

9. Telephone Call to Palm Springs

My brother got involved in a situation that was beyond his moral capacity to deal with. Sophisticated in a broad sort of way, he was nonetheless one of those who plumbed the depths only so far and no further. Only the light and agreeable commanded his attention. So had the world in fact been for him for a long time and so it seemed to be when he first ventured into the business world. Prospects looked very good at the beginning because he had a dynamic brother-in-law all set up in business and ready to take him under his wing. In my never-finished play this brother-in-law got the name of Edward Sutton. Unfortunately I also made him the devil who struts on stage at the very beginning. A very stupid move because it literally took the demonic element out of Sutton by putting him too obviously in it. By doubling him, that is, with a cardboard representation of it. All he should have been both dramatically and psychologically was thereby ruined. It astounds me now to think I could have done this because I knew very well that his darker side was the point of fusion and interplay between my brother's normal and psychotic state.

[Late evening. Charlie's Los Angeles apartment. Jason picks up the phone and dials a number. Laura answers in Palm Springs. Sutton simultaneously picks up the extension.]

Laura: Hello.

Jason: It's me. I'm ready to come out.

Sutton: I'm gonna ask your brother a simple straightforward question.

Jason: What's going on? What's he doing on the line?

Laura [*simultaneously*]: What question?

Sutton [*to Laura*]: I'm gonna ask him the question that cuts right to the heart of the matter.

Laura: That'll cut him to the heart, you mean.

Sutton: And what's he done to me, for Christ's sake?

Laura: Ed, charging at him like a bull won't help matters.

Sutton: Is it any worse than striking at me like a snake?

Laura: I don't want you asking him that question.

Sutton: It's gonna be asked because I want this mess cleaned up right now.

Laura: There are other ways to go about it.

Sutton: I haven't got time for other ways.

Laura: I don't want you beating up on him.

Sutton: I'm not gonna beat up on him. I'm just gonna ask him a simple straightforward question.

Laura: It's not necessary to ask him that question.

Sutton: Not necessary? He's trying to wreck our marriage and you say it's not necessary.

Jason : Laura, did you warn him I was coming out there?

Charlie [*returning from the washroom*]: What's going on?

Sutton [*to Jason*]: The question I have for you is this, buddy: are you sick?

Laura [*to Sutton*]: Please get off the phone so I can explain to him why he shouldn't come out here at this time.

Sutton: He'll find out soon enough.

Laura: Yes, but I'd rather it came from me.

Sutton: Laura, this is one time I'm gonna have to risk not pleasing you.

Jason: I'd like to speak to my sister if you don't mind.

Sutton: And you I'm definitely not interested in pleasing.

Jason: Alright, I'll call back later.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: What's going on?

Sutton: The reason I ask my indelicate question, buddy, is, if you're not sick and just saying this out of spite, it's the not the hospital you're likely to wind

up in, it's the morgue.

Jason: I'll call you tomorrow, Laura, when Mr. Tough Guy can't interfere with what I have to say.

Charlie: Oh, God! It's him! I can feel it!

Sutton: Who're you with, buddy?

Jason: No one.

Sutton: Who's that little sweetheart you're with?

Jason: A friend.

Sutton: I think I know who that friend is. I think I'd call her the friend you're fucking around with.

Jason: The friend *you* were fucking around with.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Are you crazy?

Sutton : Do you hear this, Laura? That's the woman he's been fucking around with for a month and now he says I've been fucking her.

Jason: I haven't been fucking around with her.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Stop it or I'll unplug this telephone.

Sutton: You hooked up with my ex-secretary, you fuck. You've been poking her for a month. What're you gonna tell me now? You're just good friends?

Jason: We went to bed once. But you were fucking her for three months before you fired her.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You said it'd only be between you and Laura.

Jason: Take it easy. I didn't know it would turn out this way.

Charlie: You take it easy!

Sutton: What's going on?

Jason: Laura, I'll call you tomorrow.

Sutton: No, you won't. You'll tell us what you and this whore are up to.

Jason: Whore? If anyone's responsible for turning her into a whore, it's you.

Charlie: [*suddenly frightened by some passing beam of light*]: Oh my God, oh my God! What was that?

Sutton: You're a fine one to talk. A guy who screws around with two and three chicks at a time. Look, Laura knows why I let her go. She's a coke fiend. She wouldn't do her job properly. And as far as me wrecking her relationship — boy, this really burned me when I heard this! — all I can say is, buddy, I don't know of any new boyfriend except you.

Jason: I don't believe this.

Sutton; What don't you believe?

Jason: These lies you're telling.

Sutton: Listen to this. He's calls up my wife, tells her I had an affair with my ex-secretary. This woman who's got serious problems and shouldn't be believed because she's got a vendetta against me. He does all this and then calls me a liar.

Jason: I don't believe this.

Sutton [*to Laura*]: Why would he take the word of a woman who was lying to me every day of the week? [*To Jason*] Listen, I can only think you're — alright, I'm gonna ease up a bit. I'm gonna say you just made a mistake.

Charlie [*returning from the window*]: Look how I'm shaking. Look!

Sutton [*to Jason*]: You've been taken in by this woman, right? This female con-artist? This junkie who'd do anything, say anything, and fuck anything for a half a gram of coke?

Jason: There's just one problem with what you're saying.

Sutton: Yeah, that's it. Of course I'm not expecting an apology right now. I can wait till you've thought the matter over more carefully.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: For a second I thought there were armed men outside.

Laura: I've stayed quiet till now because I wanted to hear something from both sides. I certainly didn't plan to have this confrontation over the phone. I would've much preferred to have talked to each of you separately. But now it's happened, well, I'm just going to speak my mind like I always do. Jason, it's my marriage that's at stake here. I want you to be aware of this. Just as I want to be fair to you and hear what you have to say. Now you've made a terrible accusation. Ed was deeply upset when I told him —

Jason: You weren't supposed to tell him.

Laura: When you called me from the beach, as I was saying, and started muttering about some wild hallucinations you were having. Then, the very next instant, you told me Charlie was on the verge of blowing the whistle. At the time I could hardly make out what you were saying and now, quite frankly, I'm not much better off. Look, I'm carrying around a child. I'm going to be giving birth in a couple of weeks. What do you expect to accomplish by all this?

Charlie: This is too freaky. This is all over my head.

Jason : I've got to clear this up. Everybody's trying to avoid the truth.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: If you keep on persisting with what you call the — Jesus, and to think he wanted to make it big in the business world!

Charlie [*to Jason*]: The truth is everyone will avoid the truth to stay alive.

Jason: [*to Sutton*]: You know very well I'm not just relying on Charlie's word.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Everyone will say what they have to say to keep on living, breathing, working, and even snorting.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: Alright, buddy, here's what I'm gonna do. If you can find a way to come to your senses long enough to stop upsetting my wife and endangering the child that's in her body, I'm gonna make every effort to see you get the help you need.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You think it's just a stupid rumour. You don't want to consider the possibility Sutton has a side to him you've never glimpsed.

Laura: Alright, enough. [*To Jason*] Get her on the phone.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: But what if my friends are right and you're wrong. Will you be able to say to me later: "Sorry, Charlie, I made a mistake. I didn't mean for you to wind up in a bag and thrown in the harbour." [*The sound of a car backfiring. Charlie leaps towards the phone*]: Ed, listen to me! It was all a mistake. He doesn't know what he's talking about.

Jason [*to Charlie*]: Stay out of it.

Sutton [*to Laura*] Stay out of it he tells her. [*To Jason*]: Alright, asshole! What's coming off here? What're you trying to pull?

Laura: Don't talk to him like that.

Sutton: The fucker's trying to wreck my marriage and I'm supposed to be polite to him?

Jason [*to Sutton*]: I was with you when you were screwing her.

Charlie [*shouting towards the phone*]: I'm disclaiming everything he says.

Laura: Let me speak to her.

Jason: It won't do any good now.

Charlie You're damn right it won't do any good. [*The light appears a second time*]: Oh, my God, there it is again!

Jason: Laura, listen to me. I was with Ed when he was having the affair with Charlie. We went out together. I was with Frida. Then Maria. We all went out together. More than once.

Charlie [*shouting*]: Don't believe a fucking word those whores have to say about me.

Sutton: [*to Laura*] He was dating both those broads at the same time. Making out like he was in love with both of them.

Jason : You want me to call them up, Laura? You want me to get them to vouch for what I'm saying?

Sutton: Laura, he was cheating on both of them.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Alright, that's it. I'm out. I'll call them from another apartment.

Jason [*to Laura*]: They're honest chicks. They'll tell the truth.

Sutton [*to Jason*]: You'd better make sure your life insurance is all paid up.

Laura: I think I've heard enough.

Charlie: By the time I get through with you, Jason, Laura will think you're a basket-case.

Sutton: Laura, he thinks those bar chicks have got something against me.

Laura: Have they?

Sutton: Not on your life.

Laura: Jason?

Jason: They haven't got anything against him. But they'll tell the truth about him and Charlie.

Sutton: Alright, Laura. If you want to take his word over mine, go ahead. Talk to them. Ring 'em up.

Laura: I haven't heard from Charlie yet.

Charlie [*to Jason*]: You weren't supposed to drag me into this. You betrayed me. [*She leaves the apartment.*]

Sutton [*to Laura*]: The two of them are about as trustworthy as — well, even Charlie's a saint by comparison.

Laura: Put Charlie on the phone.

Jason: She's gone out.

Laura: Gone out? But she's supposed to be the one making this accusation.

Sutton: Where is she?

Laura: Jason?

Jason: Out, I said.

Sutton: Hah! So your fuck-friend leaves you high and dry.

Laura: Ed — !

Sutton [*to Jason*]: This was the woman who was gonna make some vile accusations against me. What happened to her? Why did she just take off? Why did she deny everything right and left?

Laura: Is this what you call not beating up on him?

Sutton: I'm trying to figure out what's going on here. Why did he insist I was fucking around with her when she was denying it right, left, and centre?

Laura: I don't know but you won't find out by hammering away at him.

Sutton: I tell you what, Laura. I think it has something to do with certain things that were said between us before he left the firm.

Laura: What're you talking about? First you said he was sick. Now you're implying he's trying to get back at you.

Sutton: If it's not sickness, what else can it be?

Laura: Jason, is there any chance of bringing her back to the phone?

Sutton: Bringing her — what?

Laura: I'd still like to talk to her.

Sutton: Forget it. We've already heard enough from both of them.

Laura: I would feel better if I could ask her some questions.

Sutton: But she's screwed up. There's nothing — alright, I understand your intentions. You want to be fair. But what else are you gonna find out from her?

Laura: I don't know but it seems the right thing to get her side of it.

Sutton: I'll tell you straight. There's nothing to get from her or anyone else. It's been a pile of bullshit from beginning to end.

Jason: Laura, call up Frida and Maria. Then you'll find how much bullshit there is.

Sutton: I don't believe this. Those chicks are — where are my rifles?

Jason: Call them up. He won't be able to terrify them like he did Charlie.

Sutton: Did you ever hear me say anything to Charlie that was terrifying?

Jason: You made a lot of threats she picked up over the phone.

Sutton: Threats? We see how terrified you are by my threats. Don't ever say I threatened her.

Jason: Alright, but she's got other reasons to be terrified of you.

Sutton: Yeah, she's got other reasons. As many as she does lines of coke every day.

Jason: Laura, call up Frida and Maria. Listen to what they have to say.

Sutton: Laura, do you remember me telling you about going into Los Angeles?

Laura: I remember but I also told you I don't want to hear that kind of talk.

Sutton: I swear to God, if it wasn't for your sake, if it wasn't for the fact he's your brother . . . !

Laura: What happened to Charlie, Jason?

Jason: Charlie? It's Frida and Maria that can tell you what was going on.

Laura: I'm not interested in them. It's Charlie that's at the centre of this.

Jason: Yes, but she's out of the picture. She won't tell you anything.

Laura: She ran out because she was terrified of him. Is that what you're saying?

Jason: What of it? It doesn't matter now. It's what Frida and Maria can tell you that'll make the difference.

Laura: It matters a great deal if I'm to understand why Charlie was so vigorously denying everything and why she wouldn't even come to the phone.

Jason: Of course she ran out. Of course she denied everything. She thinks he's got mafia connections.

Sutton: It's the coke, Laura, and, if you ask me, it's behind his hallucinations and a lot of other things.

Jason: Oh, for fuck's sake!

Sutton: What about those weird hallucinations on the beach? Is he gonna tell you that was just sunstroke? The fucker's into it as much as she is.

Jason: That's crazy. I'm not the one who's saying he's got mafia connections.

Sutton: You've got a real nerve laying all this on me. I'm not speaking about all I've done for you. Let's forget about that. But to think you can put me on the side of the devil and yourself on the side of the angels when I know damn well you've cheated on women and laughed at it and had your cock sucked regularly by all those whores you've pick up.

Jason: Oh, what's the use?

Sutton: I've done so much for you it makes me sick to think about it. I gave you a well-paying position in the firm that was beyond your competence and, as you well know, I'm still paying for that. I let you eat and drink at our expense for two months before you finally booted it out of here and went to shack up with that Marla chick. I even smothered you with gifts and picked up the tab so often that George Haddock once joked you must be my girlfriend. I did all this for you and then what do you do? You turn around and stab me.

Jason: Laura —

Sutton: Don't beg to Laura. She won't deny a word of what I'm saying.

Jason: Are you so entirely on his side you won't speak up for me?

Laura: If he was telling any lies, believe me, I'd speak up for you.

Jason: Oh, what's the use? It's clear enough you don't want to see what was going on. You're satisfied to let him bluster and bully his way out of it. You're satisfied to let him divert all your attention away from what he was doing and focus it on me. You're even satisfied to let him make me out to be sick.

Sutton: Laura, when he called you this afternoon from the beach, you could hardly understand him. I suppose it's blustering and bullying to mention that.

Jason [*to Laura*]: It's pretty obvious you don't want to see what was going on.

Laura: And you seem to feel it's your right and privilege to make me see it, is that it? And not only make me see it but go to all lengths to see it. Look, Jason, if you're so concerned about telling me the truth, please explain to me why Charlie was threatening to blow the whistle on Ed if she was so afraid of him? Why was she in your apartment at the very moment you called and decided to tell me about these things? And finally, why was she involved in all this, as she seems to have been, and then all of a sudden getting cold feet and pulling out as if she was experiencing a living nightmare?

Jason: It doesn't matter now.

Laura: It doesn't matter. You won't answer my questions and I should be blamed for not believing you.

Jason: Alright, she was expecting . . .

Laura: What was she expecting?

Jason: . . . not to become involved directly. She was expecting me to deal with it all out in Palm Springs.

Laura: Really? She was expecting a lot then, wasn't she?

Sutton: Don't encourage him. Don't make him think he's right to be accusing me of cheating on you. Laura, the woman left because she couldn't take any more of his lies.

Laura [*to Jason*]: She sounds like a very troubled woman. I'm glad I didn't speak to her.

Jason: Oh, no more troubled than I am right now. Who's being called a liar? Who's being whipped right and left for just wanting to tell the truth?

Sutton: The truth. He's got this thing about the truth. Pal, if it's so important to you, let's call a truce on what's true and what's not. But only on condition there's no more talk about me and Charlie.

Laura: That sounds reasonable. What do you say, Jason?

Charlie [*entering abruptly*]: What! Are you still on the phone? Get off it and out of my apartment.

Sutton: Now what?

Charlie [*to Jason*]: Where are my car keys?

Sutton: I'm not in the mood for any lovers' quarrel. Let's end it.

Jason [*to Laura*]: Do you think I would've hung out with this coke fiend for so long if she hadn't threatened to blow your mind over this?

Sutton [*to Jason*]: The conversation's over.

Jason: If you'd heard the way she talked about it sometimes.

Sutton: We don't want to hear the way she talked about it.

Jason: She'd say things like: what an animal Sutton is! Do you know what he made me do? He made me stretch out over his desk and beg for it.

Sutton: Alright, that's it. Hang up the phone. Hang it up before I go get my gun and shoot the fucker between the eyes. Hang it up and let me talk to him alone or else you'll be responsible for what happens.

[*Laura hangs up while Charlie grabs her car keys and goes back towards the door.*]

Charlie [*with tears in her voice*]: You're a vindictive person.

[She exits. Jason breaks down. Sutton waits a few seconds until his anger subsides.]

Sutton: You listen to me carefully. I don't know why all of a sudden you're going to hell or why you're trying to make a hell out of my life. But I'm so close to forgetting all family ties, all past friendship between you and me, I could easily send you down the river. Now you wanna fuck with me, go ahead. But if I end up hiring somebody to deal with you because you won't shut up about this, you'll remember what I'm telling you right now and you'll wish you never left Canada.

[Sutton slams down the phone. Jason waits a few seconds, wipes his eyes, then puts down the receiver.]

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