

...By Reason of Sanity

#2 in the Peter Sharp Legal Mystery Series

By Gene Grossman

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There's nothing worse than a reformed smoker. I know, because I'm one.

I can smell something being smoked from a car pulling up next to me in traffic with its windows open. I can smell it from someone walking upwind of me a half block away. I'm insulted by the fact that some schmuck is polluting my air.

So here I am at thirty thousand feet above the Pacific Ocean, flying back from Maui, and the fat guy sitting next to me must have smoked two packs before boarding time. It's a good thing there's no smoke detector above us because his entire huge body and clothing reek of smoke. He smells like a giant ashtray. Every time he coughs, smoke comes out of his liver-lipped mouth. He's been sleeping for the past two hours... probably tired from sucking all those cigarettes.

Sitting next to this guy reminds me of a long time ago, when I was going to Chicago's Roosevelt University days, and working nights playing piano downtown on Rush Street. After working from nine in the evening to three in the morning in a smoke-filled saloon, I would return to my parents' second floor north Kedzie Ave. apartment, where per my mother's orders, I'd get

undressed in the hallway and leave my smoke-drenched suit hanging on the banister.

But other than the odors getting to me on this flight back, this vacation was a success.

With all of the book-time spent under Lahaina's Banyan tree, in my hotel room at the Pioneer Inn and on the flights both ways, I've been able to catch up on my reading with one by Robert K. Tannenbaum, one by John Lescroart, two by William Bernhardt and then John Grisham's *The Summons*, which I think he probably phoned in. Reading books by these burnt out lawyers gives me an idea: if reformed hackers can get hired by the government as computer specialists and reformed burglars can get jobs as security experts, why can't a reformed personal injury lawyer become a defense attorney? I've certainly got the credentials. In the past year alone I settled a huge asbestosis case with nothing more than a faith-healer's report... and there was the two million life insurance settlement I got for that doctor who was accused of murdering his wife. I also successfully defended my friend Stuart when a lady using his weight-loss formula sued him claiming it turned her into a nymphomaniac.

Following up on that possibility, our office sent out some inquiry letters to a couple of insurance companies I bagged last year to see if there were any hard feelings. Knowing those corporate types, they don't have feelings. To them, all that counts is the bottom line. If Hitler resurfaced as a winning defense lawyer, he'd be on their payroll in a New York minute.

When checking in from Maui, I was told that one of the insurance company's defense firms might have an assignment for me.

As promised, Stuart picks me up at the flight arrival area and I get in his car, only to be bawled out during the entire ride to the Marina. He doesn't let up, obviously having heard I was thinking of changing sides. "How can you do this? You're not one of those insurance defense guys who wanna cheat poor injured people out of a fair settlement. Those guys ruin the lives of people who're really hurt."

"You mean like you were with that faith-healer's diagnosis of fatal mesothelioma? And if I remember correctly, you didn't complain when I acted as defense attorney for you with that crazy broad who sued you for negligent nymphomania, as a result of taking that weight-loss snake oil you sell. That saved your ass and made you even richer so what's the beef?" I had him there.

"Listen Stu, I know how you feel, but if you stop to think about it, a fair defense lawyer can do more good than a plaintiff's lawyer."

"Yeah, sure. You gonna just give away your insurance company client's money?"

"No, I wouldn't do that, but if a person really is entitled to a fair settlement I can advise my client to pay it, instead of helping them interpret their policy provisions into some perverted reason not to pay."

The discussion comes to a temporary conclusion as we pull up to the C-4200 dock, where the forty-two foot Californian motor yacht I live on is docked. This isn't exactly my dreamboat, but it'll have to do until the fifty-foot Grand Banks I covet becomes affordable. We're on the same dock as George Clooney's mega yacht and I still have some hope of bumping into him and starting a friendship.

Nothing's changed while I was gone. Being close to dusk, the electric cart driven by Suzi, the adorable little Chinese girl that I 'inherited,' is parked in its spot near the boats. That means she and her huge Saint Bernard are on the boat waiting for me, hopefully with a gourmet meal – and some word about new clients.

Suzi runs my life as well as the practice, but she hardly ever talks to me. I still haven't figured out why, but in the last year, about the only time she addressed me was to bawl me out for getting arrested. I didn't mind that conversation because it was just after she bailed me out. Fortunately, my doctor client and I both beat that bad rap, ergo the boat we're now living on... it used to be his.

Suzi's a star at the Chinese restaurant around the corner where her late mother used to work, and from where the food comes during many evenings here at the boat. It gets delivered by the 'Asian boys,' a polite group of four young men who do everything from bus the restaurant tables at night, to cleaning and varnishing the boats on our dock during the day.

I still can't believe how smooth it's been going for the past few months. The kid's really been through a lot.

Her mother died in a car crash when she was only three, leaving her to live with her stepfather, my old law school chum Melvin Braunstein. When she finally got used to that situation, Melvin perished in a plane crash while vacationing in Thailand - and now she's stuck on a boat in the Marina living with me, her legal guardian. Living on a boat someday used to be my dream when I was a kid, so maybe she'll learn to appreciate the lifestyle too. I certainly hope so, because until she's eighteen or goes away to school, this is it.

In addition to her office routine, she also volunteers at the local hospital. They have a children's ward there, so Suzi brings her Saint Bernard in once a week to visit the children.

Her computer skills are top-notch, she runs our law practice, and has two one hundred eighty pound animals to boss around... 'Bernie' the Saint Bernard, and me.

To see pictures of Peter's old cabin cruiser, plus photos of other locations mention in the book, you should also visit his website www.PeterSharpBooks.com