

## **Ad-Out**

**990 words**

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Chris had to drown a guy in San Francisco Bay once-- seemed like a long time ago but he counted it back to a little under 3 years. Occasionally he'd still bolt up terrified in the middle of the night, but common sense told him he'd gotten away with it. One fortunate thing--the DNA advances in the news, where they catch the bad guys decades later--that wasn't going to apply here, the works taking place in good old salt water. At least you hoped, and what good was it thinking negative?

Chris never told anyone. He came close once on a bar stool in Indianapolis, but reined it back in. He did have one ally from when it happened, the attractive woman tennis pro in Golden Gate Park, and that's where he was headed now.

Gal's name was Jenna Lee and hopefully she was still there. Chris was in the neighborhood on account of an old friend Bethany, who scared him on the phone that she might do something bad to her ex-husband--or maybe to him too. So he tried welfare-checking her at her flat in the upper Haight, rang the bell, but nothing doing.

"Gosh, it's nice to see you my friend," Jenna Lee said.

"Well you remember me," Chris said, "I'm already ahead of the 8-ball."

“Last we spoke,” Jenna said, “you were going to book some lessons. You were quite concerned about a package discount.”

“I was a cheapskate. Sorry. I’ve been living in Manhattan Beach, trying to outgrow my old self.”

“You were also aggressive. I had to invent reasons why I don’t date students.”

“You were a good sport,” Chris said. “You remember that guy, the one got washed up at Ocean Beach?”

“Sure. He taught here.”

“Yeah which is why I bring it up--any follow-through or fallout on that? I mean they ever figure out what happened?”

“Not that I know of. The police paid us a few visits. I kept an eye on the news but it petered out.”

“And as I recall, you told them he may have got what he deserved, this guy.”

“I did.”

“Which is one more thing I like about you, you’re a straight shooter.”

“They came back once more, about 6 months ago.”

“Oh,” Chris said. Jesus Christ. What was *this* now?

“Yes, they were asking about another gentleman who teaches here--also unofficially like the deceased one--if they knew each other and so forth.”

“Oh. So they’re liking the other teacher for the crime? Ya think?”

“They were playing it close to the vest. These officers

seemed sharper than the previous two. But what do I know.”

“Oh.”

“You’re interested in this fellow, aren’t you.”

“Well sure, I’m a native, I mean no one likes open ended homicides in our own backyard.”

“Tell me about it. Even the Richmond right over here? A woman on the way to a yoga class disappeared at New Year’s.”

“I saw that. I think they found her though, at Point Reyes, she may have a mental health thing.”

“Ah thank God.”

“Well *did* the second fake tennis instructor know the first one?”

“You can ask him. He’s on Court 19.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Total jerk. Different kind of jerk than the dead one, but right there neck and neck in the asshole category.”

“So the story again,” Chris said, “these guys book courts--like the rest of us hackers--except the alleged opponent is the student?”

“Correct. In violation of Park & Rec rules which are clearly posted. They cut-rate the lessons. The legit pros are left holding the bag. This’s our career, we have all the certifications and jump through the hoops to maintain them.”

“You know something, that’s bullshit,” Chris said, and he excused himself for a minute and marched over to Court 19.

“Yes?” the fake instructor said when Chris opened the gate.

Chris walked to center court, middle of the net. “I’ll need you to vacate ASAP,” he said. “You’re out of compliance today.”

“Today?” the gal student said.

“Today and every day. Move it out--now!”

The fake teacher was in Chris’s face, youngish guy with a crewcut, decent chest on him, a bit of a rough customer probably. “My friend,” the teacher said, “only one moving it out is you. Which I’ll give you 5 seconds to complete . . . C’mon Doris, where were we.”

Chris left the court and the lesson picked back up. “Y’av a lock?” he said to Jenna.

“Padlock?”

“Something with a chain be better,” he said, looking back at Court 19. “In fact you got two? And an extra racquet?”

Chris marched back over there. It was a self-contained court which the teaching pros liked because the balls didn’t go all over the place. There were two gates. He chained the far one locked.

“You’re stepping *way* over the line now Pal,” the teacher said. “Someone doesn’t have a high regard for their health.”

“Not yet,” Chris said, coming around the other side and locking the front gate. The guy was on his phone and went back to the lesson like nothing happened.

“He called the pro shop for help,” Jenna said.

“And?”

“And what?”

“See now . . . this is why someone could be in love with you,” Chris said.

The lesson ended and the guy gathered their stuff and tossed it gently over the fence. Chris went over there, waited for the woman to climb it surprisingly easily and be on her way, and then when the guy did, his hands coming over that top bar, Chris reached up with the racquet and gave matters a couple good whacks.

The guy yelled and threatened but dropped back into the court. He hustled to a different part of the fence but Chris beat him there. He delivered a real good ride this time with the racquet, some solid graphite on bone sounds. Chris thinking I mean Jeez, enough is enough.