

"What, you're telling me you recruit poolside into the bedroom?"

"I'm *not* telling you that."

"Except you're a sneaky guy," Ned said. "They got any

vacancies?”

“No. But next one that comes up, I’m in good with Sharif, the owner.”

“Something I should have considered. I mean your apartment itself is a pit. Any of em renovated at all?”

“No. Even better. Gets her out of it.”

“Yeah, true.”

“What’s her name, your mom?”

“Janice.”

“So I’m thinking . . . Janice can have mine for a while. Like a test drive. I need to look into some stuff up north.”

“Uh-oh.”

“Yeah. Last time, I meet this chick at a gym, we go out for crab. She doesn’t mean to but she lays something on me that needs to be addressed. Unfinished business from an incident at a rest stop in Oregon.”

“You hate that,” Ned said.

“You really do. Always risky to ask innocent questions.”

Ned nodded. “Can load up your plate in a hurry,” he said.