

AMPHICAR

John Boston

He was looking for a used car for his son when he first saw it. It was parked over in a corner, like the pretty wallflower at the school dance, not sure whether she should put herself out there or not. It was the most amazing thing he had ever seen.

He hated car buying and car salesmen in general. If it was really necessary to buy, why would he need a salesman to help him make up his mind? Still, he knew it was part of the game. He just hoped this one at least had a double-digit IQ, which nowadays was pretty much becoming a luxury. The man was older, perhaps a better word would have been "*seasoned*". Most of the cars were unrestored classics. The internet had made car buying much easier, but had also driven the price of these classics up through the roof, making them unaffordable except to those with tons of money. This lot was different. These were drivers, not trailer babies. The kind of car you could give to a seventeen-year-old kid and not worry about the consequences. These cars had real steel bumpers and seats that seemed to go on forever. They didn't have an "infotainment console" or any of that crap. It was a car. You put gas in it and drove it. It was supposed to get you from point A to point B, not try and run your life.

He liked the 1974 Ford LTD, but he just couldn't take his eyes off the strange car in the corner. The salesman introduced himself. He was wearing a suit and tie, the way respectable people should dress, not wearing a tee-shirt with some stupid slogan on it.

"Hi, there? Are you tire kicking or buying?" he said

"Well, you get right to the point.....I like that" said Jeb.

"Small talk doesn't pay the bills." said the old man

"Fair enough.....How much for the LTD?"

"Forty-five hundred. You can drive her off the lot. Clean Title, don't have to worry about smogging her either. She's too old."

"Forty-five hundred.....she's got a leaky rear main. Gonna need a complete tune-up. How's the tranny?"

"Fine...only got sixty thousand original miles on her."

Jeb knew these old cars were very easy to tinker with. It wasn't hard to remove the odometer and swap out a different one. A car with two hundred thousand miles could suddenly have two hundred miles with a new odometer from eBay. The old titles did not record the mileage on the vehicles in his state, at least those not made before 1980.

"Well, if it had the four-barrel engine instead of the two barrel I guess I could bite, but it would cost me another thousand just to get it running right. These cars were smog motors. A lot of potentials, they just need some work."

"Sure, but I'm not asking an arm and leg for them either." said the salesman.

"These your cars?"

"Yup. At one point I had over fifty in my warehouse. I've got numbers matching L88 Corvette if you're interested."

"I'm buying for my son, I think that might be a little too much car for him," said Jeb

They walked around the lot, Jeb looked and asked questions. He liked the cars, but he really loved the weird-looking car in the back. The one that seemed to sit up about two feet higher than it should. He thought it was a Volkswagen.

"What on Earth is this thing?" asked Jeb

"That is an Amphicar 777. Made in the early sixties in Germany, though I guess at the time it would have been called West Germany. It is a car you take on the water. It's a car and a boat."

"Really? It actually works?"

"Sure does. I tested it myself. Had it out on the water for almost twenty minutes. Doesn't go very fast, but it doesn't leak either. Not a drop. I put down some paper towels on the floor before I went into the water. They were still dry when I took it out of the water."

"It's ridiculous," said Jeb

"Yeah, it probably is, but it's also rare. Once one of them goes to a big auction and gets money, the price doubles the next day. Never in a million years thought that these old cars would be worth the kind of money they are today."

"I guess that's the magic of the internet," said Jeb

"Take that 69 GTO over there. I could get twenty grand for that car in its present condition. Who in their right mind would pay that much money for a car that gets nine miles a gallon and can't be driven in the rain or snow is beyond me."

"Nostalgia can swing people's minds on things."

"I guess back then, we just never knew what we were missing. I just bought a new Dodge truck a few months back. The power and technology in that thing are amazing. I'll take that any day over these old cars. They were great for their time, but that's about it. Course, if you are buying a car for your son, there is one nice, added benefit with these old cars."

"What's that?"

"You have over four thousand pounds of steel protecting you. Your boy gets in a wreck, he stands a much better chance of walking away from it, rather than being in a new car. Airbags aren't a guarantee. Forty-three hundred pounds is."

The man did have a point. Most cars nowadays were just glorified golf carts. The weight reduction certainly helped with the mileage, but it killed some other parts, namely the safety. Everyone will tell you highway deaths are down over the last few decades thanks to new technology, but Jeb thought it was due more to the fact that there are far fewer 16-year-olds driving than there was during his time. He had to jump through hoops to get Zach his license. The insurance alone was enough to stop most families from allowing their kids to drive their cars.

"How much?"

"Four thousand. I could get triple that if I were to price it online, but that means shipping it to God knows where. I had to ship a 53 Ford to the Netherlands last month. What a pain in the ass that was. I'd much rather just sell it in person."

"I'm sure you're right. I guess I was also looking to start building my own collection as well. This baby certainly would be a nice addition."

"You don't want to buy this car. It's a novelty, not really an everyday driver?"

"I thought you sold cars for a living? Shouldn't you be trying to talk me into buying it instead of talking me out of it?" asked Jeb, somewhat surprised by the old man's candor.

"In this state, you have seventy-two hours from the time the car is bought to change your mind and get a full refund. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a guy walk into this lot and plunk down thousands for a car, only to return the next day with his tail tucked between his legs asking for a full refund. Once the wife sees what he bought for him and not her, it's game over. I just don't want to put you or me through all that. I can legally take ten percent of the refund. You'd just be throwing money away."

"I have a feeling no matter what car I bought, my wife would still find some reason to bitch about it. It's my money, not hers. I've been saving for a few years. I'm sure she'll hate it, but women hate anything they don't buy themselves."

"It's up to you. I'll let you have it for four grand, that's tax title and license. I don't bullshit people. The final price includes everything. Are you sure you want your son to show up in this car when he's picking up a girl for a date?" said the old man

"I'd be happy if my son even had a date," said Jeb.

Two hours later, Jeb was the proud owner of a German Amphicar 777, production number 232, from Stuttgart, Germany. He checked the Vin Number on the title before signing. He gave the man the cash and it was done. He took the car for a drive with the old man. They drove to a nearby lake with a boat launching area. There was no one else around and decided to put the car in the water. It floated just like a boat. He turned on the propeller and drove around the lake. Jeb

was floored. It was a totally unnecessary purchase, maybe even a ridiculous purchase, but it was his. He owned it. Just like the old man had said, there was not a single leak on it. Pretty impressive for a car almost sixty years old. It didn't burn oil and fired up once the battery was fully charged. Jeb was impressed. When those Germans set their sights on something, they do it right, they don't half-ass anything.

He didn't even hesitate before signing the purchase agreement.

"You sure you want to do this? I've got plenty of other cars in this price range."

"Well, we have two other cars as well. I guess I'll have to come back another time for my son's car," said Jeb as he signed

He drove the car home, which was over an hour away. He wasn't even sure if the car took regular gas or not. It was a tiny engine, so hopefully, the unleaded gas wouldn't really matter on such a low compression engine. He got plenty of stares. Someone even took a picture of him driving down the freeway. The car had no power, just getting it up to the speed limit was a challenge, but it wasn't built for speed, it was built to go in the water. Once he got back into town, he knew what his wife was going to say. He could just see the expression on her face and hear the words coming out of her mouth, he knew her all too well.

"Jeb, that is the ugliest fucking car I have ever seen? You aren't going to let Zach drive that thing, are you? It looks like something a circus clown or midget would be driving," said Alicia in disbelief.

"I kind of like it mom. It's different, just like me," said Zach as he looked the car over.

"I thought you said you were going to look for a car for our son, not some stupid toy for you," she said

"I told you I had money saved for my car collection. This one just caught my eye. You can't look at it like it's a regular car, you have to look at it like a rare coin or painting, something that will only go up in value over time."

"You actually believe this piece of shit is going to go up in value over time? Who, besides you, would ever pay more than ten dollars for this thing?" she asked

"Well, I can see I'm going to get nowhere here with you. The car will go in the barn and you won't ever have to look at it," said Jeb

"Well, that's great Jeb, but Zach still doesn't have a car?"

"He's only seventeen honey. I don't really think he needs his own car. He can drive my old GEO until he gets more road time, then we can buy him his own car. Zach, is that ok?"

"As long as I don't have to drive a station wagon, I'm fine. Those things look ridiculous," said Zach

"I thought maybe you would come home with a beater. Something ugly, but practical, instead you bought a car that goes in the water? I don't even want to know how much money you spent on it."

"I'm glad to know I have your complete support on this one honey," said Jeb

She threw her hands up in the air and went back inside. Jeb and Zach looked the car over.

"It's German son. You know what that means?"

"It's overpriced?"

"It means quality. There was a time when people took pride in their work. A time when engineers and assemblers weren't worried about their health care plans or pensions and just wanted to show the world what they could do. This little car here is the embodiment of that type of attitude."

"So, I get the GEO mobile? You know, it's not really a very safe car. I get in a wreck and I'm toast."

"Well, son I know that. Unfortunately, we can't really control every little thing that happens to us. I would never put you in a situation where I think you might get hurt. You're just going to and from school, then to work. I think you'll be ok. I still don't like the idea of you driving in the city."

"I know, but how else am I going to get better?"

"I will pay for more driving lessons. Being a good driver doesn't just happen overnight."

"Mom seems really pissed."

"She'll get over it."

"I just don't like being put in the middle of all of your drama," said Zach

"You aren't. Son, women treat their cars like the men they marry. They want a good-looking, flashy, smooth-talking type of car. The problem is son, that doesn't make a marriage work. Dependability and being practical is what makes a marriage work."

"Dad, I don't think you should be giving anybody marriage advice. I mean your own marriage is kind of a train wreck. Do you and mom even have sex anymore?"

"I don't think that's any of your business Zach, but to answer your question, yes we do. A lot of it as a matter of fact. We might even have a quickie when you go to work today."

"Dad, that is *TMI*, big time."

"Well, you brought it up," said Jeb

Zach had a job as a bag boy at a local supermarket. He was out of the house more than he was in it. He had gone from being a ten-year-old boy to almost a man in a few short years. The internet and mass media seemed to make everyone grow up faster than his generation did. He and his son used to spend so much time together, now all they did was exchange greetings and go about their business. Such was the nature of getting older. It wasn't just the fact that his son was growing up and had his own life. It meant that he and his wife were alone in their giant house with nothing really to say to one another. He wasn't sure when it happened or why, but it had happened. They had simply stopped speaking to one another. His wife would disappear for hours at a time. He would text her, asking where she was and she would just respond by saying she was running errands or at the gym. The few times he had tried to initiate some kind of intimacy with her, she had politely declined. It had been months since they had sex. It was beginning to really weigh on his mind. He found her in the kitchen.

"Look, I know the car is ridiculous, but you can't think of it as a regular car, it's for my collection," he said

"Our son needs a car, Jeb, not some toy," she said angrily.

"You really think we should just give him the keys to one of our cars and let him have at it? Your Chevy cost me almost forty thousand dollars."

"Well, he's got to learn somehow. I know he's a dork, but even he wouldn't be caught dead in that thing."

"I can still buy him a beater. I've got money left over. Five years from now, that car could be worth triple what I paid for it. It won't seem like such a crazy purchase then, now will it?"

"Jeb, if somebody is stupid enough to pay triple what you paid for it, then God help them. I just wish you would have asked my opinion before you bought it is all."

"You would have told me no."

"Of course I would have, but at least you would have asked me, that's all I want, is for you to ask me my opinion sometimes."

"Alicia, you don't ask me for my opinion on what you buy, why would I ask for yours?"

"Because that's what couples are supposed to do. We're supposed to talk to each other and ask the other one what they think. I'm not asking for too much."

"You disappear for the entire day. I ask you where you are and you give me some bullshit response. How do you think that makes me feel? You want us to talk, but when I try and talk to you, I get shot down. I just didn't think you would really care about my car collection is all, it's not that I don't value your opinion, you're a smart lady, but you don't know shit about the classic car market, do you?"

"That's not the point, Jeb."

"It kind of is the point. If I had a question about how to look better or eat better, you'd be the first one I would ask."

"Speaking of that, you know you really have let yourself go to hell," she said

Jeb felt like he was hit in the gut. He was forty-five and not getting any younger. He smoked cigars and drank too much beer. He worked so damn much, all he did when he was away from the office was relax and catch up on sleep. It was beginning to show. He did not look like the collegiate track star she had married.

"Ok, you have a point. I probably should take better care of myself. I know you're killing yourself to stay in shape, but sometimes I just think it's pointless like we're trying to move a mountain. We all age. We're all got to shit. It's going to happen to all of us, no matter how much time we spend in the gym."

"Jeb, I used to watch your track meets. You could run a mile in just over five minutes. I don't think you could run a mile in half an hour? Yes, we all age, but that doesn't mean we all get older. Just because you have grey hair doesn't mean you are old. After a hard workout, I just feel better. I don't want to look like some pile of shit when I'm sixty years old. I still want to be enjoying life."

Jeb hadn't even tried to run in years. He set a high school record for the fastest mile time and ten thousand meter time. Now he got winded just going up the stairs. He could see Alicia just wasn't really all that into him anymore. It was obvious to see. I guess it happens at some point. She no longer saw him as someone she wanted to sleep with. Maybe it happens in all marriages. Once your looks run out, you'd better like the other person, or it's game over. He still wasn't sure if they still loved each other, or had just gotten comfortable with each other. His marriage had hit a brick wall. He knew he had to make some changes, he just didn't know what they should be.

"You're right Alicia. I probably have let myself go. I work sixty hours a week so you can have your own life and spend hours at the gym and not have to worry about making money or supporting our son. I deal with a psycho for a boss and idiots for coworkers that wouldn't piss on me if I was on fire. I kill myself so you don't have to, so I'd appreciate it if you could cut me a little slack."

He could see that she had to acknowledge that he did have a good point. Her facial expression changed.

"Sometimes I worry about us. What are we going to do when Zach leaves? Will I just spend my days at the gym and you spend your life at work? Where does it all end?"

"I don't know honey. I don't have a crystal ball. I want to tell you I love you, but I'm afraid you won't say it back."

"Of course I love you, Jeb. I just don't like you sometimes," she said

"Well dear, that might be a problem," he said.

Jeb knew there was a storm brewing. He could see the clouds and sense the drop in temperature, but he was just as powerless to stop it as he would be stopping a hurricane. He knew he had to get back in shape. He had even tried out for the Olympics in 1996. Didn't make the cut, but he certainly got noticed. Now he was just another overweight, middle-aged nobody who had nothing to show for the last twenty years of his life, except a big house and a ton of money. For most men, that was all they wanted or needed. The whole world could implode around them, but as long as they had a ton of money in the bank, who cares? Jeb had found that making money doesn't mean shit when everyone around you is miserable. His marriage was in trouble. He and his son were strangers. His company which had been his lifeline for the past decade was being sold to an investment group. The first thing those bastards would do is to get rid of the highest wage earners and replace them with lower-paid millennials who had a hard enough time just showing up to work on time. As much as Jeb wanted to change his life, he knew he just couldn't. He was a senior executive at his company. Nobody wants to hire a senior executive due to the fact that most HR teams know executives don't do a damn thing to contribute to the bottom line. He had worked his way up the ladder. Put his time in and then some. He had given the best years of his life to this company. Once the old man who ran the company died, he probably should have seen this coming. His sons wanted nothing to do with the place and sold it to the highest bidder. He knew once the sale was final, he'd be out on the street. He knew the good times were about to come to an end. That was another reason why he bought the car. He figured in a few months he wouldn't even be able to afford a loaf of bread. He knew he had to change things, he just didn't know-how. He figured the first step was to try and re-connect with his son. Get him talking. See if he can once again become the most important person in his son's life.

"Dad, I know you're trying to be a super dad here, but honestly, I just don't think you can help me," said Zach one night after dinner.

"You won't know until we try. I'm guessing by the way you've been brooding around here for the last couple of days, you are having girl problems, am I right?"

"Yea," said Zach sulking into the couch.

"What's her name?"

"What? That's not it at all."

"Come on son. Believe it or not, I used to be young once too," said Jeb.

Zach rolled his eyes. Jeb knew he just hit pay dirt.

"Summer.....yes, that's her real name. Summer Thomas. I'm in love with her."

"Wait.....wasn't she over at the house a few months ago?"

"Yeah, that's the one. She's the love of my life dad, but I think she just wants to be friends. That's the worst. It's like the ultimate second prize, just being friends with a girl. I'd kind of rather she not even be friends with me at all. I think it might be easier."

"Well son, I know it's easy to fixate on a girl, but if she just wants to be friends, there's not a whole lot you can do."

"I know. That doesn't make it any easier."

"Love never is easy. Have you told her how you feel?" asked Jeb

"No, not really. I'm just afraid she'll be like: oh, that's cool, instead of saying she loves me back. I'm in the friend zone. Harder than hell to get yourself out once you're in." said Zach.

"You guys are friends then, right?"

"Oh yeah. I talk to her almost every day and then we message at night. The worst part of it all is that she's also in love with somebody who won't love her back. Sometimes I think God has a funny sense of humor." said Zach.

"Zach, I know these things can be tough for a boy your age. Hell, even at my age, they aren't easy. As hard as it is to hear, you just got to let these things take their course. Your life isn't going to fall apart because you two aren't together. My advice would be to just move on. If you fixate on just one girl, you could be missing opportunities with other girls who don't want you in their friend zone. Not much point in chasing something that just isn't going to happen."

"Maybe you're right. It's just that we're perfect for each other in so many ways. I guess both of us have to see that in order to make it happen." he said

"Zach, I only had one girlfriend when I was in high school. We dated my junior year. I thought I was in love with her. She broke up with me a week before prom so she could go with someone else. Needless to say I was devastated."

"That sucks."

"Oh at the time, it certainly did. In retrospect, it was probably the best thing anyone has ever done for me. If we had stayed together, we would probably have gotten married and then divorced. We were far too young and immature to devote ourselves to the other person at that age. I would never have met your mother and had you. She really did me a huge favor." said Jeb

"I guess I never realized you and mom dated other people before you got together. I hope you guys don't get divorced."

"Why would we get divorced?"

"I don't know. She just doesn't really seem all that into you anymore."

"Of course she is. She just has her own life now. I have mine, but we still love each other."

"I guess. You'd tell me if you were seeing someone else, right?" asked Zach

"Would you really want me to?"

"Yeah, I don't really like surprises. I think most people secretly hate them. They would much rather have known beforehand."

"Well, I guess I can honestly tell you I am not seeing someone else. If that makes you feel any better. Why would you say something like that?"

"Well.....never mind. I don't want to start anything."

"I think you already did, son."

"Mom.....I think sometimes she might be seeing someone else. At least she wants to that is."

"Why do you say that?"

"Dad, have you ever seen her get ready to go to the gym? Nobody should wear perfume and makeup to the gym. Why would you? Unless you wanted to impress somebody there."

Jeb was a bit taken back by his son's sentence. He did have a point. Alicia did seem to spend a lot of time getting ready to go to the gym where she would just sweat it all off. He was more upset with himself. He wondered if there was anything else his son was holding onto.

He didn't sleep much that night. He remembers meeting the Summer girl and just couldn't see how his son could possibly be into her. She was slightly overweight and dressed like a boy. Jeb wouldn't even have looked twice at her when he was Zach's age, but each to his own. He was more upset about what Zach had said about his mom, his wife who was sound asleep beside him. As much as he wanted to wake her up and just plain ask her if she was seeing anyone else, he just could bear to her answer. If she wasn't now, she would be at some point. His wife was just not into him anymore. He really had let himself go. He had taken her affection for granted. Still, that didn't give her the right to just screw around on him. He was reminded of a scene from a movie he had seen recently. The PI was talking to his client about his wife's extracurricular activities.

"Bud, I've seen enough of these types of things to be able to tell you that if your wife isn't getting it from you, then she's definitely getting it from someone else."

That was just the problem, just who exactly was she getting it from?

The next few weeks were not any easier. His company was sold to a bunch of Wall Street vampires who wasted no time in axing everyone who made over ten dollars an hour at the front office. Somehow, Jeb was spared, at least for this round. People he had known for decades were gone. Replaced by lackey MBA types with little real-world experience and absolutely no people skills. Jeb figured the new owners were looking to dump as much expense as they could in order to make the company more attractive to sell it off once more. The types of people who actually built things and made real money were becoming extinct. Jeb's opinion was that the MBA mentality had ruined America. Pretty soon the entire economy would be based on moving other people's money around and using smoke and mirrors to get profits, not actually making things and selling them. That type of thinking was something right out of the 20th century. He was putting less and less time in at work, partially out of fear that he drew the new owners' attention

and part of it was based on the fact that he just simply did not care anymore. He had more pressing concerns around the home front.

His talk with Zach did little to quench his fire for Summer. The two of them had shared an awkward kiss the other night. Needless to say, Zach was now clawing and fighting his way out of the friend zone with Summer. They were now spending an hour or more each night discussing his relationship with her. Last night he came home from his job and threw his books on the table. He sat down on the couch and said nothing to Alicia or him.

"Tough day at the office dear?" asked Jeb

"She's going away for most of the summer. Summer is leaving for the summer."

"Where's she going?"

"Oh, that's the best part. She's going away to fat camp.....I guess they call it 'weight loss camp' now."

"You mean a camp designed to make kids lose weight?"

"Yup. For six weeks. Six weeks of my poor baby eating rice cakes and sweet potatoes and doing group exercises. Who in their right mind would subject their kids to something like that?"

"So, then her parents are sending her?"

"Yeah. Her mom was a big softball star in college. Her team went all the way to the collegiate world series, so naturally, she wants Summer to follow in her shoes, except she doesn't even like softball. She's an artist, not an athlete. I just wish her parents would accept her for who she is. She wants to go to art school, but her mom keeps pushing her to follow in her footsteps. If she goes to that camp, I'll lose her forever dad." said Zach sulking.

"Why does her going to camp mean the end for you two?"

"It doesn't mean the end, but I know how vulnerable she is right now. She's like a lost little lamb away from the flock. There are all kinds of dangerous predators just waiting to devour her. The kind with keg taps and Camaros in their driveways."

"Well Zach, I doubt you're going to lose her over this. If anything she'll probably be glad to have you to talk to and get her through this."

"They take away their phones. Everyone has to write letters. Letters dad! Who the hell writes letters anymore? I'm not even sure I know how to write a letter." said Zach

"I see. Well, there doesn't sound like there's a lot you can do for her except to be there when she needs you."

"That's just it dad, she does need me. She needs me now, more than ever. I can't let her go to that camp. She'll be miserable there."

"It's not up to you Zach. I know it's hard to see something like this happen to one of your friends. She'll get through it, then you guys can have your entire senior year together."

"Dad....I know this is going to sound crazy. I mean it is crazy, but love makes us do crazy things sometimes."

"Zach. The last thing in the world you want to do is to get between Summer and her parents. That's not your battle to fight. You can support her without going against her parents. Remember, they still call the shots. She's not even 18, right?"

"Not until November. Man, this sucks. I was hoping this could be the summer of Summer and Zach. Guess it will just be the summer of Zach and his XBOX."

Jeb knew to leave well enough alone. He knew at 17, the hardest thing in the world would be learning to accept the faults and imperfections of others, especially those of adults, who were supposed to know better. People aren't perfect, Zach was just going to have to accept that as he got older. At 17, even the smallest of pills can be the most bitter.

For the next few weeks, Jeb tried to pretend that everything in his life was going well, but he just wasn't that good at pretending. He found several messages on his wife's phone from a name he did not recognize. They weren't really intimate, but she clearly had a new male friend in her life whom she did not tell Jeb about. The new management staff at his company managed to lose several clients with their ridiculous pricing strategy, that Jeb and several others told them was not going to work. One of the new owners put his son in charge who was fresh out of a major business school. Smart kid, but had no real-world experience doing anything and it was beginning to show. Jeb knew he was on borrowed time. He had a 401k plan and a pretty good nest egg he could dip into if things got bad, which they almost certainly were. He had heard the next round of layoffs were coming and he would most certainly be on the list.

Zach did nothing but lounge around the house. He would leave to go to work or play basketball with his friends, but that was about it. He was lovesick in a way that Jeb could not have imagined. He asked Zach about Summer one night while the two of them were watching a basketball game.

"How's Summer doing?"

"She managed to smuggle a letter out with her sister who came to see her. She made sure it got to me. Me dad, I'm the one she expects to save her."

"What do you mean smuggle a letter out?"

"They read her mail before it leaves camp. If it says anything bad about the camp, they chuck it. It's run by two former marine drill sergeants. She says she's so sick and tired of being sick and tired. She's dying in there, dad. They lock them in their rooms at night so they can't escape. Even if they did, there's no place for them to go. The camp is on an island out in the lake. Even if she did manage to get out, the island is like two miles from the mainland. If she did manage to make it out, her parents would just send her back. There's no place for her to go."

"I'm sorry bud. I wish you could write to her."

"I gotta be careful what I say. She says they're always being watched. Dad, there is one way for her to get out of all this.....and it's sitting out back in the garage." said Zach.

"You mean the AMPHICAR?"

"Yup. Quick in, quick out. I just have to get her off that damn island. She can crash here or stay with her other friends until camp is over. She told me when and where to be. Dad, will you help me?"

Jeb wanted to tell his son that he was crazy and he should just stick with XBOX and his job and leave the opposite sex for years that will follow, but it would be falling on deaf ears. His son needed him now, he just couldn't turn away. If he really was going to pull this off, he would much rather be there to supervise it. As ridiculous as it sounded, it really was the smart thing to do, if there really was a smart choice in this case."

"You want me to drive?"

"Might be a good idea. We just have to be there at the island at three in the morning when everyone is asleep. We can drive right up to the docks, pick her up, then scoot back in the water and rive back to shore. It's simple."

"Zach, her parents probably paid quite a bit of money to send her to this camp. I doubt very much they will get their money back if she leaves."

"Probably not, but I don't care about money right now, I care about my baby's happiness. No amount of money in the world is worth being miserable."

Jeb was in this balls deep by now. Zach had the entire plan worked out from start to finish. Summer would be at the dock at three in the morning. They would cruise up to the dock, pick her up, and be gone. By the time they woke up the next morning, she would be long gone. It was simple, at least that's what they thought.

They both slept on the idea. Jeb didn't do much sleeping that night. It was as if he was sleeping next to a complete stranger. How he had managed to let his wife slip away without even noticing, he had no idea. That would be another battle for another day. Right now it was Zach's turn. He knew Summer's parents were going to be less than thrilled when they find out he helped their daughter escape weight loss camp. It could backfire on him. Just because he got her off that island didn't mean they were home free, it just mean they had won that round. There would undoubtedly be more to follow.

He met Zach the next morning at the breakfast table. He made a pot of coffee and they both sat down without saying a word. Zach just ate his cereal and pretended to be reading the paper. Alicia wasn't even up yet. She rarely got out of bed before nine, unless she had an early gym class.

"Still want to go through with it?" asked Jeb

"Yup." said Zach without looking up.

"When?"

"Tonight....or tomorrow morning at three. It's now or never. She'll be there. We just have to be there waiting for her."

"There's no other way? Where's she going to go once she's free?" asked Jeb

"Her sister's house in Vermont. Her mom had her sister when she was only 24, then had Summer when she was 38. You can kind of see the issue."

"Well, as long as she has a place to stay. I'll drive.....ok?"

"Ok. Be ready to go at midnight. Not one-second sooner. They do a headcount at camp so we only have a narrow window of opportunity to pull this off."

"They do a headcount at fat camp?" asked Jeb

"It's weight loss camp dad, weight loss camp and yes they do, every hour. They don't screw around about their campers losing weight."

"I guess not. Ok, I'll be ready at midnight."

"I'm counting on you dad," said Zach as left the kitchen to get ready for school.

Jeb sat there eating his oatmeal and sipping his coffee. He thought about telling Alicia what they were up to, but decided against it. She was on a need-to-know basis and right now, that was not something she needed to know. He figured Summer would probably end up crashing here for at least a few days. He figured the girl's parents would probably show up as well. Yeah, this was going to be a real picnic. Why couldn't Zach just fall for a normal hot and shallow girl like every other guy? What was it about her that made her so irresistible to him? She wasn't ugly, she just wasn't really all that attractive either. The kind of girl you would look at then instantly forget. Not the kind to throw your life away over. He hoped this phase would pass and he would just move on. But, tonight though, it was down to business. He had an overweight girl to rescue from fat camp.

As soon as Jeb heard about the staff meeting, he knew what was coming. There were two suits in the building to do the actual firing. His buddy Morty, who had been with the company for almost thirty years was let go. When Jeb was called to his boss's office, he knew what to expect.

They were polite about it. One of the suits said the company was headed in a different direction and that they needed staff members who shared the new owner's vision, whatever that was. They thanked him for the nearly two decades of service he gave to the place and then sent him on his way. Their severance package was generous, more generous than he was expecting. He would get the remainder of his yearly salary, plus health insurance. Come January 1st when the money ran out, he had no idea what he was going to do. He could barely afford the house and taxes when he was working. He had no idea how he was going to pay the bills once he was

unemployed. He had skills, but not the kind that any company would want to pay for. The last few years of his work-life consisted of showing up and going through the motions, just doing enough to keep his job and collecting the paycheck. He had been passed over twice for a promotion, so his enthusiasm was already waning. Still, even though he knew this day was coming, it did not make any easier when it did. He never told Alicia about any of this, not wanting to worry her. He figured things would hit rock bottom once he told her. Once the money ran out, he figured she would soon follow. Jeb had gone right from the frying pan headfirst into the fire.

He said nothing to anyone when he came home that night. He saw Alicia sitting at the kitchen table with one of her girlfriends. She didn't even say anything or get up as he came in. He kissed her on the forehead and went into his study. He poured himself a glass of his best scotch and laid down on his futon. He was sleeping before he finished his drink.

His son woke him up at around ten that night.

"Dad, we gotta go!" he said nervously.

Jeb could barely open his eyes and would have given one of his testicles just for a few more hours of sleep, but a promise was a promise. As absurd as this whole thing was, his son needed him now, he couldn't let him down.

It took about twenty minutes, but they were finally on the road. He wondered if Alicia would hear him and ask what on Earth they were doing. But she never came downstairs. She didn't even text him to ask why they were leaving. He figured they would just show up with the girl in the morning and Jeb could deal with the drama then.

The old 777 fired right up. Jeb still hadn't registered it in his name and it had the temporary tags on it. It was perfectly legal to put on the road, but he knew the cops loved to pull people over with expired temporary tags. Most drivers would let them expire, not wanting to pay the exorbitant car registration fees in this state. He had no idea what they were doing and was certainly old enough to know better, but none of that seemed to matter right now. His life was falling apart, but he needed the one constant in his life to remain the same and that was his relationship with his son.

Zach had written the directions down explicitly. The camp was located off the highway on a private island. The island was only about two square miles separated by the main road by almost two miles. It wasn't terribly hard to find. Jeb wasn't really concerned about finding the island, he was much more concerned about getting in and out undetected. These were two 17-year-old kids with zero real-world experience. He wasn't sure what to do if the cops were called. He just didn't see how the camp could force the girl to stay there if she didn't want to be there, that was bordering on kidnapping. He figured if push came to shove, the law was on his side, but most cops weren't lawyers, they tended to make snap decisions and then lawyer up once the fallout came down.

"You're sure you want to go through with this Zach?" he asked as they headed down the driveway.

"Dad, I've never been more sure of anything in my life." his son replied.

He was expecting his son to doze off in the car once they were on the road, but he never did. He was wide awake, the entire time. He even offered to drive. Jeb was tempted but didn't want anyone to see his son driving a car like this at this time of night. He made sure everything on the car was working before they left. Headlights, brake lights, tail lights. The last thing he wanted was to get pulled over for something stupid like that. The old man had taken care of the car. The belts and tires looked almost brand new.

They were only on the highway for a short time, then they found their exit and were on a semi-deserted road for the remainder of the trip. They found the boat launching area which was completely deserted at nearly two in the morning. They did have one big problem: how were they going to find the island in total darkness? The lake was massive. You couldn't see more than ten feet ahead of you in the darkness. If Jeb were to turn on the lights, they would immediately be noticed by anyone on the island.

"How are we gonna find the island in the dark?" he asked Zach.

"Already thought of that," said Zach and took out a small plastic case from his backpack.

He pulled out a pair of night-vision goggles. He turned them on and focused the lens. He took them off his head and gave them to Jeb.

"I think these might help," he said

Jeb had never used night-vision goggles before but was amazed once he put them over his head. He played with the focus for a minute and suddenly could see more than a hundred feet ahead of him. He could see the trees and even other cars parked in the distance. He had underestimated his son.

"I won't even ask where or how you got these," he said.

"Probably best you don't. Can you see the island?"

"Yeah, it's pretty much straight ahead." He said. He closed the exhaust pipe in the rear and opened the exhaust baffle on the hood and slowly drove into the water. The car never even hesitated as Jeb drove it into the water.

"Wow, this is awesome. Why did they stop making these things?" asked Zach

"I guess nobody wanted them," said Jeb as they coasted into the water.

The Amphicar was pretty quiet in the water. The car's top speed in the water was limited to about twenty miles an hour, but Jeb didn't want to push it. The last thing they wanted was to be stuck in the middle of the lake. His eyes were still getting used to the green night vision. He figured it was going to take almost an hour to get to the island. The wind on the water was making some pretty good size waves and their speed had slowed to a crawl.

"Do you know where Summer is going to be?"

"She said at the dock. There's a big flag pole right in front. She said the dock is almost in a straight line from the dock onshore. It shouldn't be too hard to find."

"Let's hope so."

They drove in silence for the next twenty minutes. Jeb looked at the gas tank. They were going through fuel pretty quickly in the water. They had only half a tank left.

When they were a few hundred feet from the island, Jeb could see the dock for the island. His heart sank when he did not see Summer anywhere near the dock.

"I don't see her," said Jeb

"She'll be there, don't worry."

Jeb pulled up next to the dock. He could see his son was upset when Summer was not there.

"Where is she?"

"Dad, she'll be here, just give her a few minutes."

Jeb didn't want to kill the engine in the water. He might not get it started again. They were going through too much gas. At this rate, they would be out of gas before they made it back to shore.

Five minutes went by, then ten. After waiting for fifteen minutes, Jeb was beginning to get ancy.

"Zach, we're going through gas like shit through a tin horn. We won't even be able to make it back to the dock at this rate."

"Give me just five minutes. If I can't find her, we're out of here, ok?"

"Zach, she could be anywhere, I doubt you'll find her in five minutes."

"There was desperation in her letter. She'll be here."

Zach climbed out of the boat and was walking up to the dock when he saw Summer running at the top of the dock.

"SUMMER! DOWN HERE!" shouted Zach.

Jeb could see her through his night-vision goggles. She came running down the dock. He also saw two blurred objects moving quickly behind her.

"ZACH.....THERE ARE DOGS BEHIND ME!" she shouted

Jeb nearly shit himself.

Why were there dogs chasing her?

Zach grabbed her and ran back towards the dock. Just then two large flares lit up the night sky. One of them landed directly in front of them. Zach smacked on the dogs with a paddle, sending it into the lake. The other dog stopped and started barking furiously right in front. Zach held him off with a paddle while Summer climbed in the car. Zach threw the paddle at the dog and jumped into the car.

"Jesus Christ, those are Dobermans!"

"GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!" shouted Summer.

Just as they were pulling away, Zach could see two men running down to the dock. They were about ten or fifteen feet away from the dock by now. The two men stopped at the edge of the dock. One of the men had what looked to be a bullhorn with him.

"SUMMER! YOU GET YOUR SLIGHTLY OVERWEIGHT ASS BACK HERE, NOW! One of the men screamed into the bullhorn.

"I've never lost one of my cubs.....not ever." said the other man.

"Jesus Zach, what the hell have you gotten us into?"

"Just drive! Doesn't this thing go any faster?" she said exasperated

"What the hell kind of a camp has guard dogs?" asked Jeb

"This place is a nightmare, you can't let them get me!"

"SUMMER, I AM GOING TO PT YOUR ASS UNTIL YOUR TITS FALL OFF!" screamed one of the men.

Jeb could see them running over towards the boats they had on the dock.

"We can't outrun those boats, Zach."

"Don't worry. I super glued the lock. They won't be able to get the lock off the boat.

"Goddamit, little bitch super glued the lock!" screamed one of the men.

"I think there are bolt cutters in the shed." said the other one as he took off back to the top of the dock.

Jeb had the old car floored, but they were still only doing about fifteen knots in the water. The extra weight was taking its toll. Jeb had the goggles on and could see the shore.

Summer was crying and threw her arms around Zach.

"I knew you would come, Zach. I knew you would. My God, this place is a fucking nightmare." she said sobbing.

"I can see that," said Zach.

He gave his dad a thumbs-up as Summer cried in his arms. Somehow, that almost made all of this insanity worth it. It had been quite a while since he had seen his son this happy.

They were almost back to the shoreline and boat launch ramp when he saw the lights from the fishing boats behind them.

"Oh shit!" said Zach.

"They must have gotten the chain off. Hurry!" said Summer.

Jeb and Zach looked anxiously at one another. Summer looked behind her and seem almost paralyzed with fear. The lights had found them and were getting closer.

The fishing boats could do almost thirty knots in the water. No way were they going to outrun them. The men launched another flare in the sky. They were closing fast. Jeb and the kids were now only about five hundred feet from shore when they heard the men on the bullhorn.

"SUMMER! SUMMER YOU GET BACK HERE, NOW! YOU WON'T GET A REFUND. YOUR PARENTS ARE GONNA BE MIGHTY UPSET WITH YOU!" said one of the men.

Just as the boats were about to overtake the car, Jeb felt the tires hit the ground. He switched the controls and the car almost sputtered and died, but Jeb floored it and the car kept running. They climbed out of the water and rolled onto the ramp. Jeb thought the old car was going to quit on them, but it didn't. It went right from the water to land and never missed a beat. He'd take sixty-year-old German technology over just about anything that was made in the last five years.

The two men behind him grounded their boats and tried to swim to shore. They nearly caught them, but Jeb had the car up to almost thirty by the time they were on land. They had made it. Summer looked behind them and flipped the two men the bird as they drove off. The two men behind them were not happy, but there was little they could do at this point. Summer had escaped. They had to decide what to do next.

"We better get back. Don't know who else escaped." one of them said to the other.

Jeb took off his goggles and could see that Zach and summer were wrapped in each other's arms. They looked exactly like a teenage couple who hadn't seen each other in nearly a month. Summer picked her head up and kissed Zach passionately on his lips. Zach just reached over and gave his dad another thumbs up. Somehow seeing his son happy was more rewarding than anything he had ever done in his life up to this point. He drove home feeling better than he had in years. He and his son had reconnected and that was worth all the money in the world. His life might be one giant hurricane at the moment, but right now, the clouds had cleared and the sun was shining, it was shining very brightly on him.

Jeb then realized why old-timers liked their old stuff.....because it never let them down when they needed it.....just like the AMPHICAR. It was built to last, not built to impress.....just like Jeb and Zach.