

The Whatever Plan **By Chad Robert Parker**

(Sample: character and conflict intro)

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Jeremy unbuttoned the breast pocket of his thick blue, dark gray and white flannel jacket, accented with thin yellow lines just darker than his hair, the blue just darker than his light eyes, and the gray just lighter than his faded jeans. He wiped the brow of his chiseled features onto his sleeve. The sun shown much brighter than he had anticipated it would, so he went ahead and undid his hot flannel—exposing an undershirt that matched his baby blue eyes—and then he tied his sleeves securely around his waist like he used to do in grade school. He returned his focus back to his front pocket and then tugged an envelope free, a letter spilling from it. A wind gust blew the page across the deck and wedged it up against a post where it flapped, suspended by the breeze. He had scrambled after it on hands and knees trying to pin it against the deck at first, but now, so far removed, he stared on helplessly, expecting it to flit away at any moment.

A vivacious blonde with an inordinate amount of bright red lipstick and potent perfume, wearing a frilly white blouse purposely exposing her belly button stud, and outfitted by a denim skirt threadbare on the edges, kicked off her heels, scampered across the deck and slapped the post with her left hand, trapping the letter in between. “Lose something?” She panted. “I’m Kendra.” With a flip of her right hand she waved her hair aside from large green eyes accented by a thick layer of dark blue eyeliner, and with the other hand outstretched she shook Jeremy’s hand. He had instinctively been reaching out for the letter still dangling over the edge. “Pleased to meet you.” She caught his focus, moving her face in front of his and then shook his hand with her free hand.

“Oh yeah, sorry, of course” Jeremy stammered “I’m Jeremy, um, could you please be careful with that?” He spoke timidly.

“Oh—yeah, sorry, of course.” She mimicked flirtatiously, raising the paper up and reading the letterhead. “Michigan Technological University? So you’re in college? Me, too,” she gushed, batting her eyes. “Aren’t you going to ask for my number?”

Jeremy grabbed at the paper. “I’m not as young as you think.”

“Oh really? So tell me. How young do I think you are?” She leaned up confidently against the railing and then placed her elbow there. Resting her cheek in her hand she gazed adoringly back at him. She held the paper, away from him, down the back of her leg.

“I’ll be thirty-two in a few weeks,” Jeremy spoke wryly.

The girl straightened up. “No? Really? Wow—you are old!” She pushed the paper into his chest then shuffled back to where a couple other girls stood giggling, waiting word of the encounter.

Jeremy returned to his bench alone. He opened the letter. It wasn’t the best distraction if he wanted to forget past failings, but somehow it ignited a fire within him to succeed despite everything. The letter began: *we regret to inform you that your grades from the last semester do not meet the requirements for you to qualify to continue in the employer sponsored accreditation for the Chemical Engineering program.* He skipped down to the concluding line about a copy of the letter being mailed to his employer. His stomach growled. He grabbed his backpack out from underneath, unzipped it, reached in and tucked the letter into his red journal. From a brown paper bag, labeled *Hunt’s Mackinaw Pastie & Cookie Co.*, he pulled out a Styrofoam container holding a delicious homemade-style native meal, big enough to require a fork—a chicken pasty filled with potatoes, onions, and roasted rutabaga, baked in a steamy fresh golden brown crust,

complemented by coleslaw and an oatmeal chocolate chip and macadamia nut cookie on the side. It transported him back to his youth, to a field trip when he had first tasted the flaky crust that gave way to sumptuous flavors softly melting away in his mouth. Maybe it was a Michigan thing, but it was one local thing he was sure he could never get enough of. He leaned back, carried away in thought of the handful of times he had ventured to Mackinac Island before.