

## **Interception**

**710 words**

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Max said to Barry on the bench after pickleball: “You remember that guy Craig? Or you never met him.”

“From where?”

“From work? But I’m thinking maybe before you got there.”

Barry said, “C’mon, I’m on a short leash here, Jan needs tea tree oil from Trader Joe’s. For starters.”

“So me and Hilda become buddies with Craig and his wife Melanie. We share a vacation rental. Upstate. One night we loosened up, switched it around a bit, little swinging singles deal . . . but that’s beside the point.”

Barry looked at his watch. “Talk to me.”

“So,” Max said, “bringing it current--that was like 20 years ago--I’m over in Bridgeport yesterday ‘cause the UPS store was having computer problems, I see Melanie come out of a restaurant sucking face with a guy.”

“Ah Jesus that expression. What guy?”

“Younger guy. Dressed nice, in shape. Craig’s let himself go.”

“But they’re still married.”

“Oh yeah, in fact they were over the house New Year’s Day, seems strong.”

“And they always seem strong when they’re schtupping someone else,” Barry said. “Listen, it’s been real.”

“My question to you,” Max said, “what do I do about it?”

“If anything?”

“That too.”

“See ya,” Barry said.

Max decided he’d tell Hilda at dinner. But she made a comment that ticked him off--that it was cute Taylor Swift was rooting for the football player at his games--so he kept his mouth shut.

There was a woman at Starbucks he sometimes talked to. She was older, she’d been around the block. “Just as a hypothetical,” Max said, “someone got in this situation, what would you do?”

“I would tell the person’s friend,” the woman said.

“Wow. Lay it on him. No dancing around it then.”

She shook her head. “Sooner rather than later.”

“Well thanks for that,” Max said. “Y’ever listen to Dr. Laura? The pop psychologist?”

“I’m sorry, I’m not familiar.”

“Yeah you’re probably better off. But I’m curious how she’d handle it. I mean if she’s still doing her thing. I know they kicked her off AM for being outspoken. This a while ago.”

“Outspoken is good.”

“I’m thinking she’d say confront the female, see what you got, if anything. That or probably her real answer-- none of the person’s business.”

“The first sounds like more fun,” the woman said.

It was going to be a bit delicate getting hold of Melanie. He didn’t have a cell number for her, Hilda would, but you weren’t going to go there. It took a few tries, and Max intercepted Melanie at the elliptical machine at the gym they all belonged to.

“Listen, you got a second?”

“Well can it wait?” she said.

“Nah.”

“Now you’re making me nervous,” she said, stepping off the thing.

“Kay now I’m going to speak real quiet and this’ll be quick. Everything good with you and Craiger?”

“Of course. What an odd question.”

“Bridgeport? . . . I mean like what do you want me to

say, Mel?”

She said we need to go outside. In the parking lot she said, “You’re following me around? You’ve become that kind of asshole?”

“Not sure what I am . . . I just thought . . .”

“That it’s in everyone’s best interest. How laughable. What a riot . . . You ever look in your own backyard Max? You might not like what you see.”

She went back inside and Max stood there thinking what could she mean by that.

At dinner he said to Hilda, “Ran into Mel today. She said a weird thing--she looks in the mirror, doesn’t necessarily like what she sees.”

“She’s not happy,” Hilda said, continuing with the salad. “No offense, and he’s your buddy, but she needs to find someone else.”

“Ah. No spark, unh?”

“Nope. At least with you, we still go out and have fun.”

“Hmm. Remember that time--way back--we switched it around for a couple hours?”

“I do.”

“Have you ever--I’m just throwing it out there--wanted to do something like that since?”

“I have.”

“You mean . . . wanted to? Or, you’re not saying . . . have, like affirmative have. Right?”

Hilda kept eating, didn’t break stride, but didn’t answer.

After a while Max got up and gave himself seconds on the meatloaf.