

THREE REUNIONS

By Paul Shortt

The Twentieth – June, 1981

Jared Moritz walked back into the room he'd walked out of twenty years earlier. He'd dropped his bags at the quad gate with George, a porter seemingly middle-aged even when Jared was a freshman. Now Jared noticed that his old room was just as middle-aged and worn out as George. The current crop of students had recently decamped, pulling down their posters and paraphernalia without concern, leaving tape marks and nail holes to assail Jared's sense of order and perfection.

Jared's adult sophistication, however, now allowed him to see beyond these defects, to perceive the suite, the dormitory, the entire campus as an aesthetically innovative design, particularly for the Midwest. In the nineteen-twenties, it had emerged as an unlikely hybrid of English Boarding School, as desired by the wealthy patron, and avant-garde Arts and Crafts introduced to the Midwest by his protégé, a gifted young architect from Finland.

One of the most unique aspects of Cressbrook Academy, Jared now realized, was that all of its buildings, the entire campus in fact, were beautifully integrated. As an adolescent, the campus had seemed foreign, oddly fashioned, and architecturally lacking in the neo-classic Ivy style of the Eastern Establishment. Through adult eyes now, he re-examined the campus and saw it as significantly original for its time. And he was impressed by the extensive variety of even the smallest details: multi-patterned brick sidewalks, carved corbels, ironwork sconces; they all seemed to vary, yet reflect one another. It was as if a single architect had guided all aspects, large and small, which indeed was the case.

Jared was pleased how his self-trained eye and aesthetic sense now absorbed all the myriad details. After all, though an ambitious educator and administrator with advanced degrees in business, he fashioned himself a connoisseur of things cultural and artistic. Including his very polished well-connected wife Vivian, who complemented him in the swath he cut through the tonier cliques of town and gown.

Jared's notoriety, however, lay in his much-publicized theory of integrating business and education more directly for mutual benefit and efficiency, while talking people out of their money and funneling it into his institution, Farmington State University. The style and flare of his theories mesmerized regional and national leaders wherever he spoke, which he did enthusiastically and often. A notable book had been published, with the help of a ghostwriter, reinforcing Jared's image as a premier communicator and motivator, an innovator well ahead of his time.

Jared laid his Florentine leather briefcase on the scarred desk he'd once despised because of its odd look and uncomfortable fit. He now recognized it as a close cousin to a Frank Lloyd Wright, and he mused on an exhibit of boarding school furnishings. This particular design held significant cachet, and reflected the

uniqueness of Cressbrook, a school Jared had vigorously opposed, preferring instead Choate, Groton, or St. Paul's. But his parents were not about to let their impetuous, undisciplined son beyond the reach of their controlling influence.

To understand Jared, consider the family history. Jared's grandfather was a Jew who'd simplified his name at Ellis Island to 'Moritz', thinking of the elite resort, not realizing he'd chosen yet another Jewish name when he dropped the 'Saint.' Despite the humble family heritage, Jared's father, reasonably WASP-looking, became a very successful tool and die rep. He was an up-by-the-boot-straps martinet and worked just as hard, when he was at home, at keeping young Jared in line. It was a battle of wills between these two short, egocentric males. But the family money that allowed for their handsome suburban home and private schools came originally from Jared's mother, a staunch upright Episcopalian.

Jared's best friend in junior high, Willy Bates, was attracted to the affluent renegade side of Jared, and to his sizable collection of cool gear and cute girls. In seventh grade, Willy had moved from the other side of town, where he'd suffered from a notable lack of cool gear and requisite skills in flirting.

At thirteen Jared was socially and physically precocious, and if size counts "down there," where in the boys locker room it does, short Jared was indeed a very big man. Willy, just as short in stature would ultimately grow much taller than Jared, though, as Jared smugly believed, not much larger "where it counts." This particular physical bonus inflated Jared's ego and made one wish he could have simply enjoyed it with more discreet satisfaction. But discretion and humility, traits emanating from his mother's side, were not Jared's style, and he became instead the adolescent version of his father's Napoleon.

Jared was not thinking of this ancient history when Willy Bates entered the room for the Cressbrook twentieth class reunion. The same could not be said of Willy, as Willy had functioned as close sidekick and lookout on double dates for much of Jared's adolescent precocity.

Willy and Jared had been roommates their first two years at Cressbrook until, by junior year, Willy couldn't abide Jared. Willy had, by then, developed other social and academic interests, and chose not to live in Jared's social and economic shadow any longer.

"Hello, Bates. Nice to see you again," Jared greeted, as he fussed with his immaculate monogrammed cuffs.

"You too, Jared."

Willy put his suitcase on the bed furthest from the window, the other being claimed by Jared's Wall Street Journal.

"I see we're roommates again. Your idea?"

"Luck of the draw probably. Or someone's idea of nostalgia."

"Well, we don't see each other enough."

"I see you in the news," Willy replied. "Frequently."

Jared and Willy's friendship had carried over from public middle school when Willy moved to Jared's district. Willy came from the opposite end of the town, socially and economically. There were other differences as well. Willy was

thoughtful, Jared cocky and brash. Willy a middling athlete, Jared shot par at two country clubs. Willy was shy with girls, Jared bold and successful. Willy, not an exceptional student, was artistic, always drawing; Jared was an academic standout. They both liked preppy clothes in the latest styles, but Jared had five to any one of Willy's.

Though Jared's conceit wore on Willy, the two boys shared smart-aleck humor. And together they enjoyed his enormous accumulation of paraphernalia and gear, including the supervised access to his father's gun collection.

It was Willy's social aspiration that induced him to put up with the condescending aspects of Jared. He wanted to be viewed as cool and privileged, like Jared. Willy's older brother Sam, however, was not impressed with Jared, referring to him as "that spoiled little prick."

By their junior year at Cressbrook, Jared's access to cars, booze, drugs and girls vastly outclassed Willy. This was not unusual between upper and lower class kids. Willy observed that kids with money were racier, quicker to indulge and experiment, with manners more polished, a convenient social camouflage for passing adult scrutiny. Though Willy had aspired to Jared's world, he was more comfortable hanging back in Jared's shadow, which cost him less financially and emotionally. Perhaps it was his nature to be more the observer than the initiator.

After junior high, Willy received a need-based scholarship to Cressbrook Academy, but began to feel somewhat stigmatized by the scholarship's work-study obligations. Jared could never conceal his condescension toward Willy, who could be seen polishing brass and oak after hours. And now, twenty years on, it still seemed to Willy as if nothing had changed.

"How are things going over at Harding?" Jared asked, to which Willy added, under his breath: "...and polishing any brass lately?"

The porter entered with Jared's bags and Jared handed him a crisp ten-dollar bill.

"Thank you very much, sir. Cocktails at five, dinner at six, in Donor's Hall," George replied as he backed out.

"Well, George hasn't seemed to change much," Willy remarked.

"Some people never do."

"You're probably right."

"I know I'm right," Jared answered, smiling to himself.

As usual, Willy thought.

Jared carefully removed his Bond Street suit and took a fresh shirt and grey flannels from his suitcase. He put on the designer stripe, then knotted the imported tie and complained, "Fucking tiny mirror."

Willy noticed that Jared was looking quite like Moritz Sr. He even wore a similar mustache. At thirty-eight it did seem to give him more authority. This was perhaps essential, as Jared was the youngest president in Farmington State University history, referred to as the *Wunderkind*.

Willy himself had grown a beard to bolster a bohemian image at Harding College, where he taught painting, across town from FSU where Jared presided. Harding was

a small liberal arts college – arty and offbeat. Farmington was high profile in business, medicine and engineering, with sizable liberal and fine arts endowments. Though regional in reputation, Farmington was, after all, the state’s leading university. Jared of course considered Farmington vastly superior to Harding, not the least because he was its president.

At their eighth grade graduation Jared had challenged Willy to a fifty-dollar bet that he, Jared, would be an “Ivy League” president by age forty. Willy, taken aback, never forgot Jared’s chutzpah. As Farmington wasn’t “Ivy League,” Willy now considered Jared’s prospects highly unlikely, since only two years remained on the bet. He was now wondering if Jared remembered the cocky challenge, though he was above mentioning it. Besides it might lead to another one of their old pissing contests.

“I hear you have quite a budget cut coming,” Jared offered.

“Well, you know how it goes.”

“Think it’ll hurt?”

“I’ve tightened my belt before.”

“You ought to get a new fundraiser. Rawlins is such a lazy ass. Hasn’t had a new idea in years.”

“Yeah, well...”

“I’d raise ten million in a flash.”

“When can you start?”

“Sorry. Gotta keep it close to home. Only so much money to go around. Especially for the arts.”

“Yeah, the step-child of funding.”

“Not necessarily, Bates. But whatever it is, it’s gotta be high profile. People with money, they like others to notice. You can’t be hiding your pile under a rock.”

“You always had a way with words, Jared.”

“Why they hired me. That, and I’m innovative.”

“And ‘modest’ too.”

“Can’t be too shy, Bates.”

Willy snorted and continued unpacking. Finally he asked, “How many copies of your book have you sold?”

“Not keeping track.” Jared answered.

“I’m surprised.”

“Read it yet?”

“No. Business theory’s not my field.”

“Actually, it’s quite related.”

“How’s that?”

“Because I rely heavily on visualization and direct interaction. Kids need that kind of experience, even in business; not just be lectured to.”

“Well, I can agree with that.”

“See, I bring in the pros - management, creative, marketing, accounting. Form a team. One’ll be the project director. They brainstorm an entire project, one that I throw at them. They have to hash out all the aspects – product, concept, demographics, marketing. Everything. Impromptu. In an hour. And give a formal

pitch. No obsolete case studies. No old geezer war stories. They perform on the spot – arguments, compromises, Q&A, the whole bit – profanity, lingo, everything. And they gotta make decisions quickly.”

“Sounds exciting.”

“It is. And another thing, I don’t send our interns out to these companies just to sit on their ass. Normally an intern never gets close to a creative session. An intense one I mean. But if it happens in front of you, you can picture yourself *in* the process. I call it ‘*Projective Visualization*’.”

“Sounds good.”

“And another thing, I used to think problem-solving was linear – like a roadblock or logjam to pierce.”

“Requiring a full Jared frontal assault?” Willy queried.

“Yeah. But now I picture problems more as spherical and large. A more dimensional concept, with trickier strategies to attack – to come from different sides, to penetrate, to get inside...”

“You always had to get inside - the great seducer,” Willy retorted.

“Not all that different - the challenge of seduction - Willy-boy. I just reconceived it conceptually, strategically. My concept’s not limited to business. It even relates to your field.”

“Still sounds like seduction - a line, a move for everything.”

“Seduction’s only one tool Willy, not the final goal. Either way, you gotta have lots of tools in the old tool box.”

Throughout the graphic lecture, Will couldn’t help but recall Jared’s adolescent sexual obsessions and forays. Maybe just the target had changed.

Jared enthused on: “You have to express your ideas in professional jargon - ‘Spherical Conceptualization,’ ‘Reactive Strategies,’ ‘Creative Envelopment.’ You have to create new semantics that are understandable. And you gotta be dynamic. Make everyone confident and excited at the same time.”

“Sounds like you should be running for the White House?”

Jared paused, then smiled back. “Don’t underestimate me, Willy. But Senate first.”

“Oh, come on,” Willy answered, somewhat aghast, “And here all along I thought it was only an ‘Ivy League’ presidency you wanted.”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“The fifty bucks you mean?”

“How could I forget?”

Petty though it was, Willy was glad Jared acknowledged the issue. And he was somewhat impressed, maybe even pleased, he was in Jared’s company again. Success and the spotlight, even if indirect, *are* seductive.

“Hope I didn’t bore you.”

“Not at all. I’ll check out your book.”

“I’ll send you a copy. Autographed.”

Jared was now dressed and ready for the event. All that was missing was the lacquered woman on his arm.

“How’s Vivian?” Willy asked.

"Very well, thank you. And your wife? Beth, isn't it?"

"She died. Last year. Cancer"

"I'm sorry to hear that. I was thinking you looked a little sad. And, well, a little disheveled too."

They were both silent. Finally Jared spoke.

"You know, if you cleaned up a bit, you'd fit right in at Farmington. You were always pretty good in art and we've got quite the new building for it."

"Thanks. I appreciate the compliment. But I don't think I could keep my studio clean enough for your new white building." The real issue however wasn't the new building; Willy was annoyed by Jared's belittling tone that reflected no understanding or appreciation for Willy's passion and commitment.

"You like the new building?" Jared asked, fishing for compliments.

"Pretty impressive. Awfully white though."

"Well, you know these big name architects. White is *The Look* these days. Did you see Time Magazine?"

"Someone put it up in the lounge. It's got drool all over it. Not quite so white anymore."

"Come over sometime. I'll show you around."

"Maybe I will. But only if I can return the favor. Show you how the other half suffers," Will offered.

Jared smiled. "So, you seeing anyone?"

"A little bit. The girl who runs our gallery. She knew Beth."

"Well, any port in a storm."

"Thanks for the understanding."

"What are friends for?"

Willy turned away, eyes rolling.

Will added a faded tie to the worn corduroy jacket and jeans that reflected his mood while Jared leafed through his satchel of papers.

"Bar opens in fifteen," Jared said, checking his watch

"Right. I'm ready.

"This new girl gotta name? How old is she?"

"Annalise. She's twenty-seven."

"Young. She run the gallery?"

"That's right. But she's not your type. Besides, Vivian wouldn't like her anyway."

Jared smiled.

"Aren't you gonna change for dinner?" he asked.

"I put on a tie."

"I remember you always used to dress kinda...preppy."

"Well, a crewneck and khakis aren't too practical anymore. Besides, it's not nineteen sixty-one."

"Yeah, and it's not nineteen seventy-one either."

Jared smiled and stood, adjusted his tie, and took a final look in the mirror.

"Fucking tiny mirror".

He looked at Willy, "Shall we go downstairs, Picasso?"

As they headed to the door, "I'm serious, Bates. Come over sometime. And bring your friend, Annalise. We've got a great new gallery."

Willy opened the door for Jared. "Perhaps we will, Mr. President."

"No, please. You first." Then Jared grabbed Willy's arm, "I want you to watch me tonight. Fifty gets you a hundred I raise two million."

"Always the betting man," Willy responded.

The Thirtieth - June, 1991

Willy Bates entered the dorm room and dropped his bag on the bed nearest the window. He pulled out a magazine and sat in the wide bay. Soon there was a knock.

"Professor Bates? Your roommate is here. You probably know Doctor Moritz."

"I used to," Bates answered.

"I understand this was once your room, Doctor Moritz," the porter said.

"His too," Jared answered.

"Then I won't have to show you around."

"No, we'll be fine....umm...?"

"It's Roberts, sir," the new porter offered, "Clarence Roberts."

"Thank you, Roberts," said Jared, handing him a crisp twenty. Roberts smiled and closed the door.

"Well time flies, doesn't it Bates?"

No response.

"Hard to believe another ten years."

"I guess it goes faster for some," said Willy.

"It probably does."

Silence. Willy continued reading. Finally Jared spoke.

"How's it gone for you, Bates? Fast or slow?"

"Without Annalise, I'd say slow. A little slow."

"Means you'll live longer - when life goes slower."

"Your life must be zipping by then, Jared."

"Indeed."

Jared began to unpack in silence. Finally Willy spoke.

"How is she?"

"Annalise? Oh, she's fine. Sends you her best."

"Really? And Vivian?"

"I wouldn't know. We don't communicate. Except through lawyers."

"Not surprising."

"Well, we can't look back, can we?"

More silence. Willy read, Jared unpacked. Willy now noticed Jared's clothes were even more expensive-looking.

Finally Jared said, "Are we still holding a grudge, Willy?"

"Well, I don't know about 'We,' but 'I' might be."

"All's fair in love, etcetera. Right?"

“Reduced to clichés now, Jared? What happened to the ‘Great Communicator’?”

Then after a moment:

“You gonna be pissy all weekend? I shoulda brought Annalise. So she could see the real you.”

“Same old prick, aren’t we Jared?”

“We can change rooms.”

“And miss all this togetherness? How often do I have a chance to share a room with *The Chancellor* of the *entire* State University system? Being just the lowly *associate professor* that I am.”

“Associate are we now? Congratulations on the promotion.”

“Not as grand as yours of course.”

“Well, we all have our own row to hoe don’t we,” Jared smiled. After a long moment, “I think we should call a truce. Besides, I’d rather concentrate on old times. I really enjoyed the last reunion.”

“All this nostalgia, it’s not like you,” Willy responded.

“It’s your stories, Bates. I don’t remember half that stuff.”

Willy starred silently at his magazine.

“Things I’d forgotten,” continued Jared.

“You certainly were ballsy, even then,” Willy remarked.

Jared smiled.

Suddenly Willy elaborated, “Remember when you got what’s her name to show you her tits in the gym?”

“I remember. Caught me looking down her blouse. She just smiled and unhooked her bra. I could see her nipple. Pretty good for eighth grade.”

“Your eyes were poppin’. What *was* her name?”

“Delores Judd.”

“*Jugs* you mean! Man, that’s one time it paid to be short,” Willy said, recalling that Jared’s height was about eye-level with Delores’s sleeveless blouse.

“I don’t know how you remember half that stuff,” Jared chuckled.

“Well, you had too many girls to remember.”

“You sound a little bit unfulfilled, Bates.”

“Most of us were, compared to you,” Willy said, now wishing to change the subject. He’d begun to think of Annalise, how she’d left him for Jared just as they were getting close.

Willy had indeed visited Farmington State with Annalise, just as Jared commanded - as if he, Willy, were offering Annalise up to Jared. Willy and Annalise continued to date afterwards, though only for coffee or an early dinner, as Annalise always had some excuse to avoid going home with him.

Willy knew from the newspaper society section that Jared was still very much married to Vivian, the two being pictured together at public events. So it came as quite a surprise when Jared and Vivian’s divorce was announced and Annalise was pictured on Jared’s arm, looking as polished and glamorous as Vivian. Only twenty years younger. Then, Annalise Thiesen was announced as the new curator of the Farmington State Gallery of Art.

Some time later, Annalise asked Willy for coffee and apologized for the way things had turned out, explaining she couldn't risk compromising Jared during their clandestine affair. He was much too important for scandal and did not want to publicly humiliate Vivian. Since when had that kind of thing bothered Jared, Willy thought? All of this only confirmed Will's brother's original opinion of Jared. Ironically, betrayed as he was by Annalise, Willy still felt strongly for her.

And then, four years later, further widening the gap, Jared was named the new Chancellor of the entire State University system, all thirty-one campuses. By then Annalise no longer ran the Farmington Art Gallery, and was free to enjoy her prestigious new role as the Chancellor's wife, and to volunteer her considerable energy and talent to the art world and other high profile projects of her choosing.

Meanwhile, Willy continued teaching and painting at Harding, having risen very little in his much smaller academic world. The thought of the Jared/Annalise duo periodically depressed Willy. He now wished he hadn't come to the thirtieth reunion, to face his romantic failure and Jared's ever-increasing success.

Jared finally broke the silence, "How's Harding going?"

"Well, same old same old."

"You know, you need to broaden yourself. See Europe. Get some international exposure and perspective."

"It's a matter of money, Jared," Willy countered.

"Organize a student group then. Get your way paid," ordered Jared.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, be creative! That's what you're supposed to be, for chrissake."

"Alright, and you might start by paying me that fifty. The Ivy League, remember?"

Jared opened his wallet, removed a crisp hundred, and tossed it on the bed.

"Keep the change."

"A familiar gesture if ever I saw one."

Jared feigned reaching for the bill. "You don't want it?"

"No, no, I'll put it toward Europe. But let me get you change."

"Keep it, you'll need it."

Willy sniffed and didn't answer.

After a long evening, Willy returned to the room and lay on the bed reading. Much later Jared came in.

"You left early," he said to Willy.

"Got tired of seeing you work the room. Besides, your aura was blinding me."

"You always were a little more for the shadows, Bates."

"Well, not everyone's got your charisma."

They were both silent for a while.

"Generous bunch down there. Good men."

Willy only grunted.

"You know, I wasn't the only one hustling. You think it's easy competing with the Ivies?"

"Maybe you should have tried harder to be *in* the Ivy League. At least there was another fifty bucks in it."

"Oh, I've not peaked yet." Jared was quiet for a few minutes then, "I'll let you in on a little secret."

"You got a another new girlfriend?"

"Fuck you. I'm serious. If you keep your mouth shut, I'll tell you about it."

"I always keep my mouth shut Jared, so you decide."

Jared kept silent as he undressed and put on his monogrammed robe.

"O.K. It's not been announced yet, but as you're my oldest friend, I'll tell you."

"Whatever."

"You've heard of the Kinney Foundation?" Jared asked.

"Don't you mean the *Kinsey* Foundation?" Willy responded.

"Very funny. No, the *Kin-nee* Foundation."

"Certainly."

"Well, they're naming a new CEO next week."

"That right?" Willy answered, as Jared flashed a Cheshire cat grin.

"Now you know why I'm not going Ivy League. And you got your fifty and then some. So you might be thinking about a little champagne for the boy."

"You!? You're heading the Kinney Foundation and Trust?"

"Yeah, me. Doctor Jared Moritz. Soon to be the new CEO."

"That's unbelievable. Isn't that the richest foundation in the U.S.?"

"One of."

"God...damn! How did that happen?"

"Simple - the planets aligned. No, seriously, it was something I've been working on. For starters, I have a platinum resume. And high-powered friends. Many. And one of the Kinney trustees, I put her on the board at Farmington. Oh yeah, and my book made a huge impact on the corporate world *and* the New York Times. And I do a knock-out interview."

"Jesus, the Kinney! The museums, the collections. The prestige, *the budget*. No more budget woes for you."

"Actually the real reason I got the job: the board feels the Kinney's too stagnant. No one's had any new ideas in years. And the world's changing. Fast. I'll tell you a secret: these boards all say they want change, but they never really do, they just want to *feel* like they're changing. Anyhow, they've got their fancy new campus and they want new leadership to match. Of course I'll be putting a lot of my own people on the board. Only way to get things done."

"They must have swallowed your '*Spherical Re-Conceptualization*'!"

"Absolutely."

"Another Jared snow job hey?"

"Willy..."

"Jared, please. I've been watching you since seventh grade. 'Snow job' - it's your middle name. Or is it 'balls?' 'Snow-Balls.'"

"Willy-boy, we're not in seventh grade anymore. The Kinney is filled with PhDs who haven't looked up from their books in years. They may have big names in their own little world. But look at me - I made the New York Times best seller list."

"You made the Times best seller list?" Willy interrupted.

“Yeah, I did. Now look, it’s just that these scholars don’t know squat about innovative marketing. Hell, I could exhibit this old Cressbrook furniture and attract more attention than anything they’ve ever done.”

“It’s nice to hear your great respect for your new colleagues.”

“Look, I don’t talk like this except between you and me. I know how to handle academics. I’ve done it my whole career. You’ll see: I’ll pull off a total renaissance.”

“Sounds more like a revolution than a renaissance.”

“Sure, there’s gonna be blood spilled. Always is. Any board knows that. They want a new corporate dynamic, not just a bunch of stale academics. Everything’s gonna be re-packaged: stylish, youthful, and fresh.”

“Swap the old for the new, hey Jared?”

“Damn right. Young audiences in this country wanna see new things, presented in new ways, and I’m gonna do it.”

“Well, at least you have Annalise to help. And she’s still young. Lot more years left on her.”

“Annalise is a big help. She always has been.”

“Since Vivian anyway.”

“Fuck you. That’s none of your goddamn business. Anyway, Annalise is a tremendous talent.”

“Yeah, in which room?”

“That’s a tasteless crack. I thought you had still had respect...”

“A little more than that.”

“Look, I happen to love her too.”

“Make sure you do,” Willy said, a lump forming in his throat.

The Fortieth – June, 2001

Jared Moritz, standing in the leaded-glass window, looked more affluent now than ever, with silver hair flowing flamboyantly over his collar. Below on the lawn, classmates milled about, looking like a conservative convention of grandfathers. Compared to them, Jared knew he appeared much younger, especially in his custom Italian cashmere. And he felt young, that is, until a year ago. But now the weight of the year’s pressures bore heavily upon his mind. Naturally he refused to let any of it show. Appearance and demeanor were everything.

Initially, Jared thought he would decline the invitation to the reunion. For the past year, he knew certain enemies inside the Kinney were making life difficult, leaking malicious gossip to the press. The Kinney was particularly susceptible to these betrayals, with one garde replacing another, careerists abruptly terminated in the name of progress.

In all political organisms there are determined maneuverings of individuals and factions for favor and influence, especially those with axes to grind. A journalist latching onto a cooperative source can stir up scandal and controversy by amplifying a few choice bits and linking them together in an incriminating chain. With the messes gone public, Jared knew the press to be an undignified forum for

personal rebuttal. Instead he was determined to re-polish his image with a great show of confidence and dignity. He had, after all, “nothing to hide.” And he knew exactly what the press was trying to do to him – to shame him or, at the very least, embarrass him.

Jared had a hard shell, but Annalise, less narcissistic, found it harder to keep up appearances. The determined journalists had recently amped up the personal slurs and gossip concerning his exorbitant business and exotic travel expenses, and his accompanying wife’s lavish habits. Jared resented the press’s exaggeration and inference of how Annalise soothed her anxiety by shopping. Mockingly the press dubbed her “ATM,” an acronym of her full name - Annalise Thiesen Moritz – for her Marie Antoinette extravagance and attendant “lah dee dah” attitude. Jared was furious with the personal attacks though secretly amused by her not inappropriate nickname.

To make matters worse, one writer had seen fit to infer an improper relationship between Jared and his chief executive assistant, Katie Lawson, who, according to the press, had been “dramatically promoted to authority immeasurably beyond her experience.” As much as Jared despised the hyperbole, much of the disgruntled insider complaints could be laid directly at Katie’s attractive young feet, which indeed were stepping on ever-increasing numbers of old tenured toes.

Meanwhile Jared, having supreme but infatuated confidence in his thirty-year-old frosted blond wunderkind, insisted it was simply a matter of colleagues getting used to an alternate style of leadership. In actual fact, it was more the classic situation of the “keeper of the keys” - access to Jared controlled by Katie, to whom he had delegated routine day-to-day authority, while he devoted himself to loftier conceptualizing and high society schmoozing. He was, after all, steering the visionary course of the Kinney, preferring to leave the daily mundane and trivial details to young Kate.

Jared of course did not think his behavior compromising, though he was more than aware of the exaggerated accusations and periodic pressure on the board to give him the boot. He had an answer for anything, provided those inquisitive rated consideration.

He had finally decided that his Cressbrook classmates were, in general, discreet enough not to mention anything distasteful. After all, what was loyalty for? But to re-affirm his status, he’d endorsed a personal check for fifty thousand dollars to the class fund. If anything, it would cast him in a positive light for the weekend.

Jared’s roommate, Willy Bates, however knew somewhat more about Jared’s current shenanigans than others because he’d made it a point to ferret out every last scrap of story about the scandal. Besides, he knew Jared’s true nature.

Yet there was another source for Willy, one wholly unexpected: Annalise herself, who re-contacted him two months before. Though Willy felt severely jilted by Annalise, he could understand Annalise’s attraction to Jared’s high-profile lifestyle. Hadn’t he too been seduced by the same allure? And Jared had become a star, a super star in fact, in a highly specialized constellation. And so, despite Annalise choosing Jared, Willy found that he still had feelings for her and an ongoing curiosity about her up-scale lifestyle. His brush with Jared had ended in mid-

adolescence while hers continued in spectacular, now scandal-ridden fashion. Willy also discerned the possibility for personal revenge, beside the opportunity to offer Annalise a comforting shoulder.

“Anybody home?” Willy asked as he knocked and entered. He wore a black suit and shirt. His once-black hair and beard had surrendered to grey. He looked as worn as the leather satchel he dropped on the bed.

“Hello Jared. Didn’t expect to see you,” Willy offered.

“Not what I heard,” countered Jared.

“How’s that?” asked Willy, wondering if Annalise had mentioned anything?

“Petrie said you asked.”

“I might have. Couple of months ago.”

“He said last month.”

“Whatever. Anyway, here we are. So...everything goin’ smoothly?” Willy mocked.

“Where’ve you been?”

“You mean all the Kinney business?”

“Any time changes are made. You make enemies.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll land on your feet.”

“I have a board to soothe when I get back. Probably shouldn’t have come. But you know how it is. Not many years left to see each other.”

“Not getting any younger, are we?”

“If you think old, you get old.”

“You must be thinking pretty young then, Jared. You’re the one who keeps looking younger each time. I do see a couple more lines though.”

“Laugh lines, Willy-boy.”

His unpacking completed, his Italian blazer and silk tie laid out, Jared began his ritual transformation. And as usual, Willy remained in the same garb, though it had now morphed from shades of brown to all black.

“Care for a little shot before dinner, Willy-boy?” Jared asked, holding up a monogrammed silver flask.

Soon Jared finished the first, then poured another. “Here’s to strength and confidence.” Then fortified, both men went down to dinner.

Three hours later Jared returned to the room ahead of Willy, removed his shoes and lay down on the bed. It was not like him to stay in his cashmere jacket and tailored slacks. Eventually Will returned and slumped in the armchair.

Jared broke the silence.

“So, Willy my friend, you seem to know a lot about the Kinney,” Jared remarked, studying a particular crack in the ceiling.

“Lot of it’s just public domain.”

“That right? Public domain?”

“Everything ever written about you - all right there - just a click of the mouse.”

“Click of the mouse, hey? More like a fuckin’ rat.” Jared laughed, then suddenly stopped.

“I bet you’re one of the rats.”

“How’s that?”

“I mean takin’ sides. Opposing me in all this shit. Downstairs. You think I didn’t notice?”

“Why’re you saying this?”

“Because I can smell it when a person’s not straight. You think I got where I am, not knowing what people’re thinking? You think I don’t know what you’re insinuating? You seemed to anticipate most of the questions. Fuck, you were giving footnotes. You gave yourself away, Willy-boy. That’s why you were such a shitty poker player.”

“So...you got a problem? With what I know?”

“It doesn’t mean shit.”

“That right?”

“Yeah, that’s right. I mean, who the fuck are you? You’re just some lowly shit-ass *professor* at a meaningless little college. Oh yes, excuse me - I forgot - you’re an *artist* too. You know, I told you before, you shoulda come with me to Farmington. Then you coulda come to the Kinney. And be somebody important.”

“You’re drunk,” Willy replied and thought: with Jared, it’s all or nothing.

The two were silent for several minutes. Willy went out for a cigarette. Jared carefully removed his clothes, put on his robe, and shaved.

Willy returned.

“I see his Highness has completed his toilet.”

Jared snorted, but didn’t reply. Finally he offered, “Interested in a nightcap?”

“Maybe. No reason to stay lucid, suffering the slings and arrows. Especially after tonight’s performance.”

“Tonight’s performance? You mean what I just said?”

“No, hardly. I meant downstairs, tonight, with our fellow classmates.”

“The check, you mean?”

“That gesture was only part of it. I mean your whole attitude about ‘The Arts’ and ‘Culture’ and ‘The Kinney.’ You’re such a total phony, Jared. I could have saved everybody a whole lot of trouble.”

“That right? As if anybody’d listen.”

“Well, that’s part of the problem, isn’t it? That they’d really listen to me. But I know the real you, don’t I? The board at the Kinney, if they’d just asked a few people who really knew *you* - what *you* truly cared about. And *don’t*.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about those who give their lives to Art. Who *care*. Who are *passionate* - who are *artists* in their souls, not just those kissing your precious ass. You wouldn’t understand art to save your life. You use it simply as a reflection of your status. You’re hardly the Renaissance Man, Jared - you’re more the Renaissance *Prince*. Vain. Greedy. And power hungry. And here’s a surprise: None of it’s really yours! You just act like it is. You act like the whole fuckin’ Kinney collection - *The Empire* - is yours.”

“I’ve never heard such bullshit.”

“Jared, please. I’ve known you my whole life. When the hell did you ever have a passion for *anything* in the arts? I was there, remember? I know what your passion was always for. And I’m not talking about pussy. You always wanted to be the head of...the whole deal, remember? And prestigious - Princeton, Yale - whatever. You’ve been after that kind of thing your whole life. You always acted *entitled* to it. And I was just another one of your little minions. Hell, you never once showed any interest in what I did. When I’d go to the art museum, did you ever want to go, even once? No, your idea of aesthetics was button downs shirts, khakis, and Weejuns. Oh yeah, and tits and ass. The only colors you were interested in were in clothes. And pubic hair.”

“That’s quite the tantrum there, Willy. But we’re not fifteen anymore.”

“Yeah well, if I thought you were different now, I’d know. What have we ever talked about at all these reunions - the only time we see each other?”

Jared was silent.

“If you cared about what your scholars at the Kinney do, you’d have talked about it. You’d have been interested. And I’d’ve been interested too. Instead, you’d put them down. To me! You’d demean their work! Like they were a threat. Why do you think most of your top people left? Because they couldn’t make the necessary changes? To keep up with the times? No! Because you didn’t respect them. Who’d want to stay around with that? You were more interested in making the big splash – the red carpet, the searchlights, the fancy trips – all that crap - rubbing elbows with the stars.”

Jared remained silent, sipping his whiskey, staring at Willy, letting him rant. He wasn’t any true threat. In fact, Jared was amused by the tirade, and in the end it wouldn’t make any difference.

“You hardly understand a thing, Willy-boy. Do I need to explain that it’s not only the collections and the research? It’s also the prestige and status that’s on display. You overlook the crucial *patronage* the arts hafta reflect. I told you that ten, twenty years ago. It’s basic. Your problem, Willy, is that you’re such a little peasant.”

“And you’re like some goddamn Louis the Sixteenth.”

Jared laughed to himself. “It’s getting late. We can switch rooms in the morning.”

Aftermath

When the Kinney Board fired Jared a few weeks later, Willy’s revenge was palatable. Then, as the weeks turned to months, and months to years, his anger dulled and his passion for Annalise faded. Jared had retreated back to a tenured chair at Farmington. Annalise was still with him, as far as Will knew. And Willy found himself once again seeking the quiet comfort of the shadows. He never attended the fiftieth reunion.

Had Willy continued to follow Jared’s private life, he would have learned that Annaliese divorced Jared soon after the debacle, distancing herself as far away as Italy. She’d remarried within a year, to the world-renowned architect of the Kinney

campus in Rome, Antonio Cavalli. It was Annalise's sophistication and beauty that initially attracted Antonio, along with her hand on his elderly knee, a deft touch which quickly rekindled his flagging libido. Soon after, newlyweds Signor and Signora Cavalli were dividing their time between homes in Rome, Milan, and Morocco, a world away from the Kinney. It seemed an ideal match - the fifty year-old social-climbing Annalise and the suave seventy-year-old Antonio.

Meanwhile, Jared was married for a third time, to Katie Lawson, who'd regained her former job at Farmington State as manager of the faculty dining room, her position where she first met Jared.

And currently, Dr. Jared Moritz is writing two books: one on innovative management and fund-raising theories for non-profits; and the other, a fast-paced fictional account of intrigues and politics within a high profile foundation, screenplay to follow.

Like Willy Bates, Jared didn't attend the fiftieth reunion either. Nor did he ever become Senator or President.

The End

Read to the Cincinnati Literary Club

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