

**Rama-Lama**

**950 words**

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“I’m a little pissed at you,” Joyce said.

“Well that’s on me,” Chris said. “What are friends for?”

“Something’s up, I know you. You better spit it out.”

“I’m around *now*. So.”

“Yes I heard you moved,” she said. “It would have been more respectful to get it *from* you.”

“I know. Where’d you hear it at?”

“Your friend Booker mentioned it.”

Now that was interesting. Chris didn’t recall telling Booker he was going anywhere.

But second, had Joyce *banged* Booker?

The time he took her there, the Booker Lounge, when they left she commented he was a handsome man.

Which Chris supposed he was. Big imposing black dude, a calm deamanor, smooth. Old-fashioned cool.

And Joyce . . . she was an old-fashioned nymphomaniac, so you had that.

“Come into the city,” Chris said. “We’ll go there.”

“Where? Booker’s place you mean?”

“Yeah. I’m right on Lombard. Too early for Weatherby’s.”

Joyce said, “Doesn’t sound good tonight, frankly . . . all the options in San Francisco.”

“Oh. But coming in period sounds good?”

She said fine give her 15 minutes to pull herself together. Chris waited in Peet’s Coffee on Chestnut, which he didn’t mind, plenty of people-watching.

Something else too. Would he ever find the complete package? He knew it, he could waver between a nice guy and self-centered bastard, and he kept the other person off-balance and eventually drove them off.

Little different with Joyce. They tried a relationship once. She was good in a crisis. She could get ready fast. Someone who needs an hour to do their hair and make-up, you do the math, you’re gonna come up short.

It was warm for November and Chris went out front and had only sat his rear end down for a minute when boom, there’s Joyce.

Admittedly Joyce looked better than most of the Millennial women prancing around here with yoga pants. Jean jacket, tasteful blouse, and dang a leather skirt that fit pretty well.

Chris said unfortunately he was starved out of his mind and Joyce picked a restaurant a half-block up Steiner.

“Atmospheric conditions, I read,” Chris said when the bread and butter came, “are the key to sourdough.”

“I’ve heard that too,” Joyce said, “the fog is a factor.”

“Right. Except in Manhattan Beach there’s a Ralph’s. I tried theirs, no bite to it at all.”

“Tell me about Manhattan Beach,” Joyce said, “a typical day.”

Chris said, “People ask me, it’s embarrassing not to have a good answer . . . Let me ask you something more relevant.”

“Certainly.”

“Have you had work done? Since I saw you last?”

Joyce put down the red wine, dabbed her mouth and said, “Chris, for Christ sakes here.”

“You were coming down the street is all, the light was hitting you perfect, and it was like a TV game show, I had 10 seconds to figure out what was real, what parts.”

“You are so pathetic.”

Chris said, “Out of curiosity, what happened with the baseball field naming deal?”

“They voted it down. 3-2, the board.”

“That’s great then. It meant a lot to you, congratulations.”

“It was going the other way, I had to . . . make a backdoor promise, to one of the board members, to swing the vote.”

“Uh-oh.”

“Chris, will you cut it out please. What do you think I am?”

What mattered of course was the guy they were memorializing--that Chris might have had something to do with--was out of the damn news.

The food was good, Chris had cannelloni, hard to get right, and he thanked Joyce for coming down on a school night.

She said, “If I say you’re worth it, please don’t read into that. Meanwhile your *head* . . .” Pointing.

True it didn’t look the greatest, on account of a doorbell he rang in Reno. Joyce said, “And I know you have a mystery life, but if you don’t open up at least a little . . . I might kill *you*.”

Chris almost regurgitated his bite of broccoli rabe.

“Jesus Criminy, you have to keep your voice down, I’m not joking here. Don’t be tossing around ludicrousness from Mars, what’s wrong with you?”

Joyce said let's go up in the hills, take a look at the lights.

So they drove to the top of Divisadero where it dead-ended at the Presidio.

"I ever tell you about a crime from back in the 60's?" Chris said. "Unsolved. Pretty sure the killer had a car parked here."

Joyce had slid over. "Unh-huh."

"You're not following me. That gate? He cut through the woods and out it. Then drove away. History."

Joyce had her hand in Chris's shirt. She said fine sounds good actually.

"Wait a second," Chris said.

"What's the problem?" she said. "He came *out* of there, your big tough guy, so we're going *in* there."

"Two things," Chris said. "Do you get poison oak?"

"How strange to be worrying about. But to put you at ease, it's dormant in the winter."

"How bout mountain lions?" Chris said.

Joyce said it *is* her, isn't it.

Chris said no, a guy right around here, he saw one off his surveillance, coming out of the woods.

"Gosh," Joyce said. "I had no idea."

"So . . ." Chris said, "we can go for ice cream or

something.”

“Or, you can protect me,” she said, and they got out and she took his arm and marched him over to the gate . . . which for a second didn’t open but then it did, it was just a little stiff.

Chris figured you go along with it, but he wasn’t sure about the poison oak going dormant, he’d heard stories both ways.