

ALL INCLUSIVE SHOCK THERAPY

Dominick “Dom” Gallo

Lying on a chaise longue, Dominick “Dom” Gallo relished the cannabis-induced buzz that provided a welcome escape from his mental funk. It was a perfect Spring afternoon in Dover, Delaware – sunny and comfortably warm. Dominick’s Aunt Bernadette scanned her spacious backyard and smiled as she appreciated the 20 or so family members and friends enjoying a relaxing Sunday barbeque. Her husband Johnnie was simultaneously working two grills like a maestro as the amazing fragrance of ribs, chicken, burgers and hot dogs lingered in the air. Enthusiastic conversations and great music (a 70s playlist to be precise) converged in the background like a finely tuned orchestra of pure human enjoyment.

Johnnie Gallo yelled, “Hey Dom, how about helping your uncle out on the grill!”

Without saying a word, Dominick slowly got up, grabbed his freshly poured glass of Chianti and strolled over to assist his Uncle Johnnie. As Dominick arrived at the grills, Johnnie handed him a pair of tongs and said, “Here you go Dom. You work the dogs and burgers. I’ll handle the ribs and chicken.”

Dominick nodded as he grabbed his tools and accepted his mission.

“Hey Dom, if you’re going for the ‘Guido’ look today, you succeeded. I love the ‘wife beater’ undershirt, the gold chain, the knee length shorts, the black socks and the sandals. You’re 21 and you look like a 65-year-old Italian grandfather, except for the pony tail and the tattoos on your arms.”

Dom was physically built like a former football player who perhaps hadn’t worked out in a while. At first glance he had a daunting presence, but he was actually a laid back “big man” with a tender approach to the world. On that note, he calmly smiled at his Uncle Johnnie and shifted his focus to the hot dogs and burgers that he was tasked to grill.

An Angry Intruder

“So, I heard you wrapped it up with that girl you knocked up.”

Dominick cocked his head hard to the left, nervously looked at his Uncle Johnnie, then nodded in agreement.

“I think it’s for the best. I mean you hardly knew her, right?”

“No doubt. She was a one-night stand right after Zoi’s family made her break up with me. I was hurt and pissed, so I went looking for lust and unfortunately I found it.”

“You damn sure did, and she isn’t exactly pleasant.”

Dominick chuckled, “Pleasant? Hell, she’s borderline psychotic.”

In an effort to boost Dom’s spirit, Uncle Johnnie firmly stated, “I love Zoi, she’s the best. And you both always looked so happy when you were together. The problem is that her family don’t know nothin’”

Uncle Johnnie and Dom quietly shifted their focus to grilling the meat and in due time Uncle Johnnie said, “Well, the meat’s all set Dom. Go grab a plate of food and relax. Okay?”

“Thanks Uncle Johnnie. I love you.”

Uncle Johnnie firmly placed his hands on his nephew’s cheeks, kissed him on his forehead, then playfully smacked his left cheek. “Get outta here you fucking fattone (Italian for stoner).”

Johnnie Gallo was *the* father figure in Dom’s life. Dom’s biological father (Johnnie’s younger brother Jimmy) left abruptly when Dom was five-years-old. Jimmy Gallo was an aspiring musician who knocked up Dom’s Mom and he was not a family-oriented guy. The family had not heard from him since he abandoned his wife and only child.

Dom headed back to his comfortable spot on the chase lounge, enjoyed his meal, then relaxed as he sipped on another glass of Chianti. At that point, a friend of the family held up his beer and yelled, “Who’s ready to get their asses kicked in cornhole?”

That joyous invitation was abruptly interrupted by the loud slamming of the back gate, immediately followed by a hostile voice, “There you are you useless piece of shit!”

It was Dom’s former fiancé who forcefully stormed toward him and continued her rant. “You have absolutely zero soul and you’re an unemotional asshole. The only reason you were going to marry me was because you knocked me up. And now that I lost the baby, you’re done with me you heartless fuck.”

She slapped Dominick’s face, grabbed his glass of Chianti and slowly poured it over his aforementioned “wife beater” t-shirt. She then threw the empty wine glass against the nearby shed and smirked as it shattered about. She aggressively departed, and again slammed the backyard gate. Dominick didn’t flinch as he closed his eyes sporting a glazed and hollow expression. Being a master at suppressing unwanted feelings, Dominick then opened his eyes

and stared up at the clear blue sky above with a crystallized focus. It was as if he was watching an engaging movie in the sky. Everyone at the barbeque sat silently after they observed that very disturbing exchange. The few minutes that followed felt like an eternity until Dominick calmly stood up and slowly left the barbeque without saying a word. He simply waved goodbye as he walked out with his back facing the guests.

Reflecting Over Coffee

Aunt Bernadette gave Dominick a night to absorb what happened, then stopped by his place the next morning for coffee. After several minutes of awkward silence, Bernadette asked, “Are you OK Dom? That nonsense she pulled yesterday was brutal.”

Dominick looked down as he rubbed his left eye. Sporting a sad expression, he looked at his aunt who placed her hand over his. He quietly responded, “She means nothing to me. She was a rebound one-night stand after Zoi broke up with me.”

Dominick passionately dated the lovely Zoi Zaras for a few years and they were absolute kindred spirits. Dominick felt there was potential for a long-term relationship but her family pressured her to break up with him several months ago. They viewed Dominick as emotionally damaged with a dark family history. They were also concerned about his occupation – tattoo artist, not to mention his scarred face. A worried Bernadette stated, “I’m not sure how to help you Dom. I’m heartbroken about you and Zoi, and I know you’re still working through all the bull shit you experienced with your parents over the years. Let’s face it Dom, you were freaking traumatized when you were so young.”

Aunt Bernadette paused, then grimaced, “And that scar on your face.”

With his eyes closed, Dominick simultaneously massaged his temples. He then looked at his Aunt, “I feel like I’m a human repellent. When I get close to people they eventually split.”

“What are you going to do now?”

“I honestly feel like getting the hell away from here for a while.”

After a short pause, Dom jokingly continued, “Maybe I should go to Tibet and become a monk.”

Aunt Bernadette reacted by silently staring at Dom with an unusual facial expression, like that of a detective who discovered a key clue in a crime case.

Dom reacted, “What!”

A Getaway to Montego Bay

“Maybe getting away *is* a good idea Dom. I have an idea. Why don’t you take a trip and get away? How do you feel about going back to that all-inclusive resort in Montego Bay we went to last year?”

Dominick perked up at her suggestion and after a short pause, responded, “You know what Aunt Bernadette, I might just do that. I could close my shop for a few days. But, would it be weird for me to go alone?”

“Not at all. Thinking about our last trip there, I can vividly picture you sitting in a lawn chair on the beach with a glass of Chianti in one hand and a cigar in the other. You loved that place and although several of us went together, you seemed to relish being alone for hours at a time. Think of it as all-inclusive shock therapy.”

So, a few days later Dominick flew down to Jamaica. After completing his late afternoon check-in, he dropped his bags in his room, then headed down to the beach with a cigar and a glass of wine. He sat comfortably in a lounge chair in the area blocked off for smokers several feet from shore. He was mesmerized by the breathtaking view over the Caribbean Sea. The sun provided a glistening reflection over the calm water that heightened the beauty of the long, straight line of palm trees. He took a slow sip of his Chianti as he relished the view and his much-needed state of relaxation. He followed that with a slow toke on his cigar. He was glad he took his aunt’s advice to get away after the recent calamity he experienced.

An odd-looking guy in his early 30s approached Dominick. He was a very tall and very thin white guy with shoulder-length blonde dreadlocks, and a conspicuous gold tooth. With a distinct Southern drawl, he asked Dom, “Hey there. Y’all mind if I sit here and smoke a cigarette?”

“Of course not, public property brother, please join me.”

The guy sat down, lit his cigarette, then stared intensely at the bay without saying a word. Several minutes later, one of the Jamaican boatsmen selling trinkets pulled up to the shore and looked around. The blonde-haired dude put out his cigarette, quickly stood up and yelled, “Hello Travees, I’m over here.”

He ran down to the boat, shook hands with the boatsman and then chatted with him for several minutes. Jean handed the guy a small wrapped package and the guy reciprocated with cash. They shook hands again and the guy returned to his chair in the smoking area. He re-lit his

cigarette and relaxed in his lawn chair. In a tone that was awkward, almost suspicious, he cautiously told Dominick, "I bought some necklaces for my Mom and my sisters."

A skeptical Dominick nodded, "Cool. You were able to order them in advance?"

"I sure was. Believe it or not, he has email. I come down here twice a year and I've gotten to know him. Great guy."

Dominick shrugged his shoulders, "Interesting."

He then stood up, "I'm heading up to the buffet my man. It was nice meeting you."

A Unique Couple

As he approached the main buffet area, Dominick noticed a woman who appeared to be in her early 30s struggling to push a wheelchair through a doorway. He rushed over and assisted her. She was a very attractive woman with a friendly smile. She was wearing a long white shawl over a matching white bikini. The man in the wheelchair was elderly and very frail looking – slightly hunched over with pale skin. Oddly enough, he had long flowing silver-gray hair tied into a ponytail, and he was wearing a silk black robe, the type you associate with Hugh Hefner. Dominick assumed the woman was his caretaker or perhaps his granddaughter. The couple thanked Dominick and parted ways.

Dominick was starving, so he was looking forward to a hearty meal. After making a few strategic selections: a half dozen raw oysters on the half shell, white fish over rice with spicy gravy, and a few slices of prime rib au jus with horse radish on the side. He threw on a couple of vegetables for good measure, then headed to an outside table with a view of the beach area. Shortly after he sat down, a female voice from behind asked, "Sir, would you like to join us?"

Dominick turned around and saw the couple he assisted earlier sitting at a nearby table. The woman smiled, "Please join us."

Dominick slightly raised both of his hands, "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Not at all."

So, Dominick walked over, set down his food and took a seat. The woman broke the ice by initiating introductions. "I'm Suzie and this is my husband Nathaniel."

As the cliché goes, you could have knocked Dominick over with a feather as he was shocked that they were a couple. "I'm Dominick. Thank you for inviting me over."

Suzie quickly responded, "Thank you for helping us."

In the interest of being polite, Dominick didn't look closely at Suzie when they met earlier. Now that he sat across from her, he was overcome by her beauty and raw sexuality. He carefully glanced at her cleavage and briefly imagined resting his face on those two alluring mounds of soft feminine flesh.

At first, Suzie did all of the talking. "Are you here alone Dominick?"

"Yes I am. I recently experienced a bit of a personal misfortune with my former fiancé, so I decided to get away alone for a few days to clear my head."

"So, you no longer have a girlfriend?"

Suzie's tone was slightly seductive which made Dominick nervous considering that her husband, who appeared to be on death's doorstep, was sitting beside her. "Yes that's correct. It's a long story."

"You must be broken hearted."

"Actually, it was a bit of a relief. A while back, my long-time girlfriend Zoi broke up with me which was crushing, so I went to a local bar and that trip resulted in a meaningless one-night stand. Unfortunately, she got pregnant, so I attempted to do the right thing. She recently had a miscarriage which I viewed as my 'get out of jail free' card. When I informed her of my desire to end our relationship, she turned a bit psycho."

"Psycho? What do you mean?"

"Well, I'll spare you the details. Let me just say that she has been very hostile to me since the breakup."

"Not to be rude, but is that how you got that scar on your face?"

Dominick looked down, then took a deep breath, "No, that's another long story. I'll just say that I come from a highly dysfunctional family including a father who left me and my Mom years ago. Then my mother later betrayed me and I haven't heard from her since. But, my Uncle Johnnie and Aunt Bernadette saved my life and I consider them to be my true parents."

After a long and uncomfortable moment of silence, an embarrassed Dominick shifted the conversation. "That's enough of my drama. How about you two? Where are you from?"

Nathaniel, who sat quietly until that point, responded, "Los Angeles."

Dominick, still amazed that they were a married couple, nodded as he enjoyed his meal.

Nathaniel continued, "I see that you like raw oysters."

"Yes absolutely."

“Are you aware that they’re an aphrodisiac?”

With a boyish smile, Dominick responded, “I’ve heard that.”

“They contain D-aspartic acid, which is an amino acid that is said to help enhance testosterone production and boost sexual arousal.”

Dominick, a masculine and virile young man, shifted his focus back to his food and did not respond to that extremely awkward comment. He was stunned that a fragile looking man in his 70s or 80s with a hot young wife wearing a revealing bikini just said what he said.

Sensing Dominick’s discomfort, Nathaniel abruptly changed the subject. “Do you play backgammon Dominick?”

“Yes, I love the game.”

“Perhaps we can play together.”

“Sounds great; I’ll be here the rest of the week.”

Suzie chimed in, “An acoustic guitar player is performing this evening at nine p.m. at the outdoor pavilion. It should be nice and mellow. Maybe we can meet for drinks and backgammon. What do you think?”

Dominick stood up and said, “That sounds great. It was a pleasure dining with you both. Thank you for inviting me. I need to head up to my room and get unpacked. I’ll see you at nine.”

As Dominick walked away, Nathaniel looked at Suzie with a sinister expression. “What do you think my dear?”

Suzie gently clapped her hands and bounced in her seat with a big smile on her face. “He’s a perfect target. We can enjoy some time with him this evening, gain his trust, and then maybe we can lure him into our room tomorrow.”

Drinks, Backgammon and Music

Later that evening, Dominick arrived first, chose a table in the back corner of the outdoor pavilion, and ordered a Chianti. As he sat, he saw Suzie wheeling in Nathaniel. He stood up and waved to them. Dominick was stunned at their outfit choices. Nathaniel was wearing gold silk pajamas and Suzie was wearing a long skin tight one-piece black dress that clearly displayed her captivating anatomical features. Dominick could not take his eyes off of Suzie. “Wow, you look amazing.”

He nervously paused, looked at Nathaniel and continued, “Um, both of you....look amazing”

An amused Nathaniel smirked, then confidently nodded his head. “No need to clarify Dominick. I’m a lucky man, my wife is stunning.”

It turned out to be a very enjoyable evening. The acoustic guitar player was amazing as he covered classic tunes from a wide variety of artists such as: Elton John, Jim Croce, Kenny Loggins, and Van Morrison to name a few. Nathaniel and Dominick agreed that the first one to win three games was the victor. Nathaniel won three to two. Dominick reached over and shook his hand. “You’re a great player Nathaniel. Congratulations.”

“Thank you Dominick. Since I retired from the movie industry, this game has been one of my favorite endeavors.”

“Wow, you were in the movie industry?”

Suzie chimed in, “Yes he was a cameraman and he was in great demand.”

“What movies did you film?”

Nathaniel proudly replied, “Well, the more prominent ones in my prime were Bonnie and Clyde, The Godfather, Chinatown, and Taxi Driver.”

“That’s impressive. So, how did you two kids meet?”

“I was an aspiring young actress and this wonderful older man swept me off of my feet about 15 years ago. I was playing a minor role in a low budget film, and he approached me in the studio cafeteria. He simply said ‘My God you’re beautiful’ and then walked away and sat at a different table. I was stunned and excited, so I grabbed my tray, walked over and asked if I could sit with him.”

“I, of course, welcomed her. And the rest, as they say, is history.”

Suzie leaned forward and asked Dominick, “What’s your story? You’re a beautiful young man, but you look so melancholy.”

“I really don’t want to burden you. It’s a bit dark and quite frankly sad.”

Nathaniel responded, “We’d *love* to hear your story Dominick. You patiently listened to our boring tales, and you peaked our interest at dinner when you mentioned your two former lady friends. It’s only 10:30 p.m. and we’re both nocturnal types.”

Dominick’s Life Story

So, Dominick reluctantly walked them through his childhood including the traumatic evening when his father abandoned him and his Mom. He further explained that his mother began to drink heavily and eventually got into drugs, specifically cocaine. That led her into a

toxic and abusive relationship with her dealer who was several years younger. He moved in with them when Dominick was 16. He begrudgingly described the tumultuous, sometimes violent nature of their relationship.

On Dominick's 17th birthday, his erratic and drug addicted mother attempted to throw him a barbeque birthday party in their backyard. Several of Dominick's friends were there and his Mom's dirtbag boyfriend, who was supposed to work the grill, showed up late high as a kite. When he arrived, he immediately confronted Dominick's Mom which resulted in him slapping her in the face in front of everyone.

Suzie and Nathaniel were captivated as Dominick walked them through his painful tale. Suzie cautiously asked, "So, what happened next?"

"I was enraged, so I tackled him to the ground, then punched him in the face a few times. That's when I felt a cold, sharp object graze my face followed by blood running from my chin all over my shirt. He cut me with his switchblade. A few of my friends quickly pulled him away from me and a few others helped stop my bleeding, then whisked me off to the local emergency room."

A fascinated Suzie asked, "What did your mother do?"

"She responded by tending to her piece of shit dealer/boyfriend. Someone called the cops and she told them that I initiated the confrontation and that her boyfriend was merely defending himself. Of course, there were several witnesses who testified otherwise. I got stitched up and never returned to her house. I immediately went to Uncle Johnnie and Aunt Bernadette's place and stayed with them for a few years until I got my own place."

Dominick paused and looked up with a tear running down his cheek. "So, that explains my nasty scar. My mother disappeared with her boyfriend shortly after and I haven't seen nor heard from her since."

Suzie interjected, "Oh my God Dominick. That had to be overwhelming. And you were so young."

"Things have worked out for the most part thanks to my Aunt Bernadette and my Uncle Johnnie. After my high school graduation, I got a part-time job in a tattoo shop and fell in love with that line of work. I eventually opened my own shop and I'm proud to say that I'm doing quite well."

Nathaniel interjected, “Would you be comfortable telling us about Zoi. It sounds like she’s the love of your life.”

“Well, for starters, I loved being with her. I don’t know how to describe it.....she just inspired me. And she is a classic Greek beauty with long black hair, gorgeous brown eyes and well....” Dominick paused for a few seconds, then continued with a devilish smile, “An amazing body.”

Nathaniel asked, “How did you meet her?”

“She was a customer. She came into my shop on a very slow evening and said she wanted to get tattoos on each of her inner thighs – an angel on her left thigh and a devil on her right.”

“Oh my.” Nathaniel jokingly said. “That sounds like a fun job.”

“It was intriguing for sure, but I talked her out of it. We were both 18 at the time and I asked her why she was doing that. She explained that she was rebelling against her very strict and traditional Greek parents. I vividly remember pouring two cups of coffee and talking with her for several hours. She was wearing a long, loose skirt with a flower pattern that dropped to her ankles, black low-top Converse All Star sneakers, a tight black top with a long pearl necklace, and a paisley headband. She looked so unique and so incredible. Don’t get me wrong, I admit that I thought about how nice it would have been to provide the tattoos on her inner thighs.”

Suzie briefly interrupted, “But you did the right thing instead Dominick, good for you.”

“I convinced her to get a butterfly on her lower back instead, and that turned out real nice. She dropped by the shop frequently after that which was wonderful. We would smoke a joint and have some amazing conversations. I was beyond in love with her.”

Nathaniel interjected, “Sounds perfect.”

“It really was and we were together for over two years. I eventually met her parents and they clearly didn’t approve of me dating their beautiful daughter, but Zoi is an independent force of nature. She told her parents that she loved me and that they couldn’t stop her. That was until her father showed up at the shop one afternoon. He found out about her tattoo and he was furious. He’s not a very big guy, but he aggressively shoved me into the wall. Knowing he was Zoi’s father, I didn’t physically react. I politely asked him to calm down, but he started ranting a bunch of words in Greek, probably obscenities. He then told me to stay away from Zoi or he would kill me. He called me a scarred loser and said that my family was trash.”

Suzie reacted, “Wow, that’s harsh. How did Zoi handle that?”

“A short time later, her parents sent her back to Greece against her will and I haven’t physically seen her since. We communicated for a while, then she abruptly stopped. I discovered that she was being forced into an arranged marriage with some rich Greek fucker. That’s when I ventured out and foolishly knocked up my deranged former fiancé.”

Suzie responded, “You’ve been through so much.”

They sat in silence after Dominick’s emotional and cathartic story. Dominick stood up, “Please excuse me; it’s been a long day. I’m going to call it a night.”

Nathaniel chimed in. “Dominic, perhaps we can have a rematch tomorrow afternoon?”

“Sounds great. Why don’t we have lunch together around Noon, then play here after we eat. Does that work?”

Nathaniel replied, “Sleep tight our new friend and we’ll see you at the main buffet at Noon.”

Suzie nodded and smiled.

As Dominick walked away, Nathaniel asked Suzie, “Do you still think he’s a perfect target?”

Suzie rubbed her hands together, seductively bit her bottom lip and said, “Oh yes. He’s wonderful and this is lining up perfectly. That manly young guy has no idea what he’s in for.”

Nathaniel sheepishly smiled and slowly shook his head sideways.

Ganja Mon

Dominick got a great night’s sleep and woke up around nine a.m. He headed down to the beach to relax with a cup of coffee and a book until his Noon lunch date with Nathaniel and Suzie. He pulled up a lounge chair and again took in the brilliant view of the beach. He glanced over at the outside smoking area and noticed the unusual guy with the dreadlocks sitting there, so he walked over. “Hello again. Do you mind if I join you?”

“Like you said yesterday, it’s public property man. Good to see you.”

The guy still had “bed head” and was wearing a hotel bathrobe. As he spoke, Dominick realized he was stoned out of his mind. His squinted eyes were fiery red, and he spoke much slower than he did yesterday. Plus, he was sporting a weird, non-stop smile. Dominick thought he could really use a joint, but he was hesitant to ask a virtual stranger. Instead, he decided to

generate a casual conversation. “So, how were the necklaces you bought yesterday? Did your mom and sisters like them?”

The guy looked at Dominick with his squinted, beat red eyes, “I think you know I didn’t buy necklaces, right man?”

Dominick shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

In a fake Jamaican accent, the guy asked, “Would you like a taste of the ganja mon?”

Dominick just looked back and nodded. The guy slowly stood up, reached into his robe pocket, and discreetly handed two rolled joints to Dominick. “They’ll go really well with that Chianti you like to drink. Go easy, it’s strong stuff, a few tokes will get you where you need to be.”

“Thanks man, how much do I owe you?”

“My treat my brother. I have to meet my friends, otherwise I’d get stoned with you.”

“Well, thank you again man, much appreciated.”

So, Dominick cupped one of the joints in his hand and cautiously fired it up. As advertised, it was pretty strong, so after a few tokes he was very high. He sipped on his coffee, as he enjoyed his buzz, the cool breeze and the beautiful view. He closed his eyes, nodded off and lost track of time. A little while later, he felt a light tap on his shoulder. He perked up and looked up through red, squinted eyes. It was Suzie standing in front of him wearing a translucent pink robe with a matching bikini underneath. She reeked of sexuality and Dominick was mesmerized.

Realizing that Dominick was severely buzzed, Suzie knelt on the sand directly in front of him and gently placed her hands on his knees.

“Are you OK Dominick?”

Thinking he was late for his lunch date with Suzie and Nathaniel, Dominick quickly looked at his watch. He was relieved to see that it was only 11:30a.m. “Hey there, nice to see you. I really had a nice time with you and Nathaniel last night. So, what’s going on? Out for a morning walk?”

“I was actually looking for you. Nathaniel got a bit too much sun yesterday, so he’s going to do room service for lunch and spend the afternoon in our room.”

“OK, no problem. Let’s do a rain check.”

“How would you feel about coming up to our room and playing some backgammon with him this afternoon?”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to intrude.”

“It’s no problem. I have a great book that I’m reading and I’ll bury myself into that with a glass of Chardonnay. Why don’t you come up around two p.m.? We’re in Room 217.”

“Perfect, I’ll see you at two. I look forward to it.”

A Surrealistic Afternoon

Dominick headed up to Room 217 on schedule and was greeted by Suzie who was wearing a long pink bathrobe. She bowed slightly, waved her hand and welcomed him inside. Nathaniel was sitting out on the balcony with an uncorked bottle of Chianti, two empty glasses and the backgammon board set up on the table. Wearing dark blue satin pajamas, Nathaniel yelled, “Come on out and let’s get this dual started.”

They had a great time sipping on wine, playing backgammon and listening to Sinatra. Although Dominick improved, Nathaniel again prevailed, this time five wins to four. Shortly after they finished the final game, Suzie yelled out, “I’m going to take a shower.”

A smiling Nathaniel replied, “Okay my dear.”

They sat and talked for a while as they continued to enjoy the Chianti. Dominick asked Nathaniel if he minded if he smoked a joint which he was fine with. Dominic took several robust hits and got very high, very fast.

After finishing her shower, Suzie again shouted from inside, “Okay I’m changing this old fart music to something more exciting.”

She abruptly turned the music off in the middle of Luck Be a Lady. Nathaniel purposely repositioned his wheelchair to allow him to face the inside room. He waved his hand to Dominick and said, “Please turn your attention to the inside room. I think you’re going to enjoy this, and I’m confident you’re going to have a memorable afternoon my friend.”

Scorched out of his teeth, a severely red-eyed Dominic nodded and smiled. At that point, Creedence Clearwater Revival’s classic tune Suzie Q blasted from inside as Suzie danced out to the middle of the room wearing the same pink bathrobe she had on earlier, a black cowboy hat, brown cowboy boots, and aviator sunglasses. Both men watched as the music enveloped the room.

Suzie then seductively removed her long robe revealing her highly unusual attire. In addition to her cowboy hat and boots, she was wearing a black string bikini. As if that wasn’t bizarre enough, she was wearing a holster holding what appeared to be two pistols. As she

danced closer, a shocked Dominic realized that the holster was not holding pistols, but rather two sexual devices.

Suzie danced up to Nathaniel and kissed him passionately for several minutes. He grabbed her hips and gently nudged her in Dominic's direction. She stood directly in front of Dominick, then rested her hands on Dominick's shoulders as she moved her hips in a seductively circular motion. Suzie Q ended and was immediately followed by Tom Jones' version of You Can Leave Your Hat On. Dominick felt overwhelmed and intimidated by Suzie's beauty, her fragrance and her sexuality. He looked over at a smiling Nathaniel who glared at them in a very creepy way. Suzie then straddled Dominick's lap facing him, and tenderly kissed his neck. Still severely dazed from the joint he smoked earlier, Dominick was mesmerized and became very aroused. Suzie glanced down and smiled. She then removed the top of her bikini and rested her hands on his shoulders sporting a devious smile.

A Most Awkward Meal

Dominick woke up around ten a.m. the next day, then abruptly sat up, "Did that really happen yesterday or was it a dream?"

He stayed in bed for a little while thinking about what he experienced. After taking a shower, he sat out on his balcony and drank a cup of coffee in a very confused and embarrassed state of mind. Suddenly feeling hungry, Dominick headed out for brunch and pool time. He got his spread of food and sat at the same table he did when he first met Suzie and Nathaniel. A few minutes later, he was overcome with fear as Suzie approached his table.

She looked different, still beautiful, but different. She was wearing a blue Dodgers baseball cap, designer sunglasses, khaki shorts, and a loose-fitting white t-shirt with a picture of Andy Warhol. Feeling dumbfounded, Dominick just nodded when Suzie asked if she could join him. She then smiled at Dominick, set her sunglasses down and headed inside to get her food. Mentally paralyzed from what happened yesterday, Dominick slowly picked at his food in anticipation of sitting with Suzie.

Suzie returned and sat across from Dominick at the table. She looked over and nonchalantly said, "Good morning Dominick."

He again nodded to acknowledge her greeting. Suzie reached over and placed her hand on Dominick's. "Are you okay?"

In a low, somber voice, Dominick responded, "I'm really sorry about how I acted yesterday. I hope I didn't anger you."

"You had a normal reaction, although it was a bit harsh and abrupt."

Dominick looked at Suzie, "Are *you* Okay Suzie? I didn't intend to push you away, but I was so stoned and really shocked. And I apologize for calling you both lunatics. I was overwhelmed and I had to get out of there. You're a very desirable woman, but that was just too bizarre for me. Plus, all I could think about when you got close to me was Zoi."

Suzie smiled. "You're an adorable young man Dominick. I think Zoi made a mistake breaking up with you, and I'm certain she misses you."

"Thank you and I hope you're right about Zoi."

"I realize that Nathaniel and I appear to be, as you said last night, 'lunatics' but let me explain our motives. Nathaniel is 73 and can no longer function sexually. But, he periodically loves to watch me enjoy sexual pleasure, but only with men he selects. That is his motivation. As bizarre as this sounds, I want to be a mother. I'm 33 and, as the cliché goes, my biological clock is ticking."

Suzie looked down teary eyed, paused and took a deep breath. "Don't get me wrong, I manage to enjoy the random sex for Nathaniel's sake, but I desperately want to be a mother."

As she made that point, she waved her hands displaying her current outfit. "This is who I am. All of those other outfits are Nathaniel's choosing, and I wear them to appease him."

Dominick grabbed Suzie's hand and kissed it gently. Trying to lighten the moment, he said, "By the way Suzie, you have an amazing rack."

Suzie smiled, pulled her hand back and playfully smacked his hand. Dominick continued, "I love that you shared your story with me. I wish you both luck and I sincerely hope you become a Mom. I'm sure you'll be amazing."

They sat quietly looking at each other with appreciation. Dominick continued, "You and I are actually quite similar. Believe it or not, I still think about Zoi every day and I imagine what life would be like if we were together. I imagine us getting married and having children. I know that we would be great parents. This probably sounds stupid, but I feel incomplete without her and I'm not sure I'll ever meet another woman like her."

After a short pause, Suzie continued, "Nathaniel and I are so glad we met you Dominick. We're departing the resort this afternoon, and heading home on an early evening flight."

Suzie and Dominick finished their brunches, stood and hugged, then said farewell.

News About Mom

Dominick took a swim in the pool, then got another cup of coffee and headed down to his favorite spot – the smoking area by the Bay. As he sat quietly taking in the beauty of the Bay, his cell phone rang. It was his Aunt Bernadette.

“Hello Aunt Bernadette. What’s up?”

“Hello Dom. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the police found your mother early this morning.”

Dom sat silently as tears welled up in his eyes. He had an ominous sense of the news he was about to hear.

“Dom, are you there? Can you hear me?”

Barely able to speak, Dom responded, “Yes Aunt Bernadette, I’m here.”

“Someone called 911 early this morning and told them that she was unconscious in a motel room in Bethany Beach. The medics rushed her to the local ER and tried to revive her. Dom, I’m so sorry. She didn’t make it.”

Dom was unable to respond. He bent over and cried uncontrollably. His Aunt Bernadette shouted over the phone, “Dom, are you there?”

At that point, the dude with the long blonde dreadlocks approached and saw Dominick bent over. He could hear Aunt Bernadette yelling over the phone. He picked up the phone and said hello.

Aunt Bernadette abruptly asked, “Who is this?”

“I’m Donnie man. Who is this? What’s going on?”

“Is Dom there?”

Dominick regained his composure, sat up and took a deep breath.

“Dude, are you Dom man? The lady on the phone wants to talk with you. Are you okay dude?”

Dominick reached out with his hand and signaled Donnie to hand him his phone. “Sorry Aunt Bernadette. I had a bad moment there. I can’t believe my mom passed away.”

Donnie looked on in awe.

“I’m so sorry Dom. Yes, she passed away this morning.”

“Wow, I always thought that she would get sober, we would reunite and live a normal life. I guess it wasn’t in the cards.”

“What do you want to do Dom?”

“I think I’ll get a flight home as soon as possible. What *should* we do Aunt Bernadette? I’m not sure how to handle this.”

“Dom, you get home safely as soon as you can. Uncle Johnnie and I will take care of the arrangements. Regardless of the past circumstances, we need to give your mother a proper send off.”

A Bizarre Wedding on the Beach

The blonde-haired dude (Donnie) asked, “Are you okay man?”

“My Mom died.”

“Wow, bummer dude. You should get stoned.”

“That’s actually not a bad idea.”

Donnie carefully handed another rolled joint to Dominick and bowed with his hands in the praying position. “Bummer about your Mom man. Y’all hang tough.”

Dominick just nodded and watched as Donny headed back towards the pool area. Dominick waived down a waiter and ordered a drink. When the waiter returned, he pointed toward a commotion off in the distance, and explained that the resort staff just finished setting up for a beachside wedding. Dominick walked over and took a seat facing the small roped off wedding area that was surrounded by hundreds of vacationers enjoying the beach.

A few wedding guests arrived and sat within the roped off area. Shortly after, a dark skinned, physically massive man walked to the head of a makeshift aisle. He was wearing baggy orange shorts, flip flops and a white tuxedo jacket, a white shirt and a black bowtie. He appeared to be in his 30s, and it was apparent he was the groom. He shook hands with several people until a guy in the back announced over an amplified microphone, “Please take your seats everyone.”

The Bride arrived with two older women, one at each side. She was a tall and beautiful Asian woman, also in her 30s, and was wearing a comfortable looking white wedding dress with straps that revealed her feminine shoulders. The dress had a long slit down the side revealing her very attractive legs. The emcee announced over the microphone, “Please stand.”

He then clicked a button to start the traditional wedding march song. The bride and her two lady escorts slowly walked down the aisle smiling and waving at the guests. As Dominick

looked on, he was awed by the fact that only 15 or so people within the roped in area were actually attending the wedding. Some of the vacationers observed the wedding while many more simply continued their activities oblivious to the ceremony. The bride arrived to the front of the aisle, hugged and kissed her two lady escorts, then stood next to her soon-to-be husband. Dominick loved the way they smiled at each other, and felt sad that he would never again be able to experience that with Zoi.

At that point, another very large man who physically resembled the groom walked up and faced the bride and groom. “Hello my name is Kai and I am Kekoa’s older brother. I was honored when Kekoa and Leilani asked me to preside over their wedding. I promise to be brief, but I must tell you about these two beautiful and proud Hawaiians. Their names really give us insight into their worlds. Kekoa means warrior and Leilani means heavenly flower. This may sound bizarre, but we could actually reverse those meanings. What I mean is that, although he is big and intimidating looking, Kekoa is truly a gentle man. And conversely, although Leilani is a physically petite woman, she has a strong fighting spirit like a warrior.”

Kai then told the story of their lives’ paths including their teenage romance that didn’t come to fruition due to Leilani’s family protesting her dating Kekoa because of his bad reputation. He also talked about each rebounding from failed marriages. Kai was a captivating and humorous speaker. He concluded by saying, “The good news is that Leilani admitted to having a hole in her heart and confronted her mother and grandmother.”

He gestured his hands toward the two ladies who walked Leilani down the aisle. “Leilani told them that she needed my brother in her life and that she was going to pursue him regardless of how they felt. Needless to say, they embraced her desires and here we are today. At this time, I’d like to ask the bride and groom to share their vows before we join them in marriage. Leilani asked that Kekoa go first.”

After greeting everyone and thanking them for attending, Kekoa kept his vows brief but profound. “Leilani, I love you and I need you in my life. You are my North Star. Your mother and grandmother were correct in resisting you being with my younger version. I was naïve and got involved in things I shouldn’t have. I made improvements in who I am over the years, and I promise to be your soothing, but manly, heavenly flower. Please be my beautiful warrior as we take on life together. Again, I love you and I promise to serve you now and forever.”

Leilani also greeted and thanked everyone for sharing this amazing day with them. “I’m not going to torture you with the paths we each took since we were high school sweethearts. Let me just say that we’ve both been to hell and back, and by the grace of God, we were able to reunite.”

Leilani paused and then with emotion she yelled, “I’m your woman Kai, and I promise to be a lady in the streets and a freak in the sheets!”

That ignited a standing ovation from the wedding guests and several of the onlooking vacationers. Leilani concluded by saying, “The day we reunited was amazing and our future will be even more amazing. I love you.”

At that point, they finalized their vows and headed off to the pavilion for their wedding reception with family and friends. The weed and wine kicked in hard as an emotional Dominick sat alone. He closed his eyes as his chin dropped to his chest. He enjoyed a nice cry as thoughts of his Mom and Zoi floated through his mind. He went to his room, made travel plans and got a good night’s sleep. He was able to get an early afternoon flight home the next day.

A Proper Farewell

As promised, Aunt Bernadette and Uncle Johnnie took care of everything including setting up a small, but reverent Wake followed by a proper burial. They also planned a dinner at Franco’s – Dom’s mother’s favorite Italian restaurant before she went off the radar. Dom’s mother left a trail of damaged relationships over the years, so only a few of the attendees at the Wake were from her world. The rest were family and friends of Aunt Bernadette and Uncle Johnnie, along with a few of Dominick’s close friends. Dom wore a traditional dark blue suit and tie to ensure he paid proper respect to his mother.

The Noon Wake was scheduled for two hours which worked out nicely as people stopped by, paid their respects and spent some quality time with Aunt Bernadette, Uncle Johnnie and Dominick. At about 1:45pm, Aunt Bernadette asked everyone to be seated. She read a few of her favorite scriptures and said a personal prayer dedicated to Dominick’s mother’s life and (hopefully) a peaceful afterlife. She then asked Dominick to come to the podium to pay homage to his mother. If it wasn’t for his haircut – shaved sides, greased back black hair and a long ponytail, Dominick almost looked like a proper citizen. He walked up slowly with several pieces of paper in his hand, then nervously cleared his throat as he arrived in front of the podium.

“Please be patient as this is the single most difficult thing I’ve ever done in my life. In spite of everything that happened over the years – good and bad – I loved my mother. I want to take you back to 2002, the year I was born. Based on the early photos of my life, I can see that she was a caring and nurturing Mom. She was there for my first spoken words and my first steps. I can vividly remember a few early Christmases during which I enjoyed the full experience – Santa, gifts, food and warm contentment. I also remember how distraught she was when my father left us. I was only five, but I knew she needed comfort which I tried to provide. It was during that period that I realized how amazing my Aunt Bernadette and Uncle Johnnie were.”

Overcome with emotion, Dominick placed his hand on his forehead and wept. Everyone sat quietly with an understanding of his plight. Dominick took a deep breath and regained his composure. “My beautiful mother taught me to ride a bike, and how to throw, catch and hit a baseball. She embraced my unyielding artistic tendencies and introduced me to the greatest music known to mankind – classic rock. Although she was facing demons during my mid-teens, she saw that I was spending time with young ladies, so she often talked with me about how to treat women. The past year has been tough not only because of my mother’s situation, but also because my former girlfriend Zoi Zaras and I parted ways.”

Dominick again paused, closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “I’ve been struggling mightily trying to move on, but it’s been rather overwhelming. Zoi is so much stronger than I am. I really wish she was here to help get through this and make sense of things. Don’t get me wrong, I’ll manage because this is my painful fate for now. Mom, I’m not sure if there’s an afterlife, but I hope there is because I want to see you again – the real you – and enjoy some proper time with you. I love you and I thank you for bringing me into this world.”

Coffee at the Shop

The burial and the dinner at Franco’s went well and everyone parted ways. As they said farewell, Aunt Bernadette said, “Dom, we’re really proud of you for taking the high road. Your comments about your Mom were amazing.”

Uncle Johnnie looked at Dominick and nodded in agreement. Aunt Bernadette continued, “So, what now Dom?”

“I’m going to get back to my routine, especially at the shop. I have several customers backed up on a wait list. I think I’ll head over to the shop tomorrow morning and get things straightened up.”

Uncle Johnnie chimed in, “We understand the pain you’re feeling buddy. Not just about your Mom, but also about Zoi. Hang in there, I’m confident things will be brighter for you in time.”

“Thanks Uncle Johnnie. I don’t know how to describe it. Zoi has had a strong grip on me since that first day when she got her tattoo. I can’t think of any time in my life when I felt better or enjoyed more than just sitting with her in my shop talking over coffee. But don’t worry, I’ll shake it off in due time.”

Dom got up the next morning and, as planned, headed over to his shop. He put on a fresh pot of coffee, then poured himself a cup and put on some music – specifically Van Morrison – his Mom’s favorite. He sat and slowly savored his cup of coffee when he heard a knock on the door. He yelled, “Come on in, the door is open.”

He glanced over to see who was there. It was Zoi. She took a few steps, then nervously stopped and smiled at Dominick. He stood up and said, “Hey there. I thought you were in Greece.”

After a short pause he assertively walked over and hugged her. They held each other as tight as was humanly possible, then they both broke into tears. They settled down and Dominick poured Zoi a cup of coffee without asking. He added a touch of cream and one spoonful of sugar. As he did, he thought about how much he missed preparing her coffee precisely as she liked it. They sat as they always had, on the two cushioned chairs in the back corner of the shop. Zoi bought them as a Christmas gift for Dom a couple of years ago.

They were silent for a few minutes clearly searching for the right words to share. Zoi started, “Aunt Bernadette contacted me the day your Mom passed away. I immediately made arrangements and flew home. I wanted to attend the service, but I couldn’t get an early enough flight, so I got in late last night. I’ve been nervous about how you’d react when you saw me.”

Dom just smiled and stared at Zoi as if he didn’t hear a word she was saying. Zoi jokingly said, “Hey, earth to Dominick Gallo. Are you there?”

“I’m here and my reaction is one of happiness. I’m just really happy to see you.”

“So, how are you holding up Dom?”

“Quite honestly, not too well. I still can’t believe my Mom is gone.” Then, after a thoughtful pause, he continued, “You know it’s funny. On the night that she passed when I was still at the resort, I smoked a joint before falling asleep and I prayed to her.”

“That’s sweet. What was the prayer?”

“Selfishly, I asked her to find a way to get you back in my life. And if she couldn’t to please help me find a way to cope without you.”

Dom teared up a bit, then closed his eyes. Zoi reached over and grabbed Dom’s hand. “Dom, I realize that you have every reason in the world to be angry with me for not resisting my parents when they forced me to go to Greece. I’m not asking for your forgiveness, but I am so sorry.”

“I love you Zoi Zaras, I always will.”

“Your Aunt told me about your engagement and that whole deal. Sounds crazy.”

“Well, that chick was beyond crazy. I toyed with the idea of having a priest conduct an exorcism on her.”

Dominick paused, then asked, “So what happened over there? What’s the story with the marriage your parents arranged for you?”

“Thank God we didn’t rush it. I figured out early on that the guy, the son of a wealthy shipping tycoon, was an entitled narcissist. It took a little longer for my parents, but they also figured it out. My role was to be his trophy wife, be quiet and cater to all of *his* needs. The bottom line is that he’s a prick and I could no longer deal with him. So, I’m moving back to Delaware soon.”

“How long ago did you make that decision?”

“About a month ago. I was tempted many times to contact you, but I was nervous about how your family would respond.”

As they talked, Van Morrison’s classic and beautiful song Into the Mystic played. They smiled at each other and sat silently as they took it in. When the song finished, Dominick said, “We played that song at my Mom’s gravesite just before we left yesterday.”

“Perfect. I wish I could have been there.”

At that point it was as if a time machine took them back to their prior time together when they were dating. They got caught up on things. They talked about some books they read and movies they saw. They shared some good and some not so good experiences they had. After a few hours, Dominick said, “Zoi, would you like to grab lunch with me? After that, I need to come back here and get things organized. I have several appointments set up for tomorrow.”

Zoi perked up and asked, “Restaurant 55?”

Dom nodded, grabbed Zoi's hand and they headed off for lunch at their favorite local burger joint. They later returned to the shop and without hesitation, Zoi jumped in and assisted Dominick knowing exactly what to do and how to do it. They were a team. As they worked, Zoi told Dominick, "I missed this place so much, and I missed us so much."

Dom got a call on his phone. "Hey Aunt Bernadette, what's up?"

"You tell me Dom. What are you doing? Any surprise guests?"

Dom slyly looked over at Zoi and responded, "Oh yeah, the best guest possible. Thanks for reaching out to Zoi."

"My pleasure. Let's have dinner at our place at seven. I want to make Zoi's favorite – linguine with red clam sauce."

Dominick again looked at Zoi and was about to ask her about dinner, but she spoke first.

"Yes, I'd love to have dinner at your Aunt's and Uncle's place. And linguine with red clam sauce sounds amazing."

Dom told his Aunt, "You two are shrewd. See you at seven Aunt Bernadette. I love you."

Dom hung up, walked up to Zoi, and held both of her hands as he stared into her beautiful eyes. They then kissed passionately for several minutes.

Zoi then asked, "So what's next Mr. Gallo. How do we handle this?"

"It's simple. You get your affairs in Greece cleaned up and come back to the 'cultural center of the universe' – Dover, Delaware. Let's just pick up where we left off with no pressure nor expectations. I'm certain things will work out fine. You're the answer to my prayer to my Mom. He then looked up and said, "Thank you Mom, I love you."

They were both interrupted by the soothing sound of rain outside, and they simultaneously glanced out the window to check it out. Dominick looked back at Zoi, "In the meantime, let's dance to our favorite slow song." He instructed Alexa, "Alexa, play 'We're All Alone' by Rita Coolidge."

Zoi smiled as Dominick pulled her close sensing that good things lie ahead for both of them.

The End