

Angle of Attack

Excerpt

by Lee Baldwin

This is an excerpt from Lee Baldwin's adventure mystery, *Angle of Attack*.

You can find the Kindle edition on Amazon at

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B006U5S9HK>.



Woman shuts the door, walks around the desk of her small County office and sits. I'm just taking in her shapely rack when my nutsack goes into involuntary retraction for the third time today. I know who this is. Apprehension rises even further when she lifts her eyes and looks at me coldly. A flat, dead stare from heavy-lidded eyes. She knows me, too.

And I know her. Dayum. I haven't seen her for almost 20 years, but we were best friends in high school. Best friends mostly below the waist.

Now this striking woman levels her dark eyes on me and is regarding me with open disdain. I try to hold my gaze steady as the thought goes through my head that will define this moment in all its nefarious glory:

Oh. Fucking. Hell. It's Montana.

This new parole officer is no promotion. It's a ticket to an inner circle of Hades.

"Hollister Homicide says you tried to kill someone today. Is that right?"

I look back at my shiny new Parole Officer without expression thinking cops must go to school to act like morons. Everybody in the system tries to bait you into a lie if you are the slightest bit bent. I'm counting, if I go through this with her, how many times will it be today that I've tried to explain glider flight characteristics to a cop?

No wedding ring, which surprises me for a second. And then again it doesn't. For around 38 she's still a knockout, but the vicious gaze she aims at me now reminds me there are other sides to her personality. If you can call it that.

She leans back in her high swivel chair and gazes at me coolly. She's becoming impatient. If I recall correctly from 20 years back, that is a bad sign. I summon all my wit and eloquence for a deft reply.

"No."

She scowls at me with haughty disdain, like she's waiting for a bug to crawl off her plate. I sigh and continue, trying to be brief.

"My student jumped out of the glider all by himself. He had a parachute. I did not. It was only by great good luck I was able to keep from crashing. I think he wanted to kill me."

While this is coming out of my mouth I'm watching her eyes and wondering when she's going to cop to the fact that she knows me. Up to now she's acting like we just met. She's

watching me intently, waiting. I'm waiting too. I don't have anything else to say right now.

"I know more about you than what's in this file," she says, looking at me rather coldly. "Suppose you just tell me why you're here."

"Okay Montana," I say, uttering her high school nickname for the first time in at least 10 years. Classmates occasionally asked about her, but after I got set up on this bogus rap and did a three spot in the can, I haven't exactly schmoozed with my high school crowd.

"Yes Montana, you do know more than what's in my file. You better be talking to me off the record about that for reasons we both understand. Why am I here? This is my regular weekly appointment. With you, it turns out. Why are you here? Why was my case moved from Officer Yamamoto? How long have you been a parole officer?"

"Parole Agent," she spits out. "Agent, not Officer. There's a difference."

I can see she's really proud of her position. Dawns on me it's her career now. I am curious to know how she got to this point. She and I did risky and illegal things when we ran together in school. Part of me feels like congratulating her, but the other part, the 98% part, says forget it.

"I need to ask you the same question," I say finally. "Exactly why am I here? I have been letter-perfect every day of my parole. I intend to keep it that way till I'm out of the system."

She laughs out of one corner of her mouth. Way her eyes sparkle takes me back for a sweet second to warm summer nights long ago. I roughly shove the beguiling memories aside.

"You'll never be out of my system," she practically snarls.

I don't blink but I take a beat to contemplate that she uses 'my' instead of 'the'. She

could've said 'my' because she feels a certain ownership for the parole system. She could've said 'my' because she still feels a connection to me. Looking at her now, I recall I was hooked on her. And begin to remember why, in semi-lurid detail.

I speak up, letting impatience into my voice. "Care to tell me why I'm here?"

She waits a beat. For the moment she can't meet my eyes and looks again at the laptop. I begin to recall things about Montana from back then, the way she is. I didn't know what a narcissist was in those days, but today I'm clear that she is one. Her mental self-image is about power, and being attractive. It was the lure of power that first pulled her away from me, a powerful older man when we were in high school. She totally believes she is better than other people. In the last few minutes I've been reminded twice that she really doesn't understand other people have feelings. She appears tough-minded and unemotional, but is easily hurt. And if that happens, oh boy. Hell hath no fury, and so forth.

When her eyes come up, her face is different. When she speaks her voice is not quite so snarly.

"This meeting is routine, as you say. However, when a parolee is found at a crime scene the Parole Agent has to intervene. I took your case from Yamamoto for that reason. We're going to have weekly meetings until this matter is cleared up. Any discrepancy we'll see you back on the bracelet."

Please, not the GPS ankle bracelet again. Yamamoto wrote me up twice simply because the damn things lose contact above 2500 feet. If flying is your living, the bracelet is unemployment. It near cost me my job at the gliderport a year ago, before I was able to explain things well enough so they would listen. My employer at the gliderport went to bat with Yamamoto and they took it off.

But Montana's face is softer, voice more feminine in tone, telling me I'm starting to work on her. Which is a good thing. Up to a point. Control, I tell myself, not involvement.

"Okay I can accept that," I tell her. Now I have a question for her, the same one I'd pestered Yamamoto with the whole time I've been on parole. "You do know I was framed? I want to reopen my case."

Now she looks at me as though I'm something she needs to scrape off her pointy-toed boots. "You are joking, of course. Cicero."

Dayum. Cicero is Montana-speak for really pissed at me. But like a fool, I plunge ahead.

"No, this is legit."

"You are referring to - "

"Look Montana, I was in jail for three weeks before I was accused of possession with intent to distribute. My public defender was an amateur. How did I get convicted for possession when there was nothing at my house?"

She's not looking disgusted anymore, merely bored and faintly entertained. She knows I don't have the financial clout to hire an attorney to take on the State of California. At least, she thinks she knows that.

"Take it up with your legal counsel. Now I have work to do."

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