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## Chanel No. 9

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I answer the phone. A young man asks me if I am who I am and if I do what I do. I say yes. He says he has a legal problem and asks to make an appointment with me. I say sure and give him a time to meet me at my office.

Then the conversation becomes more interesting.

"I hear you collect stories," says the young man.

"True," I say.

"I hear if a client tells you a good enough story, that you sometimes give the client a reduced fee," says the young man. I'm curious how he knows this, but don't bother to inquire.

"I've sometimes represented people for free if their story is good enough," I say. "But I get to use their story in my stories. That's part of it. Also, the work to be done on their case has to be within tolerable limits. No big felonies for free, for instance, no matter how good the story is. I work for a living. Stories are one of my

passions."

The young man says, "Well sir, I'm charged with theft, I'm innocent, I've been set up, and I've got one heck of a story to tell you. If my story is good enough, will you give me a discount?"

"I might," I say. "Depends on whether you impress me." The young man says he's on the way.

An hour later, I'm on the phone with a super intelligent young lady who is telling me how she, a 17 y.o. high school drop-out with an IQ of 185, is paid secret money by yuppie men's fraternities at the biggest, most expensive, prestigious colleges in a major metropolitan area and at A&M. She writes "Guaranteed Grade A" (her words) undergrad and master's level essays and research papers on any topic, which "the lazy frat boys" then submit as their own work. The young lady describes the secret (very healthy) payments, the triple box dead-drop system, her "Zero Personal Contact" rule, and more. She wants to know if she's doing anything illegal. She offers to send me a sample "Master's program A+ paper on the behavior of certain sub-atomic particles" and a picture of herself.

Although I would dearly love to read the paper, I quickly tell the young lady not to send me anything. I remind her that no conventional email system and no conventional computer or laptop is secure. The young lady then tells me about the "unbreakable, not in a million years" encryption program she has written and installed in her computers, which also (handily) conceals the origin and destination points of anything she sends or receives from anywhere on the planet. She says she can do the same thing to any phone anywhere??a modern phone is just a little computer,? she says--and explains enough of the science and methodology that I believe her.

I am impressed. Very.

I tell the young lady she ought to consider working for one of several three-letter U.S. government agencies, including "No Such Agency, or Not Really [a government] Office." I offer to put her in touch with someone from my reconnaissance pilot days whom I strongly suspect has never left the game, but is now playing it on a far higher strategic level, a man who now wears a suit and tie to work rather than the Marine Corps flight suit we both used to wear.

The young lady says she'll think about it. Says she prefers to work alone, and be alone, much of the time "because others just can't keep up." The girl is an Einstein. She can leave me in the dust anytime.

I'm deep in analysis and discussion with the young lady when the office front door opens and I hear cowboy boots and also an "other" sound straight from my childhood family farm. I struggle with multi-tasking--the young lady on the phone who is working my brain like an engine at redline, the cowboy boots-wearing young man, and the "other" sound--and what it means, which my mind refuses to accept--in my front office. I feel stressed.

I finally get off the phone with the young lady, who promises to contact me again. I type up a few notes, gulp some caffeine, create a file on the young lady and holler to the reception area for the young man to come into my personal office.

I hear boots on the wooden floor. I also hear the "other" sound.

I'm shoving notes in the file when I look up to see the young man come round the corner into my office. He's maybe 21, a handsome kid wearing pressed blue jeans, polished boots, a pressed white shirt.

I appreciate it when people dress up to come to my office. I stand to greet him and see he's holding a leather leash in one hand. A moment later, the far end of the leash also comes around the corner.

A gigantic pig. At least five hundred pounds.

My jaw drops open. My lips move but nothing comes out.

"Five hundred thirty-two pounds," the young man says. "Have to use a commercial scale. Everybody always wants to know how much she weighs."

The pig is pale, slightly tan, nearly hairless, with black and white spots all over her immense body. The leash is attached to a leather harness strapped around her chest. Like a gigantic dog.

The young man says, "She's smarter than any dog. I swear she can almost read and write. She's smarter than some people I know."

He beams at his pig and pets her. She grunts and leans against him. He nearly falls over.

"That's some pig," I mumble. I've gained the ability to speak in monosyllables.

The young man enters my private office, followed by his pig. "Suzy B," he says. "My 4-H project in high school. We went to State together. Won." He pets her again. She grunts again. They seem a happy couple.

I say, "Is your pig potty trained? She makes a mess, you're cleaning it up. She breaks anything, you're paying for it. You better have a really good story to tell me, or both you and your pig are gone. I like animals, but this is one hell of a stretch."

The young man is polite. Courteous. Respectful. Says, "Sir, please don't be biased against my pig. If she were a dog, you'd be petting her right now. Isn't true that you had an office dog for many years? Suzy is completely potty trained and won't break or damage anything. She's a good pig, I promise." He pets her again and rubs her ears.

Suzy B grunts in agreement. She seems to understand what her master is saying. She lowers her one hundred and fifty pound head and snout and starts sniffing around my office. Zeros in on my desk. There's a McDonald's biscuit in a drawer. She knows.

I reluctantly acknowledge I might be biased. I tell the young man we are not going to discuss my office dog, who I buried a few years ago and wrote a story about entitled *Love and Loyalty*. I wonder how he knows about my dog but don't bother to inquire.

Suzy B comes up to me. Puts her snout directly against the desk drawer containing the McDonald's biscuit. Looks at me and grunts. From my seated position, she is taller than I am and outweighs me three to one. The floor creaks with her weight.

I open the drawer and tentatively offer Suzy B the biscuit. I'm concerned about losing a limb here.

Suzy B sniffs delicately, then, to my surprise, instead of removing my hand and wrist and leaving me with a stump of mangled flesh, gently grasps the biscuit in her Great White Shark "JAWS" mouth. I release. Suzy B shakes her head up and down, once. The biscuit is gone.

She leans against me. I am crushed. Can barely breath. The floor groans. I pet her and rub her belly. Suzy B grunts happily. She closes her eyes in ecstasy.

"Sit, Suzy," says the young man. The pig promptly sits on its ass just like a dog.

"Nice pig," I admit. I keep petting her.

The young man says, "You haven't seen anything yet. You'll see."

He tells me about his case. Turns out he is deeply in love with a young beauty named Jenny, who attends college and is the daughter of a Feed & Fuel store owner in their local town. The young man explains that he and Jenny plan on getting married, but her father is an insecure control freak A-hole who refuses to think that any young man is good enough for his daughter, and constantly seeks to destroy their friendship, their relationship.

"I know all about insecure control freak A-holes who destroy friendships and relationships," I tell the young man. "And I know all about people who won't stand up to them, which is nearly as bad. But what does this have to do with you being charged with a crime?"

The young man explains that he went to the Feed & Fuel to buy feed for Suzy. He carried five 80 lb. bags to the counter and paid for them with cash and was given a receipt. Store policy, however, holds that a customer is not permitted to haul heavy bags or supplies from the store to his or her vehicle; this has to be done by muscle boy employees. So after the young man paid for the bags, he walked to his pickup and got in. Muscle boy employees placed the bags in the back of his truck while he was on the phone with Jenny. After the young man finished his call, he started his truck and began to pull out of the parking lot when Jenny's father and one of the muscle boys rushed out of the Feed & Fuel and forced him to stop. Jenny's father accused him of being a thief and held up a sixth feed bag in the back of the young man's pickup. A local deputy constable who happens to be best friends with Jenny's father pulled into the parking lot. Moments later, the young man was arrested and hauled off to jail while Jenny's father gloated. The father was heard to say, "Got you. You're screwed. She'll never marry you now." The father laughed.

As the young man was explaining his story to me, showing me his receipt, Suzy B sniffed around my office. I tried to ignore her. It is difficult to remain focused while a five hundred thirty-two pound pig roots around in one's office.

The young man explained to me that the Feed & Fuel has a video system which will show he didn't carry any feed bags from the store to his truck. He said that one of the muscle boys had secretly confided to Jenny that her father had set the young man up and he was innocent.

While the young man talked, Suzy B stuck her head beneath the confessional bench--where my clients sit and tell me their stories--in my office. She sniffed. Grunted. Seemed excited. I said, "What's she doing?"

The young man looked at Suzy. Smiled. Looked at me and said, "You've got mice. Suzy hunts them. Snakes too."

At that exact moment, a mouse leapt from some hidden place beneath the confessional bench and streaked across the floor, out my office and down the hallway. Suzy B shrieked in excitement--this was not a pleasant sound for me--and bolted after the mouse, grunting wildly while she galloped after it.

I had never seen anything like this, and I have seen some strange shit in my life.

The young man jumped to his feet and hollered, "Get the mouse, get the mouse! Get the mouse, Suzy!" He raced down the hallway after his pig.

I joined the chase.

The mouse trapped itself in a corner beneath the water cooler in my office hallway. Suzy B skidded to a halt!leaving dents in the wooden floor--and closed in, maw gaping. There was a Hoover vacuum cleaner

sound.

No more mouse.

Suzy B grunted happily. Seemed proud of her accomplishment. The young man petted her and told her she was a good pig. She seemed to nod her head in agreement.

We returned to my office. I tried to accept the alternative reality I was now living in.

I picked up the phone and called the DA in the county where the young man had been arrested. This DA is a good man who, oddly, appeared unsurprised by my call, almost as if he had been expecting it. (I didn't bother to inquire.) I explained the circumstances, the video, the receipt, the love relationship, everything.

The DA told me I had just verified what he already suspected. He said his investigator had interviewed two of the young muscle boys, who had exposed Jenny's father's evil acts toward the young man. The investigator was on his way to recover the Feed & Fuel video. The DA said the deputy constable and Jenny's father would be arrested for their actions against the young man.

"Small town bullshit," he said. "Closed ignorant minds. They cause harm."

While I was talking with the DA, agreeing with him, I imagined I smelled a wonderful scent in my office. By the time I got off the phone, I was sure of it.

I said to the young man, "I'm a guy and I'm not wearing perfume. You're a guy and you'd better not be wearing perfume. My legal assistant isn't here and she isn't wearing perfume. So where's the perfume smell coming from?"

The young man, though desperate to hear what had transpired between the DA and myself, controlled himself--I gave him high marks for this--and said, "Suzy B, of course. Chanel No. 9."

I said, "You're shitting me."

The young man was defensive. He said, "My pig is cleaner and more tidy than most people. I want her to smell nice and make a good impression on people. Jenny bought the perfume for her. Dabbed it on her this morning after Suzy took her shower."

Once again I was rendered silent.

A showered perfumed pig.

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Five hundred thirty-two pounds of sweet-smelling bacon.

"I gather Miss Suzy B has permanent immunity from becoming a deli item?" I said.

The young man was offended. "Of course she does," he said. "Jenny and I love her like she's a member of the family. Suzy B even sleeps in her own bed in the house."

I shook my head. God. The shit I hear.

I eventually explained the case situation to the young man. Told him his case would likely be dismissed within the week. Explained what would likely happen to the deputy constable and to Jenny's father. Told he would have to testify against the father and deputy constable, if it came down to it.

The young man was very relieved. Asked me how much his case would cost. I told him he was charged with a Class B theft misdemeanor and that normally I would charge \$1000-1500 to resolve such a case without a trial and around \$2500 or more for a trial.

The young man grew pale. I could tell he was a starving college student.

The young man said, "I don't have much money, and no assets, but you've saved me, and you've saved my relationship with my girl."

The young man looked down at his pig and petted her and then, to add yet another surprise to my already freaky day, knelt and hugged her. (Suzy B grunted and nuzzled him affectionately.)

"I'll have to pay you with my pig," he said, sadly. He choked up, began to weep. Held his pig in his arms and cried over her.

Suzy B nuzzled him and made cooing sounds. She was concerned about her master. If she could have hugged him, she would have.

This was a love relationship. Man and pig. Pig and man. And their girl.

*A love triangle.*

"No," I said. "You're not paying me a penny. Keep the pig. Marry your girl. Ignore the insecure control freak A-hole father. You and your girl, and your pig, go have a great life."

I felt myself getting soft and sentimental, which I constantly fight against, since I am a Tin Man who has no heart. "Now you and Suzy B get on out of here before I change my mind."

Man and pig headed for the door. Pig and human thanked me for helping him and saving her from becoming bacon. As the happy couple walked down the office steps, the young man turned to me and said, "I've got one last thing to show you. Come watch this."

So, unable to stop myself, I followed man and pig down the sidewalk. Cars honked. People waved. I heard laughter. I'm glad I was twenty feet to the rear.

Man and pig reached the young man's pickup, a dual cab. The young man opened the front passenger door and lowered a wooden ladder to the pavement.

"Get in, Suzy," the young man ordered.

And the pig stepped up the ladder, into the pickup and sat down--just like a human--on the front seat. She propped her front feet on the dash.

The young man reached into the truck and strapped in his pig. I heard the click of the seatbelt. He rolled the window down and shut the door.

A massive porcine head and snout emerged from the truck. Suzy B grunted happily. Sniffed and raised her snout in the air. A content pig.

The happy pair drove away. Cars honked. People laughed in the distance. I eventually turned toward my office.

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