

J O H N   L E V Y



## Jimmy's Girlfriends and His Late Mother

*(for my Father)*

It is the third call from Jimmy in one day. Sam tells him that he has talked to Mike, Jimmy's probation officer.

"Yeah, what's Mike got to say?"

"Mike says he won't recommend reinstatement on probation because you absconded five months ago and picked up that misdemeanor charge for marijuana when you were arrested. Plus, when you saw the police you ran and they had to chase you."

"It's up to Judge Goosed Berries, right? Not Mike!"

"Judge Dandurry. Yes. But Mike's recommendation will influence Judge Dandurry. And it's not as if I have a magic wand I can wave over Mike's head to change his mind."

"It's your job to get me out of jail! Margaret got paid back, Ellen saw to that. Margaret got every penny back."

"That's why you got a good plea, Jimmy. That has already been taken into account. But you did steal checks from Margaret and she didn't get paid back until I cut that deal for you and Ellen paid Margaret. Now what we are dealing with is that you reported to your probation officer once, only once, then went on the run."

"Yeah, yeah, you're talking like a prosecutor, man. Mike wanted me to live in a halfway house. No way. I want to go live with Ellen again. Or Katie. I'm not sure."

"Even if the judge would let you out of jail, you wouldn't live with Ellen again. She called Mike this morning and told him about her felonies."

"Oh shit."

"Yup. Mike asked her if she has ever been arrested. She told Mike she has four felonies on her record, three from Texas and the most recent from Arizona."

“How about Katie?”

“Mike told me he ordered you not to live with Katie because she reported you to the police for domestic violence once.”

“Katie dropped those charges. It’s not fair that Mike keeps bringing that up.”

“It’s his job, Jimmy.”

“I could live with Sherry then. Call her.” He gives Sam a phone number. “She’s going to talk both your ears off when you call her.”

Sam flips through Jimmy’s case file on his desk, looking for the form, on pink paper so it is easy to find, for the list of people that a client gives him permission to talk with and finds the form behind many pages of notes about telephone conversations with Jimmy.

“I don’t see any Sherry on the people you told me you wanted me to talk to. You’ve got Katie Counter and Ellen Hill. That’s all. And you told me you didn’t want me to talk to any family. No one from your family has called, but Ellen and Katie call at least twice a day. So you have no family in Tucson at all?”

“That’s right. My mother died two years ago, pancreatic cancer. Vanessa Hanshaw. I spent every day with her during her last week in the hospital. Man, that was the worst time in my life. Her brother Tony didn’t even come to the hospital to be with her, it was just me and her at the end. And Tony lives in Tucson. But he left me all alone with my dying mother. I still think of her every day. My father, I have no idea where he is or if he is even alive. I got no family in Tucson, man. My Uncle Tony isn’t real family, he didn’t even bother to come for his sister’s funeral.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your mother’s death. My mother died last year. It’s hard to lose a mother. It’s an awful loss.”

“I’ve been there. I’m very sorry to hear about your mother. I didn’t know that. I feel bad for you. Anyhow, call Sherry.”

“Okay, so you want me to add Sherry to the list of people I can talk to about your case, right?”

“Yeah, I already said that.”

“What’s her last name?”

“I don’t know. Don’t tell her I don’t know her last name. Don’t tell her you talked to Katie and Ellen. Say I haven’t called her for the last three weeks because I’ve been in jail, okay? Tell her I am in the middle of writing her a long letter.”

“Ellen said she’d come to your sentencing. So did Katie. Do they know each other?”

“Shit! Yeah, yeah. Okay, call Ellen and tell her, tell her, I don’t know. Make up something about how my sentencing has been, uh, postponed or something, okay? Tell her you’ll get back to her when you got a new date. Then call her after my sentencing and say, real sorry like, that at the last minute Judge Gooseberries kept my sentencing on the same day after all and you forgot to call

her and I told you to call her and say it wasn't my fault she didn't find out when my sentencing was."

"Look, Jimmy, I'm willing to make calls for you but I'm not going to lie for you."

"You want a cat fight in the courtroom? Ellen will take Katie apart, a part. There will be blood, man, and it'll be on your hands. Ellen does kick-boxing every morning at the gym. That bitch has legs stronger than Arnold Schwarzkopfigger. Two of her felonies are for assault. Man, I saw her get into a fight with her sister last month. Her sister is strong too, though. Coulda made money offa that if I had a video camera."

"As I said, I'm not going to lie for you."

"Man, shove come to push and what happens? You want Ellen to ram her foot down Katie's throat? You want Ellen to kick Katie right there in the courtroom and stomp her head? It will be on you, man. You don't know what it means to help someone, do you? It's only a job to you, a paycheck, you don't care whose heart you break."

"Oh, come on, Jimmy. I told you before, when you asked me to call Katie, I will pass on a message for you but I won't lie for you."

"It's a little fib is all."

"You can say what you want, I'm not doing it. I don't care if you think I'm not doing my job. Call my supervisor and complain to him that I won't lie for you. I'll call Sherry for you. And if you figure out something I can tell either Katie or Ellen, something honest, to keep one of them out of the courtroom, then call me and let me know."

"Sherry doesn't know Katie or Ellen. I wonder if she'd figure out they're there for me. How crowded is the courtroom gonna be?"

"I'll look in my crystal ball. It's misty, no, now it's coming into focus. There you are, all dressed up in your orange jumpsuit. The courtroom is packed and here comes Ellen into the courtroom dressed in this black floor-length gown and—"

"Sam, at least you got a sense of humor. Last public pretender I had, that fucker got me sent to prison for seven years, that guy didn't even know the word smile. Know what I mean? He was carrying ten pounds in a five pound bag."

"I've never heard that expression."

"My late mother used it all the time."

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"Hello. May I speak with Sherry?"

"She's not here now. I could give her a message."

"Sure, thanks. This is Sam Riley, I'm a public defender and I represent Jimmy Oxford. He asked me to call—"

"I'm sorry, this is me, Sherry. Sorry about that. I need to screen my calls."

"No problem. A lot of people do that."

"Yeah!" She laughs and coughs in the middle of the laugh. "Yeah, I bet in your business people lie to you all around the clock, don't they? I'm sure Jimmy hasn't told you the truth for a few minutes!" She giggles. "God, Jimmy wouldn't know the truth if it gave him a ten dollar bill and a shoeshine. I mean he can put on his nice show and all that, Mister Abe Lincoln. I saw through him in a split second. He has been good to me, but that man is so full of bullshit you can't believe him if he tells you he's thirsty. What does he want now? Money on his books? Before he went to prison last time, I put twenty on his books every week for nearly five months then sent him money every month for seven years. Every. Single. Month. Not that I had always had work either. And my kids coulda used some of that money. But I am loyal. He is going to remodel our bathroom when he gets out this time too. He's good with stuff like that if he gets off the dope."

"He didn't ask me to call you about putting money on his books."

"That's not like him! But he doesn't deserve any money this time. I haven't gotten a single call from him or a single letter since he got locked up this time. You'd think I dropped off the face of Tucson."

"He told me to tell you he is writing you a letter."

"Yeah, right. You believed him? Mr. I-Can't-Tell-the-Truth. I mean, he steals checks from a girlfriend who kicks him out after she wakes up and realizes he's two-timing her. Then he gets another girlfriend to pay off the stolen checks! I'm crazy for being involved with that, that, I'll call him a piece of work. What does he want?"

"He wants to know if he could stay at your place if he gets out of jail at his sentencing."

"Is he going to get out?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Probably not. He was out of contact for five months with his probation officer. The probation officer doesn't think Jimmy is motivated to succeed on probation."

She laughs.

"But you never know. The judge could give him another chance and let him out of jail. Unlikely, but sometimes it happens."

"Why doesn't he stay with Katie or Ellen? He never stays here. He thinks I don't know about those bitches. I know all about them. All about them. I know all about what happened with Margaret too."

"Okay."

"I called both of those bitches, Katie and Ellen, a few days ago. I let them know what's what. That Ellen something-or-other, she just laughed into the damn phone. Katie cried, Ellen laughed. Jimmy can really pick 'em. Though he picked me so I shouldn't say that, I guess."

She pauses. Sam is trying to think of what to say when she begins talking again.

“Mr. Romeo Cassanova, that’s his only real talent, smooth talking. He’s a bad influence on my kids, the way he talks and smokes weed. So why does he want to stay here? I heard him on the phone once when he thought I was in the bathroom, telling some friend of his about how Ellen is so hot. Can you believe that? I’m making him dinner and giving him my money and he’s telling me he’s living with his Uncle Tony and all the time he’s over at Ellen’s. I’m not going to confront him with it. He’ll throw up such a shitstorm of lies it’ll give me a headache for a month. He promised he’d remodel the bathroom right before he got himself arrested. I don’t know why I believed that.”

“Well, all I know is that he asked me to ask you and—“

“Yeah, okay, he can stay here.”

“I’m not trying to persuade you, I’m just reporting to you what he wanted me to ask you.”

“He’s knows I’m stupid enough to say yes. I see through him, but I have my reasons for liking his company.”

“Look, I’m sorry to ask this, but I am going to need to call Jimmy’s probation officer and give him some information about you. Have you ever been arrested?”

“No.”

“Could you spell your last name for me and give me your date of birth and your address? The probation officer will need to make sure you don’t have a criminal history.”

“They want fingerprints too?”

“The probation officer’s name is Mike Elger. He’s a very nice guy so if he does call you don’t have to worry about him having an attitude or anything.”

“I bet he knows my mother’s probation officer, Betty Taschen. My mom’s on probation for drunk driving.”

“I know Betty. She’s a nice person too. If Jimmy does get out, he can’t have contact with felons without Mike’s permission. So that means he couldn’t meet your mother unless he tells Mike and gets Mike’s approval.”

“That’s a laugh. Jimmy and my mother get along fine. We go out to dinner a lot together. My mother hasn’t told Betty about me and Jimmy. Yeah, Betty is nice alright. She has been really fair to my mother. Bent over backwards, really, to help her.”

After Sam says goodbye, he calls Mike. He gets Mike’s answering machine.

“Hi Mike. It’s Sam Riley. I wanted to let you know that if Judge Danduray is willing to let Jimmy Oxford out of jail he could stay with Sherry Brown, who lives at 3966 E. Fiddler Street, apartment 439. Sherry told me she doesn’t have a criminal history. Her date of birth is April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1971.”

Sam leaves Sherry’s phone number and hangs up. Less than a minute later Sam’s phone rings.

“Sam Riley.”

"Hi, Mr. Riley. This is Ellen Hill again, calling about Jimmy Oxford. Have you heard from him today?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything about me? Did he say he loves me?"

"He did say, well, first let me say that I talked to Mike, his probation officer."

"Oh. So you know I called him. He asked me about if I'd ever been arrested so I told him. I didn't want to lie to him. He said that if he had known Jimmy was living with me he might have allowed it, even though I have some felonies, but that if you're on probation you can't live with somebody with a record without getting approval."

"Right."

"I hope Jimmy won't be mad I told Mike about my felonies. I figured Mike could have found out on his own and that would've looked bad on me. And Jimmy. Did Mike say Jimmy could move back here?"

"No, he said Jimmy couldn't live with you if he gets out. Mike is going to recommend jail time and termination of probation."

"Damn. So where would he live? With Katie? Or Sherry?"

"I don't know if Judge Danduray will let him out of jail anyway. The good thing, the good news, so to speak, is that Mike isn't recommending prison."

"Why would Danberry keep him in jail? I paid Margaret off."

"Because Jimmy didn't comply with probation."

"How much jail?"

"Mike didn't say. Anyway, Judge Danduray will decide. The judge could send Jimmy to prison even though Mike is recommending jail instead of prison."

"Jimmy didn't say anything about how much he misses me?"

"You know, we were talking about what Mike said about him and about how he couldn't live with you because of your felonies. That was our focus."

"I'll be there for his sentencing. Sherry said she'd be there too. I'm not mad at Sherry. She stood by him for a long time, waited for him when he was in prison. She isn't right for him, though, she's too bossy."

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An hour later he checks his fax machine and finds a letter to the judge from Katie and a handwritten, printed note to himself as a cover page:

Dear Sam,

I am sending this for Judge Dandears from a Kinkoos.

Katie Tiffany Counter

Sam turns to her letter to the judge.

Dear Judge Dandears,

This is Katie Tiffany Counter writing. I work at the Circle K and this job for almost 9 years today. I've lived in Tucson for 33 years almost my whole life basically. I have a handsome son. He is 14 now and he lives with his Daddy in Texas and I see him summers. I probably experienced life just as much as Mr. Jimmy Oxford, but he help me so much I want to tell you about it. I owe him a much and won't be forgetting that.

Mr. Jimmy Oxford and me have many differences obviously. He started using pot in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I never done it, never once, I am scared of it and should be. When he is using pot we are not the happiest people in each other company. But and this is important when he is sobre he and me we are so happy together and he is so good to me and help me be tolerate everything. My father just recently passed 1 month ago yesterday and Mr. Oxford wanted to be there for me. He talked to me while I was tearing over the death. He showed me he still has that good in him. That was only less than one week before he got threwn into behind bars.

My job is not easy. Some strangers treat me like worse than dirt at Circle K. I don't deserve that but I need my incomes. Mr. Oxford, if I come home and am crying because somebody, sometimes even a kid, got cruel to me at Circle K Mr. Oxford know how to say the words to make me know I am worth the while and very special. No one else can ever do this. So I ask you let him come home. I need him.

I hope this letter to you will help you to Mr. Oxfords advantige.

Sincerely, Katie Tiffany Counter

As Sam walks back into his office the phone rings. He talks to the father of another client for fifteen minutes. He is working on a motion to suppress evidence in a burglary case when his phone rings.

“Hey, it’s Jimmy. It’s my lucky day, I’ve reached you every time I’ve called today. Call Sherry?”

“Yes, she said you could stay with her so I called up Mike. He wasn’t in. I left her name and address for him, and her date of birth, so he could check her criminal background. Sherry was nice.”

“Oh shit. I got to thinking. I’ll do my jail time. That would be better than living with Sherry. She’s a nag. She’s always got a Honey Do list. I want to go back to Ellen or Katie. Ellen is better looking but Katie is always saying she needs me. I kind of owe Ellen a debt for paying Margaret off, I should start off by staying with her. Sherry is a little old for me now. Have you heard from Katie?”

“She faxed me a letter for the judge.”

“She doesn’t write too good. She dropped out of school in seventh grade. Could you read it? No, no, wait, I don’t want to hear it. I’m in a good mood and I don’t want to come down. Don’t get me wrong. I care about Katie and all that, but it wears me out to listen to her talk.”



Jimmy is in the first group of four defendants handcuffed together and in orange jumpsuits. He is on the end, next to a small withered man with a grey beard who looks exhausted and depressed. Jimmy is grinning and scans the full courtroom. The old man sinks into his seat and Jimmy sits down proudly, as if he is at the head of a table at a Thanksgiving dinner.

“Any of the women here,” Sam asks.

“Not a one. Could be worse. Do me last. Let’s give ‘em time to all get here and catch the show.”

“I can’t. I have to be in another courtroom for a motion to suppress at 9:30. I can wait about ten minutes, that’s it.”

“Look at the carrot in the front row in the blue low-cut blouse. Man, I wonder who she is here for.”

Sam glances over at a young red-haired woman in the front row. She seems to be looking at the man on the other side of the old man, a young thin man who is winking repeatedly in her direction.

“You know what they say about redheads, real redheads?”

“Jimmy, tell me later, okay? Let’s review what you’re going to say to Judge Dandurry.”

“Judge Goosed Berries?” Jimmy says loudly, laughing.

A corrections officer looks over at Jimmy and Sam, scowling. Sam nods at him, grimacing.

“Keep it down, okay? So what are you going to say to Judge Dandurry?”

“Depends on if all the women show up, you know. They will each want to hear me mention



them. If only one shows up it will be easy.”

“Jimmy, we have about a minute before the judge walks in. Just make sure you say something about being sorry you absconded, okay?”

“I’m sorry they caught up with me. Yeah, relax, relax, I got it all rehearsed and ready to go. I’m good with words. Where are those women? Didn’t all three of them tell you they’d be here?”

“Yes.”

“You’d think one outa three would show up, wouldn’t you? I’d put my money on Katie showing up first, she’s the one who’s always yapping about how she needs me. Ellen needs me twice as much but knows she doesn’t have to be saying it over and over. See that fat woman in the second row in the pink dress? She looks like the woman who works at the Circle K with Katie, a Samantha. Everybody calls her Sam. Too bad her last name isn’t Riley, huh? Then there’d be two Sam Rileys in my life.”

Everyone stands when the black-robed judge enters. The judge sits down and tells everyone else to sit down.

The first case called is a sentencing for the old man handcuffed to Jimmy. His lawyer gives a long sentencing speech. At one point he asks the people in the audience who have come to support this man to raise their hands. Among the ten or twelve people in the courtroom raising their hands the red-haired woman in the blue blouse raises her hand. The man is being sentenced for his first DUI felony. As soon as the sentence is pronounced the people in the audience for the man get to their feet, including the redheaded woman. Some of them wave at the old man. Sam looks at the old man and sees tears filling his eyes.

“I love you, Grandpa, be strong,” the red-haired woman calls out.

“There will be no more outbursts in this courtroom,” the judge says sternly.

The redhead shrugs and follows the others out of the courtroom.

“Could you chase after her and get her name for me?” Jimmy whispers to Sam. “What a fireball.”

“Mr. Riley, are you prepared to go forward with State v. Oxford?”

“Yes, your Honor.”

The case is called. Soon afterwards the prosecutor recommends the presumptive prison sentence and Sam gives a speech outlining the mitigating factors. Then the judge asks Jimmy if he has anything to say.

Jimmy desperately looks at the closed doors of the courtroom, as if sure that if he waits another moment at least one of the women will arrive. The doors don’t move.

“Yes, Judge Dandurry. First of all, I am very relieved that Margaret Penswingle got her money back. I was very depressed when I stole her checks and forged them. I wasn’t thinking right. Next, I want to tell you that I am ashamed of myself for blowing off probation. There is no excuse

for that and I am not going to strain your belief by making up excuses. I thought I could follow probation rules, but I failed at that. Part of my problem was that my mother died of cancer and thinking about her gets me depressed and I turn to pot and I got scared I'd get thrown in jail for testing positive for marijuana. That is not an excuse, I am explaining what I did but I know it was wrong. I would like you to give me another chance on probation, your Honor. I have had more time to grieve and heal myself about the loss of my mother. I am ready now to face my obligations like a man. I'm not a criminal, I'm just stupid sometimes. We all make mistakes. That's all."

"Mr. Oxford," Judge Dandurry says, staring at him.

"Yes sir?"

Judge Dandurry is in his mid-sixties, a gaunt grey-haired man with a wispy white moustache and a pale complexion.

"I would like to disabuse you of the notion that you are not a criminal. I am not saying you are a bad man, but you choose to lead a criminal lifestyle. You have a lengthy juvenile criminal history dating back to when you were caught with marijuana at your school at age 13. At age 19, sir, you went to prison for seven years for three residential burglaries. You have fourteen misdemeanors and now you are on probation for forging checks, which will soon be your second felony as an adult. You did not even pay the restitution to the victim yourself. A generous friend did that for you. Mr. Oxford, please do not tell me you aren't a criminal."

"But Judge, what I mean to say is--"

"You had your turn to speak, Mr. Oxford. Let me have mine. You lasted one week on probation before you absconded. I told you during your sentencing that you would have one chance on probation. I remember that. You should have remembered that."

"I do, your Honor. I did. I just had problems, you know. I meant well."

"You absconded and you were on the run for five months before the police found you. You picked up a new misdemeanor charge when you were arrested. You had to be chased down an alley by the police when they found you. You were lucky you were not charged with fleeing from law enforcement. Apparently that felony charge slipped through the cracks or you would have another felony case pending, sir. For you to say you are not a criminal simply astounds me."

"All I had was a little marijuana when they caught up with me, less than--"

"As you know, and have known since the age of 13, possession of marijuana is a crime. And you are on probation for forgery. In any event, I am not going to lecture you on semantics. Call yourself whatever you like. The legal system classifies you as a criminal, Mr. Oxford. I am designating your offense a felony so the legal system will also call you a two-time felon. I agree with your lawyer, however, that the mitigating factors outweigh the aggravating factors in your case, especially the fact that restitution to the victim has been paid in full. I will impose a mitigated sentence, although if you keep talking I may change my mind. I will sentence you to the mitigated

term of six months in jail, no work furlough, no credit for time served. Please use your six months in jail to give serious thought to how you want to conduct yourself when you are released.”

“Yes sir.”

“Do you understand your sentence.”

“So I don’t get the 19 days off for the time I’ve already done in jail?”

“No sir.”

“How come? Aren’t I supposed to get that?”

“No. If I sent you to prison you would get 19 days credit. I don’t have to give it to you if I am keeping you in jail. But I could give you six months and 19 days. And then give you the 19 days credit. Would you prefer I did that?”

Sam glances at Jimmy. Jimmy looks baffled.

“Mr. Oxford, I want you to be incarcerated for six months. It is a lenient sentence, under the circumstances. But if you don’t like the sentence, I’ll change it. Would you prefer the presumptive sentence of one year in prison with credit for 19 days in custody?”

“No sir.”

“I hope we never see you in a courtroom again, Mr. Oxford. I hope you can turn your life around. If you don’t, you are going to keep coming back here until eventually you get such a long sentence that you spend your final years in prison. Did you enjoy your seven years in prison?”

“No, your Honor.”

“Then quit committing crimes.” The judge picks up another file and opens it. “Mr. Rowland, are you prepared for State v. Hebert?”

“Yes, your Honor,” a tall lawyer answers.

“I have to go in a minute,” Sam whispers to Jimmy. “Call me if you have any questions. So you will get out in 180 days.”

“I thought he’d give me 30 days with 19 credit.”

“Sorry.”

“If any of the women call would you ask them to put money on my books? Especially Ellen, she can afford it.”

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When Sam gets back to his office he finds a typed letter on his chair.

Dear Judge Danberry,

My name is Ellen Hill. I am 28 years old. I have been living in Tucson for the last 10 years since my mother, sister, and I moved from Los Angeles. I work as a nurse at Tucson Medical Center. This is my seventh year there. I first met Jimmy Oxford when he moved into the apartment next to mine. We immediately became good friends because we both shared the love of music. I cannot begin to count how many days, after work, we would relax and listen to music together.

I know Jimmy hasn't always made the best decisions when it comes to the law. If he did, you wouldn't be reading this letter right now. But in all sincerity, I ask you to consider giving him a break. He is not a bad man. Only he has been smoking pot since he was in grade school and I have tried to help him stop and he has tried, but failed. I know he will try again and I know he will find the strength to stop so that he can finally resist the temptations and do the right things.

I think he had his last set-back because he was so torn up about his mother's death. I have been helping him recover from that. I will also help him in every other way I can. I can try to teach him ways to relax that don't got nothing to do with pot. I am thinking that maybe me and Jimmy should take yoga. I did yoga for a few months when I was getting divorced and it made every difference to me. I do kick-boxing now. But I can do yoga too and get Jimmy to do it with me and that can be the answer to getting him off the pot.

Thank you for reading my letter. And have a good day.

Ellen Hill

Sam puts the letter in Jimmy's file and walks out to his secretary's office.

"Did you put the letter from Ellen Hill on my chair?"

"Yeah. She came into the office about two minutes after you'd left for court. I told her where Judge Danduray's courtroom was but she said she was busy this morning. She was in sweat pants. I think she had just come from the gym or something. I would've brought the letter over to you but Clive has me working on a motion that I had to file by ten. And there was no one else around who could take the letter over for me. Elizabeth is at the dentist's."

"That's okay. Thanks. It wouldn't have changed Jimmy's sentence."

Sam goes back into his office. The red light on his phone is on. He has one message.

"Hello, Mr. Riley. This is Vanessa Hanshaw. I am Jimmy's mother. I received a call from Jimmy's Uncle, Tony Hanshaw, this morning that Jimmy is being sentenced this morning. Jimmy didn't tell me he was on probation, much less that he went on the run. Could you please call me and tell me what his situation is? Thank you very much."

She leaves her phone number twice.

"Hello. Is Ms. Vanessa Hanshaw there?"

"Speaking."

“Hi, I’m Sam Riley, I’m returning your call.”

“Thank you, sir. Jimmy hasn’t been in contact with me for about a year. I lent him a lot of money he said he was going to use to buy a car so he could stop having to take the bus to work. Then I heard, from his uncle, he kept taking the bus. I don’t know what he did with the money, but he must’ve thought I would have been furious. It isn’t the first time he has gotten a lot of money from me on false promises, but it will be the last. It is time for tough love. I spoiled that boy. Tony heard from Katie that Jimmy ripped off one of his girlfriends, stole her checkbook and forged some checks. So what happened in court this morning?”

“Jimmy got six months jail time and the judge designated his offense a felony.”

“Sometimes I think Jimmy will never learn. What did he do to violate probation?”

“I’m afraid he didn’t give me permission to talk to you. I’m sorry. There is a rule that says that I can’t share information with anyone, even a parent, unless the client gives me permission. He didn’t mention you when he told me who I could talk to.”

“How many girls did he put on the list?” She laughs. “I know, you can’t answer. Okay, I’m not surprised he didn’t want you talking to me. Did he tell you I was dead?”

“Um. . .”

“The only reason I ask is that Katie, probably one of the girls on your list, told his Uncle Tony that she was sorry I had passed. Tony is my brother. Tony was visiting Jimmy and Katie. Jimmy ran down to the store for some cigarettes and while he was gone Katie told Tony that Jimmy was grieving for me every day. Then Katie had this wild story about how Jimmy slept in my hospital room as I was dying, for a week, and Tony stayed away for some reason. Jimmy painted himself as a loving son and Tony as a cold, selfish man. Tony said he almost laughed in her face. But he’s a good guy, he didn’t tell her that I’m still alive and that Jimmy fed her a line.”

“I can tell Jimmy you called and ask him if I have permission to talk to you, if you’d like. He calls me on a regular basis. If he gives me permission to talk with you, I’ll call you back.”

“He was a good boy, a completely different boy, before his father divorced me. His father was like Jimmy, he needs more than one woman. Jimmy was almost 13 when the divorce was finalized. Everything changed and I couldn’t do anything with him after that.”

“That’s too bad.”

“Got so you couldn’t believe a word out of Jimmy’s mouth. Tony spent a lot of time with him, took him places, tried to be like an uncle and a father to him, but it did no good. Age 13 and Jimmy is caught, in eighth grade, for bringing marijuana to school. I had no idea what he was doing, he lied to me. Jimmy was involved with the juvenile court until he turned 18. Nothing different as a so-called grown-up. Seven years in prison did nothing for him. He juggles girlfriends, he never holds down a job for more than a week, he has lied to me and his uncle over and over to get so-called loans. I am afraid it would take a miracle for Jimmy to turn his life around. But miracles do happen.

Give Jimmy my love, okay? Tell him I'm still his mother. You can tell him he will never get another dime out of me, but that I'm here for him. Tell him I'm praying for him."



The next morning Jimmy calls.

"Hey, Sam, I want to talk to you about my sentence. Put in a motion to get me my 19 days of credit. I should get six months minus those 19 days. That's what everyone in here says. The judge cheated me, man."

"No. The judge talked about that at your sentencing yesterday. He doesn't have to give you credit for those days unless he sends you to prison. What he tried to explain to you, though I can understand that you might not have followed what he was saying because sentencings are so emotional, but what he told you was that he could have given you six months and 19 days and then given you credit for the 19 days. In other words, he wanted to keep you in jail for a full six months. That's his decision, he's the judge."

"Fucker. You know what they call him in here?"

"Yeah, I do actually. By the way, a woman who identified herself as your late mother, Vanessa Hanshaw, called me yesterday. Didn't you tell me she died of pancreatic cancer?"

"She did. Really. Really. I don't know who would call you claiming to be my mother. I can't believe that, that's really fucked up. I wonder if Ellen did that because she is mad I haven't written her any letters."

"Whether or not this woman who called was your mother—"

"I told you my mother died."

"Look, Jimmy, clients lie to me all the time. I don't take it personally. I don't cry myself to sleep. Anyhow, whoever it was claiming to be Vanessa Hanshaw says she is praying for you, okay?"

"What?"

"The woman I talked to yesterday said she thinks you got scared she would be angry at you after she loaned you a lot of money to buy a car and you didn't buy a car. She said she knows you are telling people she is dead. She says that you told Katie that she is dead and then Katie told your Uncle Tony, but your Uncle Tony kept his mouth shut. And this woman who called claiming to be your mother ended up by saying she is praying for you."

"She did?"

"Yes."

"You're not bullshitting me?"

"Why would I?"

“Yeah, that’s my mother. You can call her back. I give you permission to talk to her. Sorry I lied to you about her. I don’t know, I thought she’d get in a big rage after I didn’t do what I promised I’d do, get that car. I threw the money away on dope and the casino. It was stupid. Stupid! Did she sound okay?”

“Yes, she sounded good.”

“I’ll write her a letter. Did Ellen or Katie or Sherry call to find out what my sentence was?”

“Nope. Only your mother called.”

“Well, at least there wasn’t blood on the floor in the courtroom. I admit, though, it would’ve been fun to watch Judge Little Berries try to break up a fight between Ellen and Katie.” Jimmy laughs. “But that redhead. Man! I asked that old guy who she was, I wanted to find out her name, as we were going down in the elevator. You wouldn’t believe what he said to me.”

“Oh, I might.”



## Longhouse

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The poet John Levy makes his living as a public defender in Tucson, Arizona. He has begun to write fiction for the reading pleasure of his father, and the above story is his first from a work-in-progress: "Moon Ache, Crack Cocaine in a Boom Box". These stories will be loosely based around the State Criminal Defense System. John is the author of many books of poetry: *Among the Consonants* (1980) as well as a book of prose *We Don't Kill Snakes Where We Come From: two years in a Greek village* (1994). A new book of poems from First Intensity has recently been released — *Oblivion, Tyrants, Crumbs*.