

Fidget's Revenge

With my tongue planted against the inside of my cheek, I walk into The Hook & Gull and sidle onto an empty stool next to my two best friends. We recognize there's safety in numbers.

We are called a Savant, a Mensa member, and Doc, a perpetual grad student. Still living in our seaside village, from elementary through high school, bullying from our nemesis won't stop.

Who pays the tab tonight? Not me. I might be a Mensa, but the reality is I'm cheap and working my way out of drowning debt.

Minding my own business and slinging back a cold one after a long day of work, I'm sitting with the smart guys. We're a private club. We became allies in our small fishing village, guarding ourselves against mediocrity and the people with a disdain for using your brain. Finances kept us from leaving to find the pearly oyster in a bigger city where more people like us probably exist.

My job as yacht captain began a week ago. I'm, the guy behind the wheel overseeing a three-person crew. Some call it a baller's job. You won't notice me. Your focus is on the bikini-clad hotties on the deck rubbing suntan oil in all the right places.

I'm human, but the love of my life, Julia, is everything I need and want. My pregnant, hormonal wife is stuck in our shitty apartment lined with lime-green shag carpet. It's my job to buy her a nice home with a backyard and a nursery.

The dog suffers from fleas and scrapes his itchy butt across our bedspread. Count me and the wife lucky. The cover is a cheapy from Walmart, and with my first paycheck, we are out of here and headed to Pottery Barn. The dog's going to the vet and I'll set up a new crib in a cozy two-bedroom by the sea.

I tried to leave high school behind, but my reminder opens the door at the bar and fills the air with mindless chatter. He walks and talks at the same time—neither too smoothly. Ernie is a curse from my school days I can't shake. His voice grinds my teeth together. My jaw aches. He drives me to want to punch a wall.

The low-life-shrimper-for-life crosses the empty dance floor and edges into our personal space. He stands too close behind me.

“Hey, Fidget. Where'd you steal the fancy-schmancy white uniform?” I cringe. Why the hell can't he call me Wyatt? After decades, he might need a reminder. My child is coming into this world soon, more than enough reason to end the embarrassing legacy Ernie is guaranteed to push onto my kid.

“Someone should shoot that human waste,” Savant whispers to me in my free ear. I nod. Savant hates the guy as much as me. Savant can't forget his underwear flying on the high school flagpole or the time Ernie beat the hell out of him for getting extra pudding on his birthday from the school cafeteria lady. Never mind she was his mother.

Yes, we're holding old grudges, but he's the one keeping them fresh as the fishy smell on his boots.

“Get the big word off your word-of-the-day calendar, Ernie? Quite a mouth full for the village idiot,” Savant shoots the retort across the bar but it plops like a cheap fifth of whiskey on my empty stomach.

Ernie closes in and jerks Savant's arm behind his back like he's about to twist it into a pretzel.

I grab Ernie's wrist and pat his shoulder with my other arm, like a broke mom calming a small child in the toy aisle at Walmart.

Ernie refuses to give up the nickname he bestowed on me in high school. He found me at a party in a bedroom fumbling—fidgeting, whatever you want to call it with my hands down a girl's Guess jeans. He blabbed to everyone close enough to listen. The girl screamed with embarrassment. I chased Ernie out of the room to find a roomful of laughing teenagers as he told the story.

A decade after high school, Ernie delights in reminding the three of us of our embarrassments, most of all, me. When he corners Julia on the street, he makes sexual innuendos. She's afraid to be cornered by him. I hate the bastard.

“If you must know, I'm a yacht captain. The *Carpe Diem* is in dock until my boss returns from Barcelona.” I gulp my IPA and think about less Ernie in our lives as a ticket to a better future. Savant, Doc, and I talked about this moment. I fire a suggestive nod to my friends. Both shoot me looks of anticipation.

The lack of a reliable police force adds to Ernie's mayhem. We've called the station multiple times over the years until we gave up. Ernie's assaulted us, held us at gunpoint, and robbed Doc. But Ernie's uncle is the police chief.

Last week the exhaust pipe on Doc's truck was discovered with a potato stuck in it. Ernie could kill him from carbon monoxide poisoning. Thank goodness, Doc, a mechanical engineering wizard, understands a thing or two about cars, but he's had enough. Doctoral laid out several scenarios to free us of Ernie.

Doc nods to Savant, sets a twenty on the bar, and grunts goodnight. And just like that, my dollar-night beer bill is covered and our plan is set in motion.

My cell buzzes, and I turn it over. It's Julia. *Can you come home? My feet are swelling, and dinner's getting cold.*

I flip the phone face down. It's no mistake the three of us were sitting here tonight. Ernie doesn't miss dollar night.

The jerk's hot breath permeates the back of my shirt.

"You're the captain? So, where's your Tennille?" His lameness digs into the back of my neck.

"Her name is Julia, Limp Dick." I turn my attention to the bartender, holding up my empty. He sets another bottle in front of me.

"My lover got away." Ernie shakes his head as if the scenario was a possibility.

"She was never yours. Get over it." I tap down my anger because a barroom brawl will spoil our plan.

“Feels like yesterday.”

“High school is history. Go make something of your life.” The three-piece cover band in the corner launches into *Freebird*.

Ernie scoots his barstool closer.

“What do you want?” I turn and face him with defiance. Typical Ernie is empowered to be bad when anyone confronts him. He’s a starving fish lured by cheap bait.

Savant lays a twenty on the bar and winks. The cash guarantees I can drink all night if our plan goes sideways. “Heading home. Good night.”

Now, if Ernie would disappear or face plant on the bar, he might live another day, but with a guy like him, it’s bound not going to happen.

“You think since you gave up shrimping and wear a pretty uniform, you’re better than me?”

“Never insinuated otherwise, Ernie. Loved shrimping, but the bills are piling up. I need cash to move us out of the crap hole we live in.” I slide from the barstool and walk to the bathroom. Ernie’s a dog on my heels. Beside the bathroom door, is the worn newspaper article of my induction into the Mensa Society, framed and screwed to the wall.

The bar owner, a passive-aggressive friend of mine, nailed it there, specifically for Ernie’s eyes. Ernie pees a lot—probably weak kidneys.

Ernie sneers at the framed article. “Why don’t they throw that piece of shit in the trash? No one needs a constant reminder you think you’re smarter than everyone else.” He pushes me

against the wall, pressing my face into the glass. The glass crunches against the pressure before shattering to the floor, a couple of pieces buried in my cheek.

“You looking for an apology for being more intelligent than you?” I push back, but Ernie’s a big man with a badass reputation. I wipe a trickle of blood from my face. A couple of shrimpers I used to work with walked out of the bathroom. They despise Ernie, but they’re not about to get in Ernie’s crosshairs.

“What happened to Friday night beach bonfires and getting stoned?” Ernie tilts his head.

“We grew up—at least some of us did.”

Ernie lets go of me and steps back. “If you want to prove you’re my buddy, you’d take me out on the boat.” Ernie’s jealousy is apparent.

“I’m not. And no can do.”

“You got a key, don’t you?”

“I should go home.”

Ernie yanks the sleeve of my shirt. “This is our chance. Your boss is out of town. Now’s the perfect time to relive the good old days.”

I walk into the john, leaving Ernie in the hallway, but turn back in the open door like I have to ponder his proposal. I scratch my head and wipe another trail of blood from my face. Ernie believes everyone thinks as slow as him. “Okay. One condition.” I wait.

“Name it.” Ernie takes the bait.

“You’ll never call me a name other than Wyatt.”

When I exit the bathroom, Ernie follows me back to the bar. I sit down. He pulls a ten from his pocket, changes his mind when he eyes the two twenties on the bar, and pockets his bills. “Done,” he overpromises.

“And. You won’t tell anyone we took the yacht out.”

“What’s the fun in staying mum?” A smirk slides up one side of his face.

“Promise, or we don’t go.”

“My word is good.” My gut lurches because I know the truth. He’s lying.

In addition to giving me the hated nickname and telling everyone about my early girl troubles, he tried to turn Julia against me when we started dating. “But a decade later, I still hear the nickname from you. It ends tonight.”

Ernie draws an x over his heart and smiles. “Let’s go.”

“I’ll call Julia. Let her know I’m going to be late.” I walk a few feet away to pretend I’m groveling into the phone. I’d rather be home rubbing her feet, but Julia and I agree this Cro-Magnon needs to go.

When I return, I look around the bar. No one is paying any attention to us and no one would suspect Ernie and I would leave together.

“Leave your beater here. We’ll walk to the slip,” I don’t want to dispose of his truck, too.

The forty-foot cruiser glistens pearly white, and water laps against the dock like a hundred mermaid tails.

Ernie whistles. “Damn. She’s a beaut.”

“She is. Go to the other side and untie the ropes from the cleats. We’ll jetty out a few miles.”

A text buzzes on my phone. *Julia. About time. I’ll put dinner in the frig.*

Another text—this one from the boss lights my phone. *Son’s in town. Be available in the morning for him and his friends.*

I text back to both messages. *You’re the best, baby. Thanks for understanding. And. Checking out a strange engine noise. I’ll be at the dock early. Glad to do it.*

I climb aboard and check the gauges. Ernie walks the gangway wearing his shrimp-stink cut-offs and a grin the size of Massachusetts. I check under the dash for glass cleaner to make sure I can erase his fingerprints. “Go below and fetch us a beer.” The dock is secluded and dark, but I don’t want anyone to be able to testify they saw Ernie on the boat.

The engine purrs to life, and I shift into reverse with the lights off.

Driving past the docks, there are a few fishing poles anchored over the top rails—homeless guys this time of night, none eager to engage with the police or answer questions.

I’m making the world a better place by tossing Ernie out like the trash he is. Soon he’ll be every shark’s dream dinner.

“Here’s your beer.” Ernie hands me the bottle with the cap still on. I hand it back. He peers over the side and whistles. “Wow. So, this is how the rich live.”

I nod to the bottle. “Could you open it? I’m busy taking you on the ride of your dreams.” I switch on the string of LEDs circling the deck.

“Sure thing, Fidget.” He screeched his nails down my nerves and I make a sharp right around a small uninhabited island. Ernie sways but doesn’t fall. Lights flicker in the distance from the tourist-trap town I lived in my entire life.

The crusty barnacle annoyance steps to the deck. He walks the perimeter, stroking the buttery leather of the yacht’s curvy couches and the polished chrome accents. He gazes at the highly-varnished floors beneath his ratty sneakers.

The moon takes refuge behind a cloud and I switch on the masthead light as we reach the backside of the island. The water’s deep but too shallow for dumping his body. I take a mental inventory of the heavy items I left in the engine room.

Ernie whistles behind me. I turn. He’s rubbing his hands over a lounge chair. “I’ll bet there’s a lot of eye candy lounging on a yacht this size.”

“I concentrate on doing my job.”

“Come on. You’re telling me you’ve never brought Julia on the yacht for a night of hanky-panky?”

“Not your business, but, no.”

“I bet Julia is disappointed marrying a Debbie Downer.” Ernie takes a swig of beer and scans the ocean.

“As I said, this is my job.” I shut the motor down and switch off the lights. Waves lick the hull. I meet him on the deck.

“Man, Fidget, I thought this would be more fun—counted on you to lighten up. Nothing changes with you. Let me put you out of your misery.” He slips a pistol from his pocket. The gleam of silver shines in the moonlight. He sticks the gun in my chest.

“What the hell?” Ernie with a gun isn’t part of the plan. Dammit. Dammit. Dammit. I’m going to die.

“I’m getting Julia. Hell. I might be able to take your job,” The barrel of the revolver is poking my ribs. I step back until my spine hits the stern.

“You’re delusional. Put away the gun before somebody gets hurt.” I talk big, but I’m shaking inside. One pull of the trigger, and my baby is growing up fatherless.

“On your knees, asshole.”

“Pl...eaeaea...se.” My cry breaks apart. I fold to the floor of the yacht. Sweat gathers on my forehead and upper lip and the muscles in my back tremor.

The yacht dips to one side, and I gaze up. A storm is brewing a few miles out to sea. The perfect night for a killing. Mine.

Savant and Doc walk up the steps out of the engine room. and close the distance between them and Ernie’s back. Savant’s carrying a large pipe I stored in the engine room. Doc holds tape, bungee cords, and a cinder block.

Ernie pivots at the footsteps behind him. He can’t shoot the three of us, and he knows it.

He lowers the gun and I grab it from his hand. “It was a joke. Lighten up. I’ll never call you Fidget again. I didn’t know it bothered you.”

“You tried to kill me and you’re a liar.” My plan is stupid, but so is his.

“I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“You’re nothing but a pathetic bullying piece of shit who’ll never grow up.”

Ernie launches his bulk toward me. The impact knocks me off balance, and I slam my back into a chrome rail. He raises the pistol and shoves it into my ribcage. It hurts like a son of a bitch. A flash of Julia hugging our child crosses between the end of the gun barrel and my heart.

Savant raises the pipe over his head, coming down hard on Ernie’s skull. I hear popping and cracking and pivot from the rail. Blood flings across the deck. Ernie’s eyes roll—his feet wobble—his arms flail and the gun goes off. A bullet flies out to sea toward the moon. The gun bounces across the deck. Ernie’s arms and legs splay into a starfish pattern on top of a pool of blood.

We step out of range of the blood and stare at the lifeless body. I lean over and stick my hand in Ernie’s pocket, slipping out the twenty. “For the bartender he stiffed,” I explain.

Doctoral and Savant nod.

“Got a bottle of bleach in the engine room,” I say. Doctoral groans and goes below.

“I’m not sorry,” Savant stares at Ernie’s body.

“Let’s push his sorry ass overboard and clean up this mess,” I say. Using a bungee, we bound his feet and attach the cinder block. I wrap the duct tape around his arms, connecting them to his torso, turning him into a hunk of chum.

Savant tosses the pipe overboard. I tug at Ernie's deadweight from the legs while Savant grabs his arms. We need more muscle. Doctoral returns with a bottle of bleach. He sets it down and heaves Ernie's butt in the air until we dangle his body on the rail with the cinderblock banging against the side of the yacht.

"On the count of three. One. Two. Three." Doctoral directs.

We grunt and lift the body over the railing. Savant pushes the cinder block over the side, and a splash confirms Ernie's gone. I pick up the gun and fling it overboard. The three of us lean against the rail, not speaking.

The rhythmic waves calm my racing heart.

I grab the roll of paper towels while my friends pour bleach on the bloody circle. Savant goes below and returns with a mop. We scrub until there's no sign of blood. I polish the railing until it sparkles in the flashes of lightning from the approaching storm.

Savant and Doctoral lie on the leather loungers and stare out to sea.

I step behind the wheel and fire up the engine.

Perfect night for taking out the garbage.