

HAT TRICK

(a novella – 26,593 words, 101 pages in length, New Times Roman 12 font)

PREFACE

Way back in 1998, when I retired, I did what I always promised myself what I would do when I retired, and that is, write. I loved writing. In fact, I can trace my desire to write back to when I was in 5th grade. We had to read a book. Maybe it was Moby Dick or one of the other classics; I forget now, but man, did I feel something after I read it. As destiny would have it, the teacher had a writing contest after her students read their books, and that contest was a one-page synopsis of the tale we had just read. My failure to express that feeling I had was of paramount importance to me. How the hell was I suppose to write down on paper what I ‘felt’ about what I had just read. I really didn’t know how to do that. Of course, I hadn’t discovered the classics yet – the Dickens, Faulkner and Conrad classics, but that’s when I discovered the flap, those glorious words on the cover of the book that explained what I had just read with an elegant touch beyond my ability. It expressed my feelings perfectly about what I had just read. I remember the feeling I had after reading the book, and the flap mirrored those feeling exactly. It was magical. So, I paraphrased what the flap said, as best as a 5 grader could, and I submitted that into the contest. As fate would have it, I won. The teacher thought what I wrote deserved first place. Boy was I embarrassed. I didn’t have the heart or the courage to tell the teacher what I did, but I promised myself that I would never do that again which left only one alternative. I had to learn how to express myself with words. I had to learn how to write because would never plagiarize somebody else’s work ever again. No longer could I call someone an asshole, because that word meant something, and it didn’t mean the same thing I was feeling. If someone was ‘acting’ or

‘talking’ stupid, no longer was that person an ‘asshole’. He was something else more meaningful, like ‘a jerk’ maybe, or he was being ‘stupid’, not an anal cavity that dispelled waste.

I know, I’m being ‘silly’, but the point is, I promised myself that I would learn how to express myself and use words that really meant what I thought or felt, not words that could be interpreted as an idea or ‘feeling’ that I didn’t have. That’s how ‘fake news’ gets conjured.

In any event, what does this have to do with ‘Hat Trick’? Well, I’ll explain. When I retired in 1998 I wondered what I wanted to write about. I thought about it a lot, actually. But I couldn’t consciously develop a storyline. I guess I summoned my conscious brain enough times and failed to produce anything of value, that my subconscious brain took over and I had a dream that had me laughing when I woke up. As far as can remember, this was the first time I ever woke up laughing. My wife asked me what I was laughing about. Now, please don’t think I’m an ‘asshole’, but I didn’t know what to say. The dream I had was complete with a beginning, middle and end part of the story, complete with complement characters, and I thought it was funny. So, when my wife asked me ‘what am I laughing about’, I told her that I was laughing at Jim Brown, the greatest football running back there ever was, running down the field with no clothes on. Now, if you think about it, that’s not funny. And my wife told me so, that that dream wasn’t funny, I mean. So, I had to write the story as I dreamt it, complete with compliment characters and a new beginning, etc. to show why I wasn’t perfect, or completely insane.

In the process of writing Hat Trick, I not only had my wife laughing at one of the main characters running down he football field with just a jock strap on, but I learned how to write a screenplay and, later on, a stage play – the formatting and nuances of writing for the genre, I mean. I took a Michael Hauge seminar and got the Screenwriter’s Bible, by David Trottier, and I was off and running. To cut to the chase, Hat Trick was my first endeavor to ‘write’ in

retirement, or full time. It was the fastest work I've ever done and the storyline came easy to me, when I spent literally months trying to get a storyline going. It actually took about a week to write the first draft. Now, that was 1999, and after I finished about three drafts, I won the first writing contest I submitted the screenplay to, which was the *Fade In Magazine Writing Competition* in the year 2000. For the longest time it was the winningest screenplay on moviebytes.com. But my attention was soon diverted and I wrote other screenplays. Still, *Hat Trick* remains one of my most successful endeavors if contest placements are the criteria. I've written about 10 more screenplays counting the short, but haven't submitted all of them to writing contests, not like I have with *Hat Trick* and *South of Main Street*. Money prohibited me from doing that, I suppose, but I hold this novella close to my heart because the story-line was my first feature screenplay after retiring. Since the year 2000, and as of June of 2022, it has been second to *South of Main Street* with 11 contest wins, five 2nd place finishes and one 3rd place finish. I have long since stopped sending the script into contests, but I think it can do well in any contest I send it into.

In any event, here is *Hat Trick* – my first attempt at converting my dream into a novel. It is October of 2020, right in the middle of the pandemic.

CHAPTER ONE

Jim Greene, who was a black man and pushing the limits of middle age, drove his car to Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia with his friend Walter, who was white, and also pushing the limits of middle age. Walter had that weathered look about him and looked older than his 55 years. He was sitting shotgun.

They were looking for their mutual friend, and sidekick, Dustin, who was the same age as them, but a bit smaller in stature. He had a peeing problem that spilled over to virtually everything else in his life. He was sort of a whiny individual. But the truth be told, there weren't enough restrooms in the world to accommodate his needs.

Jim Greene was big man at 6 foot 3 inches tall, and he weighed about 300 pounds. Walter was about 5 foot 10 inches tall, and if one asked him, he was probably considered the leader of this threesome. Dustin was about 5 foot 4 inches, a small, weasel kind-of character. Jim was constantly ragging on him.

It was hard to tell how tall any of the boys were because it seemed they all tilted forward while walking anywhere, as if they were fighting gale winds, even though the weather was nice with little or no breeze. They all were retired and lived in a retirement home.

All three wanted to do something special to spruce up their lives in retirement. Sort of like a Hat Trick, a hockey term for scoring three points.

Walter was impotent and no one knew why except his wife was dying, and it probably had a lot to do with that. He allowed his buddies to think he had an audacious goal of having sex with a mystery woman he met at a bar. But he was still emotionally attached to his wife who was in the hospital in and out of consciousness, so his goal was more bravado than real.

Dustin, who had a urinary stricture that caused problems when he urinated, simply wanted to pee normally again. He found a doctor who would operate on him, but not before driving his buddies crazy groveling or complaining about one thing or the other, usually something related to this 'condition'.

The main thread of this story involved Jim's goal. He wanted to do the unthinkable. The impossible! Jim couldn't forget, or wouldn't forget, a football blunder he made 30 years ago when he played for Navy, as did Walter, and his team lost to Army because Jim fumbled on the one-yard line as time ran out. Although Jim knew he couldn't turn back the clock, he wanted to fortify his place in history by jumping onto the gridiron during a present day Army/Navy football event. His idiotic plan was fueled by his belief he could change his tarnished image for the better because he was going to do this naked. He thought this adventure, somehow, would erase the memory of a mediocre player, if only in his own mind. Walter, who was totally against the idea, got sucked into Jim's adventure because of the dying wishes of his wife.

The story really starts out when Jim and Walter had to find Dustin before Navy's first game of the season. Dustin had wandered off not knowing where he was going or what he was doing because he also had a touch of dementia. Jim's car pulled up to Rittenhouse Square park bench in Philadelphia. Birds chirped away in their nestled treetops while a breeze rustled through the branches and leaves. It was a nice day, and the quiet moment was interrupted by the honking noises the geese.

Dustin Fisk, frail and pushing the limits of middle age, sat on a park bench next to a crumpled newspaper. He was wearing tight clothes as if they have been washed too many times. He broke off pieces of bread and tossed it to the geese. They honked for more. They never could

be satisfied. They knew what starving was all about, Dustin thought. As far as he was concerned, they could eat until they dropped dead.

Jim pulled up with his car and stopped several yards from the bench.

“He looks so helpless, doesn’t he?” Walter said peering out the window and watching Dustin feed the pigeons.

“Dustin’s afraid of his own shadow,” Jim said. “Now, come on, Walter. Go get him. We got a lot to do. And the season opener is today. Don’t forget that.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Walter mumbled as he got out of the car and marched down the cement path to the bench where Dustin was. He tilted forward while walking, like usual, fighting the imaginary gale winds as he walked. Walter stopped at the bench, and looked down at Dustin.

“Oh, God,” Dustin said when he looked up and saw who it was. “Did I space it again?”

“Yes,” Walter said emphatically. “And Tracy is looking for you. Again, I might add. You’re going to get us all in trouble one of these days if you don’t pay attention to where you go. You can’t just up and leave like that.”

Dustin grabbed his newspaper and followed Walter to the car. Walter jumped in the front seat and Dustin hopped in the back, then Jim peeled off and made a sharp u-turn sending the men smashing into their respective doors, the only thing that kept them from flying out of the car.

“Good thing you love feeding the birds,” Walter said ignoring Jim’s poor driving skills, “else we’d never be able to find you.”

“You know,” Dustin replied, “some days I feel like a mosquito in a nudist camp. I know what I want to do; I just don’t know where to begin.” Jim issued a loud groan and Dustin responded that it was the joke of the day in the newspaper, as if that exonerated him from saying it. A few seconds passed in silence, then Dustin added, “Pull over. I have to pee.”

“Can’t you hold it until we get back home?” Jim asked.

“No. I’ll pee in the car, then.”

“Oh, good grief,” Jim said as he pulled off to the side of the road and let Dustin out so he could pee.

Walter rolled down the window and said, “Tracy has a package for you. Hurry up. I want to see what it is.”

“You told me that already, didn’t you,” Dustin said. “Anyway, you know what I say to that? She can kiss my you know what.”

”She’s too much woman for you,” Walter replied.

Dustin dwelled on that visual for a second, and then groaned. He finished and jumped back into the car.

“How long are we staying at the center?” Jim asked. “I’m only asking because we have to visit Gloria, right? And then - you know - we don’t want to miss the kick-off.”

“We know, Jim,” Walter said. “And please don’t start about that stupid fumble you made during The Dark Ages.”

By saying that, Jim felt the urge to talk about the fumble he made thirty years ago, which he did, all the way to the retirement home. He also explained how he challenged Ricky, his grandson, who currently plays for Navy, to a two-hand-touch football game, and that Jim volunteered Walter and Dustin as his blockers. Somehow that got advanced to jumping on the field during the present-day Army/Navy game.

After going into a long dissertation of what he was going to do, he made a hard left and Walter and Dustin went flying again.

“Stop whining about the fumble a long time ago and get us back in one piece,” Walter then turned to Dustin. “I’m just saying watch out for Tracy. She’s got an agenda. So stop wandering around alone, Okay, Buddy. She expects us to know where you are all the time.”

“I don’t wander around on purpose,” Dustin said. “I just forget things, sometimes. I was an engineer, for crying out loud. I could recite the periodic tables ...”

“In your dreams maybe,” Walter added. “You can’t do it any more.”

The three men entered the Retirement Center through the Center’s Recreation Room. The residents, all upper middle-aged people, helped define the room's diverse character. Some were playing checkers or cards. One man exercised on a tread mill in back of the room. Another woman sat on a soft cushion chair quietly reading.

Walter, Jim and Dustin slowly jaunted their way to a table where four residents were playing cards: Sandra, who hid her age well with makeup; Lester, who was thin and wrinkly-looking; Barbara, who was quiet, watchful; and Ted, who was the singer of the group - carefree.

“A little bit of Monica in my life,” Ted sang, “A little bit of Erika by my side. A little bit of Sandra in my pah-jah-mah ...”

Sandra pointed to Ted as if to say, ‘Watch your mouth’.

Meanwhile, Walter looked at Lester’s cards. “Why do you guys sing that song?” Walter asked. “It’s dumb. What’s trump, Lester?”

“Got a good beat,” Lester said. “Hearts.”

“Get rid of your clubs,” Walter advised. “Save your spades for the end game.” Walter then peeked at Sandra's cards as he approached Ted.

“What’re you doing with all the aces, Sandra?”

Sandra pressed her cards close to her chest. Walter held a stare at her bosom then gave a Groucho Marx eyebrow move. “Knock it off, Walter,” Sandra warned.

Walter peered over Ted's shoulder, and Ted exposed his cards to him. Walter pointed at a card and Ted eagerly tossed it out.

“How's Gloria doing, Walter?” Sandra asked trying to make polite conversation.

“The same,” Walter said. “We're going to the hospital to see her now.”

Tracy, in her 30's, strutted in from the hallway with a confidence of a woman twice her age. Everyone at the table shifted their bodies as if coming to attention. Dustin hid behind Jim.

“Dustin,” Tracy said in a commanding tone, “will you please tell people your cabin number. I keep getting your mail at the office.” Tracy tossed an envelope at Dustin but Walter intercepted it. The men at the table all looked to Walter for leadership. “Down, Rover,” Walter said to Tracy. Walter looked at what he just caught. “Oh,” he said. “It's just a magazine.” He turned to Tracy and faked a smile to her.

“I'm just an administrator here, Walter,” Tracy said, still in a commanding tone. “Not your personal lackey.” Tracy left, and Walter tossed the envelope to Dustin. “Good God,” he said. “What a nutjob! Let's go.” Walter turned to those at the table. “So long, guys. Gotta go see Gloria.”

After Jim, Walter and Dustin were out of hearing range Barbara spoke up. “I can see a change in Walter since Gloria's been sick,” she said. “He seems to be a little out of control without her to keep him in check,” Sandra added.

CHAPTER TWO

A Female Orderly exited the Bellevue Hospital in scrubs, just as Jim pulled up and let Walter out. He entered the building while Jim parked the car. Several Nurses and Doctors also exited the building. It seemed the boys had gotten to the Hospital right at tour change.

Walter entered the hospital, and before you knew it, he was on the floor where his wife was staying. He walked down the hall and entered room 401 where Gloria Grimm lied unconscious and with a Nasal Cannula protruding from her nose. Wires are attached to her and machines which monitored her vital signs.

He opened the shades, and then stood over Gloria like a sentinel. She awakened, moaned a little, and then smiled at Walter. “How are you doing, Handsome?” she asked in a rhetorical sort way. She really wasn’t looking for an answer.

“Okay, now that I’m here,” Walter said. “I thought you went blank on me again.”

Jim and Dustin walked in. Dustin waved and Jim said, “Greetings Earthlings.”

“You guys want anything?” Jim asked. “I saw a coffee pot up at the desk.”

Walter shook his head and waved both of them on, and they both left.

“How are they doing?” Gloria asked.

“I don’t know,” Walter whined. “Driving me nuts, I guess. Dustin's peeing and dementia problems are back. They seem to go together. I think it’s a lack of protein in his diet, maybe. Jim’s back talking about the fumble he made eons ago.”

“Again,” Gloria said, knowing full-well the patience required when Jim was touting his yesteryear exploits.

“Yeah. And now he actually challenged Ricky to a game of touch football, and he wants to jump on the field in this year’s Army/Navy game and score an imaginary touchdown that he should’ve scored 30 years ago, and he wants me and Dustin to plod along side of him to block. I won’t do it. People would think I’m an old fool, just like him.”

“But you are an old fool,” Gloria admitted.

“Well, thank you for that assessment. Let’s talk about something else. Let’s talk about you coming home.”

Gloria’s sigh came at an expense. It was more from the heart than anywhere else. Walter took her hand and couldn’t stop kissing it.

“Do it. Help Jim,” Gloria commanded.

“Please. Don’t ask me to do that,” Walter pleaded.

“You two have been friends all your life,” Gloria reminded Walter. “You went to Annapolis together. Played football together. Shared the same losses together.”

“He lost that game. He should’ve passed the ball to me. But nooo. He couldn’t do that, could he? He had to try and run it in himself. He had the ego of three people back then, and today he’s got the ego of four.”

“Where’s your spirit, Walter,” Gloria insisted. “Do it.”

Walter sighed as Gloria struggled for the book on night table. She opened it to a marked page, and handed it to Walter for him to read. “Out loud,” she commanded.

“Ah. The Teddy Roosevelt Speech,” Walter said, pointing to the title line, which said, “The Teddy Roosevelt Speech. I’ll paraphrase a bit”.

He read it slowly: “It’s not the critic who counts, not the man who points out where the strong man stumbled. The credit belongs to the man who’s actually in the arena, whose face is

marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, who spends himself in a worthwhile cause, who, at the best, knows if he fails at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place will never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Walter gently put the book down. “Reminds me a little of Dustin. The timid soul bit.”

“You were never a timid soul, my love,” Gloria struggled to say.

“I’m not doing it,” Walter insisted. “Ricky’s a guard for Annapolis and 35 years younger than me, for chrissakes. He’ll destroy us.”

“Maybe not,” Gloria said. “I see you now, my valiant knight. Help Jim with his last hurrah.”

Gloria moaned loudly in pain. Walter became frantic and bolted to the doorway just as a Male Nurse walked by. Walter pulled him in. “My wife’s in pain,” Walter insisted. “Do something.”

“Oh, that’s a normal response ...,” the Nurse began to say, but was cut off because Walter took him by the shirt collar and twisted, choking him and cutting off any words that were to follow.

“Listen, you bug,” Walter said, “She’s in agony. Now do something about it.”

Just then Jim rushed in and tried to release Walter’s grip with one hand while holding a cup of coffee in the other. “Come on, Walt,” he said. “Let go.”

A large, robust woman, the head nurse, entered the fray. “What’s going on here, Walter?”

Walter explained that Gloria needed more pain medication, but the Male Nurse showed her Gloria’s chart and explained that her next dose wasn’t due for another two hours. Walter tried to explain that if Gloria was going to die anyway, then why worry if she’s going to get

addicted. It didn't make sense. "My wife needs more pain medication," Walter yelled. "Overlook the process, will ya?"

The Head Nurse motioned for the Male Nurse to leave, which he did, and then she put her hand on Walter's shoulder and told Walter to tend to his wife and told him she would be right back.

A few minutes passed and the Head Nurse sauntered in with a chart and syringe. "Years ago we had more say over medication," she said. "Fact is we accidentally overdosed patients when they were in pain like this. Sometimes we overdosed them on purpose, and sometimes by accident. Now the law says we can't go off schedule unless the doctors say so. But I see here Gloria's chart is a little ambiguous. It doesn't have her last dose logged in. Hmm. A small amount will do, maybe. Nothing harmful ..."

"Yes. Yes," Walter kept on repeating. "Do it."

The Head Nurse injected the glucose bag. Walter tried to speak his gratitude but couldn't summon his voice. The Head Nurse smiled, then left. Walter hovered over Gloria who was asleep now. Jim came in and quietly sat at the foot of the bed. Walter kissed Gloria and said 'Goodbye'.

Just as Walter and Jim walked out of Gloria's room and down the hall, a loud scream erupted and an orderly appeared with Dustin.

"He walked into Mrs. Murphy's room while she was undressing," the Orderly said.

Walter thanked him then, ready to do battle, he turned to Dustin.

"Don't look at me that way," Dustin said to Walter. "I got lost, is all. Hell! You should've seen Mrs. Murphy's body! Not bad for ninety years old."

"TMI! TMI!" Jim shouted. "You have to get a life, Dustin. Mrs. Murphy? Really?"

The men kept walking to the elevator half listening to Dustin explain his excitement over seeing Mrs. Murphy's nude body. As they arrived, Jim hit the button several times hoping that would bring the elevator up sooner rather than later and be rescued from Dustin's gibberish, his soliloquy of nonsense.

While waiting, Walter watched a male Barber through a window of a Beauty Parlor adjacent to them. "That Barber is like Edward Scissorhands. He's all over that woman customer." Walter noticed a wig sat on a mannequin's head nearby.

"This elevator is slow as molasses," Jim observed.

"It's just the first game of the season, James. Please ... Don't start.

"I have to pee," Dustin said.

Walter pointed to the "MEN'S WARD" sign close by. That's where you're going end up, Dustin, if you don't get your peeing issues under control."

"They'll help you smell better to," Jim said.

CHAPTER THREE

Harry, the bartender at McGinty's Bar and Grille, drafted up 3 beers for our boys as they came in and bellied up to the bar. They grabbed their beers, clinked their mugs, and sipped in unison.

The Army/Navy football game was on the overhead TV. The cusotmers at the Bar were focused on what the TV Announcer, Kent, had to say.

"Wow," Kent said. "That was a great block by Ricky Greene."

Jim pointed to the TV and with great enthusiasm said loud enough for everyone at the bar to hear, "Yes. That's my grandson." He raised his arms high in the air and twirled around like a top.

"We know, Jim," Harry said. "No need to spell out every play."

"Ricky Green is in great form," TV Announcer Kent said. "Coach Brown thinks he'll be All-American this year if he stays healthy."

"Hey, Jim," Harry yelled out, "you think your grandson will make All American this year?"

Jim gave a look to Harry as if to suggest that was a risky question if one didn't want a half-hour response.

"I'm just trying to make polite conversation," Harry said. "That's all."

Walter chimed in and said that if Harry wanted to talk about Jim's grandson to Jim, that he'd have to bow his head or tap his chest three times while he talked.

Just then Dustin got up to leave.

"Where do you think you're going?" Walter asked.

“To the bathroom,” Dustin responded. “Might I take a pee in private? Might I go and pee.”

“OK, OK,” Walter said as he waived him on. “Go to the bathroom. Just don't wander off and get lost.”

“And don't talk like a fagot,” Jim piped in. “Might I? What's that all about?”

As Dustin wandered to the bathroom, Jim wanted to finish what Walter had started.

“How about we all genuflect when I say my grandson's name?”

Walter moaned and threw his hands up covering his face.

“I have a right to be proud of my grandson, don't I” Jim asked. “Am I really that bad?”

Everyone agreed – Jim was that bad.

Walter knew once Jim got started, it was very hard to stop him. He could go on for hours about his grandson. “Please, Harry. Don't get him started” was all Walter said. h got up and walked to the jukebox just as the phone rang. Harry picked it up.

“If only I could've had someone like him on the line during that Army-Navy game way back when,” Jim said, “my life would be different today.”

Harry held his hand up to everyone at the bar for quiet. He leaned in, whispered something and the place fell silent. Walter turned from the jukebox to see what the silence was about.

“What?” Walter asked. “What's with the sour looks?”

Tracy from The Center just called,” Harry said. “It's Gloria.”

A light drizzle set the mood around Gloria's casket as a Rabbi finished up on the eulogy. Jim, Walter and Dustin sat in the front row at the retirement center Banquet Hall while their retirement center friends and Harry were close by.

“And so, Dear God,” the Rabbi said in a pompous tone, “take Gloria in your bosom, and cherish and love her as those here cherished and loved her. Help Walter with his grief, and let him know that Gloria rests in peace ... Amen.”

Everyone said 'Amen' together, and they began dispersing, but Walter broke out singing *Amazing Grace* forcing everyone to stay put and sing with him. Walter did it because he loved to hear Sandra sing and he knew if he belted out a tune she would join in and sing up a storm. And she did. In fact, she dominated the song, which ended on a high note and Walter received pats on the shoulder and a hug from Sandra.

“Hey, Walter,” Sandra said, “I didn't know *Amazing Grace* was sung at a Jewish burial. I thought that was a Christian song.”

“It is Christian,” Walter admitted. “But Gloria loved that song. It was one of her favorites, and she always wanted it sung at her funeral.”

“Well, thanks for singing it,” Sandra said. “It is one of my favorite songs too.” Sandra wasn't going to say anything else, and she gave him a hug and started to leave.

Barbara came up and hugged Walter then left with Sandra. As the ladies were out of hearing range of Walter, Barbara asked Sandra, “What's going to happen to Walter now?”

They watched Dustin, Jim and Walter pray over the casket. As the ladies continued with their exit, Sandra piped in “It's the three of them together we need to worry about.”

As Walter, Jim and Dustin huddled together by the casket and they silently prayed. Finally, Walter nodded and the three of them left as one grieving unit.

Three months later, at McGinty's Bar & Grille, the boys had been drinking for some time and were obviously a little tipsy. Walter raised his glass to the TV and said, "to Jim's grandson, Ricky Greene." Then he said to Harry, "Season's almost over, thank God." Then Walter took a swig. They all slug their beers as a handful of CUSTOMERS sit at the bar alternately look at the overhead TV and Walter. Dustin shook his leg and started to say something.

"Don't say anything. Just go," Walter said to Dustin.

While Dustin exited to the men's room, Walter did a double-take on the women at the end of the bar. "What's with all the women, Harry?" Walter asked.

Harry told Walter that there was a cosmetic convention in town and these ladies were basically from all over the country patronizing the convention, and the bar. Just then a waitress came out with food for one of the tables.

Some real lookers, huh?" Harry asked Walter.

As Walter looked, he was more interested in one woman more than the others. Jim, of course, was more interested in what the TV announcer had to say. He announced the score. Navy was winning.

Jim raised his glass. "That's my boy," Jim yelled. "That's my grandson."

Walter jabbed his finger into Jim's shoulder. "Don't start, James."

"All I'm saying is that if Ricky was the guard during that game ..."

"What game would that be, Jim?" Harry said.

Of course, Harry was being sarcastic, because he really didn't want a half-hour dissertation on how Ricky had a long line of football players in the family. If anything, Harry

said what he said for the benefit of his customers who hadn't heard the story yet. It worked because Jim was getting ready to tell them.

"It was the Army/Navy game in nineteen sixty something. JFK Stadium right here in Philly."

Walter threw his arms on the bar and buried his head. "Please no. Pleeeeeeese," Walter pleaded to no one in particular.

"I was the Navy quarterback," Jim continued. "Walter here was the tailback. We were on the one-yard line. Two points down with seconds to play. I couldn't hear a thing the noise was so loud. I was supposed to pass the ball to Walter but our guard, Wolfman Smith, missed his block and I started to run but I got creamed. Game over."

Walter raised his head from the bar. "Wolfman Smith!" Walter yelled. "You gotta be joking. You add on to the story every time you tell it. And I was in the clear in the end zone. You should've passed to me. But noooo. You had to be the hero and try to take the ball in yourself. But you didn't take it in, did you? And you fumbled the damn ball, you forgot to mention that. And you lost the game. Why do you like telling that story so much? It makes you sound like a fool."

"I'm just saying it wasn't my fault," Jim said. "If I scored that day, life would be different now. I'd be a somebody and I wouldn't have to hang around with degenerates like you."

"But you didn't score a touchdown," Walter said, "did you? And you didn't pass the ball either because your ego's bigger than your butt. You fumbled the damn ball because you're not a team player. And now you're a nobody, just like me."

"Don't say that," Harry piped in. "You and Jim were officers in the Philadelphia Police Department. You're retired cops. You're heroes in real life."

But Walter didn't feel like a hero. In fact, since Gloria's death, Walter had felt nothing. Without her, he felt lost. And at that moment he actually wished he never played football, or became a policeman. He never felt that way before. "Yeah, yeah. Real heroes," was all Walter could say.

"I fumbled because I didn't have someone like Ricky blocking for me," Jim said, and really believed that.

Just as Dustin came out of the men's room shaking his leg, Jim added, "And you know what? I'm gonna jump onto the field the next Army-Navy game at Lincoln Field, and I'm gonna run down the field and score that touchdown I should've made a long time ago. And I'm gonna do it naked. That's right. NAKED. And to show you my worth, you and Dustin can block for me."

"Are you happy, Harry?" Walter asked. "You got him started, and now he's really flipped out. Naked! Good grief!"

"If I were you," Harry said to Walter, "I'd make an issue out of the fact he wants you to jump on the field with him."

"Yeah, well okay. I'm not going to do it."

A customer leaned in to Harry and asked, "Did he play pro-football?"

"No," Harry said. "But he played first string for Annapolis. Just like his grandson. And Walter over there played tight end for Annapolis. They were a good combo. And good friends since school."

The customer had Jim's attention, so he asked Jim if he was any good.

"Yes," Jim said. "In fact, I was very good."

Walter stared down the customer while Harry drafted another beer for the boys.

Dustin leaned into Walter and whispered “Is Jim talking about his screw-up again?”

Walter told Dustin that Jim hadn’t stopped talking about his faux pas since they arrived at the bar. But then Walter saw how vulnerable Jim was. The facial expressions. The tone of voice. Suddenly, Walter had a change of heart and felt sad for Jim. “You were a first string college football player,” Walter said, “I guess that means something. And you were a first-string quarterback on a nationally ranked team. That’s saying something too, I guess.”

“But nobody remembers me, Walter.”

“That’s not true, good buddy. I’m sure they remember the fumble.” Walter laughed but then reconsidered. “We all should have goals in life, I suppose.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Jim said, and then thought for a few seconds about what Walter had just said. “What’s yours, Walter?” Jim finally asked.

Walter wasn’t prepared to answer that question, but he answered it anyway. He whispered that he hadn’t had a boner in a long time. So, he said, “Let’s just say I’d be happy if I could just get a boner again.” Walter grimaced, as if he to suggest he felt that Erectile Dysfunction was not something that one just blurted out in conversation, and especially not at a bar. Or maybe that was the only place it belonged, Walter thought.

“That’s a goal?” Jim asked. “Well, what good would that do? Gloria’s not here, God bless her soul, and you’re too old and ugly to attract a woman this late in life.”

Walter agreed, laughed at himself, then looked down at the other end of the bar and saw the good-looking women.

“I’m baring my soul by telling you that I can’t ... can’t ...”

“What?” Jim asked. “Have sex?”

“Shh!” Walter tried to hush Jim. “Not so loud. I was just trying to make YOU feel better, chump.”

Jim saw that the customers at the bar were not paying attention to them so he could relax a little bit. He felt a little down for Walter. So he said, “How long you been impotent?”

“SHHH!” Walter hushed Jim again. “Keep your damn voice down. Don't say that word in public.”

“Three months,” Dustin yelled out. “You told me the other day it was three months.”

“I said no such thing.”

“Yes,” Dustin reiterated. “You did. You said ever since Gloria got sick you couldn't get it up.”

“All right, all right,” Walter said. “Hush down. Will everyone just shut up?”

“Why don't you take Viagra?” Jim suggested.

“I'm not taking that crap.”

“Yeah, you better not,” Jim said. “Especially if you're driving. If a cop stops you you'll face a STIFF penalty.”

While Jim faked a laugh, Dustin gave Walter a goofy smile. “You know what would make me happy?” he asked.

“No, Dustin. What would make you happy?” Walter said. “Making goofy faces?”

“If I could pee normally again.”

“That would make you happy?” Walter asked again.

“Yes. That would make me very happy.”

“SHUT UP. SHUT UP. SHUT UP,” Jim said to Dustin. “Why is that every time we're with you, we have a talk about pee.”

“I don’t know,” Dustin replied, “because you look thirsty.”

Dustin laughed at his own attempt at humor, and Jim groaned at the silliness of it.

“Why is it every time we’re with you we have to talk about your stupid fumble?” Dustin said. He then turned to Walter and placed his hand on his forearm. “You don’t know how it is. Every time I go into the bathroom I don’t know if I’ll hit the target or if I’ll pee down my leg. Do you know how mortifying that is when you pee down your leg?”

“If you have khaki pants on, that could be a real problem,” Walter added.

“Not to mention the smell,” Jim added.

“Will you guys stop,” Harry piped in. “You’re embarrassing my other customers.”

One of the customers at the bar appeared to be hanging on every word and was more than curious as to where the conversation was headed. He laughed, and then stopped as if he couldn’t believe what he was hearing and seeing.

Kareem, the TV Announcer yelled out, “Touchdown!! Navy scores,” and you would’ve thought Jim scored the touchdown the way he stood in a victor pose.

“James, sit down,” Walter said. “They’re not cheering for you. You didn’t score a touchdown.”

“So, now what does all this mean?” the customer asked Jim. “You gonna jump on the football field, or something?”

Walter groaned because he saw that Jim was deep in thought getting ready to answer. Walter knew Jim was preparing to give a long soliloquy explaining how he was going to jump on to the football field at Franklyn Field dodging college players that were a third his age.

“Harry, what’s the stock market doing?” Walter asked thinking it might divert the conversation. But it didn’t.

“I'd go to Lincoln Field where they are going to play the next Army-Navy game ...” Jim began.

Walter scowled at the customer, as if to say ‘See what you started?’

“... and I'd run from one end zone to the other,” Jim added, “and I'd score that touchdown I should've made 32 years ago.”

Walter started singing to Harry. “Old McDonald had a farm. Ee-yi-ee-yi-ooo ...”

Dustin raised his hand above his head and shouted for the world to hear, “Touchdown! Jim scores!”

“And on this farm he had TWO schmucks. Ee-yi-ee-yi-ooo ...”

“Exactly,” Jim roared. “Thank you, Dustin.”

“With a —“ Walter blew a raspberry sound which was supposed to sound like a fart. “... here and a—“ he blows another raspberry sound. “...there...”

“Very mature, Walter,” Jim said.

It was Dustin's turn to pipe in so he said, “Don't forget naked. You said you wanted to do this naked.”

“You know,” Walter said after calculating the do's and don'ts of the plan, “what's so funny about all this is that you'll never get past security guards.”

“There's no security guard today that could stop me,” Jim bragged.

“Maybe not,” Walter admitted, “but two dozen guards with billy-clubs sure could. No way am I going to a game with you. And that's my final answer.”

“I was going to wait to surprise you. Ricky promised me 3 tickets to the Army/Navy game next week. I was going to take you and Dustin with me.”

Dustin raised his hands above his head. Walter shrugged, as if to say, 'big deal'. He pointed to the TV and said, "Remember the baseball guy who jumped on the field last year and mooned the camera? People see him as an idiot now; they would see you as an idiot as well."

"Most people think he's a hero," Jim said. "He is a hero in my book. And He's been on TV talk shows all over. Besides, when we do it, we're going to run down the field naked. That should get people talking."

"You mean, 'riled up'. And what's this 'we' you're referring to. You have a mouse in your pocket."

"We won't be totally naked," Jim said reconsidering. "We might be wearing jock straps. Don't want your nuts bouncing around for the world to see."

"And we don't want to get blue balls, either," Dustin added.

Walter groaned, as if he was going to get violently ill.

"That's right, Dustin," Jim said. "You'll help. I'll need you both to run interference for me. You'll need your testicles in a tight hold."

"Yes," Dustin said with a pint of gusto in his voice. "I'll do it with you. I'll run down the field naked with you."

"Thank you, Dustin. At least I have one friend around here."

Harry looked at his three friends and smiles. They obviously held a special place in his heart.

"Stop the bull shit," Walter said. "I'm not taking my clothes off for you or anyone else. You have as much chance of getting me naked on the field as you have of getting one of those women down there on the couch in Harry's office. Alone. And on the couch ... naked."

Jim does a double-take at the women sitting at the tables. He was nervous and didn't like the proposition, or where this conversation was heading. Takes a swig of beer.

"It looks like Mister Pot-Belly, Hot-Shot has overextended himself," Walter said.

"Wuddya say, Buddy? You go over there and get one woman to go into the office and I'll give you twenty bucks and I'll run down the football field butt-naked with you."

Jim looked at the women, then back at Walt, then to Harry.

"Okay. You're on," he finally said.

"This won't take long, Harry. A slap in the face only takes a second."

Jim slowly walked down the length of the bar. He finally appeared in front of a few ladies who were buried in conversation. He puffed his chest out a bit, opened his mouth, but nothing came out. A young and nicely dressed woman looked up at an awkward and scared man.

"Can we help you?" a blonde woman said.

Jim stared at an ugly picture on the wall above the table, and appeared to be assessing its value. "I'm ... I'm ... I'm just admiring the picture. The pastels! Lovely, aren't they?" Jim walked back to the bar and found Walter laughing more than the occasion merited.

"Hey, Macho dude," Walter said after he calmed a bit. "You're really the suave one, you know?"

"Mr. Erectile Dysfunction has a big mouth. You're such a suave guy? I got twenty bucks that says you can't do it either."

Walter looked around and saw everyone at the bar looking at him and waiting for his response. So, he reluctantly agreed and told him to hold that twenty. "A kick in the nuts doesn't take long, either," Walter said. "I'll be right back."

"Damn right you'll be right back," Jim said. "With your tail between your legs."

“Not to mention you’ll be twenty dollars richer,” Harry added.

Walter took out twenty dollars from his wallet and handed it to Harry. “Where’s your twenty dollars, Jim. Harry is going to hold it for us.”

As Jim took out a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet, Walter buzzed down the bar and swiftly walked to the seating area past a table where one of the women needed her hair done. It had that matted look. It was dry, stringy. Scraggly.

An alluring Mystery Woman, in her thirties, dressed in a business suit, sat alone at the next table reading a book and sipping wine. As Walter centered himself so they all could hear, the Mystery Woman looked up. She appeared to be interested.

“Ladies, this is your lucky day,” Walter said loud enough for them to hear, but not Jim or Harry. “I made a bet with that gentleman at the bar. That ugly dude over there.” Everyone at the bar looked so it was hard to tell who he was referring to.

“I’m sorry. They are all ugly. It’s that black dude over there. “Walter pointed again and the women looked again. This time it was easier to single Jim out.

“He says, the despicable man that he is, that I can’t proposition one of you, successfully. I would’ve punched him, being the noble person I am, but, as you can see, he’s much bigger than I am and ... well ... If one of you were my wife, that would be a different story. I wouldn’t care if I got hurt and would take my chances. ”

Walter paused to let the women get a good look at Jim and the other gawking customers at the bar. “Anyway,” Walter continued, “I took the bet to teach him a lesson. I’ll give any of you the 20 dollars to go in the office. No messin’ around, mind you. Just talk. But we make it look like we had, you know, a tryst, or something going on.”

There was a mixture of responses from the ladies. One looked surprised, another amused. Still another woman appeared shocked.

“No. Just go in the office with me to teach him a lesson. We'll talk for a bit about the weather or your knitting club, and then we'll leave. Maybe you can pull your shirt out. Mess up your hair a little bit, and make it look like ... You know, like we did something. Okay?”

He waited a few seconds but there are no takers. He heard Jim laughing. Walter looked over to the Mystery Woman whose back faced him. He shuffled a couple of steps in her direction. Maybe she didn't hear.

“A couple of minutes. Twenty dollars. Please, my whole reputation is at stake here,” Walter said to no one in particular.

The Mystery Woman got up and took Walter's hand. She put on a strut, like a hooker, as they went into the office. Walter thumbed his nose at Jim as he passed and disappeared into the darkness of Harry's office.

Once inside the office, the Mystery Woman led Walter past a business desk and stood by the full-length couch.

“Okay, big boy,” she said. “You've strutted in here like a peacock showing off to your friends. What now?”

She fell into the couch, prostrating herself, and beckoned Walter to climb aboard. She held his hand, but Walter's face exuded anxiety. He tried his best, but couldn't summon the right words.

“All I want is to just sit and talk,” he finally said. “Nice weather, isn't it?”

The woman tried to pull him down, but Walter refused. “No. No. This is not what I meant,” he said. “You don't understand. I can't ... I'm ... I'm ...” He hunched his shoulders and

said he was married. “The angels took her away three months ago and my heart went with her. I’m still trying to work things out.”

The Mystery Woman nodded. “I understand,” She said and got up. “That’s so sweet. Okay. If you still want your buddies to think you’re a big stud, it’s going to cost you that twenty.”

Walter weighed his options, and nodded. Then, as if auditioning for a Harry-Met-Sally part in a movie, the Mystery Woman messed up her hair and started moaning without provocation.

Back at the bar everyone heard the loud auditioning moans, but they thought the moans were real. A slap on the office wall caused the ugly picture to fall on the other side, so Jim threw his head into his hands and thought he was bested. Meanwhile, Dustin got up and disappeared from view.

Seconds later, loud screeches emanated from outside the bar, than a muffled voice from afar yelled out, “Hey! Watch out where you’re going!”

And with that Jim looked out the bar window and saw Dustin crossing the street. Jim took off after him.

Back in the office, and having finished ‘faking it’, the Mystery Woman kissed Walter on the forehead and face, then a longer kiss - tenderly on his lips.

“How old are you?” She asked.

“Forty-three ... Sixty-something.”

Nodding, the Mystery Woman said, “Age is nothing to be ashamed of.” She held out her hand, and wiggled her fingers. “Come on. Pony up.”

Walter gave her a twenty. Then she messed her hair up and pulled out Walter's shirt and messed up his hair as well.

Walter and the woman came out of the office looking like they had a toss in the hay. They were greeted with applause while the Mystery Woman walked past the woman with bad hair and tossed the twenty dollar bill on her table.

"Go get your hair done. Compliments of that man over there." And she pointed to Walter who threw her a smile. They shared a glance and had a moment before he headed back to the bar.

Walter plopped down on a stool. Harry leaned in and said, "Way to go Walter."

"Nothing happened, Harry. She just faked it. Pretty good, wasn't she?"

"Wow," Harry said. "I'd say. But that would've been something if you three got your wishes. You know, Dustin wants to piss like a race-horse again, and that'll happen soon, maybe. And it'd be nice if you could get it on with a woman sometime soon. That should've happened today. And if Jim could score a touchdown at the Army-Navy game, and that'll happen Saturday. That would be a Hat Trick I'd love to see."

Walter appeared reflective, digesting what Harry just said.

"Go ahead and help Jim," Harry said. "He can't do it alone."

"Speaking of the devil, where are Jim and Dustin," Walter said.

Harry gave Walter the forty dollars and nodded to the door as Jim walked Dustin in from the outside. Walter leaned into Harry and as he put the money in his pocket, he said, "Okay, Harry. I'll help Jim. But keep it under your hat for now. I don't want to tell Jim just yet. He'll never stop talking about it. He'll drive me more nuts than he has already, if that's possible."

Harry nodded as Jim plopped Dustin on the stool next to Walter.

“That's the last time I go chasing after you, you hear?” Jim said like he meant it. He turned to Walter and said, “Shut up. Who asked you?”

There was silence and all one could hear was the TV. “So, Army and Navy,” TV Announcer Kent said, “are both undefeated. The stage is set for what should be a nail-biting game at Lincoln Field on Saturday night.”

“Yes, indeed,” Jim said. “The stage is set.”

“And don't forget,” Dustin yelled out. “We're going naked.”

Jim stopped talking. Although their relationship seemed to be on the mend, Dustin knew how to get under Jim's skin, although he didn't do it on purpose. And Walter's blank stare at Dustin had Dustin cowering a bit.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jim and Dustin sat in the Rec Room of the Retirement Center playing checkers with each other. Tracy walked by with a package.

“Dustin, will you please tell people what cabin number you live in. I'm tired of receiving your mail. Besides, most of it is not that interesting. This is though.” She threw a National Geographic Magazine his way and left.

Jim leaned in and whispered so no one could hear, “You watch it with her. She bites.”

Across the room Ted, Lester, Sandra, and Barbara were playing cards, their favorite pastime.

Walter entered and headed right to Jim waving two twenty dollar bills. Walter put the money back in his wallet and added, “Thank you, Sir. Let it be known that I did it when you couldn't.”

“You turkey. Ricky's coming over. He's got the football tickets.”

Lester saw Walter put the money in his wallet and yelled, “What's the money for?”

“Walter got laid last night,” Jim yelled back, “and needed to borrow some money.”

“Shut up,” Walter said. “That was private, you idiot.”

“It wasn't very private yesterday when the picture fell off the wall.”

“What?” Lester yelled. “I didn't hear you.”

Then Jim yelled as loud as he could, “WALTER GOT LAID LAST NIGHT!”

“Oh, good grief” was all Walter said as he turned to the card table, “Jim was just kidding,” Walter said. He would’ve said more but he didn’t want to have Lester or Sandra yell back, or think the worst.

As Walter made his last comment, Ricky entered. Jim bolted over to him. They hugged and found an unoccupied table near by. After a second or two, Ricky handed Jim three tickets.

As Ricky explained, the tickets were right by the goal posts and were damn good seats. Of course, Jim thanked his grandson, and then Walter and Dustin came over, sat down and thanked him as well. Then Walter flipped Jim the finger.

“What was that for,” Jim protested.

“For saying what you just said in front of them.”

Walter turned his attention to Ricky. “Ricky, I think you should know that your grandfather intends to run onto the football field during your big game this weekend.” Walter gawks at Jim, as if to say, "So, there. Take that!"

Ricky immediately grabbed the tickets from Jim's hands and pocketed them.

“I don't believe you, Grandpa,” he said to Jim, then turned to Walter. “He tried to do it when I was freshman.”

“I know,” Walter said. “I was there. I saw him.”

“It was very embarrassing, wasn't it? They still laugh about that today.”

“Walter, I don't believe you just threw me under the bus like that. And Ricky ... I'm not going to run onto the field. May I have the tickets back, please?”

“I didn't mean for you to take the tickets back,” Walter recanted.

Ricky got into Jim's face and said, “You think you can interrupt a nationally televised football game by running your fat ass around the field? I don't think so.”

Jim thought for a second then finally made the comment he made a thousand times before, "I want to score a touchdown that I should've scored a long time ago."

"And you believe this will immortalize you?" Ricky replied as he had many times before.

"And he's going to do it naked," Dustin chimed in. "Don't forget to tell him you want to do this naked."

"Oh, for crying out loud," Ricky said. "This just gets better and better as time goes by. Really, Grandpa. You want to take your clothes off."

"Not really," Jim retorted. "We'll have jock straps on."

"Oh, that's okay, then," Ricky said facetiously. Ricky got up and said for Jim's benefit only. "If you did try to do this, Grandpa, I'd tackle you myself. You'll go down, and I'm just the person to do it. Sorry boys. No tickets today."

"There's no college player today who could stop me," Jim yelled back. "Not even you, big shot."

Ricky yelled back as he left, "I love you grandpa, but you're a foolish man. And that's putting it mildly."

Jim, Walter and Dustin sat at the table contemplating what just transpired. Jim's hard stare intimidated Walter a bit. Walter got up and as he left he said, "How did I know he was going to take the tickets back? You shouldn't've yelled to everyone that I got laid. What's done is done. I gotta go see Gloria. You gonna take me, or not?"

Jim got up and followed Walter. Then Dustin got up and as he followed Walter as well. Dustin yelled, "Hey, wait up. I have to pee:"

Walter and Jim made a hard left and waited by the 'men's room' door while Dustin entered alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

At the cemetery where Gloria was buried, Walter put a couple of rocks on the headstone. He looked over to Jim and Dustin who patiently waited from afar. Walter spoke to Gloria while kneeling. "Remember when we first met how I used to talk about getting to first base with you? You said you wouldn't kiss me on the first date. I respected that, even though I wanted to go to second base with you right away. You know, touchy-feely stuff. That was a big deal in our time. We called it petting. Remember that, Sweetie?"

Walter paused a bit and looked around the cemetery. "I'm glad I buried you here, Sweetheart. It's really nice. Anyway, kids go right to third base today. You know, the Bill Clinton stuff. I did not have sex with that woman."

Walter chuckled, and then put another rock on the headstone.

"Well, something happened yesterday. I mean, you might've been somewhere else when it happened... so, you didn't really see what happened. I gotta tell you about it else it's gonna drive me crazy. You see, I tried to tell this woman to act a little bit. Just to goof on Jim. But no! She acted like she wanted to go right to home base. You know, all the way, right from the get-go. She went to first base and planted one right on the ole kisser. I mean, she wanted to run the bases like a bunny rabbit, but I didn't want to. I couldn't, wouldn't and didn't. I put my foot down and said 'no'. But I did let her bunt.. I'm sorry about that."

Walter looked to Jim and Dustin who began walking down a path.

"It was all Jim's fault, anyway," Walter continued. "If he hadn't shot off his big mouth, I wouldn't be in this predicament. I mean, he's always talking about that fumble he made during

the Jurassic Period ... aagh. That's why I challenged him, to get him to shut up. But I feel like I cheated on you but I didn't. I just wanted to shut him up.”

He picked up another rock from the ground and put it on the gravestone. “Honest. I haven't gone all the way home with anyone but you. Ever ... Ever. It's always been only you. Always.”

He gave the sign language for 'I love you', got up and ran to his friends.

All three started walking on a path past other grave sites. Dustin looked at the gravestones and was in wonder over some of them. “What’s the date on that one,” he said.

“It looks like it’s sometime during the revolutionary war,” Jim guessed.

“Wow,” was all Dustin said, and they continued walking and looking.

After a few seconds Walter apologized to Jim for what happened with the tickets.

“It is water under the bridge,” Jim said, but Walter knew it wasn’t. Walter knew how much it meant to Jim to go to his grandson’s game.

After a few minutes of walking, Walter finally said, “Gloria is gone and now you guys are my best friends. Pretty sad, huh?”

Dustin’s response was “I have to pee.”

So, without missing a beat, all three veered off to the nearest tree.

“Piss on that one. I’ve seen dogs pee on that one. You’ll drive them crazy.”

“Yeah, they’ll think you’re a bear, or something,” Jim said.

While waiting for Dustin to do his business, Walter said, “I respected her opinion, you know?”

“I know you did,” Jim said.

“Gloria actually thought your crazy football obsession was a cool idea.”

“Gloria always understood true genius.”

“Notice I said cool, not good,” Walter clarified.

Walter and Jim hear Dustin moaning and the sounds of peeing, but ignored the sounds.

“She was all pumped up with drugs,” Walter continued. “Not too rational, you know?”

Walter and Dustin eyed each other and Walter made a face at him and twirled his finger as if to say, 'let's hurry it up'.

“I can't pee while you're looking,” Dustin said, so Walter turned his back and faced Jim who looked away so Dustin could pee.

“I'll do it,” Walter said. “I'll run down the damn field with you, because Gloria wanted me to.”

“Naked?”

“Why do you have to be so damn theatrical?”

They heard the streaming noise again of Dustin peeing, and then he stopped and zippered up his zipper. “We'll be the Three Musketeers,” he said, then responding to their blank stares, said, “There nothing wrong with my hearing. I can hear better than most.” He joined the walk with the boys then stopped. “Oops,” he said. “I have to go again.”

Dustin turned his back and unzipped his fly. “Don't stop now,” Dustin shouted. “You gotta run. You gotta block. Gotta go...go...go, already.”

“We have to have a gimmick,” Jim said. “If I'm not naked I'm just another schmuck jumping the fence for TV glory. But if I do it naked? That's a horse of a different color.”

“Yes,” Walter agreed. “You'll go down in the annals of football history next to ‘Jim Brown: most rushing yards; Tom Brady: most touchdown passes in the post season; Randy Moss: most touchdown catches ever; and Jim Greene: the naked schmuck who embarrassed his

grandson, and the oldest guy to run down the field naked showing off his wrinkly body to ten million people'. Good for you. Anyway, I said I'll do it, so let's not beat it to death."

"You could've saved us a lot of trouble if you made that decision before Ricky's visit."

"Yeah, well I'm sorry about that," was all Walter could say.

Sounds of peeing started up again mixed with Dustin's moaning in relief.

"So, if there are no tickets, then how can we go to the game?" Jim wondered.

"We'll think of something," Walter said. Walter looked back to Gloria's grave site. He sighed. "Gloria was my best friend."

"I know, and I'm sure she'd love to know what you did yesterday."

"Yeah. Well, about that. I have a confession to make. I didn't do anything with that Mystery Woman."

"You want to say that again?"

"She was just moaning for the camera, so to speak."

Walter eyed Dustin. "Are you quite finished?"

"I don't know," was all Dustin could say.

"What do you mean you don't know? It's not a hard question to answer. You either feel like peeing or you don't."

"I think I'm done."

"Good. Then zip it up and let's go."

Dustin zipped up his fly and joined Walter and Jim in their walk.

Jim wanted his twenty dollars back if Walter didn't go to home base with the Mystery women, but Walter argued that Jim was totally fooled by the fake orgasm routine and that should be worth something.

Jim agreed. "Ten dollars, then. That's all it's worth. That means you owe me ten."

"Done."

"Oh, oh," Dustine said, as he stopped and turned to the trees again.

While Walter pulled out his wallet to retrieve the ten dollars, Jim and Walter kept walking and Dustin fell behind real quick.

After they reached Jim's car and Jim pointed at Dustin. "He's not riding in my car anymore. He's beginning to smell. No joke."

Jim, Walter and Dustin sat in the car in the parking lot of a strip mall. Silence ruled for a few seconds, then, Walter abruptly said, "This is stupid. Why buy jock straps if we don't have the tickets? And why do we need jocks at all?"

"We'll get the tickets back from Ricky," Jim said. "You'll see. Besides, have you ever run around naked?"

"I've done only two things while naked," Walter replied. "One is taking a shower, and the other is doing the humpa humpa. Can't say I remember wearing a jock strap in either one of those occasions."

"Well, like I told you before. You're gonna need a jock strap while doing this. You don't want your Gazuntas banging in the breeze. Very painful."

"Never heard them called Gazuntas, either. Bollocks, maybe. Balls, certainly. Testicles. Nuts. Family Jewels.

All right. Are you gonna come in with us, or not?"

Walter was fine where he was, so Jim and Dustin got out while Walter sat alone in the car.

While in the Drug Store Jim walked briskly past several isles and Dustin had a hard time keeping up, but followed Jim, nevertheless.

Jim stared at the boxes of jock straps, inspects a few, then grabbed three of them.

Meanwhile, outside in the car, Walter rolled down the window and had a quiet Zen moment with the Universe. A shadow appeared over his shoulder, and he opened his eyes, turned and yelped at a young boy who leaned in, cocked his head, and googly-eyed Walter.

“Gees, man,” Walter said. “You scared the living crap out of me.”

The boy's penetrating gaze seemed spiritless. Hollow. Scary to anyone.

“Isn't someone from the mother-ship looking for you?” was the only thing Walter to think of saying.

They both took a few seconds to size each other up. Walter looked in side-view mirror and saw an unattractive woman who looked like she was coming off a sci-fi movie set and she forgot to take off her makeup.

Before the mother reaches them, the boy said, “You're bald.”

“And your mother is ugly,” Walter said. “So, what's your point?”

The Unattractive Woman reached Walter and said, “Frederick, get away from that man.”

The Unattractive Woman burst out of view while yanking the boy away just as Jim jumped in the car and started it almost in the same motion. Dustin jumped in the back seat. Jim threw a bag of jock straps on Walter's lap and off they went. The woman saw Jim carrying the three boxes of jock straps with the picture of the jock strap on the front.

“Perverts,” she yelled as they took off. Jim watched the woman in his rearview mirror.

”Wow,” Jim said. “That’s one ugly ass woman.”

“So? I wasn’t making a pass at her.”

“Then why was she so upset?”

“I don’t know. She probably saw the jock straps and was responding to that.”

“She’s very upset. She’s reacting to something you did. Why is she so upset?”

“I don’t know. Probably thought I was making a pass at her son.”

“You made a pass at her son?! Something’s very wrong with you.”

Walter went to defend himself, but only said, “Never mind”.

Walter then took out the box marked large. “Thanks,” Walter said. “You got me the right size.”

“Don’t flatter yourself.” Jim said. “That’s mine.” Jim went on to explain that the medium one was Walter’s and the small one was Dustin’s.

Walter, kidding, said if the large one was Jim’s, then Jim should’ve gotten an extra large for him. “You’ve seen me in the shower,” Walter added just in case his point wasn’t understood.

“They’re supposed to hold you tight, not loose. It keeps you from flapping in the breeze.”

Walter threw the straps in the back seat next to Dustin.

“It doesn’t matter,” Walter said. “We don’t have the tickets, so you’ve just wasted your money.”

“Then, I guess we’re just gonna have to get the tickets back.”

The boys were running out of time. If they wanted to go to the game, they had to get the tickets back from Ricky because the stadium sponsored Ticketron sold the last upper-deck seats

about three hours ago. So, unless they were adept at scalping tickets, they were out of luck. Jim had to see if they could get the tickets back from Ricky. Walter had other ideas.

CHAPTER SIX

Ricky exited his apartment complex with a suitcase in hand. Jim walked behind him as they both headed to Ricky's parked car. Walter and Dustin stood by Jim's vehicle waiting for Jim to get the tickets back. Jim parked his car next to Ricky's auto in the double car driveway.

"I just came back to get a few things," Ricky said. "I got a team meeting in three hours, so I gotta get back. Mom's not home, so ..."

"I came to see you," Jim said. They proceeded to have a conversation about how sorry Jim was for even thinking about jumping on the field during the Army/Navy game. Ricky didn't believe him and Jim asked for Walter's help. But when Walter couldn't convince Ricky to change his mind, Ricky told Walter it wasn't a matter of changing his mind because he didn't have the tickets anymore. He said he loved his grandfather very much and was grateful for the support Jim had given Ricky over the years, but just as he was ready to explain further, Mr. Hartley, his neighbor, appeared taking out the garbage. He waved robustly to Jim and thanked him for the tickets before disappearing back into the house.

"You gave the tickets to your neighbor," Jim said in a scolding voice.

Ricky couldn't deal with the situation right then because he had to leave. He needed to focus. So, he jumped in the car and rolled down the driver's side window just as Walter walked over to him.

"Did you know his father worked on the railroad?" Walter said. "His mom worked as a cleaning woman until the day she died. And the way it the way it was told to me, his father was hit and killed by a drunk driver."

“Yes, well, he’s a little like his father,” Ricky said. “My great, grandfather was actually J-walking, but he wasn’t around to make his case. The guy with the bad alcohol level was, though, and he got off on a technicality. My grandfather is always talking about technicalities. You ever noticed that ... what could’ve been, I mean. I coulda, shoulda, woulda scored that touchdown way back when.”

“Yes, but he was a good football player,” Walter reminded Ricky.

Ricky agreed, but he also knew, even though he was a football star, that there was more to life than football. Ricky knew he owed a lot to Jim as it pertained to college and football. He told Walter that his dad left when Ricky was only three, and Jim was Ricky’s only male role model while growing up. “He taught me how to throw and block and tackle, but his teachings wasn’t just limited to the physical stuff. We went over the multiplication tables repeatedly until I knew them. However, physically he was always stronger than I was, and I could never get the best of him. Then one day I knew I could, but I never did because I knew that would destroy him. He taught me the difference between a man who escapes his mistakes and a man who won’t stop making them. It’s all about attitude. Yet, there he is. Look at him.”

They paused and looked at Jim sitting in the car. “I can not stop him from doing the ridiculous,” Ricky told Walter. “But I’m not going to enable him. I owe him that.”

“Don’t worry about him,” Walter said. “He’ll get over it. Good luck Saturday, Ricky.”

And with that Jim watched Ricky leave, and then yelled to Walter, “He gave the tickets to his neighbor!”

“You self-centered schmuck,” Walter said. “The least you could’ve done is wished him good luck.”

Jim and Walter huddled at a table in the Retirement Center's Recreation Room. Sandra, Barbara and Ted were not in the room, but Lester and Dustin were playing checkers at another table.

"Let me get this straight," Jim said. "We park a couple of doors down from Ricky's house and we wait for his neighbor to go to sleep. I'm assuming he has a wife."

"Yes," Walter concurred. "Let's assume both are in the bedroom and the tickets are in the den or somewhere else."

"But what if the tickets are in the bedroom?" Jim asked.

"Then we're screwed," Walter said. "Hopefully, he's got the tickets in the TV room or the study or the den. Anywhere but the bedroom."

Jim pointed at Dustin and said, "What about him? This is a two-man job. He'll screw things up. I just know it."

"Let him stay in the car," Walter said. "He needs to feel like he's part of this. He's never been a part of anything. He's been alone all his life living in that dingy little cabin by himself. He's never been married."

"Who would want to marry him?" Jim asked. "He smells terrible."

"That's not the point," Walter said. "He was an engineer back in the day when they used slide rulers, and fingers and toes and brain power. His biggest adventure in life was his class trip to Washington DC. So ..."

"So what?"

"So, stop kicking him when he's down."

"Ok. Ok. But I don't have to like it. Anyway, how are we going to get in if the door is locked?"

Walter showed him a set of lock-picks he used when he was an undercover cop. “I haven't used these in years,” he admitted, then blew on his fingers. “But I still got the touch.”

Jim rubbed his temples; a headache was brewing.

Hey,” Walter said. “You sat behind a desk for twenty years. I was out in the field longer than you. I know what I'm doing. We'll be in and out of there like a flash.”

“Your mouth to God's ears,” Jim said then looked over to Lester and Dustin and watched Lester make a move on the checkerboard. Dustin immediately double jumped Lester and gave in to a childlike clap. Jim moaned, as if in pain, and buried his head in his hands.

“I know I'm going to regret this, but...what the hell.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

The boys were parked across the street from the Hartley's house. They saw that the Hartley's house was dark except for a light in an upstairs window, and a flickering light coming from a downstairs room.

"Shouldn't we be doing this when they are out of the house?" Dustin asked.

Walter reminded Dustin that a lot of robberies were committed when the owners were home asleep.

The lights finally did go out in the bedroom, and the house was dark except for the flickering light in the den, which indicated that someone was watching TV or they left the TV on before going to bed.

Dustin chimed in "Shouldn't we wait some?"

"Yes, Dustin. We should wait some," Walter said. "Most people go to sleep in twenty minutes after the lights are out." Then Walter reminded them that the tickets were likely in an envelope."

"Shouldn't you take the tickets and leave the envelope?" Dustin asked.

Oh, for crying out loud!" Jim said. "What's with the thousand questions?"

"No, that's an excellent question," Walter said, trying to calm the situation. "I already thought about that, good buddy. I got Mr. Donut coupons. Here ... look."

And with that Walter retrieved three Dunkin Donuts tickets from his wallet. They looked exactly like the football tickets on one side. "Dunkin Donuts made them just like last year's Army-Navy tickets," Walter said. "They're the same size and shape. See."

The backs of the coupons look exactly like football tickets. The fronts had a picture of donuts and a cup of coffee.

“They have a picture of a donut on it,” Jim yelled out, not believing that the tickets will sway anyone.

“Yeah, but the back of the coupon is identical to last year's football ticket,” Walter said. “It's an advertising gimmick. It'll work. Trust me.”

Yeah, right. Famous last words.”

Walter looked over to Dustin and asked him how are you doing? “You have to pee?” Walter asked.

“No,” Dustin said. “I don't have to pee. Do you have to pee?”

Walter faced forward. “Okay,” he said. “I'm going to sleep. Wake me up in 10 minutes.”

Actually, Walter couldn't sleep. Dustin could, though. After 10 minutes, Dustin had his chin buried in his chest. Snoring. Walter looked over to Hartley's downstairs window and it still showed the flickering light.

“Okay,” Walter said, nudging Dustin awake. “It's time. You stay in the car in case we need a fast getaway if the operation goes south.”

Jim and Walter got out of the car and walked across the street to the Hartley's property. Walter flashed his lock-pics at Jim who just rolled his eyes.

“A fast get-away?” Jim asked. “Really, Walter? Dustin should not have come. If this ‘operation’ needs a fast getaway, we're in trouble.”

“If we need a fast getaway, Dustin is there. He'll be fine.”

“Operation?” Jim said. “What do you think? We're breaking into Fort Knox?”

They reached the front door, and as Walter started finagling the lock with his pics, Jim just turned the knob and the door opened. Jim shot Walter a disdainful look, then rolled his eyes, shook his head, and entered the house.

Walter and Jim tiptoed inside the house. A voice and a flickering light came from the TV room. Jim peeked inside and saw that it was an empty room. "Mr. Hartley and his wife must've left it on before going to bed," Jim whispered to Walter.

Walter waved him off. "Leave it on," Walter whispered to Jim. "There's no desk in there. I looked."

Walter made a motion for Jim to follow him, and continued down the hallway where Walter spotted the den and waved Jim in. Walter discovered a mini-bar stacked with liquors. He took the top off a decanter, smelled its contents and took a swig.

Meanwhile, back in the car, Dustin seemed preoccupied with the blinking light in the TV room window. He felt a little useless and wanted to be more useful: exactly how, he didn't know. He did know, however, that sitting in the car made him feel useless, so he got out of the car to investigate.

Dustin stopped on the porch to peek in the window. He saw the TV was on and continued to the front door. He crept into the house, and into the TV room.

In the den, Jim opened a desk drawer and found the tickets which were in an envelope marked "Army/Navy". Jim opened it. "Bingo," Jim said.

Walter grabbed the envelope from Jim and pulled out the tickets. He took the donut tickets from his pocket and compared the two, then inserted the donut tickets face down, so the football side of the coupon would show when anyone took them out of the envelope.

“See,” Walter said. “Looks like the real tickets. He'll never know until it's too late.”

Walter put the envelope back in the desk drawer.

“Good,” Jim said. “Let's get outta here.”

As Walter and Jim exit the house, they totally ignored the TV room and Dustin, who was watching the TV. He tried to stifle a giggle but couldn't.

Outside, Jim trotted past Walter easily. “Man,” Jim said, “You gotta be faster than that if you're gonna block for me.”

Jim reached the car first, and looked inside and saw Dustin was gone. Walter brought up the rear and looked in the car to see if Dustin is okay. In unison, they flipped their attention toward the house. And together, they said, “Shit!”

In the Hartley's bedroom, the distant sound of Dustin laughing woke up Mrs. Hartley. She heard another laughter noise and nudged her husband until he woke up. “You left the TV on,” she said. She heard another noise and nudged her husband again. “I think someone is in the house.”

Moaning, Mr. Hartley got up and opened the bedroom door and the sound of Dustin laughing came in the bedroom loud and clear. He reached into his closet and pulled out a .22 caliber rifle. “Call the cops,” he instructed his wife.

Two Policeman had Jim, Walter and Dustin handcuffed and sitting next to each other on the couch in Hartley's living room. The Hartley's stood behind them and listened to their explanation. Mr. Hartley asked the police to unshackle the boys, and they did.

“It's that simple,” Jim said. “Dustin gets confused sometimes and wanders off and we're the only ones who can find him.”

“Yeah, I have mad cow's disease,” Dustin said.

“no he doesn't,” Walter chimed in. “He's just kidding.”

“Okay. But all this doesn't make sense, Mr. Greene,” The lead Police Officer said. “Why did he wander here so late?”

Jim shrugs his shoulders and looks to Walter for help.

“Oh, that's simple,” Walter said. “We were over here this morning visiting Ricky next door to wish him luck.”

“I saw them officer,” Mr. Hartley said in their defense. “They were here this morning. I did see them.”

“I still don't understand”, the lead Cop said. He sighed and waved his hand. He gave up. “Has anything been stolen, Mr. Hartley?”

He started to say ‘not to my knowledge’, but he the held up his finger and told them to wait a second. He remembered the tickets and where he kept them and he wanted to see if they were still in the desk.

As Mr. Hartley bolted to the desk Jim started to say something, but Walter dug his heel into Jim's foot. Jim grunted, but he held the pain in quietly so no one noticed.

Mr. Hartley opened the 'Army/Navy' envelope and saw the tickets (coupons), then put the envelope back in the drawer.

“No. Nothing's missing, Officer,” Mr. Hartley said.

“Told you so,” Walter whispered to Jim, then drew his attention to the Lead Policeman. “It's like we said before,” Walter said. “When Dustin wanders off like this, he goes to the last place he's been that day. He's just a knucklehead, that's all.”

“Yeah. I'm a knucklehead,” Dustin said with pride.

“Do you want to press charges, Mr. Hartley?” the cop asked.

Hartley told the officer that out of respect for Ricky, he didn't want to press charges.

So, the boys were free to go, but the cop wanted them to follow him to the center.

“They don't have to know about this, do they?” Walter asked.

I know Tracy Thacker over there,” the Police Officer said, “and I'm sure she would want to know about this. Now get into your car and follow me.”

Once outside of Hartley's house, and out of hearing range, Walter said, “We're screwed.”

“Let's make a getaway now,” Dustin said.

“You can't make a getaway once you're caught, numbnuts,” Jim said. Then he turned to Walter and said, “I told you this would happen.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Walter walked on the treadmill while Jim jogged on the machine next to him at the fitness center. On the other side of the room, a Physical Therapist helped an older woman resident with floor exercises.

“Do you think Tracy will report us?” Jim asked Walter.

“Who cares if she does?” Walter replied. “This is a private retirement center and Sandra and Lester are on the Board. They’ll never kick us out of here.”

Jim wanted to ask another question, but he was breathing heavy from the exercising and couldn’t.

“You think working out for a couple of days will get you into shape?” Walter asked.

“I’m in better shape ... than most ... forty-year-olds.” Jim turned off his machine. He checked his pulse to see if he was still alive.

Walter shut his machine off. “To be honest,” he said, “I don’t see you getting past the ten-yard line. Security guards are going to nail your gazuntas to the turf. And mine too. Where’s Dustin?”

“Probably at the park,” Jim replied. “Where else would he be?”

A little later at the park, Walter and Jim sat on the bench where they found him last time. But he’s not there this time.

“He’s not at the Center,” Walter said, “and he’s not here. Where could he be?”

“Maybe he got hit by a cement truck,” Jim said. “No such luck. He’s been gone a long time. We would’ve heard by now.”

Walter didn't laugh because something just didn't feel right. Upon Walter's urging, they headed back to the recreation room of the Retirement Center where Walter confronted Tracy. She appeared agitate over what Walter was saying.

"I'll go to the board," Walter said.

"I don't have to remind you Walter," Tracy said, "that's it's a felony breaking into a house. We simply can't have our residents wandering around and walking into private homes in the dead of night because they have the beginning stages of dementia. The Board can't help Dustin. It's out of their hands. You know in your heart Mr. Fisk needs help."

Dementia? Maybe and maybe not. However, Walter did know that Dustin was in the beginning stages of something. He just didn't want to admit it, and he didn't want Dustin restricted in the Men's Ward at Bellevue Hospital either. "Dustin has no next of kin," Walter said trying to get him unreleased from the hospital. "That means we are his next of kin. You should've told us you ... you ..."

"I have work to do, Walter. Please go."

"But he'll die in that place you got him in."

"We all have to die sometime," Tracey said. "Oh, you see what you've done. You made me feel guilty. I didn't mean to say that. Walter, let's not argue. Dustin will be evaluated. If he doesn't get the right medicine now, he'll end up hurting either himself or somebody else later. You have to know that."

"How can a docile fool like Dustin hurt anyone?" Walter surmised. "The worst thing that happens to him on any given day is that he pees down his leg."

"Last night might suggest otherwise, Walter. And his peeing problem ... he has a Urinary Stricture. And he'll get help for that where he is now."

“You're a pismire!” Walter said. “In case you don't know what that is, that's an animal who has an anal cavity is bigger than its mouth.”

Tracey threw a magic marker at him which bounced harmlessly off Walter's chest. Walter fluttered his hands in the air. “Shiver me timbers,” he said as he headed for the exit door.

“Wait. Walter. Do you remember the accident Dustin was in last year?”

Walter remembered but he didn't say anything. He just stopped.

“He wandered off and got hit by a car, remember?”

“He was fine,” Walter said. “He got a couple of bruises on his leg. Big deal. He recovered in no time. And nobody was hurt by it.”

“That's not exactly true,” Tracy said. “Do you remember the driver who was so emotionally distraught she had to be taken to the hospital?”

“Yeah. Yeah. She was a little shook up, that's all.”

“She died of a heart attack while she was in the hospital, Walter. We never told you men because we didn't want to burden Dustin.”

Walter hung his head in defeat and left. Jim was not far away, and bumped into him by the exit door. “Any luck,” Jim asked.

“Luck? I wouldn't call it that. They sent him to Bellevue.”

Jim pondered that information a second or two. “That's too bad,” he said, “Well, I guess it's just you and me, buddy.”

“I told you before; I'm not going to the game without Dustin. And don't give me that 'I told you so look'.”

“But I did tell you so,” Jim said. “We should not have taken him with us to the ... ‘Operation’.” Jim used finger quotes on that word.

“Come on,” Walter said as he walked briskly down the front lawn of the Retirement Center. This time, Jim had difficulty keeping up with Walter.

“Where are we going?” Jim asked.

“To Bellevue.”

Walter and Jim walked out onto the third floor from the elevators and stared at the set of double doors in front of them - the Women's Ward, which he remembered so well at the Bellevue home. The ghastly memories and feelings he had when he visited his wife had him moaning with despair. The beauty parlor was to the left. They turned right and went through another set of double doors to the Men's Ward.

Jim wondered if the nurses in the Men's Ward ever worked in the Women's Ward and maybe would recognize them. Walter didn't think so.

“The Men's Ward has different nurses,” Walter said, “Which is good for us, I suppose, else they would recognize me and we'd be up shit's creek, so to speak.”

They reached nurse's station. Walter eyed the nurse who appeared to be purposely ignoring him. He coughed to get her attention.

“Can I help you?” She said.

“I believe you just admitted Dustin Fisk?”

“Yes.” The nurse said with a ‘So what’ attitude. “Why do you want to know?”

“We're here to make sure that we can pick him up on Saturday because we're going to the Army-Navy game.”

“Oh, no, no” the Nurse said with a tone of authority. “You can't do that.”

“And why not? Pray tell.”

The nurse became more stern in her glare. "Who are you?" she asked. "You look familiar."

"We're his family," Walter said, "and we'd like to take him to the Army/Navy game this Saturday."

The Nurse took a long, hard look at Jim and Walter. Jim especially. "I was told he doesn't have family," she said.

"Yeah, well, you were told wrong. We're like brothers to him."

"Oh. I see. Well Mister ..."

"Grimm. And this is Jim Greene." Jim nodded.

"Well, gentlemen, he has a catheter up his penis now, so I don't think he'll be going anywhere for a while."

"What does that mean?" Jim wanted to know.

"It means he's urinating into a bag." Walter turned to the nurse and said, "You stopped doing lobotomies 50 years ago. Sticking tubes up a person's penis is worse."

The Nurse talked slow as if she was talking to a child. "We're doing it because he can't control his urination."

Walter slumped, a temporary defeat.

"Well, that's it," Jim said. "We tried. Give us an 'A' for effort".

"We're not going without him."

"Gentlemen, Mr. Fisk has a Urinary Stricture and he's having an operation next week, so I don't think he'll be going anywhere. That's the beginning and end of the story."

"The game's on Saturday," Walter advised. "We'll have him back in plenty of time ..."

Just then, Doctor Molano came over and handed the nurse a clipboard. “Mr. Fisk’s diagnostics,” he said.

Before Doctor Molano left, Walter asked if he was Dustin’s doctor. He was, so he told the doctor that they had tickets to the Army/Navy game on Saturday. “We were just reviewing the prospect of taking Dustin with us,” Walter said. “You don’t get this opportunity too often. We’ll have him back Saturday night. Can he go?”

“The Army-Navy game?” Doctor Molano said with surprise. “Wow! Those tickets are hard to come by. Well, let me see. He’ll have to use a day bag, and if he doesn’t move around much, I don’t see why not.”

“I don’t think so, Doctor,” the Nurse advised. “Until Mr. Fisk gets a psychological review, he can’t go anywhere.”

“Agh. Well, there you go, Gents,” Doctor Molano said. “It’s out of my hands.”

The doctor exited and Walter glared at the Nurse as if she had single-handedly put the kibosh to Dustin going to the game.

“I’m sorry,” the Nurse said, not really being sorry, “but our patients ... excuse me our RES-I-DENTS need to be approved by Doctor Almquist as fit to leave without supervision. And since you’re not family, you need to be approved as well. Judging from what I can see, that might be a difficult task.”

“Oh, really?” Walter said. “Okay, well maybe then we should see the doctor. He’ll straighten everything out for us.”

“Wrong again, Cowboy,” the Nurse said with a real Southern twang. “I’m afraid Doctor Almquist comes here only on Mondays and Wednesdays. And what’s today? Oh! That’s right. Today is Thursday. Sorry.”

“But the game is in two days,” Walter said, trying hard to sway the nurse.

“That's a real shame. Now if you don't mind, I have things to do.”

As they walked away, Jim told Walter that they fought a hard battle, but the fight was over.

“Are you kidding?” Walter asked. “The fight has just begun.”

CHAPTER NINE

Walter rummaged through a box marked 'DISGUISES' at the kitchen table in Walter townhouse. A telephone book was open on the table and Jim sat in a chair looking disinterested.

Walter pulled out a wig from the box, then a mustache, bushy-eyebrows, Buddy-Holly black rim glasses, and a name tag marked DOCTOR NEUBERGER. He waved the wig in front of Jim.

“Got this when I was an undercover cop.” Walter pinned the name tag on his shirt.

“This is not gonna to work,” Jim said. “The nurse will recognize your voice.”

“No, she won't,” Walter said. “I met Dr. Almquist.” And then Walter conjured a very good German accent, “He's got an accent. German, maybe.” Walter then went back to his own voice and said, “In any event, I'm his assistant, Dr. Neuberger, who could be German as well. What do you know? You were a beat cop most of your career. I was an undercover cop my last seven years. I was a master of disguises. Some bushy eyebrows, a little wig ...” Walter talked with a raspy voice, “put a little sand in the voice,” then he we back to his normal voice, “I know what I'm doing. So ... shut up.”

“This is not going to work.”

“And so, we have another ‘I told you so moment’. It should be more of a ‘watch and learn’ lesson, if that's possible. Walter picked up the wall phone, read the telephone book and dialed. He coughed ready to disguise his voice.

“Hello, Bellevue,” Walter said in a German dialect, “Is dis the man's nurse station?” A second passed. “Oh, good. Well, dis is Doctor New-berg-ah. I'ma Doctah Almquist's assistant.”

Jim could hear the nurse's voice emanate from the telephone. "Doctor Neuberger, you say?" the Nurse said.

"Yes. Doctah New-berg-ah. Now, I just see two gentlemans who want to take Mistah Fisk, a patient in the Mans Ward, to the Army-Navy gamah dis weekendah."

"Yes, doctor. They were here and ..."

"I dink dese two gentlemans are psychologically fit to take dah game."

"Why isn't Doctor Almquist making this phone call, Doctor Neuberger?" the Nurse said, interrupting Walter.

"Oh, data easy. He's no here." Jim shook his head and sat down waiting for a shoe to fall. "He went on a long weekendah vacation."

"Where to?" Jim heard the Nurse ask.

"If you mustah know," Walter said, "he'd went ah somewhere upstate far away where fishes are."

"Well, I'm surprised Doctor Almquist didn't tell you about the rules we for new residents."

"Why don't you tell me dat, Dear," Walter said.

"You have to examine Mr. Fisk and sign the proper forms."

"Of course," Walter said. "I know dat. Duh! Dat's why I'm calling, Dear. I'll come over dere to examine Mr. Fisk myself. Will dat be sufficient." Walter waited anxiously for her response.

Finally Jim heard her say "I didn't know Doctor Almquist had an assistant."

Walter pondered for a second, then said, "I guess you no know everything young lady, do you? I've beenah his assistaunt for a month now."

“Well, I didn't mean ... I mean, I never implied I didn't believe you.

“I'm highly competent doctor. Over 25 years' experience with brain sicknesses. Was a foot doctor once, but switched to psychology. More interesting, don't you dink? So, I be over dare shortly. Oakie Doke?”

“We're close to a tour change here now, Doctor. I'll let the incoming tour know you're coming.”

“Dank you, nurse.” Walter hung up the phone and pumped his arm saying in his real voice, “And that's how you do it. James, the party's back on. We're going to bust him out.”

“You sounded more Spanish than you did German. Oh ... I got a bad feeling about this.”

“Wait till you see my disguise. You'll love it.”

“Hey, why is it so important to you that Dustin is part of this? He'll just screw things up.”

“Ease up, Partner. This is Dustin's last hurrah too, you know. He hasn't had an adventure his entire life. It'll give him something to talk about. It's good dinner conversation.”

”I don't need good dinner conversation,” Jim said. “Anyway, what are we, his guardian angels?”

Walter sat back in his seat and contemplated. “You never met my older brothers. Tommy and Bobby. Good Mid-West boys.”

“No,” Jim admitted. “I never knew them.”

“I never really knew them either,” Walter said. “Tommy was ten years older than me. Bobby was eight years older. We had our separate lives. Still, I fantasized a thousand times about being their side-kick while growing up.” Walter stopped. It was a nostalgic moment for him.

“Vietnam was hard on our family, Jim. I never got to know them.”

“I know,” Jim said. “You don't have to rehash.”

“Dustin needs us. I need him. You both are like brothers to me.”

The elevator doors opened on the third floor of the Bellevue Home and out walked Walter, a sight to see with his disguise outfit on: a white coat; a 'Doctor Neuberger' name tag over the pocket; a disheveled wig, mustache and black glasses. He walked into the beauty parlor and stood in front of the mirror before entering the Men's Ward.

As the beautician worked on a customer, he eyed Walter who was grooming himself and adjusting his wig in the mirror by the Beauty Parlor Sign.

“You need to reshape that thing.”

“Nah, I noah think so,” Walter said. “I'm going to an audition. Dere doing a film in dah hospital here soon. They'll have a real one for me if I get the part.”

The Beautician perked up and inspected himself in the mirror that was close to him.

Walter left and walked through double doors and sauntered towards the Nurse's Station. The nurse, Maria, was busy studying a folder when she looked up and spotted Walter looking at her. They took a long look at each other before Walter said in best German accent, “Hello. I'm Doctor Neuberger and I'm here to evaluate Mr. Fisk.”

Maria ushered Walter into the psychiatrist's office and said, “We've been expecting you, Doctor. Please wait in here.” And then she left. Walter was alone now, so he walked to a book shelf and took out a book on mental health. He opened it to a Rorschach Inkblot test picture and put the book face up on the desk.

He shuffled over to the window and spotted Jim three stories down in the parking lot. Walter opened the window and waved. “Hey, Jim. Over here. What are you doing?”

“What do you think?” Jim responded. “I'm waiting for you. What are you doing?”

“I'm waiting for Dustin. They're getting him now.”

Walter waved then went back to the desk and looked around. He saw on the whiteboard the column marked PATIENTS which had numbers under it. Under number 31341 the words "SEX DREAMS" were scribbled beside it.

Walter opened the drawer with the patient folders and pulled out a patient's folder 31341 and slapped it on the table. He began reading it.

Meanwhile, outside in the parking lot, Jim spotted Tracy's car driving up the driveway, so he ducked behind his car and watched Tracy get out of hers. She slammed the door and marched towards the entrance like a sergeant in the Marine Corps, as if she owned the place. She entered the building.

Meanwhile, back in the Bellevue Psychiatrist's Office, Walter walked over to the window with a folder.

Walter spoke in a loud whisper. "Get a load of this," Walter said. "There is a guy in here who is 88 years-old and has sex dreams every night. Pretty wild, huh?"

At the parking lot level, Jim exudes disbelief. "What are you, demented?" he asked. "Who the hell cares? Tracy's here. She just walked in. You're screwed. Get the hell out of there."

Walter mumbled an obscenity and bolted back to the desk. While he tried to compose himself, Tracy pranced out of the elevator and headed through the double doors that led to the Men's Ward.

Tracy marched up to the station. "Hi, Tracy," Maria, the nurse, said. "What's up?"

"I'm here checking' up on a few people," Tracy said. "When is Johnson leaving?"

"Monday," Maria said. "He'll have a walking cast, though."

“Good. How's Mr. Fisk doing?”

“He’s fine. In fact, Doctor Neuberger's is here to see him. Dustin will join him in there shortly.”

“Doctor Neuberger?” Tracy wondered. “Who’s he?”

“He works with Doctor Almquist. His assistant, or partner.”

“Really. I didn't know ... Never mind. I'll introduce myself.”

Meanwhile, in he psychologist’s office, there was a knock on the door, and then Tracy entered.

Half of Walter's face was buried in a folder to protect his anonymity. Tracy strained to get a good look at him, but couldn’t.

”Dr. Neuberger? I'm Tracy Thacker, office supervisor at the Retirement Community Center.

“Yes, my dear. What do you want?”

Tracy sustained a stare at Walter. She was more than suspicious than anything else.

“Speak up, my Dear, I'm busy.”

”I didn't know Doctor Almquist had ...” just then another, rather large, female Nurse, Sharon, entered. “Excuse me,” she said. Tracy stepped aside and let the Sharon guide Dustin in who dragged a night stand with a drip-bag attached. Sharon wiggled her way past Tracy and to Walter. She handed him some forms and said, “You need to fill out these. Sign them, and give them back to me. I’ll be at the Nurse’s Station.” And then she left.

“Hi, Dustin. How are you doing?” Tracy said, breaking the awkward silence.

“Hurting a little,” Dustin said, “but I'm fine.”

“I’d like to talk to you after you’re finished here, Doctor,” Tracy said and then left.

Walter continued with a disguised voice and demeanor even though they are now alone. "Okay," Walter finally said leaving the work papers he was pretending to read. "Let's get down to business. Mr. Fisk, is it?"

"Yes. I'm new here," Dustin said.

"Yes, I know," Walter said. "You're a newbie, as people around here like to say. OK. I just have a couple of questions. Do you bop the bonzo?"

Dustin fell into a chair. "What," he said. He could hardly believe what he just heard.

"You know," Walter continued, "choke the bald guy, do the pork-sword-jiggle, the five-knuckle-shuffle on the ole piss pump. Fondle the pig. Pet the lizard. Do you masturbate?"

Dustin still couldn't believe his ears, but he heard what he heard, so he responded.

"That's a strange question to ask a guy who can't even pee right, let alone do what you just said."

"Masturbate, Mr. Fisk? Really? You have a tough time with that word, or is it the question that confounds you?"

"This is a strange place," Dustin said, "and you're a strange person. Hey, listen, my problems aren't like that. I just told the other doctor if he can get me to pee normal, I'd be very grateful."

"Agh, don't worry about that. All men have peeing problems."

"Really?"

"Sure," Walter said. "Why do you think men wear dark pants? When they finish peeing maybe they shake their peckers too vigorously, or maybe they don't shake it enough. In any event. a couple of drops get on dare pants, you know what I mean? Women notice that when we come out of the bathroom. That's why men wear dark pants so they can hide their embarrassments."

“Really?” Dustin said. “Wow! I didn't know that.”

“Well, now you know. You check it out the next time you're in the men's room. So, don't feel so bad.”

“Well, my condition is a little worse than that. I'm going to get a Urethral Meatoplasty, or something like that, and the doctor says I'll be able to piss like a banshee in no time.”

“And that will make you VERY happy, I suppose.”

Dustin threw Walter a look of suspicion as Walter picked up a book and showed the Inkblot page to Dustin. “Good. Now, I want you to study this and tell me what it looks like to you? Take your time and hurry up.”

Dustin studied the page then said, “It looks like a man peeing somewhere. Who knows. Maybe in a stream.”

Walter took a look at the Inkblot. He obviously doesn't see the same thing.

“What the hell's the matter with you?” Walter said in his normal voice. “It looks like a butterfly. Why can't you just say that? Normal people would say it's a butterfly.”

“Well, it's like I told you. I'm not normal.”

“You can say that again.”

Walter spelled out B-U-T-T-E-R-F-L-Y on the form. “Question Four is No ... DNA ... DNA ... No...”

“What does DNA mean? What does DNA got to do with anything?”

“It's 'does not apply', knucklehead,” Walter said. “You don't have a menstrual cycle, do you? Reached menopause yet? Good. Then shut up. It's DNA.”

”That's no way to talk to a patient.” Dustin said. “I got kidney problems. You don't understand. I'd rather be dead than live another day like this.”

While Walter opened a folder he said, “Okay. Okay Cool your jets. Hey, do you know this guy Charlie Oswald?”

“No. I'm new here, remember?”

“It says here he gets an erection every night. Complains he has sex dreams. Who complains about that, right?”

“I don't think you should be telling me that about another patient. What kind of doctor are you, anyway?” Dustin looked carefully at Walter and realized who he was.

“That's right. It's me, moron. Oops. I shouldn't be calling you a moron. It's unbecoming of a shrink. If I was an urologist I couldn't use the words numbnuts, or asshole, right? Hey, they think I'm a real Shrink. Pretty cool, huh? I'm gonna certify you so you can go to the big game. You do want to go to the Army-Navy game, don't you?”

Dustin took his time answering the question. “I don't know, Walter. I'm getting an operation on Monday. I don't know if I want to drag a bag around all day at the game.”

“We'll hide the bag. Tie a windbreaker around your waist, or something.” Walter escorted Dustin to the window and they looked out together. Walter raised the pee-bag so Jim can see.

Walter unwrapped the drain cord and pointed the tip out the window. In a loud whisper Walter said, “He's peeing into the bag all the time now. Isn't that great? And he's getting an operation on Monday. No more peeing problems. He won't smell anymore, either. Yipee.”

”Where's Tracy?” Jim asked.

Walter opened the valve and squished the bag, directing the urine flows out of the tube in a steady stream out the window at Jim.

“What are you doing?” Dustin asked. “Stop pulling. OW! You got to pinch the bag here so it doesn’t back up. OW! Stop it.”

“You crazy nut” Jim said. “Stop peeing on me.”

“Technically, Dustin is peeing on you.”

As Walter wrapped the cord and put the bag back on the stand, Walter told Jim not to worry about Tracy because he had everything under control, and then he ducked back to the desk with Dustin in tow. “We gotta end this, Buddy,” Walter said. “They weren’t going to let you go to the football game unless the shrink saw you and signed papers saying your noggin has blood pumping through it.” Walter tapped Dustin on the head a few times. They sat.

“So, I dress up like a shrink. Cool caper, huh? OK. Let’s finish these forms. Then I’ll have to vanish before Tracy gets a hold of me.” Walter continued writing and filling in the answers.

Dustin didn’t want to run around naked carrying the urine bag, but he also didn’t want to disappoint Walter, and Dustin told Walter that. Walter told Dustin he didn’t have to get naked, but just come. Walter clip the bag to his belt as a way of practicing how to handle the urine bag.

“You don’t have to run down the field, either,” Walter said. “Just come. It’s all about the journey. It’s not about doing it.”

Walter signed the forms, got up and ushered Dustin to the door. “OK. Now go,” Walter said. “Don’t talk to anyone about this. I’ll see you Saturday morning. It’ll be a long day, so bring an extra urine bag, or something.”

Walter slowly opened the door and peeked out both ways. The coast was clear so he pushed Dustin out and followed behind him and Walter coughed for the nurses’ benefit at the station.

“You're a fine specimen, Mr. Fisk,” Walter said louder than the occasion merited. Dustin took a right while Walter turned left to leave.

Sharon took her time getting up at the Nurses Station. “He's a strapping young man,” Walter said to Sharon as he approached.

Just then a woman screamed. Dustin had opened a wrong door, and Maria went into the room to see what the matter was. Walter walked up to the Nurses Station laid the forms in front Sharon, then spotted Tracy talking to a patient down the hall. She spotted Walter and raised her finger for him to wait. She suspected that he was Walter, but she wanted to make sure by exposing the ridiculous masquerade he was portraying. Walter turned around and was undecided which way to bolt. He faced Sharon at the station.

“Oswald ... what room number?” Walter asked.

Sharon told Walter he'd find Oswald in room 301, so Walter rumbled down the hall, scouting the room numbers until he met up with 301, and he disappeared into it.

Oswald, in his 80s, lays in his bed snoozing. A night table had a clock radio and a tape player on it. Walter leaned up against the door and forced a few controlled breaths. Composed, he walked in and nudged Charles. “Wake up. I'm Doctor Neuberger. I need to know something.”

Charles appeared disoriented, so Walter shook him again. “Don't give me that groggy crap. I was looking in your folder and I noticed that you have sex dreams. What gives, my man?”

”Who are you?” Charles said while at the same time he rubbed his eyes.

“I just told you. I'm Doctor Neuberger.”

“What do you want?”

“I haven't got time for this crap. If you don't tell me what I want to know, then I'm going to beat it out of you, you old prick. Why do you have wet dreams all the time?” Walter looked

around the room and saw a walking cane leaning against the wall. He picked it up and pounded it into the palm of his hand, as if he is going to strike Charles if he didn't speak up. Oswald's face showed a look of terror, which softened Walter even though it was more of an act than anything else.

"No, no. Hey, I'm just kidding. Stop. Don't be afraid. I just wanted to know why an old man like you has sex dreams all the time. That's all." Walter waited for an answer.

'God Bless America', Charles finally said.

Walter rushed to the door, opened it and peeked out. He closed the door and came back bedside again. "Listen up, you drowsy runt. I haven't got time for this."

Really, it's the truth," Oswald said. "Every night before I go to sleep I listen to Kate Smith sing God Bless America. That sets me off somehow. My doctor can't explain it."

"Really? A song does it for you?" Charles, still scared, pulled the covers up to his nose and can't stop nodding.

Walter saw a tape player by Charles' bed. He hit the play button and the beginning of Kate Smith's 'God Bless America' played. Walter hit the stop button.

"Well, I'll be," Walter said as he reached out and patted Charles' arm. "Sorry I scared you, old man. You taking anything? Viagra?"

Charles shook his head, and Walter acquiesced. "You're okay, buddy. Go back to sleep. If I were you, I'd put the head set on, hit the repeat button, and sleep all damn day."

Walter peeked out of Oswald's room. The coast was clear, so Walter gingerly left and walked down the hall to the Nurse's station and past Sharon, the Nurse, who was sitting at the station. She bolted from behind the desk to follow Walter. "Gotta go," he said once he realized he was being shadowed.

“Wait. Doctor,” Sharon said, debating with herself whether she should tackle the good doctor or not.

Sharon actually had to run after Walter because he was going so fast. Walter spotted Tracy on the other side of the nurse's station a good distance away. They locked eyes and the chase was on.

Walter to quicken the pace, but Sharon was still being persistent. “There’s an answer here, Doctor, that confuses me.”

“No time,” Walter said. “Gotta go.”

“I can't process this until you answer me,” the nurse said as sternly as she could.

Walter stopped abruptly. “What? Make it quick, please.”

“It asks if he has psychosis,” the nurse said, “and you replied ‘he has normal psychosis.’ What does that mean? Is he sick with psychosis or not.”

Walter, annoyed that he had to stop and answer the questions, replied, “It means that he is as healthy or as sick as any one else here.”

“You should've answered 'No', then.”

Walter took a pencil from the nurse, and wrote 'NO' on the form, and handed the pencil back. Walter began to walk away and the nurse followed. Tracy was still some distance down the hall, but was gaining ground.

The nurse persisted. “You answered a lot of the questions by saying "Does Not Apply".

Walter stopped by the double doors and faced the nurse and said, “Dustin doesn't have any obsessive behaviors. He's not crazy, not morbidly self-centered or depressed, and he doesn't play with himself every night before going to sleep like some people we know, okay? Are you satisfied now?”

Tracy was closing in, so Walter said, before rushing through the double doors, “Dustin has penis neglect. Get him a cute nurse. That should straighten him right up. No pun intended.”

Walter rushed up to the elevators and hit the 'down' button. He heard the double doors open from the Men’s Ward so he ran into the beauty parlor and grabbed a customer who had large glasses sitting on her face. She was relaxed on a couch reading while the Beautician worked on another customer. Walter tossed his white coat behind the couch, grabbed the long blonde wig off one of the mannequin-heads, grabbed the customer's hand and ushered her to an empty parlor chair.

He put his wig on the customer and placed the blond wig on himself. He exchanged glasses with the customer, then ripped off his mustache and tossed it in the corner. And just like that, Doctor Neuberger was gone and another Beautician arrived.

“What are you doing?” the Beautician-owner asked.

“It's a rehearsal,” Walter said. “Everyone just be quiet. The hidden cameras are rolling, so just follow my lead.”

Tracy waited by the elevator doors scratching her head. “Where the hell did he disappear to?”

The only place he could’ve gone was to the Beauty Parlor, she thought. But first he could be hiding behind that couch, so she checked. He wasn’t there. She headed for the beauty parlor.

Tracy poked her head in and looked around. Walter's back was to her so she couldn’t see him. Walter did snip away at the ugly black wig he was just wearing, as if he were a real beautician. In fact, he had a gay demeanor.

“You look marvelous, Joyce,” Walter said with a perfect gay accent. “If Philip doesn't flip over you now, then he can just bite my ass. I promise he'll want some foreplay tonight instead of that 'slam-bam-thank-you-ma'am' attitude of his.”

“Excuse me,” Tracy interrupted them, not really looking at Walter. “Have you seen a doctor?”

Walter chuckle then said, “Why? Do I look like I need one? No doctors here, Sweetie-pie.”

The head Beautician said with a John Wayne-like attitude, “I think I saw the doctor up at the old Hennessey farm. Word has it, two Flanagan boys put a hurtin' to the Stepford girl and might've kill her straight out. Yeah, you might find him up at the Hennessey farm.”

Tracy wasn't too sure what she just witnessed, but she didn't have time to explore, so, with a wide-eyed look, Tracy just exited quietly and Walter watched her through the mirror. She hesitated at the elevators and when she disappeared around the corner Walter took off his wig and tossed it on the table.

He exchanged glasses with the customer, then picked up his mustache, found his white coat, then faced the Beautician.

“What the hell was that?” Walter said.

“I was kind-of-like ... Auditioning. Wasn't I?”

“Well,” Walter said with a heavy dose of sarcasm, “You know what they say, always go with the subtext when you can. So I'll say, that was good.”

“Where's the cameras?” the head Beautician wanted to know.

Walter put on his coat and as he left, he said, "They're hidden all over the place. Don't forget that one." Walter pointed to the security camera in the hallway ceiling. The Beautician looked into it and sported a gritty smile.

Walter ran up to the elevators and pushed the button. He waited, then Tracy appeared from around the corner.

"That was quite a show, Walter."

Busted.

CHAPTER TEN

At McGinty's Bar and Grille, Jim sat next to Walter and watched TV while Harry tended bar like usual. A jock strap with an ANCHOR drawn on it was sprawled on the bar next to Walter. As he drew an anchor on another jock, Harry broke the silence and asked Walter what he was doing.

"Drawing an anchor," Walter said. "We have to show 'em we're Navy fans, right?"

"Don't sprawl it out on the bar like that. You're embarrassing me."

Walter removed the finished jock-strap from the bar, and continued drawing on the one in front of him.

"So, what does this all mean? Dustin can't go with you guys tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not, Harry.

"You took too long at Bellevue," Jim yelled out. "What happened to the 'I'll be in and out like Batman.' Well golly zooks, Batboy, you left me standing out there in the parking lot for over an hour."

"It didn't work out as I planned it. I didn't expect Tracy to come." Walter squinted at a woman in the seating section. She was by herself reading a book and sipped a glass of wine, looking very much like the Mystery Woman.

"Remember that woman I picked up the other day, Jim? Is that her down there?"

Jim took a couple of double takes and shrugged. "I doubt it. I don't know."

The woman turned towards the front of the building and Walter and Jim plainly saw that she was not the mystery woman.

Dustin was watching the pre-game football show on TV in the recreation room of The Bellevue Hospital. A urine bag sat on a low-lying stand next to him. Another patient walked in and sat next to him. The pre-game show began.

Mr. Hartley packed his station wagon with a case of beer as Jim turned onto the street a quarter mile down the road. Walter was sitting shotgun.

“I’m not sure if we should do this,” Jim said.

“If he’s not there, we’ll just take off. Yes ... yes. There he is. Just go by slow so I can wave to him and that will be that.”

Jim slowed down as he reached Ricky's house. Another man was helping Mr. Hartley pack his station wagon.

“Slow down,” Walter said. “Let me wave.”

Walter waved and Mr. Hartley saw Walter and waved back. He smiled and went to say something to his fiend, but snapped his head back. He recognized who Walter was and quickly sobered. He smiled and nodded to his friend while he leisurely took out the ticket envelope and opened it. He looked at both sides of the tickets. The shock on his face said it all.

Jim appeared serene while driving down the highway to the Army/Navy game. He tossed Walter a couple side glances and Walter wanted to know what the looks were for. It turned out that Jim wished Dustin was with them. It also turned out that Walter gave Dustin his ticket anyway in case a miracle happened and he escaped the clutches of Bellevue. Dustin was very depressed at having a catheter shoved up his penis, to say the least. It hurt if he twisted a certain way.

“In fact,” Walter said, “Dustin said he was experimenting on trying to kill himself by covering his face with a pillow.”

“You can’t kill yourself with a pillow,” Jim said.

“That’s what Walter told him.”

“What a knucklehead he is,” Jim said.

“Yeah. That’s what I told him too.”

Dustin continued to watch the TV in the Rec room of the Bellevue Hospital. Other Patients were in the room watching with him. On the Television, Announcer Kareem was commenting on how awkward it was for that hour when the lights went out at the Super Bowl game last year at the Superdome.

One of the patients agreed. “Did you see that game?” he asked. “Boring. They should’ve kept the lights off. What happened, anyway? Anyone know?”

“An electrical relay protecting the facility during a cable failure,” Dustin said as if anyone knew what he was talking about. “It was between the switch gear and the stadium and it was installed improperly.” That made absolutely no sense to anyone except to Dustin. He saw everyone was staring at him like he’s had two heads.

“It activated when it shouldn’t have,” Dustin added.

One of the patients made a face indicating Dustin was a geek.

Jim pulled into a spot and parked at the Franklin Field parking lot. They both grabbed raincoats from the back seat and put them on. Each took a rolled up duffel bag and fitted it in their raincoat. Jim took out a football from the trunk.

The two men began their march and passed by bizarre-looking people engaged in tailgating parties; some had painted faces; some were half-dressed with their upper bodies stenciled with their favorite team logos.

Jim and Walter short-stepped their way on the ticket line to be admitted. Jim tossed a football in the air while waiting. Finally, Walter stepped up to the attendant who took his ticket, ripped off the top, and handed the stub back. He did the same to Jim's ticket.

The boys breezed through the entrance area and into the stadium. Jim put the football into his duffel bag and started looking around like a tourist. He soaked in a view of the entire stadium all at once, and so did Walter. Jim was lost in the excitement of the moment - like he just arrived in heaven and Walter guided him, as if they were on a cloud and were being ushered to their seats by an angel.

Meanwhile, at the Bellevue Rec Center, Dustin reached into his pocket and pulled out his ticket and gawked at it, then at the Television. "These two teams started playing each other in 1890," the TV Announcer Kareem said, "but then didn't play annually until 1930 ... Ooo! Here we go, the teams are coming onto the field ..." Dustin carefully looked at the fans as the TV zooms in on the section where Walter and Jim are.

At the Stadium, Walter and Jim cheered as Navy took the field and booed when Army did the same. The music blared and the fans went wild. Before Walter and Jim knew it, the kick-off started the game and the pre-game festivities were over.

Navy got the ball first, and the grunts on the field could be heard in the stands. Walter and Jim were definitely getting into the spirit of the moment. Jim loved what was going on – the

head-butts, the players banging on each other, the physical contact. It brought back memories of long ago when he was a football player.

Navy scored and half of the people in the stadium went wild with celebrations.

The TV cameras and the network loved Ricky Greene as he blocked and banged heads with the opponent. A timeout was granted and ‘the wave’ had the fans participating in the joyous celebration. The first half was over and the score was Navy 14 and Army 0, thanks, in part, to Ricky’s contribution.

Walter and Jim sat patiently while the half-time performers took the field. The band played music and in the middle of the song Jim picked up his duffel bag and said, “It’s time.”

Moments later, in one of the Men’s rooms, Jim came out of a stall wearing a raincoat over his naked body. He had sneakers on and a football tucked under one arm. His street clothes were rolled in a clump under the other arm. Walter came out of another stall looking the same way except he didn’t have a football. Walter and Jim stuffed their clothes in their respective duffel bags, and then exited the men's room with their Duffle Bags in tow.

Outside the Men’s Room, Walter spotted an abandoned vendor's cart, and they put their duffel bags behind the cart. Then they marched off with a purpose.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TV Announcers Kent and Kareem were at the stadium in the Announcers Booth along with other workers such as the producers, sound people and computer people.

While Kent and Kareem talked to each other during a commercial break, a Producer nearby appeared very serious. “Get ready guys,” he said. “We're back in five...four...three...two...”

Announcer Kareem led the segment by saying “I spoke to Longley, the Navy quarterback, this morning, Kent, and he was all business. You could tell the way he was focused, his intensity, that he was going to have a good game today.”

“Two hundred and thirty yards on eighteen completions so far,” Kent said. “I'd say that's pretty good.”

The teams ran out on the field to begin the second half. Navy kicked off.

At ground level, Jim and Walter came into view. They were by the entrance to the locker rooms and Jim found an opening that would take him and Walter on the field. But they had to hop a fence. So, Jim jumped the rail dragging Walter with him, and then both men crept along the sideline to the ‘Navy End Zone’. Two Security Guards popped out of nowhere, and Jim started to run, but one of the Security Guards, who was as big as Jim but half his age, tackled Jim from behind.

Within seconds Walter and Jim were surrounded by a multitude of SECURITY GUARDS and a minor commotion ensued. A CAMERAMAN, who was close by, spotted the commotion and pointed his camera to pick up the action.

While watching Television at the Bellevue Hospital Rec Room, Dustin sat up as he recognized Jim and Walter on TV. The other patients laughed at what they saw. Dustin tried to contain himself as the announcers told the viewers what was happening. “Looks like a couple of characters want to get into the game, Kareem,” Announcer Kent said.

In the TV booth, Kent nudged Kareem and head nodded to Walter and Jim who were being escorted off the field by security. A TV monitor was close by to show the announcers what was being broadcasted. One of the cameras was picking up the action Jim and Walter were creating.

“Looks like they’re being escorted to the security room, Kent.”

The Producer strokes his throat with his index finger. “CUT! CUT! We don't promote that kind of behavior,” the Producer tried to whisper above the rising commotion.

At the Bellevue Hospital Rec room, Dustin was glued to the TV as the camera followed Jim and Walter who are being escorted off the field and down the tunnel. The picture abruptly switched to a commercial.

In the Stadium Tunnel Area, the guards escorted Walter and Jim to a nearby security room. The Security Guards opened the door and ushered Walter and Jim to two seats.

Meanwhile, back in the Bellevue Hospital Rec room, Dustin watched a Medic push an empty gurney down the hallway of the Stadium. The TV then replayed the ‘blackout’ of the Super Bowl and Dustin jumped to his feet, startled, as if he had a thought. Dustin briskly took off his bag from the stand, attached it to his belt, and walked down the hallway and into his room

with just a catheter in his hand. He pinched the end that once went into the bag. Seconds later he walked out of his hospital room with a windbreaker tied around his waist hiding the bag and the catheter that was inserted into it.

Meanwhile, at the hospital entrance, there were three vehicles. One was unoccupied. The front door open and Dustin appeared. He walked over to the unattended emergency vehicle, and jumped in and took off. While driving out of the hospital area, he turned on the radio and heard Kent announcing that Navy scored again and that if Army didn't get their act together soon that this game would be the worst run-a-ways ever between these two teams.

"Navy is just too powerful on the front line, Kent. Ricky Greene and Josh Spencer have given Longley all the protection he needs."

Kent viewed the last touchdown on their TV monitor, as it was presented to the public by CBS.

"Watch this," Kareem said. "Longley flips the ball to Gary. Look at this hole. Greene just tosses Maverick aside and picks up the linebacker. And boom, Gary is off to the races. That is just amazing football right there."

In the Franklin Field Security Room, the security guards were huddled next to the FM radio. Jim and Walter were waiting patiently for something to happen.

In the Announcers' Booth, Kareem said "There's two All-American linemen on Navy's front line. I mean, how do you stop their running game, Kent?"

"Well, you don't, Kareem. That's the simple answer. The pass protection for Navy has been phenomenal as well. Longley has twenty-one completions and two hundred fifty yards so far, Kareem. Is this game over?"

Somewhere in route to Franklin Field, Dustin weaved through traffic like a madman. He turned on the siren and cars pulled over for him. He unbuckled his bag and sees that it is full.

“Damn,” Dustin whispered to himself, “I forgot to empty it.”

He unclips the hose, pointed the tube out the window. He opened the valve, and squeezed the bag. The wind caught the urine and sprayed the car behind him.

The guy driving behind Dustin was a rich guy driving an expensive convertible with his ‘trophy’ wife sitting next to him. Dustin not only wet the driver and his wife, but the car as well. The man had to turn on his windshield wipers because the car was getting so wet from the spray.

Meanwhile, in the security room of Franklin Fields, where Jim and Walter were being held captive, the chief of Security burst into the room and motioned for the two security guards to leave.

The chief waited until he was alone and issued his first command. “Stand up,” he said to both of them.

Jim stood as the Chief opened Jim's raincoat. The Chief's face was a look of astonishment. He squinted and said, “Is that an anchor?”

Jim pointed to Walter and said, “It was his idea.”

“I don’t care who’s idea it was,” the Chief said, “It’s funny.”

The Chief did not have much else constructive to say. He just shook his head and said, “Well, now I can die, because I've seen everything.” He eyed Jim closely, as if he knew him.

“What's your name?” he asked.

”Jim,” Jim said.

”Do you have a last name? Or do you have only one name, like Fabian or Elvis.”

“Elvis had a last name.”

“Yes. He did, didn’t he? My mistake.”

“Greene,” Jim said. “My last name is Greene.”

The Chief thought for a second, and then realized who Jim was. “Yes,” the Chief said, “You’re the grandfather of Ricky Greene?”

“The one and only!” Walter chimed in.

”Shut up,” Jim said to Walter.

The Chief took a deep breath, then appeared confused.

“Why did you do this? Are you crazy or something?”

“Bingo,” Walter. As far as Walter was concerned, the Chief hit the nail on the head. “You don’t know the half of it,” Walter added.

“Shut up,” was all Jim said.

“Then ... why? None of this makes sense to me.”

”Yes. Pray tell. Explain, James,” Walter said.

But Jim remained stubbornly silent, not like at the bar where he loved telling everyone why he was going to jump onto the football field.

“He’s recapturing his youth,” Walter explained. “He was a football hero a long time ago. You see, he played for Navy about 30 years ago, and he fumbled on the one yard line. He wants to score an imaginary touchdown so the world will remember him scoring a touchdown, not fumbling the ball.”

”You mean that touchdown he should’ve scored a long time ago.” The Chief threw his hands up. “Now it makes sense. Listen, both of you. I’m not going to press charges out of respect for...” The Chief stopped.

“For Ricky,” Jim interrupted. “I don’t want your respect because of him.”

“No. Out of respect for you, Mr. Greene. I remember you when you used to play for Navy. I was only a kid then, but I remember you. I remember that game ...”

“Everyone remembers that game,” Jim said. “That’s why I’m here. To erase that memory and to let all the world know what could’ve been.”

“Yeah, well, you were good, Mr. Greene. No, I won’t press charges out of respect for you. And your talent. Now you both stay put. I have a couple of things I have to do first.”

The chief opened the security door and told the guards to stay with Walter and Jim until the game was over.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The game was a runaway for Navy. They were in the third quarter, and Navy was advancing the ballxx. They scored their fourth touchdown in the game, thanks to Ricky. Upon Ricky's urging, they played him on defense, which they did twice that year already. They might've allowed someone to play offense and defense in Jim's day, on a regular basis, but rarely did that ever happen in current day college football, and certainly not in professional football. Too much was at stake when trying to stretch someone across two disciplines like that.

Anyway, Army tried to march down the field, and they had mild success when they issued a play away from Rickey. But play after play we can see how Ricky excelled in his position as defensive guard. He tackled the offensive halfback and fullback repeatedly, as the Army tested that side of the line repeatedly. Ricky was pure misery for Army and disrupted their game plan on every down.

The Navy fans in the stands were becoming less and less exuberant because the game was becoming a runaway. The Navy coach was calm and collected. He even shouted to the bench, "Okay – who hasn't played yet." The coach wanted to make sure everyone had a chance to play.

The Army coach threw his hands up in the air, beaten; team players have lost hope. He too shouted at the bench for anyone who had not played yet. And he too wanted everyone to have played a series of downs, but for different reasons.

They were in the fourth quarter and the game was almost over. The Navy coach looked up at the clock just as the two minute whistle blew.

In the parking lot at Lincoln Financial Stadium Dustin pulled in and headed right for one of the entrances. He saw a maintenance man and poked his head out the window and asked where security was. The maintenance man directed him to Gate Seven.

Dustin turned on his siren and headed for Gate Seven. He arrived at the gate and jumped out of the medical van and headed inside. He met up with an attendance worker. He informed Dustin that he hadn't called an emergency vehicle, but Dustin slapped down his tickets, grabbed a program and ran in. To where? He didn't know.

As Dustin approached the security room, he spotted a door marked "Electrical Room" and wandered towards it. He peeked inside at the electrical panels and three large generators.

"Wow!" Dustin said to no one in particular.

He ran up to another door and peeked through the window portion of that security door and saw Walter and Jim.

Dustin ripped a page from his program, took a pen from his pocket and wrote something on the paper. When finished, he put the paper to the window then pointed to the floor. He slid the paper under the door and waited.

Inside, Walter nudged Jim. They both saw a piece of paper on their side of the door. Walter leaned in to Jim and whispered "Distract them."

Walter and Jim were unbound at this point and Walter got up and headed for the door.

Jim approached the guards who were still distracted by the game on the radio.

"Man. Boring game," Jim said.

“You said it,” The guard was emphatic when he said that. “But your grandson is doing great.”

Walter picked up the paper and nodded to Jim. They both sat back down and read the note which said, “When lights out, make a run for it.”

Meanwhile, Dustin approached the Electrical Room and saw the Engineer through the Plexiglas’s window on the door. The engineer had his back to him. The door was slightly ajar, so he quietly snuck in. Dustin was adept at hiding himself, and he did so easily. He slowly walked down an aisle, and he touched a large electrical panel as if it were made of gold.

Another engineer in another aisle made some noise, alerting Dustin of his presence. Dustin ducked down behind the generator to hide. The Engineer wrote something on a ledger, then walked to the door and exited.

Meanwhile, Dustin leaned against the wall, and he hummed with the hum of the equipment, as if he was becoming one with it. He then ran to a 15 foot bank of breaker panels. The stenciling above the panel says "Field Lights only - 480 Volt Main Disconnect and Distribution Gear". Dustin rested his hand on the Disconnect Arm, which stuck out four inches off the face of the panel. He took a deep breath and hoped he was doing what he thought he was doing – shutting the lights off in the stadium creating a diversion needed to disrupt the game and allow Jim to work his magic, whatever that was. Dustin closed his eyes, too a deep breath and held it, then flipped the arm down, and prayed for the best.

The GFI mechanism engaged and a loud BANG of a relay switch startled Dustin as the generator turned on. It got louder and louder as it picked up speed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Meanwhile, in the CBS Announcers Booth, Kent and Kareem saw the lights on the field go off right in the middle of a play. All other lights are on except for the field lights. Kareem stood and and looked out at the field which was in total darkness now. He looked to Kent who looked at the producer and said, “Unbelievable. This is déjà vu all over again.” He was referring to, of course, the previous Super Bowl game when the lights went off and caused an hour delay in the game.

In the stadium’s security room, the two security guards were glued to the radio while Jim and Walter sat patiently. A panicked voice screeched over the guards' two-way radio.

”Help! HELP! Field lights are out,” the person on the other end said.

Neither guards knew where to go, but they bolted out of the room, nevertheless, leaving Walter and Jim gawking at each other, wide-eyed.

The Engineer bolted into the Electrical Room in panic. He was talking on his two-way radio while Dustin was by the door ready to leave. The Engineer shouted into his receiver, “I’m right in front of it. The GFI tripped for the main switch gear.”

“The entire field is dark, man. Reset it. What are you waiting for. Do it NOW!”

”I have to turn off the other breakers first,” the Engineer said. “The main switch won’t take the load all at once.”

The voice from the two-way radio echoed some static, then the command came in loud and clear. “Do it!”

Dustin bolted out of the room and, meanwhile, in the Announcer's Booth, the producer was on the telephone trying to assess the damage. "What happened to the back-up power?" he yelled at no one in particular.

Kareem peered out the glass window and into the darkness. "Well, folks," he said, "this is about the most excitement we've had all day."

"It's certainly dark out there," Kent said.

The announcers shrugged, as if they were struggling to keep the conversation going.

"Wow! Kareem. This is like the Super Bowl all over again. This may not be a landmark game, but I don't ever remember anything like this happening before."

The lights went back on in sections, interrupting Kent. But he sensed that the problem had been fixed, so he piped in, "Here we go. Lights are coming back. That wasn't too bad, folks. What do you think happened, Kareem?"

"Probably a squirrel got into a circuit breaker or something."

A loud roar came over the crowd as the lights came back on in sections, and the attention it created allowed Walter and Jim to trot onto the field out without being accosted. Jim guided Walter into the far end zone. They stood tall with their raincoats on, like warriors ready to do battle.

Announcer Kent spotted Walter and Jim at the opposite end zone and nudged Kareem. "Kareem, do you see what I see?"

"This day keeps on getting better," Kareem said.

On the field, one referee blew his whistle to resume play, but another referee spotted Walter and Jim and blew his whistle loudly to stop play. The fans started to pick up what was going on and a buzz started to spread throughout the stadium.

The Security Guards were about to close in just when Walter and Jim threw off their raincoats. An enormous roar spread throughout the stadium at the sight of Walter and Jim with nothing on except sneakers and the 'anchor' jock straps.

In the Announcer's Booth, the producer paced nervously.

“My God! Will you look at that?” Kent said, and then looked at the CBS monitor. The network cameraman had his trained eye on Jim and Walter as the fans went wild with their applause.

On the playing field, Walter looked to the sky and said, “Well, Honey. I may be your valiant knight, but I have no shining armor to offer you today.”

Walter looked down at his jock strap and shook his head because he couldn't believe that he was doing this. However, his buddy, Jim, was thoroughly into it as he took a deep breath and said. “Let's go. You first.”

Walter took several puffs of air then, as if this will be his last act in life, he trotted in front while Jim jogged behind a few steps.

The security guard, who tackled Jim earlier, tried to stop him again, but this time he was no match for Jim who gave him a stiff-arm that put the guard away with ease.

Ricky watched intently with a teammate next to him. “You had to do it,” Ricky whispered loudly enough for his teammate to hear.

“He had to do what?” his teammate asked.

“That's my grandfather. The idiot.”

His teammate looked around the stadium and saw the mayhem that Walt and Jim were causing.

“I think that's the funniest, stupid thing I've ever seen,” Ricky's teammate said.

Some of the Army football players were kicking the turf in disgust while others watched with great interest.

Ricky started to separate himself from his team and headed over to the five-yard line in direct line of Jim. Twenty security guards lined up in the end zone locking their arms and moving forward like a human net.

Up in the booth, the producer who wanted everyone to stop paying attention to ‘these derelicts’ was now forgetting his responsibilities, meandered over to the window and became a spectator like everyone else.

As if out of nowhere, Dustin appeared on the sideline. He could see that Walter had lost some steam running interference for Jim. A couple of security guards were getting closer to Jim and were getting ready to tackle him, but Walter threw his body on the ground in front of the guards and down they went. Jim ran over to Walter, looked at him briefly, then continued on his journey. Jim and Walter both knew that Jim was going to have to do it alone from here on in. Walter was just too exhausted.

Walter watched as Jim ran past the 25 yard line and had 75 yards to go. One of the guards got up and chased Jim again, but the other guard wrestled Walter who managed to keep the Guard grounded. However, in a respectful moment, a 'esprit de corps' overtook that guard, and he let Walter win the moment.

Huffing and puffing, Walter got up and meandered down the field well behind the guard that was chasing Jim. Walter took his time walking down the field. He was too tired to run.

The gap between the guard and Jim shortened. On the sideline, Dustin got up and, seeing the guard gaining on Jim, yelled “Watch out. Behind you.” But it was to no avail because Jim

didn't hear him. Still, Dustin moved onto the field and continued to yell warnings. He clipped the urine bag to his pocket and picked up a little speed.

In the Announcer's Booth, announcer Kareem noticed Dustin and yelled "Holy cow. There's another old man running onto the field."

"Looks more like a waddle, Kareem," Kent said.

Dustin waddled as fast as he could which, by most standards, was somewhat of a snail's pace, but he was at a good angle and, although he lost steam, he took aim at the Guard, who was about to clobber Jim. In a desperate attempt to help Jim achieve his goal, Dustin threw himself like a dart and managed to dive on the ground in front of the guard and tripped the guard up just before he took aim on Jim.

The crowd roared when the Guard took a hard fall. Dustin checked his bag. No damage. Walter approached. "How are you doing, Buddy," he asked Dustin. Dustin looked at the urethra tube that terminated in his urethra bag, and squeezed the bag a little. He squirted a little urine into the air.

"Don't even think about it," Walter said. "Point it at him." Walter pointed to the guard he tripped up and who held his hand up. He had enough and was walking off to the sideline.

"See ya later, alligator," Walter said, and then continue on down the field.

Jim stopped, not because he was tired, although he was, but because he observed two obstacles in front of him. One was a line of BIG security guards standing arm-and-arm on the FIVE-yard line, and Ricky who wanted to make good on his promise to tackle his grandfather if nobody else could or would. He was standing on the ten.

“First things were first,” Jim said to himself. Ricky was his first obstacle. So, like a bull he positioned himself on the twenty yard line. “Well, I’ll be damned,” was all Ricky said, as he waved Jim on.

Jim took a panoramic view of the stadium and saw the fans, most of whom were on their feet yelling and screaming, and the TV Camera people, most of whom were pointing the camera on him. The scores of Paparazzi snapped pictures waiting for Jim to make his next move.

In the Announcers' Booth, the Producer watched by the glass with great interest. “Come on old man. You can do it,” he whispered to himself so no one else could hear him.

An eerie quiet took over the stadium. Jim looked in front of him and saw Ricky ready to take him head on. They squared off with each other from fifteen yards away. The band started playing the "Rocky theme" and Jim moved at a slow pace, then faster and faster until he was at his top speed. The fans went wild again, cheering Jim on, but just as he closed in on his grandson, instead of tackling Jim, like Ricky promised, Ricky turned toward the guards to run interference.

Jim followed his grandson into a wall of Security guards. Ricky sent a couple of them flying to the turf. But there were too many guards. Two were on Jim’s back. One had him by the waist and the Guards looked like they had the upper hand. But Walter suddenly appeared in the end zone yelling to get Jim’s attention. Jim saw him, but remained determined to take the ball in himself - just like he tried to do three decades ago.

As Jim moved forward, another security guard jumped on him just about sealing Jim’s fate. However, Jim moved the ball out in front and was ready to take that last lunge into the end zone but instead he passed the ball to Walter who caught it for a score against no particular opponent.

Jim looked up into the stands, and judging from the pandemonium, it was a touchdown scored for humanity.

“The old man scores. The old man scores! The old man scores!” Kareem kept on yelling in the booth and couldn’t stop.

Walter fell down, but immediately got up and spiked the ball to the ground. He ran around the end zone with his hands over his head dancing to the Rocky music.

Walter couldn’t stop dancing, and a couple of trombonists in the Navy band wouldn’t stop playing the Rocky theme. Finally, amidst the cheers and the camera flashes, Walter fell to his knees, exhausted. Jim ran to Walter and picked him up and they did a high five as Jim grinned from ear to ear.

Then they both jumped as high as they could into the air, and their bodies were protruding forward, and a Photographer from People’s Magazine was in the right place at the right time and snapped a picture from the end zone. The photo hit the front pages. The photographer captured Walter and Jim bumping chests in mid-air, with Dustin lying on the 15-yard line with his arm raised up in victory.

CHAPTER FORTEEN

Several months had passed. At McGinty's Bar and Grille, a pre-season football game was on the TV and competed with the usual banter of Jim, Walter and Dustin as they sipped on their beers at the bar. Harry drafted a beer for another customer when a UPS Delivery Man walked in with what looked like a two-foot by three-foot picture wrapped up in brown paper.

"I've been waiting for this picture for months," Harry said. "Just put it here."

The man placed it down on the bar, Harry signed for it, and then the postman left.

"Kareem," TV Announcer Kent said, "this is Navy's first game of the season and Ricky Greene is in mid-season form already."

"He's one of seven people coming back for Navy, and Navy's got as a good shot as anyone for the national title this year, Kent."

Jim looked at Dustin and smiled. "How are you doin', buddy," Jim asked.

"I'm fine," Dustin replied. "How are you doin', buddy?"

Jim reached into his pocket and pulled out a string. A Customer watched Jim attach one end of the string to Dustin's belt and the other end of the string to his belt. He tugged on it and looked Dustin in the eyes. "You're going nowhere tonight."

Walter squinted a couple of times at the seating area on the other side of the bar. He got up off the stool, walked towards the jukebox and tried to get a better view of a woman sitting at one of the tables. He put money into the jukebox, pushed some buttons, and sauntered to a table. It was the Mystery Woman.

"May I sit?" Walter said to the Mystery Lady.

She looked up, nodded and then smiled. "It's you," she said when the music started to play from the jukebox. It was Kate Smith singing, 'God Bless America'.

Jim's back faced Dustin as he divided his attention between the TV and Walter. Jim tugged on the string without looking. It was tight. But just to make sure, he glanced over to Dustin who appeared content munching on pretzels and watching TV.

Walter guided the Mystery Woman to the floor for a dance. Harry and Jim watched from the Bar. Jim looked at the TV and raised his arms and yelled, "That's my grandson."

Harry strutted over to the seating section where to the ugly picture hung on the wall. He removed it, then meandered back and placed the ugly picture on top of the bar. Harry took a moment to watch Walter dance with the Mystery Woman, and then he reached for his glass of water and leaned into Jim. "You know," Harry said, "I knew Gloria. So, in her memory I say a dance is just as good as anything. She'd be proud of him."

Harry held up his glass and clinked it with Jim's mug of beer. After a moment, Jim heard a screeching noise emanating from outside.

People at the bar could hear the man outside yell, "Watch where you're going, old man." Jim tugged on the string. It was tight. "For a second I thought ..." he started to say but didn't finish because Jim saw the end of the string was tied to an empty stool. Dustin had pulled a fast one. With a fluster of moves, Jim broke the string and bolted outside

As Walter and the Mystery Woman danced, she asked, "So, how you been these past few months?"

"I'm just happy to be alive, I guess."

As Harry washed glasses in the bar sink Jim pranced in with Dustin. They were silent with each other and Harry watched Jim as he tied the string back on Dustin's belt and attached the other end to himself, and didn't say anything.

Harry turned and gave a customer his full attention. "I think they should rename this bar Codgertown Bar and Grille," the customer said.

"And why is that, may I ask?"

And the customer just replied the town was overrun with retirees. The so-called 'Baby Boomers' were overtaking the world. "I don't understand why you let them in here in the first place," he said. "They're loud, and old, and obnoxious and ..."

Harry held up his hand like a traffic cop and the customer stopped talking.

"I guess you haven't heard," Harry said. "Sixty is the new fifty." Harry took a gander at Walter who dipped the Mystery Women while dancing, and then he head-nodded to Walter and the Mystery woman. "In their case, it's the new thirty."

The customer started to laugh but stopped when he saw Harry's stare was one that would freeze anyone.

"Why don't you just drink up and call it a night," Harry said.

This insulted the customer, so he finished his drink and left.

Harry unwrapped the new picture he just received and took it over to where the ugly picture once hung. He placed it up on the wall and stared at it as if he was looking at the Mona Lisa.

A slow, creasing smile brightened Harry's face. He backed up to get a better view the picture, which was a lithograph, actually, an enlargement of a photo that the sports photographer

took at the Army-Navy game of Walter and Jim in mid-air, bumping chests, with Dustin on the 15-yard line waving his hand in celebration of Jim's and Walter's touchdown.

Walter saw what Harry was doing, so he dipped the mystery woman so she could see, and when he brought her back up, he raised his hand and made a fist said, "To the Touchdown."

Hearing this, Harold turned to Walter, and raised his hand and made a fist and said, "To the Hat Trick."

-THE END-