



Butt Out, Geezer-Face

Thirty minutes for lunch is ridiculous. And now it was down to twenty-five.

On his way to *Barnes & Noble*, Chuck Tisdale had been listening to an NPR piece on schools that allow twenty minutes for grade-schoolers to eat their lunches, ten minutes of which are occupied with standing in the lunch line. *Asshats.*

In the Travel section Chuck picked up the first substantial-looking book about Hawaii that he could see. In a week he would be landing at Kailua Kona, on the Big Island, ready to pick up his rental car and *boogie.*

Twaddle. The book was a sloppy glop of bloated restaurant blurbs and puff pieces about hikes and helicopter tours. He just needed a decent guide book with maps.

"You should take a look at this one," a voice behind him announced, followed by a bare arm and a bearded face. A sixty-something grandfatherly-type handed him a slim paperback.

"This one has the goods," the man said. "No sales pitches, just information."

Great. A freaking librarian. Chuck looked at his watch, to check the time (down to twenty minutes now) and to alert this intruder that the small talk needed to be wrapped.

"The thing about Hawaii," the man said, "is that you need to keep your dance card open, for those little jigs that aren't in the book."

Why? Why do these people think I give a steaming horse apple about their personal views on MY vacation? And spare me the freaking DETAIL. If you have to talk to me, give me the Cliff Notes, not a freaking New Yorker piece. Why does everybody think other people want to smell their brain farts? Butt out, geezer-face.

"Which island are you visiting, or are you thinking about more than one?" the man asked. "I would say Hawaii, the Big Island, if it's your first time. They've got everything there, even snow."

Unfortunately, that's not all you "would say," is it? The upside is I don't have to answer your inane questions because you won't stop talking, will you? And here it comes ...

"My son actually worked in Hilo for a few months, after college. Sort of like a German *wanderjahr*, you know what I mean? I visited him once while he was there. I wish I could have stayed for longer than a week. He was working the retail shop at a coffee plantation. The boy had a thing about coffee. I offered to help him do something on his own, but he wasn't ready to settle down. I wish I'd been more persuasive. The boy had a knack for friendliness, you know what I mean? He would have been great running some kind of retail thing that made people happy. He never met a stranger."

The man reached over and put his hand on Chuck's arm. Chuck jerked his arm away and looked at his watch again.

"Damn it!" he said, "I'll have to come back after work."

"One more minute," the man said, "take a look at this one." He held out another book.

"Look, man," Chuck said, "I know you mean well, but not only have I used up my lunch listening to you go on and on without a chance to look for a book on my own, now I can't even stop somewhere to pick up some lunch to take back to work."

The man sighed. "You sound just like my son," he said. "He used to say, '*Boundaries, dad, boundaries.*'"

"Well, he had a point," Chuck said.

"Yes he did," the man said. "He was wiser than his years. He always found a way to say things so he didn't hurt people's feelings. Look, I'm sorry, at least let me give you this."

He handed Chuck a small piece of paper and walked away, before Chuck could examine it.

When he did look, he saw that it was a coupon for the Subway that was next door to the bank where he worked. *Ten dollars* worth.

Great. If I only had time to use it.

He was ten minutes late getting back to the bank, and he felt his gut clench when Stan Blake, the branch manager, came out of his office and waved him over.

Chuck walked over as quickly as he could without actually running.

"What's up, Stan?," he said.

"Not out here," Stan said, motioning him into his office.

Great. Now that old fart has cost me my job.

"Look, Chuck," Stan said, "I don't care about the being late, at least this time, but I do have to know you're up to speed on commercial loans.

"The president of something called Pantheon Corporation is coming in about twenty minutes. They could be a major player for us. They're rock solid and they want to borrow almost a million-five. They've been over at First National, but they just bought the building next door and want the convenience.

"That means not only the loan but the business accounts, merchant account, the whole enchilada. I was going to meet with their guy myself, but Miranda will neuter me with a nail file if I miss another one of Janie's school plays. *Don't screw this up, Chuck.* If you land this you'll get the same bonus Radford would get."

Radford was Chuck's supervisor, on vacation, irony of ironies, on the Big Island.

"I've got this, Stan," Chuck said. "I wouldn't have been late but some old dude thought I needed to hear his Theory of Everything and I couldn't get away from him at the bookstore. It won't happen again."

"Oh, one more thing," Stan said. "This guy coming in lost his son in one of those roadside bomb things in Afghanistan a couple of years ago. He's still a little raw. He must have talked about it for a good half-hour. Then he wouldn't stop apologizing for taking so much of my time.

"*As if!* I know you aren't married, Chuck, and you've never talked about any kids, but you can imagine what it must be like to hear that knock on the door and find a couple of uniforms standing on your doorstep. Sad."

Chuck thought about the old guy at the bookstore. His son may have called him a windbag, but at least the kid was still alive.

"I hear you, Stan," Chuck said. "Sometimes somebody just needs an ear. I can handle that."

"Oh, yeah," Stan said, "if he tries to give you a coupon for the Subway, make a big deal out of it. The Subway is in his building and I guess he hands the things out like Halloween candy."