

**Jettison**

**875 words**

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“Here’s mine,” Palmer said. “Guy’s teaching a program, one of those low-residency deals? You get a Masters that probably isn’t worth much. Anyways--”

“Not always true,” Shirley said.

“Right, if they’re accredited,” Mert said.

“So they have to come up with a book outline,” Palmer said. “That’s the semester project. Thiz around here somewhere. Upstate. Fictitiously.”

Marilyn joined them. They were all showered and dressed casual.

Palmer said, “One of them won’t reveal his. He claims he has a block-buster best-seller dialed up and he’ll be damned if he gives it away. To a bunch of flunkies, he says. This guy’s a piece of work. The professor dupes him into telling him privately.”

“So what’s it about?” Shirley said.

“Did you know,” Mert said, “there are only 7 plots in all literature? This goes back to Homer. What we *think* is fresh, it’s always a variation.”

Marilyn said, “That’s bullshit. Let’s hear what it was about.” Marilyn and Palmer were married, as were Shirley and Mert.

“Little fuzzy,” Palmer said. “I’m thinking James Patterson type stuff? Wasn’t central to the story I’m trying to tell.”

“Too many coincidences in James Patterson,” Shirley said.

Palmer said, “The professor doesn’t admit it but thinks the guy’s idea *can* hit big. Couple years later he wonders if the book ever made it into print. He googles the guy. Turns out the dude died of a drug overdose, not long after the program ended.”

“Come on, get *to* it,” Marilyn said.

“Should be enough,” Palmer said. “But since you people don’t have an imagination, the professor takes the plot and writes it himself.”

They’d been playing these kind of games all weekend, interspersed with other activity. They were supposed to weigh in on where the story goes from here. Palmer didn’t really care at this point.

What he was into more was Shirley. One of the activities they planned on the way up here was maybe pairing off, testing the waters that department. A little

friendly swinging. Among consenting adults was how one of them put it in the car, and there was a bit of giggling from the women but no one objected.

They tried that an hour ago. Nothing came to fruition, everyone was tentative. There was red wine that went down smooth and a cozy fire in the wood stove. It felt set up but didn't get there.

Palmer was happy to confirm that his business was more substantial than Mert's business, certainly better than the alternative. But he couldn't see where that was going to factor into anything.

Shirley though. Ripe luscious spectacular endowment. Who would have thought. Skinny legs, and loose blouses and sweaters--or whatever the fuck it took to minimize it apparently. Palmer was able to caress her situation--very briefly--before everyone shifted gears and got in the hot tub.

Then they showered and started the dumb fill-in-the-blank story games again like nothing had happened.

When they got back to the city Palmer weighed how you would handle it.

Shirley was an attorney, high powered firm, corporate stuff. She was on the 47th floor in midtown. Palmer told the front desk person he had an appointment.

“What are you doing here?” Shirley said. “Do you need something?”

“No?” Palmer said.

“No.”

“Oh. Okay then, it was real.”

Shirley said, “What happened in the book? You left us hanging there.”

Palmer said, “There were a dozen directions it could have gone. After the guy steals the storyline. The worst one got picked.”

“So what’s yours?”

“He gets away with it, moves to Malibu, dates an American Idol contestant.”

“You’re a bad boy,” she said.

“Right. But no?”

“No.”

There was a strip club he remembered, an upstairs-downstairs place on 45th Street, but it had been a long time and nothing looked familiar.

There was a cop on foot and he asked him. The cop pointed to a brew pub a few doors down, said you’re looking at it and gave him the name of a place on Route 9.

Today was a bad day. Palmer supposed he should

check in with Marilyn.

“The exterminator was here,” she said. “He said there have been reports of bedbugs.”

“In the building?”

“No, in Monrovia. And Shirley called.”

“She did? What was *that*?”

“Thanking us for organizing the weekend. They want to reciprocate.”

“Really? How they gonna do that?”

“No, not really. What do *you* think?”

Palmer took his time. “She ever tell you she used to live in Malibu? What went on there?”

“No.”

“The story I heard,” Palmer said, “her girlfriend married a movie producer. They had the wedding at the house . . . Except Shirley, she butted in. The inopportune moment.”

“Uh-huh.”

“She had to reinvent herself. Luckily there was Mert.”

“Good place to land,” Marilyn said.

“Indeed. You notice Mert never honks the horn when he drives?”

“I hadn't.”

“On account of Shirley gave him a bobblehead once.

One of those doohickeys you stick on the dash? He took it out of the car and put it in the kitchen but he was conditioned . . . They still enjoy watching it bob around, Shirley says.”

“You can go to hell,” Marilyn said.

“Babe that’s a start,” Palmer said.