

Michael Harvey

You Sure This Is You?

"I was coming down that slow curve on to Kapowski bridge ... the road's deserted ... that early morning feel ... not a car - nothing. Then I'm on the bridge and I see this guy in a hat up on the rail looking down at the water. He's not fishing. It 's obvious what's up. The whole scene, just the way you imagine, just like the movies - his face is stone dead already. I stop the car and get out. He's so out of it he doesn't even hear me running up. I shout: Hey!

Don't try, he says, still looking down at the water. Don't try. No emotion, nothing.

I don't want to stop you, I says ... I want the hat.

That throws him. After a bit he turns, looks down at me like he didn't hear right. I say it again. I want that hat.

You want my hat? He can't believe it.

It's a good looking hat.

This is my hat.

You won't need it.

Won't need it, what's up with you? You see what I'm doing here?

Yeah. But, if you're gonna jump, you're gonna jump. Why waste the hat?

Now he's pissed. He gets down off the rail and comes over to me. He's shaking with anger.

"It's because of people just like you that I was up there in the first place. "

Sharon looked steadily into Bob Bedemeyer's face without blinking, a small bubble at the corner of her open mouth. He raised his hand and touched her gently behind her earlobe with his ring finger.

"You liar," she bit his heavy lip. "You really had me going there for a minute."

His sweat was salt in her mouth. His gaudy cologne blended with the smell of disinfectant. He laughed.

Someone was at the door, rattling the handle, trying to get in. They caught their breath, nervous, stifling the impulse to giggle, and waited. They were in the broom closet off the stock room, wedged between the mops and buckets, their bodies bunched over the sweeping compound. Her back against the wall Sharon could feel the sharp lump between her shoulders now, she'd have a bruise. Her left foot was in something sticky, she didn't want to look. The rattling persisted. Bob flicked his eyebrows in a silent laugh. It wasn't funny anymore, she didn't want to look. A muffled irritated voice cursed beyond the door. The handle shook again and then it stopped. Bedemeyer grinned, they tried at ValueBuy, but they didn't try very hard.

"Bill's gonna kill me he ever finds out." Sharon straightened her clothes after the footsteps died away.

"Don't tell him. Here's your shoe."

"I'm gonna have a bruise." She turned her back to Bedemeyer. "My blouse torn?"

"Nah."

"Why I let you talk me into these things ..."

He picked up his new golf putter and grinned. "Cuz I'm a winner."

"That all they give you?"

"And the afternoon off."

"You'll get a bonus at the awards tonight."

"Another one?"

Bob Bedemeyer sauntered across the parking lot, breathing in the fresh air of success. He had been named ValueBuy salesman of the year earlier in the morning. The formal presentations would be later that evening at the Holiday Inn. It was about what he expected, about right. Sliding into his car he tossed the putter onto the back seat and checked the clock on the dash - 2:10, plenty of time. Time to pick up his suit from the cleaners, be on the greens by three. He looked for the cleaning ticket, slid his fingers into his shirt pocket - nothing. His wife had given it to him, he remembered that, yesterday after breakfast, practically thrown it at him. In his wallet, probably. An unconscious whistle fanned his lips as started the car and pulled out past the mall into traffic.

In time to the heavy beat on the radio, Bedemeyer drummed out his mood on the steering wheel. A glance at the Dairy Queen slipping by on the other side of the road brought Betty to mind. Betty was something. She'd put some mustard on his life. He'd met her a few weeks ago outside that same Dairy Queen, her little Escort next to his Taurus the bull. She was standing there wiffling embarrassed giggles into her vanilla swirl because she'd locked her keys in her car. And Bob the bull was full of playful snorts making her laugh even harder before pointing out that the back window was wide open. Betty didn't look like any heart-breaker that day – sweat pants and unwashed hair, she'd just stepped out to the market. But she was fun he could see that. It was reflex for him to pitch and she surprised him. When she showed up for their date there wasn't a guy in the restaurant could keep his eyes off her.

Bedemeyer brought the car to a stop outside *Stainaway Cleaning*. He'd see Betty tonight - after the awards. His wife, Connie, didn't want to go. She never wanted to do anything anymore. He'd called her from the store - "Hey, Babe, I won." And she says, "Oh, yeah. 'At's nice." Like, who gives a shit. Bitch hadn't even asked what he'd won. The hell with her. He got out.

In the middle of the sidewalk he swiveled to lock the car. Bob liked that, the gunslinger swerve on the ball of your foot, bring up the remote and whap! He hung for a moment taking pleasure in the metallic zaps of the little bolts shooting into the locks. Hey, that's a wallet. He saw it laying at the curb near his front wheel. It looked like his own. He stepped toward it, hovering a before bending to scoop it up. It was his. How come? He hadn't felt it fall. He gazed dumbly at the leather pouch for a moment before the obvious occurred to him. He reached back and pulled his own wallet from his hip.

The two wallets were almost identical. He held them side by side. The same broken stitching, same familiar imprint of the credit cards, same worn patch. Uncanny. He lay the two wallets next to each other on the hood of his car. They had same layout, the same organization: cash card, the same credit cards. One by one he went through the items, everything in one duplicated in the other, even a similar amount of cash. Apart from the guy's name - Maitland, William D. – they were practically interchangeable, except Maitland didn't have a dry cleaning ticket. Bob closed the wallets slipping his own back into his pocket as he crossed the sidewalk to the cleaners. He'd think about it later.

The young woman at the counter was very still when Bedemeyer walked in. The wheezy door and Bob's bluster didn't budge her. Her small body had a Buddha like stillness as if the chemical air and the humming florescent held her in a trance.

"Hey there, beautiful." Bob set his ticket in front of her.

She left the greeting in the air and studied his ticket without expression. It made him smile, he knew that game. Without a glance a small gesture of her hand set the conveyor rack in motion. She turned her gaze to the bare wall and waited. Bob stared at her. The look of spite about her intrigued him, as if she blamed him for her job.

When the rack stopped she pulled off a hangar of clothes and lay them across the

counter. A sports coat and pants in plastic wrapping. Right away Bob could see it wasn't his suit, but the outfit looked familiar. Had his wife dropped off the wrong clothes? It took a moment for him to see they weren't his.

"These're not mine, sweetheart. Give it another spin."

"What?"

"Give it another twirl, girl. These aren't my mine."

A hint of panic showed in the woman's eyes as they darted back and forth from ticket to garment. Then with relief she said: "Match the ticket,"

"But they're not mine."

"Numbers match."

"I don't care about the numbers. I have a blue suit, sweetheart. This is not my suit."

"They match," she said, then took her lower lip between her teeth and sank into a downcast stare.

"Ah, shoot!" Bob snapped the frustration with a sharp laugh. He glanced at his wristwatch, then out the window at his car beyond the pulsing backwards neon Stainaway.

"Look, sweetheart." He turned back.

Now there was a man there, a man with lacquered hair who took the ticket from the woman.

"Ah. Here we go." Bob nodded. "Now we're getting somewhere."

"All right, Rita," said the man. "I'll deal with this," His voice was flat and hard. "I'm the manager, sir. What seems to be the problem?"

"Good. How y'doin'? No problem, really. It's just - this is not my suit."

"Numbers match." The assistant beeped like some irrepressible electronic device.

"Yeah, you said that."

"She's right, sir. They match."

"Then there's some mistake." Bob prodded the garment bag. "That is not only not my suit. It's not even a suit."

"You sure it was a suit?"

"Hey, what am I? 'course I'm sure. It's a blue suit. It's obvious the ticket got pinned to the wrong garment."

"Doubtful, sir. Not usual." The manager gazed at Bob Bedemeyer with undisguised mistrust - a troublemaker. He looked down at the ticket.

"What was the name?"

"Bedemeyer ... Bob." He pointed at the ticket the man was studying, then checked his watch again.

"D'you have any proof of that..."

"Proof?" Bedemeyer popped. The words rushing, the finger poking. "What is this, I'm buying a handgun or something? Whaddo I need proof for? I know who I am." His thumb jabbed his own chest. "I know I've got an appointment to keep, and I also know that's not my goddamn suit."

"Calm down, sir. We got a problem here. I'm tryin' to help, all right?" He pointed to the wallet in Bob's hand. "Can't you just show me some ID?"

"Ah, man!" Bob dropped the wallet on the counter. "Here." He pulled out the driver's license and shoved it across the worn Formica.

The manager picked it up and held it firmly before his stocky chest. "Well, Bob. This says William Maitland," he said with satisfaction.

"What?" It took Bedemeyer a second to get it then he snatched the license back and began to struggle with his pockets. The manager made a point of not looking at his assistant. She trapped that lower lip again and they stood waiting for Bob to produce an identical wallet and set it down next to the first. Then they couldn't resist.

"Hah! I see what happened." Bob forced a laugh. "I just found this wallet outside on the sidewalk. I gave you his license by mistake." And as he spoke he picked through his wallet and slid his own license toward the manager. "Here."

"You sure this is you?" said the manager picking it up and reading.

"Very funny, yeah. That's me."

"Milton Bedemeyer?"

"Yeah."

"Milton?"

"Yeah, Milton. Bob's just a nickname. Look at the photo."

"So, it's not your ticket."

"Whaddya mean?"

"The ticket says Maitland."

"Show me that. I just gave her that ticket two minutes ago. How can it possibly say Maitland?"

"You tell me. Where'd you get it?"

"My wife gave me the ..." Bob began rooting through his pockets. His embarrassed grin turning sour with failure. "I had it. I don't know. I don't get it."

"Maybe you took it out of his wallet," said the woman. "Looks like yours."

"Yeah, must've." The manager nodded.

"No, no. What I want his crummy sports coat for? What I want is my suit. You gave it to some one else is what happened."

"Not without a ticket we wouldn't."

"Then he had my ticket."

"How did he get it?"

"How should I know? You must've give it to him." Ron looked desperate. "I've got a ceremony tonight. I can't go like this. This is golf, and look at this cheap sports coat, it's not even golf."

"Can't help you, sir." The manager turned away smiling. "Maybe you'll find it at ~~Hoister~~, I've gotta have my suit! That's my best suit." He slapped his palm on the counter sending manager and the woman back a step. "Where's my goddamn suit?"

"We don't have it," said the manager. "And you don't have a ticket. That's it!"

"That's it?"

"That's it!"

"Fuck this!" Ron pounded his fist on the counter.

"None of that. Not in here." The manager edged away behind his assistant who leaned forward cautiously to whisk the clothes off the counter.

"Oh no!" Ron grabbed them out of her hand. "I gave you a ticket for these. I'm taking 'em." He threw money on the Formica and backed toward the door clutching the cleaning bag.

"You gave my suit to this guy. If you won't fix it, I will."

Bedemeyer stood by his car looking up and down the street for answers. Nothing came. He got in and jerked open the wallet looking for an address. He found the driver's license and stared at the photograph of Maitland.

"Who is this guy?"

Maitland, William. The name meant nothing, just another guy with the same wallet. Their birthdays were close too, just a few days difference. There was a membership card to a local golf club, just like his own. Bedemeyer felt his hand clenched on the steering wheel to the point of pain. Was this worth it? He forced himself to lean back and calm down till his body relaxed. What about his golf game? He checked his watch, it was either golf or the suit. He'd paid a lot for that suit and the suit meant the awards. There was no choice.

He tossed the wallet on to the dash, and started the car. Pulling out he could see the manager of *Stainaway Cleaning* standing at the window watching him from behind the neon. Bob gave him the finger.

Maitland's address was on the far side of town it wouldn't be too hard to find. A twinge of embarrassment pinched his cheek as he drove. That Milton thing. He'd always hated the name, felt like a sissy all through childhood, every time anyone called it out. First chance he had, he remembered, when he left home he changed it. Down at the bus station he booked a seat on the bus and the clerk asked him what name, and he said Bob, Bob Bedemeyer. Then he'd held his breath expecting the clerk to look up and say, you ain't no Bob you're a Milton. But he hadn't and he'd been Bob ever since. Bob was a man's name. Waiting at the light Bedemeyer realized he'd lost sight of the details in his fit of indignation. Now he could visualize the two wallets laying open on the hood of the car. There was no ticket in Maitland's wallet. He remembered thinking they were alike except for the ticket. So, how the hell did he get Maitland's ticket? And how did Maitland get his ticket. Bob had never seen this guy in his life. Maitland's wallet was near his car when he picked it up. There was no ticket inside, which had to mean he'd already been into the cleaners and left.

"With my fuckin' suit." The anger jumped back at him and he took a swipe at the dashboard sending the car swerving into on-coming traffic in a welter of blaring horns. "Damnit! He's walkin' around in my best suit. Probably stretching the shit out of it. Poppin' the seams."

William Maitland lived in a suburb just like his own. The planning, the set of the houses, the park full of kids chasing soccer balls was all too familiar. He found himself

making turns along the tree lined streets without even thinking, inhaling the smell of fresh mown lawns without surprise.

"I bet he's the sweaty type, this Maitland. Anyone who'd wear jacket like that. Better not be. All I need, great wet patches under the armpits."

Suddenly the house was there, as if he hadn't had to find it at all. Some sort of instinct had brought him right to the door. He rolled the car to a stop and let the engine idle. Look at this place - a contractor's boilerplate without distinction, four walls and a roof. Not a bit of character, like all the others on the street, like his own. The yard was neat with a pebble path, dividing the scrap of lawn, leading to a door garnished by bougainvillea blooms on either side. It was quiet. If anyone was home he couldn't tell from where he was sitting. He cut the engine and got out taking the cleaning by the hangar, then reached back for Maitland's wallet.

There was no sign of life through the windows as he crunched up the path. Was this whole thing going to be a waste of effort, miss the game and the suit? He pressed the doorbell and waited. A yellow-jacket hummed, trapped in the coach lamp that hung on the door jamb. The door was yellow too. He watched the wasp buzzing back and forth building its irritation, smashing itself against the glass. The lamp had more patina than the one on his own door.

If he comes to the door in my suit I'm gonna pop him one. Bob glanced back at his car talking out loud. Wrecked my whole goddamn afternoon. Missed my tee time, everything. Ask him. You have to ask, right? Didn't you fuckin' notice it wasn't your clothes? Asshole!

Muted Latin music began playing somewhere in the house interrupting his thoughts. Bob reached for the buzzer again and gave it an irritated jab. It had taken longer than it should for the door to open, and then it did.

His wife Connie reacted first - a little gasp, hand up to her mouth, stepping back out of range. Bob blinked. She was all dolled up. Was this the wrong house?

"What the fuck're you doing here?"

"Whaddya think, clearing the drains?"

Her defiance threw him, standing there with her hands on her hips. His face, like a marble on a slow roll across a tabletop, finally fell.

"You!" He suddenly held out the cleaning at arms length. "You! That's how I got his ticket." He looked back and forth from his wife to the jacket as if there was some one inside it. "You're screwing this guy."

It wasn't accusation. It was a gasp of realization.

"You're screwing him!" Now it was accusation.

"What of it?"

"What of it? You're my goddamn wife. That's what of it!"

"Oh, yeah! What about all the women you're screwing? What about Sharon?"

"That's finished."

"What about Betty?"

"Betty?" That shook him.

"Didn't think I knew about her did ya?"

"That's different." He recovered, shouting to make his point.

"No, no. She's not different, she's just like all the others. You want me to name them all? They're not different, he's different," Connie shot out a finger at the empty jacket.

"He's special."

"Him!" Bob gave the jacket a violent jerk. "Special? Different? He's not different he's just like me!"

His own words caught Bob off guard, his eyes burning with frustration as he glared at the furious wasp in the lamp. Confused, he was in the closet with Sharon, turning wallets on the hood of his car, staring at the face of the shop girl in flashing neon full of spite. It wasn't right. It was all wrong. He'd won. Salesman of the year, people liked him. There'd been applause. Now everything was wrong. Connie's venal sneer clenched his fists, and curled his body to lash out, to smash his fist into her taunting face, but the clothes snared his arm. And she was quick, she knew what was coming and with a sharp yelp she slammed the door in his face. Bob punched it so hard he turned away howling, smothering his crumpled hand in his armpit.

He trampled the sports coat and pants in a futile dance of rage, then gave it up in favor of throwing a rock through the window. The glass shattered leaving a jagged black hole and muted Latin music. And then it stopped. Bedemeyer stood in silence with a look of thoughtless concentration on his face.

"Hey! ... Hey!"

Bob turned to the sound of the voice. A man streaming by on a bicycle, waving.

"Hey, how you doin' Milton?"

