

The Final Running of the Corinthian Cup

Remington and Barbara Poots were arranged at opposite ends of a handsome rosewood table, enjoying a light breakfast in the south dining room. Barbara sipped her breakfast wine and slid a letter opener up the length of an envelope like a local bayman gutting a fish. Her eyes scanned the contents with great interest, but then something near the bottom caught her eye, and the smile on her face moldered like one of those time lapse videos of an animal carcass decaying on a forest floor.

“Oh dear,” Barbara said. The letter rattled ever so slightly in her trembling hand.

“What is it, Muffin?” Remington said without looking up. The business section featured an article on his company’s impending merger with its chief rival. The execution of said merger, despite the wholesale abuse of a number of antitrust laws, was looking like it would go forward thanks to the application of some well-placed bribes. Barbara exhaled, the sound like a small bird beating its wings in a gilded cage.

“Rem, do you remember Lucille?”

Remington made no visible sign that he had heard his wife, because he hadn’t. His previous question was a conditioned response to her voice that required no actual thought. Usually what would then follow is Lucille would say, “Oh, nothing,” though she had something she desperately wanted to share, and when Remington did not further pry, she would go on and tell him anyway, to which he would respond with appropriately timed “Mmms” until she had finished. It was how these things went. But then he noticed the silence in the room, and that Barbara was still in the room as well. This meant, he’d learned over time, she must have asked him something and was waiting for his reply.

“Mmm?”

“Lucille, darling. Do you remember Lucille?”

“Lucille, you say? One of the girls from the club?”

“Yes, yes, Lucille Baumgardner. Honestly, Rem, I wonder if you ever listen to a word I say.”

Remington folded his newspaper neatly and placed it in his lap. It wasn't like Barbara to accuse him of ignoring her so early in the day.

“Muffin, you know I have a lot on my mind with the merger. And then there is this nonsense down at the plant with all of those ethnics protesting for better work conditions, not to mention the regatta next month—you *know* I have my heart set on winning the Corinthian Cup this year.”

“Oh, poo to your cup!” Barbara sobbed, waving her hand at him. A gaudy ring with an immense ruby loosed itself from her finger and tumbled across the dining room table, thumping heavily with each bounce on the polished rosewood. In an instant, Rosalita, the maid, scuttled in from an adjoining room and scooped up the ring, then quickly replaced it on Barbara's waiting, outstretched hand. She then wiped vigorously at any visible scuff marks left on the table. When she passed out of the room, they continued.

“I hardly think breakfast is an appropriate time for such vulgarities,” said Remington, and he pushed his plate away as though he'd lost his appetite. The sound of rattling silver summoned Rosalita again, who retrieved the plate and replaced it with a tumbler of scotch and a cigar.

“I'm sorry Rem, it's just that I've received the most terrible news. Dreadful. I'm beside myself.”

“What has Lucille done? Has her husband besmirched my good name at the club?” As Remington attempted to light his cigar, he had a daring and violent daydream of grabbing this Baumgardner fellow, whoever he might be, and drubbing him in front of the collected club members.

“Lucille was but the cautionary tale whose lesson I failed to heed, my dear Remington.” She waved the offending sheet of paper. “This,” she paused, for dramatic effect, “is a DNA test.” She then collapsed onto the table in sobs.

“DNA...” Remington mused. “Your DNA?”

“Of course *my* DNA, Remington! Why on earth would I have someone else’s DNA results?”

“Well, why would you have your own DNA results?” The cigar, for whatever reason, would not light. Remington banged the palm of his hand on the table. Rosalita reappeared, took his cigar, and returned with another one. “Has your genetic history ever come into question?”

“Well of course it hadn’t,” Barbara said. Barbara Poots had been Barbara Auf der Maur of the celebrated Auf der Maurs of Dover. On any given day, Barbara would happily regale patient guests or long-suffering friends with the bloated history of her family’s ascension from simple German sheep herders to Boston royalty. It was long and tedious and heroic in its fastidious adherence to Anglo-Saxon purity. The name, and Barbara’s substantial wealth and status, were why Remington had married her in the first place.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow,” Remington said. Mercifully the second cigar ignited, and blue smoke began to obscure the space between the Pootses. “What do your genetics have to do with, uh, Cynthia was it?”

“Lucille.” Barbara, recognizing a rare moment where she had Remington’s full attention, shifted her body and mind into a kind of focused stage presence, as though the curtain had been drawn for her to begin her monologue. An actress at heart, she had always harbored secret designs to pen her own one-woman play, where she would act out the story of her glamorous, tragic life. “Auf der Maur gives a tour-de-force performance!” the papers would proclaim. In these dreams, poor Rem was always dead, and she had gone back to her proud family name.

“Recently, one of the girls mentioned that she had seen an advertisement for those DNA tests. You know the ones I’m talking about?”

“Mmm,” Remington said seriously.

“Well of course we all tittered at the thought. What a gas it would be, to discover one of us was something exotic, you know? It was all in good fun, but then Lucille, who had been quite liberal with the sherry that afternoon, declared that she would actually do it!”

“Bold, very bold,” Remington said, nodding.

“We could all tell she regretted it afterward, but a lady’s word is her bond, that’s what we say around the book club table.”

“A fine motto,” Remington said. Barbara tinked her fork lightly against her crystal wine glass and Rosalita reappeared with a newly opened bottle. Barbara urged the maid to pour until the glass was filled to the top. Remington raised his eyebrows. It must be bad news to precipitate a full glass before noon.

“Well, when Lucille’s results came in, we pulled our chairs in close and told the maitre d’ to keep the help out of sight. We wanted to make a ceremony of it. So Lucille opened the letter and let out a gasp, Rem, a gasp. We were all on the edge of our seats because we *knew* it would be something ghastly.”

To see one of their own brought low was the highest form of entertainment in the Poots’ social circle. Remington leaned in.

“What did it say, Muffin?” he growled.

“The results concluded that she was twelve percent *Asian*.” Barbara said with a deeply satisfied smirk, her own personal tragedy momentarily forgotten.

“No!” gasped Remington.

“We were all shocked, of course. Poor Lucille just sat there weeping into a napkin. It took quite longer than was decent for her to leave. At first I sympathized, of course, but after a few minutes, I mean, to just make us sit there and endure her personal crisis. Can you imagine?”

"It isn't decent," Remington said, huffing in disgust. "So very...*coarse*."

"The girls all claimed to have had an inkling. Beverly Dubois said she suspected as much the whole time, which we all laughed off, nobody could have known, just by looking at her. But you know, I've always been a very observant person, and when I got to thinking about it, it wasn't all that shocking. Do you remember that time she took us for a spin in her husband's new Aston Martin?"

"Don't recall that," Remington said, still unable to remember Lucille at all. He furrowed his brow and tried to recall this Lucille, who was now shuffling around his mind dressed as a geisha in white face paint, waving a fan in intricate circles and giggling into her hands at some unspoken joke.

"Lucille drove us to the marina for Calvin's retirement, don't you remember? I thought we were going to die at least a dozen times. It all made sense, you know, after that."

"Orientals *are* terrible drivers," Remington said matter-of-factly. Then he leaned back in his chair and puffed away at his cigar, and, thinking the conversation was over, started to unfold his newspaper. Barbara fluttered the letter loudly and sobbed to get his attention.

"Oh, sorry Muffin, I thought we were done."

"We haven't even gotten to my problem!" Barbara fell back in her chair, the back of her hand held to her forehead. "We all moved on. Nobody mentioned Lucille or the test, you know how these things are. But I am weak! My curiosity grew, Remington, it grew in me like a child waiting to be nourished with the milk of forbidden knowledge!"

Barbara, childless, always fell into maternal similes when she was particularly drunk or upset.

"I have been living a lie," she said to the ceiling.

"The news can't be so bad. What does it say? Do you have a dash of Irish in you? No shame in that. You'd be hard pressed to find somebody that didn't have some Irish tarnish on the family silver," Remington said. Then a thought gripped him. "You're not... *Argentinian*?"

Remington had once been involved in a bad business deal with an Argentinian man, and ever since he viewed the entire country with open hostility.

“Look for yourself,” she said, and rang a small silver bell. Rosalita returned and took the test results the length of the table to Remington. The results featured a map of the world, with color-coded circles over the areas from where Barbara’s genetics had sprung, and a number of bars of varying length below the map, indicating the percentages of Barbara’s genetic makeup. Once Remington scanned South America and saw no circle over Argentina, he gave the rest of the test his attention.

“German and Swiss, of course. Wonderful breeding, your family.” He furrowed his brow. “But, what is this? It says here that you are twelve percent *Isirus oxyrinchus*, Muffin. What is that? Scottish? Welsh?” He lowered his voice. “Dutch?”

“Far worse, Remington darling.”

“Mexican? No offense.”

“None taken, señor,” said Rosalita, who had returned to refill his tumbler.

“Read what it says in parentheses,” said Barbara.

Remington, as a rule, never read anything in parentheses. He (stubbornly) believed that if something wasn’t good enough to be stated directly, it wasn’t worth reading at all. His eyes scanned the sheet and found the parentheses next to *Isirus oxyrinchus*.

“Mako shark?” he said. He ruffled the paper, as though he could shake the letters around until they made more sense.

“It’s the worst news possible,” Barbara groaned.

“And you had no idea?” Remington said, a hint of suspicion in his voice.

“Not in the slightest,” Barbara said. She gulped down the rest of her wine and blew her nose into a silk napkin. “How can I face the girls, knowing this?”

“This *is* troubling,” Remington conceded. He peered over the sheet of paper like a hunter in a duck blind, scrutinizing his wife for any signs of shark that he’d overlooked.

“Stop looking at me like that.”

“We need to keep this a secret.”

“How? The slightest slip up and they’ll be on to me. Those women are like bloodhounds!”

“Just don’t do anything...sharkish,” Remington said. Then, overcome by the realization that his wife’s polluted ancestry could lead to his own downfall, he grew quite serious. “You mustn’t let anyone know about this, Muffin. If the board finds out, the merger will assuredly fall through. The damned lawyers will smell blood in the water...” he gave her an apologetic look then continued. “...and you *know* they won’t let me sail in the regatta!”

“I’ll be thrown out of the book club,” Barbara moaned.

“They’ll say I have an unfair advantage on account of your genetics,” Remington said almost to himself.

“We will be ostracized,” Barbara said, mascara running down her face.

“Run out on a rail like your oriental friend! I will be ruined, I tell you. Ruined!”

Remington slammed the palm of his hand on the table. The noise made Barbara jump in her chair and summoned Rosalita, who tried to take Remington’s drink and cigar until he swatted her away.

“Keep it under wraps, Muffin. Tell no one.”

Barbara retired to the sun room, where she flung herself onto the daybed. Over the sound of her sobs she could hear shouting voices carried in through the open window. A handful of protestors had come from the plant and found their way to the boundary fence at the end of their expansive lawn. They carried placards with colorful messages about the massive pollution Remington’s plant dumped into the river that fed into the bay. A white sign with a grey blob in the middle caught Barbara’s eye. She had to squint to make out the image - a shark with a thermometer in its mouth, and a hot water bottle on its head. When she realized what it was, she grabbed a nearby pillow, threw her face into it, and screamed.

The Final Running of the Corinthian Cup (part 2)

“Rem, I think I’m going to start a blog.”

Remington’s croquet ball bounded wide right of the hoop he’d been aiming for, and his lips disappeared into a thin, white line. Rosalita, who stood near the rose bushes holding refreshments on a silver serving tray, muttered in Spanish and crossed herself with her free hand. Remington Poots took all competitive endeavors extremely seriously.

“No talking during my backswing, Muffin,” he said through gritted teeth. Rosalita took his mallet and handed him a scotch.

“I’m sorry dear, it’s just that I can no longer contain my excitement!”

Remington waved impatiently at her to take her shot.

“I have been thinking about it for a while now Rem,” Barbara said, as she stood over her blue croquet ball. “I really think writing is my true calling.” Mallet struck ball, the satisfying sound echoing across the south garden. Twenty yards away, Barbara’s ball passed through the hoop easily. Remington huffed.

“This doesn’t have to do with your...*problem*, does it?”

Barbara’s genealogical “problem” had a dramatic effect on the Poots household the weeks following the discovery. She was reclusive in those early weeks, and had taken to spending long hours in front of her vanity obsessing over her own features. Most mornings when she finished flossing, she examined the sharpness of her teeth. She even bought a dentist’s mirror to see if a second row of teeth had started pushing through behind the first. At the club, she ordered her steaks well-done, so as not to arouse suspicion of a blood lust that was common in the Mako shark. Once, she caught Fanny du Pont watching her as she ate foie gras, but, as the mallard is a freshwater animal, she felt her secret remained safe.

Remington found the whole situation agreeable, after a time. Whenever he needed peace from his wife he would describe her using words that would raise in her mind images of

sharks—words like “relentless” and “voracious” and “bloodthirsty”—and she would quickly run off to a mirror and check her teeth, leaving him in peace.

“This blog will be my platform to the world, to defend the noble and misunderstood shark.”

“You’ll do no such thing, Barbara,” said Remington. “No wife of mine will lower herself to ‘writing’. It’s secretary’s work.”

“But Rem, I have so much to share with the world! And it would be easy! Rosalita’s grandson Nieto taught me how to work the internet.”

Remington’s complexion took on a purple hue. “That’s too much. I think you’ve grown far too bold with this nonsense. The driver told me you rolled down your window in one of the colored neighborhoods recently.”

“I asked a man for directions, Rem.”

“You could have been groped!” Remington bellowed. Then, in a lower voice, “Someone could have seen you getting groped! Think of what would be said!”

“Oh poo to what they’d say,” said Barbara, lining up her next shot. Remington looked at her with an uneasy, sideward glance.

“This DNA business has made you very *antagonistic*, Muffin. Very *aggressive*.”

Barbara clubbed her continuation stroke through a distant hoop.

“Maybe it has,” she said with a wink.

She tossed her mallet to Rosalita in a theatrical flourish, a cool, confident smile on her face. The crashing sound of Rosalita dropping tray, glasses, and mallet did not diminish for Barbara the freeze frame of defiance she had crafted on the south garden lawn.

Barbara found strength in her new heritage she hadn’t before known. It made her feel dangerous, powerful, *defiant*. Remington sensed it too, and chose to be swallowed up in the distractions of his work and social responsibilities rather than deal with a wife suddenly obsessed with conservation movements. Barbara ignored her husband’s demand that she forget

“all of this shark nonsense” and started writing under a pseudonym in the local paper’s readers blogs section. Soon Barbara began churning out post after post advocating on behalf of sharks. She called “Jaws” a propaganda film, denounced “Black Lives Matter” as “old news” and pushed for a “Grey Lives Matter” movement to start, and insisted that her readers begin boycotting advertisers who bought time during “Shark Week”. Quite suddenly, Barbara became the mysterious voice of a new conservation movement.

“All of these nature programs are pornographic in how they portray sharks as mindless, violent, killing machines,” she told Rosalita one night. “It isn’t fair. When I see these poor creatures, *my family*, experiencing this kind of prejudice, I tell you, I feel it too.” Her eyes shimmered in the light of the computer screen. Rosalita sat mutely as Barbara touched her cheek. “I only wish you could understand what it’s like, sweet Rosalita.”

Two days before the running of the Corinthian Cup, the Poots’ world came crashing down around them. Barbara had recently written a blog post about the Hannah Barbera cartoon “Jabberjaw”, calling it the equivalent of shark blackface. She demanded all reruns be removed from syndication, and the original cells burned in a bonfire celebrating shark equality. Later, when she logged on to read what she thought would be glowing messages of support, she instead found:

“How hypocritical that the woman who is always going on about shark rights is married to the biggest oceanic polluter in the state!!! Isn’t that right, BARBARA POOTS?”

The messages that followed were foaming with vitriol. Somebody had cracked the code on her identity. Dozens of readers attacking her credibility, and most horribly, “Poots” was everywhere. “Poots” was in every post, “Poots” in every title. Barbara was so beside herself she could barely finish her morning mimosas.

Remington announced his discovery of the news that his wife had been blogging behind his back by hurling his three-wood through the sitting room window. He spent the rest of the day fielding phone calls from his lawyers and business associates. Barricaded in her room, Barbara

could hear Remington ruffling a great many papers as Rosalita made countless trips between him and the liquor cabinet. The scandal shocked the city, and before the day was through, Barbara had been excommunicated from the club, and Remington had lost his merger. Barbara, at odds with the woman she was and the one she'd become, decided to face her accusers and accept whatever fate held in store for her.

The sunset was a deep, crimson red, the color of fresh blood in the open water. Barbara walked the length of her driveway with slow, deliberate steps, chin held high. Rosalita trailed behind her, dragging a suitcase. Barbara showed no fear, calling on her shark ancestry as she walked toward the glow of lanterns and torches bobbing up and down outside the Poots compound.

The day of the Corinthian Cup regatta opened under slate gray skies and the promise of murky, miserable weather. Remington awoke on the couch in his office, defiant and angry, but determined. The yacht club board faced a tidal wave of opposition from members who wanted him out of the race, but Remington used the last of his social capital to keep his name on the race sheet. His wife's maniacal obsession had cost him everything, but this race was something he could still control. It was all he had left.

Remington's driver could barely turn the limousine down the yacht club drive, thanks to all of the protestors outside, who pelted the vehicle with solid waste that, if Remington had ever actually visited his factory, he would have instantly recognized as the very stuff he dumped liberally into the nearby river. It took a sternly delivered phone call to the chief of police to get the deployed local police to break up the crowd, but even as he watched his mood darkened.

"Look at them, driver. Their hearts aren't even in it. Crack some skulls, you imbeciles! It used to be a call from Remington Poots could get something done around here. I doubt any of these hippies will even need to visit the local emergency room." He downed the drink in his hand and stared wistfully into the empty crystal tumbler. "I'm ruined," he said.

Remington hurried to the captain's check-in. He could feel the other members staring at him as he scribbled his name in the ledger. They didn't attempt to hide their snickers as they watched him swaying in front of the race director's table, still wearing the wrinkled suit and personal shame from the day before.

"Mr. Poots, you'll just need to get your vessel to the starting point by-"

"Just be ready to etch my name into that cup," Remington said. He cut a swath through an increasingly antagonizing crowd. Remington didn't care. Their derision would be the soundtrack to his renaissance, he determined then. He'd lost the merger and his reputation, but he would have the cup.

Conditions were choppy and the fog was thick when the officials blew the starting horn. Remington's vessel, "The Hostile Takeover" got out to an early lead, thanks to a strong tailwind and an aggressive style Remington would not have attempted before his collapse, when honor meant something. "Hey Poots, what you're doing isn't very sporting!" shouted Clyde Eubanks, just after Remington had cut him off. Remington responded by firing a flare over Eubanks's head.

It seemed The Hostile Takeover was blessed with a wind the other yachtsman couldn't catch. White foam kicked at her sides as Remington shouted orders to his only crewman, his beleaguered driver, who couldn't even swim, let alone sail a boat. It was something Remington had no knowledge of despite the man including it on his resume.

- *Driving is my specialty, though I can cook in a pinch. I'd rather avoid pool cleaning duties, if at all possible (I can't swim).*

Victory within his grasp as the Hostile Takeover coasted past one of the last markers before the finish, but then an odd sound carried across the waves.

"Do you hear that?" Remington shouted.

“Sounds like drums, sir.”

The drums grew louder, and then Remington saw a giant shark moving fast in his direction.

“It’s a barge, sir.”

“What in blazes is a barge doing in the middle of the course?” shouted Remington. Then a familiar voice carried across the water, amplified by a megaphone, and all of the pieces fell into place. The rear of the false shark was crawling with protestors like a school of placard-carrying pilot fish. Standing atop the shark’s head like some kind of conquering Ahab, stood Barbara. At her side, huddled beneath a raincoat and looking miserable, was Rosalita.

“Eco-terrorists!” shouted Rem.

“Is that Mrs. Poots?”

“Head in the game, driver! Evasive maneuvers! They intend to ram us!”

The driver did what he could, but his driving abilities did not extend to the open seas, and the Hostile Takeover moved sluggishly. Remington cursed the crude boat engines that pushed the barge against the wind. The shark abomination pushed closer, and in the closing gap between vessels, Remington and Barbara stared each other down.

“Get away from those hippies, Muffin! Do you have any idea how embarrassing this is?”

“These are my people now, Remington!” Her voice was carried to him by her megaphone. “I have heard the call of my ancestors!” Then the protestors launched a salvo of garbage at the Hostile Takeover, covering Remington and the driver in what smelled like human waste. When Rem wiped his eyes clean, he saw that the shark boat hadn’t rammed them, but had cut across their path. Despite everything, his mind returned to the race.

“There’s our opening, driver! Full sails!”

He’d hardly gotten the words out when the boat struck something underwater, and he and the driver were sent tumbling across the deck. The Hostile Takeover had gotten hung up on a heavy chain trailing from the shark barge to shore. Remington watched as the shark barge

continued a slow arc away to port, and soon saw the full design of their plans. One by one, the rest of the boats crashed into the submerged chain. Soon, Barbara's shark boat had encircled the entire racing fleet, the boats grinding against one another in a tight ring. The protestors beat their drums and threw Poots pollution and cheered their victory.

"This is a clear violation of the regatta rules, Poots!" Someone shouted over the sound of splintering wood. Enraged, Rem fired his flare gun. The red flare hit the sail of the boat pinned up against his own. The sail, coated in Poots waste, instantly burst into flames. In a matter of seconds, the entire Corinthian Cup racing contingent was engulfed in flames. Heads bobbed up and down around the massive pyre as captain and crew jumped overboard. Remington was the last captain to abandon ship. And as he hung from the boom, he waved a fist at his wife.

"You've ruined us, Muffin! You've ruined us!"

"I'm on a path of self-discovery, Remington, and I will be ashamed no longer! This is who I am and you'll have to accept that."

"Señora, viene un tiburón."

Rosalita pointed at a fin moving quickly toward the crowd of swimmers. The air was filled with sea spray and screams.

"This is exactly what is wrong with society today," Barbara shouted into the megaphone. "Not every shark is a violent killer! You are perpetuating stereotypes!"

"¡Ay, dios mio!"

Rosalita pointed to where the Poots's driver had been flailing to stay afloat, and where now there were only pink bubbles indicating a great deal of stereotypical violence happening below the surface. Placards were stretched down into the water to outstretched hands, as protestors became rescuers.

"You are all over-reacting! That man couldn't swim! We don't know that the sharks did anything to him! You're all being racist!"

Finally, Barbara's searching eyes found Remington. He was never much of a swimmer, and he was struggling to get to the barge. A fin arose behind him, closing quickly. Their eyes locked again, and they were enemies no longer.

"I shall save you, Remington!" Barbara handed Rosalita the megaphone, and mounted the giant shark head once more. "These are my people!" she shouted, and then she dove beneath the surface.

Remington had no memories beyond that moment when his wife arched gracefully through the air and into the churning waters. Later he learned that moments after she dove in, the sharks stopped their feeding frenzy and abruptly swam off. The protestors had pulled aboard those who hadn't been killed and brought them to shore, where the coast guard quickly got to work sorting out those who would be hospitalized and those who would be beaten and arrested. Of Barbara Poots there was no sign, and nobody ever saw her again.

The local boating community never recovered, and the Corinthian Cup was unceremoniously tossed in a cardboard box and eventually found its way to the local dump. In the years that followed, Remington Poots chartered a small fishing boat for tourists. The tours were famous for the salty old captain who knew almost nothing about fishing, but who would spend the whole trip regaling his customers with tales of a shark who took everything from him and further dishonored him by saving his life. A shark he swore he would spend the rest of his days hunting, until that fateful moment when she would show herself, and he would plunge into the sea, knife between his teeth, his vengeance at hand.