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A STOUT HEART

Tossing his black Tumi shoulder bag across to the passenger seat, Patrick braced himself, thrust his folded chair in the open back, and pressed up and into his beloved silver bullet. Beloved for its utility and dependability, certainly not its sex appeal. A decade-old minivan is anything but sexy. He was sick to death of this same old routine. But what choice did he have?

What reasonable choice, that is? He used to do it joyfully, for his family, his clients, and his own self-interest, of course. But not now, not like this. The idea of it had become nearly unbearable. Scooting down the brick-paved driveway, he glimpsed the early morning, sun-sparked chop of the Intracoastal Waterway before turning west past lush tropical foliage. Usually taking more interest in the architectural nuances of his historic neighborhood, he blew through it this day, his mood anything but lointy. He was late for a meeting. One he had no interest in attending. Dialing his Sirius radio to the Classic Rock channel, Richa Havens' "Freedom" coursed through the cabin like an urgent on.

Tuning right at Olive and heading north, he moved along briskly. The heavier commute hadn't finished showering yet. Patrick Connelly-Pat or Paddy to longtime friends- was moving steadily through his fifth decade and feeling every bit of it. Two grueling years spent in the entanglements of divorce had seemed like ten. The textured plaster and beamed interior walls of his Mizner-inspired house were lined with boxes he hadn't yet labored to open. He retained the structure in the settlement only because Becky wasn't interested, but its soul was long gone, in addition to most of the furniture. The process hadn't been pain-free, that's for sure. Going their separate ways was little different than their twenty-five years of wedded bliss had been. A daily grind where nothing came easy. Two well-meaning but mismatched people, each deserving better, he'd ascertained.

In pursuit of that idealistic outcome, the brutal process of decoupling had left him wholly diminished, especially financially.

That was the toughest part because finance was his business.

Born in an ascending Bronx still aglow with the second war's decisive triumph, Paddy resembled a brick outhouse some said it more graphically. He was a picture of sturdiness and vigor in a never-ending pursuit of the distant rainbow of success. Not just a win or even several wins. He'd had those. It was an enduring state of well-being he craved. Firm evidence he'd crossed the finish line and been declared champion. There were times he felt close, like he was leaning in toward the tape. But just when it seemed within reach—poof—it would be violently wrested away. Time to start again. And he would. He always would.

In his youth, he'd extracted himself from a regrettable family ecosystem and learned how to win—and lose—with dignity.

The magic formula was his immersion in team sports— the more physical, the better. And despite taking a couple of massive shots to the gut that may have kept any other baller or rink rat prone, he never failed to get back up and push ahead. After earning an economics degree at the infamous "Suntan U" in Coral Gables, he landed a challenging job in stocks and bonds. He soon married Becky, and they started a family called Liam and Erin. The job turned out to be more about sales, less about economics, and Patrick, a cerebral sort, found himself a misplaced introvert in a fast-paced and shrill world. But with years of hard work and training, he learned his craft well and built what many would call a lucrative life. His base of operation was northern Palm Beach County. Not a particularly common homestead in those days, it had something to do with 1970s heartthrob Burt Reynolds raving to Johnny Carson and the world that he made his home in Jupiter, Florida.

"WhereinthehellisJupiterFlorida," read the skintight black t-shirt just below his beaming smile.

This caused Patrick's mother to pine for a visit to Burt's home-town, which caused his reluctant father to veer off I-95 and into the slough of Jupiter's cow pastures and orange juice stands. The next day, Eleanor and Seamus were plunking down a cashier's check and taking possession of the Connelly's first and only vacation home along the untamed Loxahatchee River. You know how those heartthrob things go.

The timing was impeccable, if not unplanned. After graduation, Patrick migrated the few hundred miles up the coast to West Palm Beach, where the urban action lay in this neck of the Everglades. If "action" was the appropriate word. He took up residence in this small, manageable city with its "redneck"

tropical breeze pace, conveniently flat terrain, and curb cuts in the side-walks— just his speed. Largely invisible on a national scale, West Palm had grown steadily through the good and the bad of the past few decades, thriving in boom times and surviving the brutal busts along the way. Today, a new boom is underway. The downtown abounds with upscale hotels, condos and office towers, prominent theaters and museums, a university, a library, a cozy bookstore, coffee shops, sidewalk cafes, restaurants, wine bars, and one especially notable Irish pub.

There is also a rather world-renowned playground just east of the city center—the tony island of Palm Beach. In sum, it was a good place to be a purveyor of securities— a money guy. For a kid from the Bronx, Paddy was one hell of an ice hockey player. Fleet on his skates, he delivered thundering body checks and had a nose for the net. Against all odds, he thrived in junior