CAREER MOVE

Written by

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INT. BAR - NIGHT

Winter wind keens past the windows, causing SHOATE BARNES, 30s, whose cap has seen better days, to look up from his beer. He sits at the bar away from RUTHIE, 60s, the owner. She watches a TV that shows a huge snow storm.

Shoate and Ruthie are the only people in this worn tavern.

SHOATE
Ruthie, how long I been comin’ here?

RUTHIE
When did you turn twenty-one?

SHOATE
Seems like I’ve spent my whole life here.

RUTHIE
And most of your money.

The door opens and FLETCHER, 50s, enters. In fedora and topcoat, carrying a battered, leather briefcase, he looks cold. He blows into his hands as he comes to the bar.

FLETCHER
Jack, neat. Make it a double.

Ruthie waits until Fletcher pulls two twenties from his wallet and slaps them on the bar. Then, she pours.

FLETCHER
And a receipt. Green shade boys want a receipt for a pay toilet.

Ruthie delivers the drink, and Fletcher downs it in a flash.

RUTHIE
Do I know you?

FLETCHER
Long time ago maybe. Another--and a beer for my friend here.

SHOATE
Thank you. That’s right neighborly.
SHOATE
I don’t see--

FLETCHER
Forget it.
   (holds out hand)
I’m Fletcher

FLETCHER
Don’t pretend you’re going to return the favor. We both know you’re not up to it.

SHOATE
I don’t see--

FLETCHER
Forget it.
   (holds out hand)
I’m Fletcher

FLETCHER
It’s cold and snowy, and I have a schedule, so don’t give me any hey-neighbor-well-met crap. You’re in trouble, and I’m here to help.

SHOATE
I’m not in trouble.

FLETCHER
Salote, don’t try to snow me.

SHOATE
My name’s not Salote.

FLETCHER
Like hell it’s not.

SHOATE
Ask Ruthie. She knows me.

FLETCHER
You’re not Salote Berry, son of Walter and Irene?

Fletcher pulls a cell from his pocket.

SHOATE
What kind is that? I’ve never seen one of those.
FLETCHER
And you never will.
(on phone)
Larry, we have a problem. Pull up
my schedule and tell me who I’m
looking for.
(beat)
Yeah, well, I got Shoate Barnes
here, not Berry.
(beat)
Are you sure? OK, download the
file now or I’ll come there and
kick your ass.

Fletcher puts away the phone.

FLETCHER
Sorry about that. They do their
best, but you know the drill. Too
many clients, not enough help.
Whole system needs an overhaul.
But what the hell, you’re not here
to listen to me. I’m here to
listen to you.

SHOATE
Listen to me? Why?

Fletcher looks over at Ruthie.

FLETCHER
Let’s get a table.

Fletcher walks to a table where he removes hat and coat.
Shoate grabs his beer and follows.

FLETCHER
(sitting)
OK, kid, I’m here to help. I’m
your fairy godfather.

SHOATE
Godfather? Hell, I ain’t never
been baptized.

FLETCHER
FAIRY godfather as in fairy
godmother. Think Cinderella.

SHOATE
Yeah, I know Cinderella.
FLETCHER
Everyone does. The publicist who penned that little gem transformed godmothers into gold, pure gold. They get accolades while godfathers wither on the vine. It's not fair, but what the hell do you expect? That Cinderella kid stole everyone's heart.

SHOATE
I've never heard of fairy godfathers.

FLETCHER
We're the best-kept secret since Tiny Tim's limp. You know, Tim wasn't really crippled. He had what is known as a beggar's limp, good for alms. But you can't blame that English guy for writing Tim up that way. Had Tim-boy really been crippled, we'd have been there in a flash. We'd be famous if we had pulled Tim's bacon out of the fire.

Shoate lights his cigarette, not buying the talk.

FLETCHER
This is the hardest part. You don't believe in godfathers. You think I'm some crazy dude without sense enough to wear gloves in a blizzard.

SHOATE
It's colder'n a bitch.

FLETCHER
You're wondering why I didn't just hover over the bar like in a Disney cartoon. Well, the brass insists we be inconspicuous. Civilian clothes, cars, driving, like ordinary folks. They don't want a repeat of that little tyke in France who spotted one of us hovering and thought it was the second coming. Sure, we could debunk that 'miracle', but that would piss off the religious folks.

SHOATE
This is getting weird.
Fletcher’s phone CHIRPS and he answers.

FLETCHER
(on phone)
You sure? Good, thanks.

Fletcher opens his briefcase and pulls out a laptop.

FLETCHER
Shoate, your file is up. This will take a sec.

SHOATE
Those things don’t work in here. No wi-fly or whatever.

Fletcher fires up the laptop and puts on reading glasses.

FLETCHER
OK, now, it makes sense. Success, Shoate, let’s get started.

Fletcher grabs one of Shoate’s cigarettes and lights it.

FLETCHER
To recap, you’re overdrawn at the bank, behind on your rent, and not working. Your worker’s comp has ended, and you’ve tapped all your friends. You owe just about everyone in the county. You have no family to fall back on. Does that cover the waterfront?

SHOATE
I got a Jeep, and I start welfare on Monday

FLETCHER
Welfare might keep you afloat until you drink yourself to death, but I doubt it. Your future looks bleak, kid, very bleak.

SHOATE
Your point?

FLETCHER
My point is that you qualify for a total makeover, our gold seal package. New life in a new place with all the trimmings, what you dreamed of before you quit high school.
SHOATE
I got a GED.

FLETCHER
You bought a piece of paper. Come on, Shoate, don't try to scam the system.

SHOATE
How do you know so much?

FLETCHER
I'm your fairy godfather. I even know about that little incident in seventh grade. Taboo fireworks in a bone dry field, right?

Shoate's face reddens.

FLETCHER
It was a long time ago, and the barn was insured. I'm offering to change your life. What do you say?

SHOATE
What, what exactly is a total makeover?

FLETCHER
That's the spirit. First, location. As I recall, you had your sights on California, Malibu?

SHOATE
I was gonna be a rock star.

FLETCHER
Of course you were. Platinum records, gigs all over the world, your own recording studio.

SHOATE
I was pretty good in high school. I could play guitar and sing.

FLETCHER
So you will again. OK, we have location and career, what about spouse? According to the file, you had the hots for Stephanie Beyer.
SHOATE
She, she went to college and married a doctor. No way, she's gonna change

FLETCHER
You don't get it, son. Once we ink this deal, the past is history so to speak. Your life gets rewritten. You end up where you want to be. It's that simple.

SHOATE
How are you going to do that?

FLETCHER
I'm every bit as magical as those dogmothers, er godmothers. We lock down the parameters, and your world spins in a new direction. What do you say to children?
(Fletcher holds up glass)
Ruthie, another round, please.

SHOATE
Kids?

FLETCHER
I'll give you some advice. Some clients opt to be childless, thinking they can pick up the little rascals later. Generally, they miss the boat. For a shot at happiness, you should toss in a boy and a girl. They round out the picture and add value. Trust me.

Ruthie arrives with fresh drinks and gathers empties.

RUTHIE
I remember you. I was ten, maybe eleven, and I was doing homework in the corner. You came in and talked to Marty McCoy, which I thought was odd because no one ever talked to Marty McCoy. Marty left with you, and no one ever saw him again.

FLETCHER
You have quite a memory.

Ruthie heads back to the bar.
SHOATE
What happened to Marty McCoy?

FLETCHER
Marty wanted to fish for lobster off the Maine coast. It took some clout to get the bureau to spring for a new lobster boat, but that's how I operate. No second-hand dreams, gold seal all the way. What do you say? Ready for a makeover?

SHOATE
Hold on a minute. We're moving kinda fast. How do I know you can do what you say you can do?

FLETCHER
I liked it better when people just believed. I grant your point.

Fletcher rummages through briefcase and extracts a short, wooden stick, which he places on the table.

SHOATE
What's that?

FLETCHER
My wand. You can't expect me to work magic without a wand. Of course, I don't expect you to jump into a makeover without a test drive. No pig in a poke here.

SHOATE
A what?

Fletcher hits some keys and spins his computer.

FLETCHER
How about a brief taste of your new life? Ready?

Shoate nods. Fletcher removes his glasses and hits a key. The screen grabs Shoate's attention, drawing him in.

INT. MALIBU BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Shoate stands in a room like none he has ever experienced. As rich as a Malibu room should be. In front of him, a glass wall displays a beach and a brilliant blue sea.
A guitar leans against a leather couch; a music score sits on a table. Stunned, he looks at a wall of platinum records, Grammys, awards. Against the other wall is a fully stocked bar.

BOY & GIRL (O.S.)
DADDY, DADDY!

He turns as two children race into the room. A BOY, 10, and a GIRL, 8, They squeal and jump around him.

BOY & GIRL
Daddy, daddy, can we go to the beach? Please, daddy?

SHOATE
I...I don't know.

He hugs them.

STEPHANIE (O.S.)
I'm sorry, Shoate.

He looks up as STEPHANIE, 30s, sweeps into the room. She is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Shoate's mouth drops open.

STEPHANIE
I told them not to bother you. See how they listen?

She pecks his cheek.

STEPHANIE
How is the new song?

SHOATE
You...you're gorgeous.

She steps back and laughs.

STEPHANIE
You've been working too hard. Why don't you come to the beach with us?

SHOATE
Which beach?

STEPHANIE
Malibu beach, silly, the one right in front of you.
SHOATE
I...I guess maybe I can.

BOY & GIRL
Yay!

The Boy and Girl race from the room.

STEPHANIE
Thank you. The kids love it when you're there. So do I.

She leans forward for a kiss, and Shoate closes his eyes.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Shoate opens his eyes. Across the table, Fletcher sips whiskey and stares out the window at the snow. The computer is blank.

SHOATE
What the hell! What happened?

FLETCHER
Getting bad out there. What did you think about the demo? The tech boys put a lot of work into the demos, so your candid opinion is welcome.

SHOATE
That was a demo?

FLETCHER
Trial run but certainly a valid rendition. Did you like it?

SHOATE
Like it? My god, would it really be like that?

FLETCHER
Some days, but we don't warrant that it will stay that way. I mean, no one can write the future, not even us. You have to look through rain to see a rainbow, right?

Shoate shakes his head and looks around the room. He gulps beer. He waves his empty mug at Ruthie.
SHOATE
Let me get this straight. You're sayin' I can have that life if I do this, this makeover?

FLETCHER
The deluxe, gold seal makeover includes the house, the awards, the family, the money, even a modicum of talent. But we can't guarantee that you'll never have problems. It doesn't work that way. No 'happy ever after' BS. Reality, Shoate, we grant you an altered reality but reality nonetheless.

Ruthie delivers another beer, and Shoate lights a cigarette. His fingers shake.

FLETCHER
I hate to be pushy, but time is short. My schedule isn't padded, I can tell you that.

SHOATE
You can make it like that.

FLETCHER
In the beginning. After that, it's up to you.

SHOATE
If I don't go for it?

FLETCHER
You still have this.

Shoat studies Fletcher a moment.

SHOATE
Why do you do this?

FLETCHER
Employment. The pay's not great, and the benefits won't rock your boat either, but it's honest fairy work.

SHOATE
No, I mean, if you can work magic for me, why don't you do it for yourself?

Fletcher swirls the whiskey in his glass.
FLETCHER
Rules of employment. The wand only works for others.

SHOATE
You're kidding.

FLETCHER
Would I be here if the wand worked for me?

SHOATE
What happened to Marty?

FLETCHER
He got a new lobster boat.

SHOATE
After that. Something happened. What was it?

FLETCHER
How should I-

SHOATE
You know. Tell me.

FLETCHER
Marty made some bad decisions. He lost the boat, his business. He started drinking.

SHOATE
His family?

FLETCHER
Marty used a filleting knife on them right before he shot himself.

SHOATE
Jesus.

FLETCHER
What can I tell you? The makeover is a one-time thing. I'll be honest. Some of my clients can't handle the change. Jumping from here to a Malibu beach house might be too much. All I know is that not every candidate takes the offer. I wish they did, my monthly stats would be better and my bonus bigger. But some walk. Maybe they know they can't pull it off.
SHOATE
What did you turn down?

FLETCHER
What?

SHOATE
That's how you know all this. You were offered a makeover and turned it down, right?

FLETCHER
It doesn't matter.

SHOATE
It does to me.

Fletcher shrugs.

FLETCHER
Baseball player, all-star. Season of records, World Series MVP, Yankees. Her name was Angela, and the kids were Bonnie and Jimmy. Satisfied?

SHOATE
If you turned down the makeover, how did you become a fairy godfather?

FLETCHER
Because that's the door prize, Shoate. If you turn down the makeover, you can still play. You can have my job.

SHOATE
You're joking.

FLETCHER
Paragraph seven, sub-para three of the standard offer. You can become a fairy godfather. You can dispense makeovers, deal with headquarters, meet impossible schedules, create beautiful lives and ruin them. I have to tell you that the job isn't all it's cracked up to be. Like I said, no magic for you. Just lots and lots of travel.

Shoat shakes his head as if the beer is affecting him.
FLETCHER
I have to tell you, if you really want this job, you can have it. It's yours for as long as you want, even longer. I'll be happy to turn it over.

SHOATE
Just like that.

FLETCHER
Just like that. Oh, there's a contract to sign and a ceremony, but in essence, just like that.

SHOATE
Why would you give it up?

FLETCHER
I can't remember how many men and boys I've met during my tenure. Too many, I suppose. I don't care any more. It's time to move on. I need a change. There's a forest fairy gig I've been eyeing.
(beat)
Time flies. What is it going to be? Makeover, career move, or nothing? I'm going to the restroom, old kidneys. Be ready to decide when I come back.

Fletcher rises and heads for the restroom. Shoate lights a cigarette as Ruthie makes her way from the bar.

RUTHIE
I don't trust that one. What kind of lies is he telling you?

SHOATE
Do you think I’m a screw up?

RUTHIE
What?

SHOATE
A screw up. Do you think that’s me?

RUTHIE
Shoate, everyone goes through down times. It’s natural.
SHOATE
I thought so.

Fletcher returns and sits.

FLETCHER
What's it going to be?

Fletcher shuts down the computer and stashes it in his briefcase.

SHOATE
I want your job.

FLETCHER
A wise decision, Shoate. Get your coat.

SHOATE
Why? Don't you just wave the wand?

FLETCHER
The contract and ceremony are for you only. Come on, it will take maybe five minutes.

INT. FLETCHER’S CAR – CONTINUOUS

Fletcher starts the engine and turns on the heater. Next to him sits Shoate.

FLETCHER
God, I hate cold. Reminds me of Siberia.

He rummages through the briefcase and pulls out a long form.

FLETCHER
This is the contract. The usual disclaimers, the standard language. What you have to remember is that you can't work magic for yourself. The wand works only for clients.

SHOATE
Yeah, right.

FLETCHER
And the job lasts as long as you want it.

SHOATE
I can quit any time?
FLETCHER
All you have to do is find a replacement.

SHOATE
Great, where do I sign?

Fletcher hands Shoat a pen and shows him the bottom line.

FLETCHER
There is no buyer's remorse, escape clause. Once signed, you're in.

Shoat scribbles his name.

SHOATE
Whooeee, gimme the wand.

FLETCHER
It's not quite that simple. Remember the ceremony?

SHOATE
Sure, say the magic words and make me a fairy.

FLETCHER
Fairy godfather, and there are no words. (sifts through briefcase) Remember when you were a kid and you wanted to make someone a blood brother? What did you do?

SHOATE
Pricked our fingers.

FLETCHER
Exactly, shared blood. Well, it's that way for fairies too. You have to share blood with a fairy in order to become one.

Fletcher pulls out a sharp knife with an ornate, gold hilt.

FLETCHER
We share blood, and you start your new career.

The blade glows in the feeble light.

SHOATE
Why not?
He holds out his finger, and Fletcher chuckles.

FLETCHER
That might work for an eight year old, but fairies require a bit more commitment.

He grabs Shoat's hand, jerks it forward, and slices deeply into Shoat's wrist.

SHOATE
What the hell!

Shoate pulls back as blood spurts. He glances around, looking for something to staunch the flow.

SHOATE
Stop it! STOP IT!

FLETCHER
Hang on.

Fletcher bares his wrist. The blade flashes, and the edge doesn't bite as deep. Fletcher's wrist barely bleeds.

FLETCHER
Come on. Come on!

Fletcher jams his wrist against Shoate's. Their bloodmingles. Shoate slumps against the door.

FLETCHER
A few more seconds. Hang on, Shoate, hang on.

Shoate stares at a maniacal grin in the glow of the dashboard lights.

SHOATE
Please. Please.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Ruthie stands behind the bar. The door opens and in shuffles a shivering man, RYAN, 30s, who moves to the end of the bar. He looks as miserable as a person could be.

RYAN
Ruthie, how about a beer?

RUTHIE
(pointing)
Waiting for you.
At a stable, a Man has his back to the bar. On the table sit a fedora, a worn briefcase, and a beer. Ryan slides off the stool and goes to the table. He sits and faces...Shoate, an older Shoate.

SHOATE
Drink up, Ryan. We have a lot of ground to cover, and I don’t have all day.

RYAN
(sitting)
Do I know you?

SHOATE
What matters is that I know you.

FADE OUT.