

matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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DEDICATION

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,
mine, and ours—and
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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2 Boys Will Be Men



"Can Mommy come live with us again?"

Chad Wilcomb's shoulders sagged as he switched off the coffeemaker. He turned. His six-year-old's eyes shimmered above his cereal bowl like tiny blue Christmas balls. "Chuckie, we've been over this a million times in the last three years. No; Mommy's not going to live with us anymore."

Chuckie frowned into his milk. "I don't like two houses and Mrs. Sherwatter—she smells funny. Mommy has day care; she doesn't need no babysitter at night."

"*Any*'—*any*' babysitter," Chad said. "Daddy and Mommy have different jobs. Sometimes Daddy has to work late or go away. Finish your Lucky Charms. I gotta drop you and get to the office." As he swiped up his keys from the hallway table, the phone rang. "Hello?"

"Hi, dear." It was the "ex"—Lana Margo McCarthy. "I'm glad I caught you. Don't forget Chuckie's appointment at Dr. DiPassini's at four; I'm pretty sure

he's got a cavity. All that sugar weekend mornings, no doubt."

"Shit."

Silence.

"I forgot. Look, can you cover it? I got a full day today."

"Goddamn it, Chad. I've run through almost all of my sick leave as it is." She paused, and sighed.

"Listen. Did Chuckie bring up getting back together again?"

Chad turned toward the wall as Chuckie emerged from his bedroom, struggling with a backpack strap.

"Yeah. He said something this morning."

"Did you talk to him about it, Chad?"

"Yeah—sorta."

A longer pause and deeper sigh. "Do you ever really *hear* that kid?"

"Gotta go," Chad mumbled, and hung up. *A woman who uses all three names—I should have known better.*



"Why me?"

Chad sat and propped his feet on Tim Ireland's desk—he, the *Sacramento Independent Review's* News Editor and his boss.

"What I got from his mother's letter was that he saw the piece you did on the temple bombers and decided you were fair." Tim grinned. "Go figure. Maybe he used to be a 'subscriber.'"

"Okay—so Charlie Don Morton, convicted local rapist and murderer, wants to give our little lefty rag an exclusive before he gets put to sleep at San Quentin in three months. That about it?"

"Not entirely. Two conditions."

"Oh?"

"One, he wants the piece to be 'first person' — you know, 'Charlie Don Speaks.' Your ruminations and purple prose in sidebars only. Two, he wants you as a media witness."

Chad used his best Ted Baxter voice. "Won't giving a felon an 'open forum' besmirch our journalistic integrity?"

"Listen, wise-ass. This is a no-brainer, a *coup*, if we can pull it off. Set all your other stuff aside. I've already gotten the Department of Corrections' new guidelines. You work on whatever phone calls you need and a visitation request, and I'll get started on getting us into the media pool. There's one slot for a weekly and Morton's local, so we should have a shot. A guy I used to play racquetball with works in CDC's legislative office, which might help."

Any lingering *bonhomie* evaporated.

"Get *on* it, Chad," Tim said.



Chad leaned into Tim's doorway. "Here it is. Under the Department's media policies, non-'random,' face-to-face interviews and recording devices of any kind are prohibited. Inmates can make outgoing, recordable collect calls 'according to their privilege group'—Death Row being the most restricted. I can visit only after I get CDC Form 106, 'Visiting Questionnaire,' from Morton, return it, and wait for the prison to approve it. Realistically, that'll take four to six weeks—just on their end."

"I should write him immediately," Chad continued, "since their search of a Number 10 envelope and a one-page letter for 'contraband' also can take four to six weeks. I'll give him the *Review's* number, and you'll authorize all charges. I'll ask him to try to call me at least three weeks in a row, since each call will be

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