

## **Hang Down**

**920 words**

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When he walked in some kids in back were singing a college drinking song but otherwise it was reasonably quiet for midnight on a Tuesday and Mitch was polishing glasses. “Whoa-ho . . . my blood brother!” Mitch said. “What the heck.”

Chris said anything on draft please works, and how are you back.

Mitch said, “You know showing up out of the blue, no rhyme or reason, it keeps me off balance.” He lowered his voice. “I keep thinking I’m going to read about you in the paper sooner or later. Sorry.”

“Nah that’s fine,” Chris said. “You’re playing the odds, I can’t blame you.”

“But?”

“But only, I’m good. That department. At least I think I’m good.”

Mitch cleared his throat. “Well, whatever that means--and don’t tell me . . . We can celebrate then.”

“Never the worst thing.”

Mitch went in the kitchen and brought him a slice of pecan pie, heated up nice with a touch of whipped cream, explaining there'd been an office party today and the people barely touched the desserts.

“God dang it,” Chris said. “There goes my diet, Part 2.”

“What was Part 1?”

“Bob’s. On Polk. And not that long ago.”

“You know something, all that time it seemed like, you’re checking with me do I look too thin. Now you’re reversing on me?”

“Oh.”

“I mean your white blood cell count and shit?”

“No idea.”

“So you never . . . got yourself checked back out?”

“No.”

“Well pardner . . . no harm, no foul then.”

“Yeah something like that. Listen, I’ve said it before Mitch but I mean it, thanks for putting up with me.”

“Okay stop it.”

Chris said, “You remember that gal Bethany?”

“No clue.”

“Okay maybe I never got her here. I tried to lure her back to my apartment that time we went to New Joe’s

but it didn't work. She lived in the Haight."

"You're rambling."

"Bethany was my doctor's front desk person. From when I got my alleged bad news? She started going out with me because she felt sorry for me."

"Ah."

"Yeah. Anyways, she had this mope husband--ex one--she claimed this dude was holding her back. You know."

"Maybe you did mention this. Have to admit Brother, you had a bit of a circus going on there for a while, the womanizing department, couldn't necessarily keep it straight."

"I guess I did. It's embarrassing to think. I was sorta throwing mud at the wall, see what stuck."

"Understandable."

"So she calls me couple weeks ago, in L.A. She sounds pretty wasted, I'm tempted to ask are you working a new medical job and getting your hands on the stuff."

"More common than you think, I know someone that happened to."

"I don't ask though. She said she tried to reconcile with the husband--went down there expecting to (this is

in Arizona)--but discovers the guy is screwing around not only on her now but on his new wife that he's supposed to leave for her."

"Too complicated Bud. Especially this hour."

"Sorry. Bottom line she asks can I take care of the guy. She lets it linger, and it's clear--I think--what she's talking about."

"Hmm. So why you?"

"That's what *I'm* saying. For the next couple days I run back through a whole bunch of stuff. I'm thinking what did I miss."

"And I know the answer," Mitch said, "you got zip."

Chris said, "How come you're so smart?"

"Cause you wouldn't be telling me this. So where we at?"

"No idea where we're at. Do I ask specifics, what gives her the notion I'm a candidate to take care of this piece of garbage. Do I risk asking her did I ever blurt something out in my sleep."

"Thought you said you didn't get to that point."

"Couple times. Makes no difference. Or did she witness anything--any clue . . . Or Jesus . . . did that son of a bitch Steiner suspect anything?"

"Son of a bitch who?"

“My doctor. Ah shit. An old friend from way back . . . could he have read something in me? Fuck.”

“And passed it on to his secretary? I don’t think so.”

“You don’t?”

“Nah man, be real. Guy an MD?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay their Hippocratic code of ethics or some shit.”

“Doesn’t mean anything.”

Mitch said, “You’re starting to wobble off the deep end . . . you don’t mind my saying.”

“Oh.”

“If your friend is gonna pass on any wild suspicions, it’s going to be to the police. Or to you directly--how ‘bout that?”

“You would think . . . still pretty dang weird she posed it to me.”

“Forget it . . . unless you’re, like . . .”

“Considering helping her? Mitch are you nuts?”

“Just checking, good.”

“I did speak to the guy once, just for my own personal edification. When I was in the area. In fact it backfired on me later, not worth going into.”

“Hmm. So how’d you end off?”

“The phone call? Told her have a nice day and I’d buy

her lunch she's ever in Manhattan Beach.”

“Ah, so she good with that?”

“Not at all. If anything she was more pissed off. Someone like that, I could see her taking the law in her own hands, I'm not kidding.”

Mitch said, “Well can you like, you know, with the woman? Calm her down?”

“At this point that'd be absurd,” Chris said. “Even though it crossed my mind.”

“I know, right,” Mitch said.