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Busted

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Everyone has imagined their demise. If you tend toward the dramatic, it might play out like some movie: some scandal on the evening news with beautiful people fighting over sex and money. Even if the dramatic is not your style, you've still wondered what your picture would look like in the paper - next to all the lurid details of your transgressions. It's entertaining to read, but we don't want to live it. We avoid it at all cost. We suppress even thinking about the worst case possible scenario. The "what if I got caught?" situation. The perfectly scripted way you can fuck it all up.

It all started on Tuesday when Nathan called.

"Dude, what kind of connections do you have in town?"

"Connections? For what?"

"You know, connections. A hook up. I'm thinking of something green and sticky."

"Oh, *that* connection. I think I know somebody."

"Any chance of you passing me his number?"

Nathan needed a favor, and I was in position to help him out. I wasn't doing anything that would land me on the news; I was simply going to put two people in touch with each other.

Instead of just caffeine and aspirin, Lauren, Miss D to the students, found other coping mechanisms to make it through the school day. She slipped me a Vicodin last week and two Percocet the week before, but her Oxycodones really helped kick everything into a lower gear and made teaching tolerable. She preferred Valium over the generic muscle relaxer, but together, they packed a good punch. Half of her pills came from her doctor to help with her arm, the other half she got from some guy named

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Tom or something like that. I assumed that if he didn't deal in green, he would know someone that did.

I fought the lunch crowd through Building 17 to see Lauren. I never have and never will enjoy the smell of teenagers. Adding to a crazy mix of too much perfume, not enough deodorant, stale smoke, sweat and garlic, their bodies are oozing out all kinds of stuff that I really don't want to know about. Now matter how many times they clean it, the school will always carry that adolescent funk that makes you feel like you need to wash your hands.

Lauren was at her computer entering grades. A few students talked and rocked in their chairs. A girl brushed her blonde hair; a boy crunched his Doritos.

Looking up from her computer, "What's up?"

"I need to get a hold of your friend, Tom. ...You know, the one you see about your arm."

Lauren was in a nasty wreck three years ago. She saw the collision coming and braced her arm against the dashboard. The impact shattered it in three places and tore the ligaments in her wrist. Four surgeries got her in the habit of popping pain-killers, but they never killed all the pain. She complained to her doctor who upped her to his highest comfortable dosage and accompanied that with warnings about addiction. She took his pills, ignored his advice and started seeking more pain relief elsewhere. On any given day, Lauren would take about a dozen pills - half of them self-prescribed.

"You mean Tim? Why? What's wrong with you?" was not the response I was hoping for.

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Like sharks smelling blood, teenagers instinctively knew when a teacher hesitated something was up.

Seeing my wide eyes had her recover nicely.

“Stop by after school; I’m doing grades now.”

I started breathing again as the students - sensing the moment had passed - resumed rocking and crunching.

I wondered if I should feel awkward scoring weed off another teacher. While I was an authority figure, most of my students would probably respect me more if they thought I smoked. The only twinge of guilt came from conducting this sordid business around teenagers. In theory, I was a role model. In reality, my students couldn’t picture a worse fate than being a high school teacher.

I stopped smoking when I moved to Florida because I could only get my hands on the nastiest Mexican skank weed you can imagine. Nothing against Mexico or her people, it’s just a terrible product. It’s sad to think of that bad pot’s journey into my hands. Maybe the farmer risked jail time. Maybe he paid off the authorities or even worked for them. Then there’s harvesting. Months of nursing the plants to produce a crop that will get dried out, pressed down, and squeezed into airtight bags with dozens or even hundreds of other thirty-pound bricks. These bricks get welded into the gas tank of some rusted out ‘72 Chevy Nova trying to slip across the border undetected. If they make it through, the distribution begins. It works its way from the barrio to the ‘burbs and lands in my unappreciative, uncalloused, gringo hands.

Lauren called Tim after school to introduce me. As a precaution, he only sold to people he knew. He did deal in green but preferred pushing pills. Marijuana caught the

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noses of dogs and cops too easily making a routine traffic stop fatal. Even though I could vouch for Nathan, Tim the Paranoid would only deal with me because Lauren was such a regular customer. And because I was a Taurus? I'm pretty sure that's what he asked me, but it had nothing to do with anything else we talked about so I can't be sure.

Nathan was restringing his guitar when I stopped by. He understood Tim's paranoia and handed me four hundred bucks - the going price for an ounce of the good stuff. The wad of tens and twenties more than doubled the girth of my normally thin wallet. I told him I couldn't guarantee a quick turnaround or even the quality of the product. Happy he'd soon be back in green, he looked forward to enhancing his sun and fun beach days.

Two days later during fourth period, Tim called. I was helping my seniors write their *Catch 22* papers when I felt my phone vibrating in my pocket. I recognized his number but didn't think it was appropriate to finalize a drug deal with him in front of my students, so I let it roll to voicemail.

He left me a detailed message - apparently smarts don't come with all that paranoia. He got his hands on some "mids." Supposedly between the skank and the dank, the going rate for this average weed was fifty bucks a quarter. Mids provided an easy bait and switch for dealers looking to take advantage of some rich kid or someone they didn't know. To Tim I was probably both. Worst case, Nathan would get two ounces of overpriced, less than ideal weed.

Tim lived down the street from St. Pete High. Maybe I've seen too many movies, but I thought a drug dealer would live in a nicer place. Cleaning the cat's litter box would be a good start. A coat of paint wouldn't hurt either. Most of the furniture looked

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like he pulled it out of the dumpster - including the coffee table that was covered with little plastic baggies of dope. He wouldn't let me leave without smoking some of it to prove its quality. Despite my protests, he pulled out a cigar and a razor blade. He slit the cigar down the middle, emptied the tobacco and filled it with grass. I tried not to think about hygiene as I watched him slobber up the spliff to seal it. He lit it, took a few drags to really get it smoking and then handed it to me.

The smoke filled the room. The sweet, distinct smell worked better than the kitty litter and found me sinking deeper and deeper into the couch. Tim started talking about Taurus, bulls, sacrifices, gods and kings. I never knew the story of the Minotaur was about divine punishment.

"Minos became king because of a bull that Poseidon sent, but when he didn't sacrifice it like he was supposed to, Poseidon got pissed. He made Minos's wife fall in love with this bull. I mean, she *wanted* this bull. She had a carpenter build her a wooden bull - with a few holes in it - so she could have sex with it. That kid - the half-bull, half-man - is the Minotaur. Get it, Minos's taur- us? Dude, talk about a harsh punishment. How would you like to be known as the guy whose wife screwed a bull?"

Either he was brilliant, or I was stoned, I'm not really sure. He went on about horoscopes, numerology, sun and moon signs. He told me he could do my charts but looked disappointed when I told him I didn't believe any of it.

Wanting to be done with the deal, I lay the wad of tens and twenties on the table. He didn't count the money, but carefully counted out eight plastic baggies and pushed them in front of me. Explaining that *his* dealer sold mostly quarters, he offered to put all

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two-ounces in one bag. I told him not to bother. I shook his hand and made my way out the door.

I suppressed the voice that warned about driving stoned and took extra care to fasten my seat belt as I took stock of my rear and side mirrors before pulling out. I felt like I was watching myself as every movement I made took on a heightened awareness. I could feel the clothes on my body and my toes on the gas pedal as my mind raced on ahead.

Act normal. Just drive. Relax. You've done it before. It's gonna be fine. Keep it together. You're just stoned. You can handle this. Chill. Am I driving too fast? Too slow? Look around. Any cops? I need a mint. What about my eyes? Does the car smell? Am I being obvious? Breathe. Relax. Breathe.

Driving by the school, I had to drown out the voices by turning on the radio. WMNF was in the middle of their Spring Drive asking for donations, 97X had Green Day, and The Bone was still overplaying Guns n' Roses. Not happy with any of these choices, I reached for my CD case glancing down to see if it was on the passenger seat.

That's when I hit them.

Two of my students who got their licenses last week decided to stop instead of running the yellow. The impact wasn't much. Enough to bust their tail light and leave a slight dent on the hood of my car. On a normal day, the only outcome of this would be some extra paperwork for the insurance company.

As he filled out the accident report, the officer noticed a sweet, pungent smell. Figuring it was the girls, he asked to search their car. My too emphatic protest had the

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officer take a closer look at me. After my car was searched, the cuffs clicked on, and I was stuffed in the back of the squad car.

Driving while impaired was the least of my concerns. Possession of two ounces kicked it up to a third degree felony with a maximum penalty of five years in jail. Since I have no previous record, the judge might have been lenient. The eight quarter-ounce baggies had me staring down an "intent to distribute" rap. The fact that I am a high school teacher had them assume that I sold to students. I tried to explain. A few students even spoke out on my behalf... The judge didn't believe a word of it.

I didn't script it this way, but it does make a good read. You can find it on the front page of the local section in yesterday's St. Pete Times.

At least my picture looks good.