

## **By The Numbers**

**850 words**

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Bart was at his 40-year 6th grade reunion, kind of a weird setup, someone picked a Himalayan restaurant and it had a downstairs room for cocktails and appetizers. They were standing around and it was a bit awkward and Bart's regretting this, and then he hears a woman's voice that he recognizes but can't place.

She's tan, jet-black hair, tight skirt, big hoop earrings. She's with a kid that lived on the other side of the park back then, Ronnie Dibble. A few more things out of her mouth and a laugh, and Bart has it figured out.

Whatever.

Bart--and it seemed a few others--were expecting a dinner situation after cocktails, but that was it, short and sweet. A couple of hugs on the sidewalk, some *We'll be sure to get together soon this time*, and *Oh most definitely*, which was never going to happen.

Sitting up in bed with a good-sized bowl of butter brickle ice cream, Bart said to Sally, "Y'ever listen to that show, you know the one I'm talking about--the blues thing on the weekends?"

“There are a lot of those,” Sally said, looking up from her book annoyed. She was reading the latest Ann Patchett, which annoyed *him*, one more pseudo-intellectual novel that cluttered things up.

“I get it going to play golf with Dick. 88 point something. It fades out around Torrance. You got the guy with the deep voice, could be a black dude but maybe not, and then the woman with him. That’s who was at the reunion tonight.”

“Wait, Jessie Remington?” Sally said.

“Right. She was hooked up with this guy no one paid much attention to in grammar school. He wasn't athletic and he tried to make jokes.”

“Well she’s hot actually. At least from that voice.”

Dick had to admit she had a sexy delivery, in fact that was the whole show, she brought nothing else to the table. What was she gonna know about blues music?

“She must work on that,” he said. “She sounded the same as on the radio.”

“Well what was she like?”

“I didn’t butt in. Someone mentioned they’re living together in Brentwood. She did outshine the pretty motley crew of significant others who got dragged to the thing.”

“I’m thinking,” Sally said, “there was an article on her. She had to reinvent herself.”

“Huh?”

Sally got rid of the book and was roaming through her iPad. “I’m right. Last year the *Daily Post*. Her husband it says had a stroke and hit his head. It says he doesn’t always know who she is.”

“Jesus . . . didn’t waste much time then.”

“Your opinion. I’m not sure I can blame her.”

“How *old’s* the woman? It say? And she had to reinvent herself how?”

“Says she had to look for a real job. It doesn't specify beyond that.”

“Yeah well wonder if they fact-checked the dame on that. Just a guess, but Ronnie Dibble looks like he's doing okay that department.”

“I’d like to meet her,” Sally said. “Can you arrange it?”

That seemed absurd but Bart was a bit more curious now too, plus there admittedly was the interesting full hips image framed by that tight skirt.

The reunion had given out these cheap memory books with a bunch of people's contact information . . . and in the morning Dibble said well, they did like the old seafood place down by the Sport Chalet in Marina del

Rey, and Tuesday nights generally worked.

After the first round of cocktails Sally and Jessie Remington excused themselves for a little 'girls' room'. Bart said, "You got me dang curious, have to say, how you pulled this one off."

"Not quite sure what you mean," Dibble said, "Jess and I have been friendly for years, since Club Med."

"I mean the husband, he's still around? Or no."

"Oh yes. He encourages her to, you know, live her life. He told her we're all human."

Bart said, "Guy doesn't recognize her--how the fuck does that make sense?"

"It's what she told me," Dibble said. "Listen, you're going to need to calm down."

"You know you didn't live that far away. No wonder I never wanted to come over to your house and play."

The women were back. Jessie had a hand on Sally's waist and they were laughing. "I finally have a museum partner," Sally announced. "We're going Friday."

"We invited?" Bart said, and it looked like Dibble was wondering the same thing.

"Ladies night out," Jessie said, still laughing and looking at Sally.

Bart never considered Sally particularly attractive but

Jeez--maybe he was missing something.

More drinks came and and at one point Sally got up and whispered to Jessie, and a minute later Jessie whispered back . . . and dang, it sure felt like the odd man out, and Bart wondered was there an endgame here and decided yes he'd been missing something.