

Gradient

940 words

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Mel spotted Anelisse at Kinko's in San Rafael. At least he was pretty sure--and thought about leaving it alone, but heck.

“My goodness, what has it been?” Anelisse said.

“Welp . . . if you weren't at the 10-year, it's been 28 years. I missed the 20th . . . unless I got early Alzheimer's onset and saw you somewhere else.”

“Maybe Beach Chalet? The Dorn reception? Around 2010?”

“Huh?”

“Or was that your friend I'm thinking. You two always hung out.”

“Bob. My better looking half.”

“Your opinion,” she said. Just enough of a smile to make it interesting.

Mel said, “We had a falling out actually. What are you gonna do.”

Anelisse paid up and Mel walked her to her car. She said, “I'm processing that, what you said. I had a falling out with my sister as well. It shouldn't work that way.”

She said she had to deliver some paperwork to the city and Mel asked how important and Anelisse stood there a minute . . .

Mel lived in old Corte Madera, near the top of the grade where the rock music guy Bill Graham once did. Anelisse had Mel's robe on and some big slippers. "This is the type of encounter," she said--kinda nice and dreamily, Mel was thinking-- "I'm going to beat myself up for later."

They were on the terrace and Mel was bringing out the coffee. "You very well might," he said. "What was the deal with your sister? In fact maybe I remember her, was she a couple years behind us?"

"Just one. It got ballistic over my parents' estate."

"Yeah that's a theme," Mel said.

"With a twist. Linda'd been helping with their accounts, the last few years, and there were some improprieties."

"Ah."

"Including a 40 thousand dollar check to save her girlfriend's place from foreclosure."

"Gee, I'm picturing her. She went gay?"

"Oh yes. Is there a problem with that?"

"None at all," Mel said. "So how'd you work it?"

“Only one way *to* work it.”

“You sicced the authorities on her? You’re kidding.”

“Why would I kid? It was classic elder abuse. She pled no contest, served 11 months of a year and a half sentence, at the CIW in Corona.”

“Holy Smokes. Well did you visit her at least? Like the inmate families on TV on Sundays?”

“Mel are you nuts?”

“Come over here,” he said.

In the morning they walked down to the plaza in Mill Valley. There was a bookstore and Anelisse picked up *Why Everything You Think is Wrong is Wrong*.

“No surprise your author is an MFCC person,” Mel said. “I talk to one of those.”

“Really,” Anelisse said. “You never told me what happened with Bob.”

“You’re saying did it send me into therapy. Would you slap me if it’s simpler? That I enjoy hanging out with her?”

“Okay. She’s attractive?”

“Not particularly, but she’s mysterious. Bob and me, we stupidly got in the real estate business. Fixer uppers out in Russian River, which went okay. Then we saw an opportunity, pick up a square block in Richmond for

pennies on the dollar.”

“Richmond is dangerous.”

“Right. When we had to go there we went at 7 in the morning. Best odds the criminal element would be asleep. Very long story short, I threw him off a roof.”

“Wait--this is *Bob*?”

“Right. We were arguing about something on the way over, we had to meet a roofer, guy was gonna be late, we went up and took a look--and boom. I didn't really throw him, I bumped him.”

“Mel this is unfathomable. Are you sure?”

“Am I being a wise guy? My therapist person asked the same thing. I do like to make stuff up. But no. Luckily he didn't land too bad. Broken arm, wrist, punctured lung, some ribs. Wasn't seeing great out of the right eye for awhile but that seemed to clear up. Does have a shoulder problem he says, no range of motion. And his back is fucked.”

“You have me stunned here . . . What was the argument about?”

“I don't even remember.”

“Well when you say *he says* . . . how does that work when you had a falling out?”

“He leaves me texts, he likes to threaten. You wanna

get an ice cream? They still have a Baskin Robbins.”

“But he didn’t call anyone on you. You’re telling me.”

“Nah.”

“And the therapy, you’d say, is it effective?”

“No idea. We’ll have a turbulent session, I’ll get mad at her line of questioning, I’m thinking she’s gonna cut me loose for sure--and she’ll conclude with *we made some nice progress today!* So there’s that.”

“Interesting.”

“Last week she throws me a curve. What’s the most outrageous thing I did before the age of 40?”

“And that’s Bob?”

“Not even close. What’s yours?”

“You put me on the spot. You won’t think worse of me?”

“Maybe. But go for it.”

“I made a pornographic film. A clip.”

“Hoo boy.”

“That doesn’t bother you?”

“Not really. See that guy by the chess tables? The blue beanie? He played with the Greatful Dead, no lie.”

“You don’t shock easily.”

“I can but I need extra.”

“How did it feel when you pushed him off?”

“Fine actually. Can’t complain.”

“Can you describe it more?”

“You’ll laugh. It felt like that first shot of Irish whiskey in a cozy pub, back of the throat, when you come in real thirsty.”

“Well I wish I’d done that,” she said.

“You’re goofy. Wasn’t that big of a deal.”

“That’s the thing isn’t it,” she said.