

Except from M*O*R*E M*A*S*H

Chapter VIII: Doggy Moore and Big Benjy Pierce

Big Benjy Pierce had three things that were fairly unique about him. For a start, he was a life-long lobsterman who had lived past the age of fifty still in possession of all his teeth, all his fingers and was still relatively sober on Sundays.

A few months earlier he'd taken a hunter's bullet to his neck and nearly bled to death. It was probably his fault for living and sitting in a fifty-foot-long, ten-foot-wide white and green formerly mobile home set very close to a road on the edges of a small town of Crabapple Cove where hunting was not allowed and being mistaken for a buck deer.

His survival had made a couple things clear to him, and the first of them was there is more to life than sitting in a boat between a pair of oars hauling up heavy lobster pots six days a week between the hours of five a.m. and at least noon. This led to his announcement at the Pierce family dinner table where Mary Pierce insisted on cooking his evening meals for his first three weeks back from the hospital.

What he had to tell them all was he'd come to a decision.

"Gonna give up them damned water bugs! More pain than I want ta get at this point and they're not gettin' anyone any more wealthy."

While the rest of the Pierce family contemplate that announcement here are the other two unique things about him.

2. Big Benjy had almost more money than he knew what to do with.

During all of Hawkeye's youth and teen years he had lobstered for the 38-40 weeks of good (cooler) lobstereing weather bringing in enough money to feed his family plus put away at least ten dollars a week toward his son's education—provided he ever managed to get the boy to stay in school long enough to graduate.

Then, when Hawkeye got older he joined his father on weekends when neither particularly wanted to clean up and go to church now that their wife and mother was gone.

During college months Hawkeye worked like the dickens with Benjy during holidays home (about four weeks total) when they borrowed an extra twenty or so traps hauling up two or three of their chosen prey in each one just about every day.

Big Benjy kept shuffling all his extra cash into a special account for Hawkeye and Hawkeye kept secretly transferring what he knew he had no need for into an account for Big Benjy's retirement.

And so, now that he was over sixty, Big Benjy had been living off his solo lobstereing and putting money aside and his secret account had been growing as Hawkeye kept siphoning off small amounts to add to the unknown account as well as putting in an extra few dollars weekly. His own account had about twenty-nine thousand in it.

His secret "Benjy" account had about forty-three thousand in it.

His trailer had been bought and paid for by Hawkeye and Mary and it was situated on what had been his homestead land he had signed over to them as a wedding gift.

His weekly outlay was about a sixty dollars and so his fortune was going to last him nearly eighty years assuming the bank did not fail. He had no Social Security to look forward to, as he had never paid into the system.

He did pay his taxes, or at least on a small portion of what he actually brought it, and felt no

remorse for his withholding money from, “A bunch of pantywaist politicians who’d spend it on guns and whores.”

3. Benjamin Harrison Pierce had made one and only one investment in his life and it was about to pay out to the tune of his original one-thousand dollars were going to make him over fifteen-thousand-three-hundred dollars.

This was no take-a-chance investment; it had been a single payment life insurance policy that would pay out at fifteen-to-one (plus interest) if the insured made it to the age of sixty.

Only about nine percent made it and the company was built on that statistic.

He’d had Doggy Moore help fill in all the claims paperwork and even paid local lawyer Jackson Rimmer twenty dollars to check everything over, notarize the forms and get them shipped off.

Since then a trio of letters suggesting there must be some mistake and that their records showed that one B. H. Pierce had passed some eleven years earlier was answered with a legal request for not only the death certificate the insurance company would have demanded, but a check for the payout of the face value of the policy, or some twenty-five-thousand dollars.

That was followed a month later with a request for a full physical by “a recognized licensed physician who is not any relation to the insured” be submitted.

Doggy Moore even blew warm breath on his stethoscope before placing it against Big Benjy’s chest and pronouncing him to be both alive as well as in, “Better than you ought to be,” condition.

The final stalling technique was to tell Big Benjy an insurance investigator was to be dispatched, “At some point in the future,” to assure that this was no scam.

Jackson Rimmer reminded them the policy and state laws in both Maine and their location in Florida called for payments to be made within 90-days of the death and notification.

It was approaching day 91 when a rather oily-looking, effeminate man drove into Spruce Harbor and stopped at the first eatery he could see.

The Bide-A-While (etc.) was technically a restaurant but could be best described as a bar. They served the best seafood in all of Maine and among the coldest beers around.

The man, Pervis Jarvis, perused the menu and sighed on seeing it was not the sort of food he was used to. Then a shadow crossed the menu. A very large man suddenly loomed over and above him in much the same way a plummeting piano might hover over an unlucky individual on a sidewalk.

“Whadayawant?”

Jarvis gulped. “I, uh, that is, you don’t happen to serve chicken, do you?”

Stanley Warczinski, owner and manager—whenever his wife was out of earshot—looked down at Jarvis. “Do you see anything about *chicken* on that menu?”

Pervis shook his head. “I can’t eat seafood. I get bileous. What do you have that doesn’t come from the ocean?” He looked up and added, “Please?”

“The surf and turf don’t got much surf if ya ask for a small lobster, but it has a nice half porterhouse steak. We cook ‘em medium. Is that what you want?”

Pervis Jarvis nodded and handed the menu back.

“What sort of beer ya havin’?”

“Pardon?”

Stanley shook his head and repeated the question.

“Could I just have a glass of water?” He discovered he was now trembling and wishing he had just not answered the phone that morning. If he had not he would be at home in Concord, Vermont where he could go down to Jonnys’ Cafe (even with the cringing mispositioning of the apostrophe)

having a lightly grilled chicken cutlet, delightful green beans and even a scoop of whipped potatoes with a pat of margarine and not in this foreign country being loomed over by a giant and not looking forward to a giant chunk of underdone meat.

Stanley let out a heavy sigh. "Sure. Water. Food'll be out in fifteen minutes. Water will be out in two."

* * *

Back at the Pierce dinner table the five jaws belonging to Hawkeye, Mary and their three boys rose back into their normal positions.

Together, as if they had practiced it, the five stated, "Good!"

"It's about time, pop."

"Benjy, you've worked long and hard and deserve this."

"Does this mean you're gonna spend more time with us?" This from the oldest son and not without some level of unspoken, "I hope not," behind it all.

The youngest, only four, climbed into his grandfather's lap and told him, "I love you, Gramp Benjy!"

"Giving it *all* up?" Hawkeye asked spearing a piece of pot roast from his wife's plate and adding it to the half-chewed bite in his mouth.

Big Benjy looked at his son as if he'd suggested chopping off an arm and slapping the local constable with it.

"Hell no! Just gonna ease out of it. See, I've got this insurance policy I've outlived and I'm gonna get a big check so I'll just do the pots a few days a week and maybe not on the really stormy days."

He told them about the forthcoming windfall and how the lawyer, Rimmer, was helping him.

Hawkeye had saved that man's life a couple years earlier so he suggested if things were going too slowly, "Or if that shyster wants a percentage of what you get, you tell him I'll shove that old, diseased spleen back into his carcass, sew him up and let him die in a closet!"

"Naw. Rimmer's doin' me a good turn and all *because* you saved him. Just costin' me twenty bucks and a few stamps."

* * *

Pervis Jarvis had to admit the part of his steak he had eaten, around the edges where it was properly gray and not pink, was about the best he'd eaten.

The water was so cold he had to let it warm up a little; it hurt his teeth it was so icy.

He paid his bill and left a large tip in case he had to eat another meal here and did not wish the giant man to dislike him.

After that he placed his hat on his head and headed toward the door.

"Oh," he said turning around to Stanley who was now behind the bar that seemed to run all along the one long wall. "How do I find either Benjamin Harrison Pierce or his personal physician, Doctor James Moore?"

"Big Benjy will be at his trailer and Doggy is at his home." Stanley turned away and walked through a door into a back room.

Jarvis sighed and left the establishment. He looked around finally spotting something that appeared to be an open-sided building down by the docks with a curios sign stating:

Finestkind Clinic and Fishmarket

in block letters on a signboard hung under the eaves.

Muttering how the “fishmarket” part must be a local joke he hoisted his pants up, loosened his belt to account for the far-too-big lunch he’d consumed, and strode forward.

One thing Concord did not have this small town did was the pervasive smell of fish both old and new. To Pervis it was a bit overpowering. But, he reminded himself, he had a job to do and do it he would! His \$20.00 payment plus the very generous 2¢ per mile driving allowance depended on it.

At the bottom floor was, indeed, a fishmarket complete with tables full of wooden boxes filled with fish and ice, and two people handling both the customers as well as the cleaning and preparation of their orders. The man was tall, with dark slightly curly hair and looked bored. The woman was what Pervis might call, in a moment of private candor, one hot little number in her bathing suit top—what he believed was known as a bikini top—and her rather revealing shorts.

Pervis sighed. His mother would never approve of such a young woman and so she was and would forever be out of his reach, or at least until his mother finally choked on her own sanctimonious bile and died!

Then, he could do what he liked and she could go be with who she called “her very special friend.” She spoke about “him” nonstop almost as if they had been best buddies in college. Heck, she was old enough to have gone to college with God! ‘He’ was welcome to her and the sooner the better!

Pervis sighed again. He’d been having these fantasies more and more lately. He secretly hoped she would be taking the non-stop elevator down to the “other place.”

“Excuse me,” he called over to the man. When he was completely ignored he repeated his greeting. Again, the man seemed either to not hear him or not wish to hear him.

“Shop!” he called out in a strong voice.

“Hold onto them, fella,” the man said without looking up. “Make sure they’re your own ‘cause we don’t put up with any of that funny business.”

Pervis, and not for the first time, wished his voice had a more manly tone to it. He totally and completely liked women; it was just that his voice often sounded as if it were trying to say something else.

The young woman came over and looked at him with a smile. “Can I help you? And, by the way, he’s mine so don’t get your eyes headed in that direction.” She’d hooked a thumb over her shoulder at Trapper John.

“Erm...” Pervis said trying desperately to not look down from her eyes. “Uh, I am looking for Benjamin H. Pierce and also for a physician in this town, a Doctor Moore.”

“Big Benjy and Doggy?” she asked in a disbelieving voice.

Now standing next to Lucinda was Trapper John McIntyre. “Why?” he demanded, “and don’t look at my wife’s chest you dirty man.”

Pervis found his eyes had drifted downward and he snapped them back up.

“Uh...” he said now close to panicking, “I’m from Mutual General Insurance of New England. I, uh, am supposed to see if this Pierce man is still alive and if he is, have this Doctor Moore verify it is really him.”

“Oh,” Trapper said. “In that case, Big Benjy is at his trailer and Doggy is probably at his house. You buying anything?”

“I... hadn’t planned...” was all Pervis got out before both John and Lucinda McIntyre turned to their other customers.

“But, I don’t know where their homes are.”

“Then, ask someone!” Trapper told him.

Pervis Jarvis turned away only to find a door into the stairway of the building. Perhaps someone

up there would help him.

At the reception desk he asked the young woman where he might locate the two men he sought.

“And, please don’t tell me they are at their homes. I need to find out addresses,” he pleaded.

“Well, Doggy is out on Route Nine; that’s the road just on the other side of the Bide-A-While. Three miles out and the first bright red house you find. As for Big Benjy, his son is on duty today. If you’ll wait...”

He nodded. It was probably the best he would be able to do.

When a tall, sandy-haired man in a white jacket and golf pants came out Pervis did not believe he could be a physician. When he inquired about his true job, he was told, “I am Doctor Hawkeye Pierce, M.D., F.A.C.S. and a bunch of other letters. I spent eighteen months in Korea opening up people I didn’t know and even some I hated and rearranging the damaged bit into something that would let them live. We even saw a few like you.”

Pervis thought better of arguing the point. He did ask about the senior Pierce.

“Yeah, pop told me someone would be coming around. I have to tell you that he’ll probably punch you before he’ll let someone like you touch him, but if you promise to behave I’ll have him brought down here.”

“I’m going to need the word of another physician other than you to verify whomever you parade down here is actually Benjamin Harrison Pierce.”

“Well, Trapper John is downstairs right now. He can verify it.”

“What? That rude man in the fishmarket? He’s a doctor?” Pervis Jarvis was horrified.

“Sure and don’t worry. He washes most of the fish guts off his hands before he touches patients. He also would probably rather punch you than have you touch him, so behave.”

“But, I’m not...”

“No. Of course you aren’t. Your type never are,” Hawkeye said turning to the receptionist. “Sweetheart? Call the trailer and get the old reprobate to wash his armpits, brush his teeth and... no, that’s about all we can hope for. Anyway, tell him to get his ass next door where his more than understanding daughter-in-law will be driving him down here.”

As she made a call Hawkeye picked up the other phone on her desk and called his wife. After a brief explanation that included covering the mouthpiece and whispering something to her, followed by, “I’m fairly sure, but you never know with them,” he suggested getting to town in the next twenty minutes was possibly a good thing.

Twenty-three minutes later and grumbling about the injustice of everything, Big Benjy Pierce was introduced to Pervis Jarvis who handed him his credentials. Big Benjy, able to read to a point, made a big show of studying each and every word before handing them back.

“So?”

“Uhh, the so is I now need to see your identification, Mr. Pierce, assuming always that is whom your truly are.”

Big Benjy was convinced to put the “nice man” down and let go of his shirt front a few seconds later, and to “just pull out your damn wallet and show him your driver’s license, fer crissake!” by his son.

With a grunt Benjy complied with both parts of the request. Jarvis copied down the license number before asking if Benjy had anything with his photograph on it and his name as well.

“Where the hell would I get something like that?”

“Well, a family photo with some notation on the reverse side? A vacation snapshot with your name on it?”

Hawkeye interceded. "You wanted Doggy Moore to verify his identification, right?" Pervis nodded. "Then, we can do away with the photo and name crap, right?" Again, the nod. "Fine. Doggy'll be here in ten minutes. Go over there and sit down and don't annoy anyone," he told the meek man pointing to a set of three chairs to one side of the waiting room.

Doggy Moore was slowing down as he approached seventy-eight years of life and fifty-three years of practicing medicine. He came slowly out of the stairwell complaining about having to mount the stairs and one more forced march would do him in.

Pervis stood up, smoothed down his suit jacket that suddenly had turned into a hot, grasping tube of angry fabric, and came forward shaking Doggy's hand and introducing himself. Doggy held back on commenting about the rather weak grip and the man's tone of speech.

Pervis Jarvis spent ten minutes telling Doggy who he worked for and the reason for him being in Spruce Harbor.

"What can I tell you, Mr. Jarvis?" Doggy asked with a new gleam in his eyes.

"Well, and please without speaking to anyone else, can you identify the man standing over there?" He swung his arm around and pointed to his left side.

"That is Dr. Hawkeye Pierce. Can I go?"

"What? No, the other man," Jarvis insisted still not looking over.

"That would be Dr. Trapper John McIntyre. Now?" He pointed to the stairs.

Jarvis was perplexed and about to scream until he turned and saw the only two men standing there were the two doctors. Big Benjy was sitting in a seat a few feet behind them.

"No, him," he said weakly pointing right at Big Benjy.

"Officially, he is Benjamin Harrison Pierce, born and raised in this vicinity and all records indicate he is sixty years and about three months old. Now, tell me why."

Jarvis was nearly at the end of his strength, but he held out a small clipboard with a three-page form on it. "If you are willing to give me your medical license number and full name, then sign the final page certifying that the man in question is whom you say he is, that will be all."

The man in question stood up and came over. "Hey, Doggy. After this ya want ta go grab a beer and a steak?"

Doggy nodded as he filled in the seven blanks on the form and signed it.

"Mr. Pierce? The insurance company will issue your check Monday after this weekend. As that is four days after the period allowed by the law it will include an additional two-hundred-and-fifty dollars for the delay. And now, I need to get home."

He turned toward the stairs and began to take a step.

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis? A word, please." Doggy placed a large arm around the shorter man's shoulders and began explaining that he, too, had taken out a policy from the same company and had passed the "due" date for policies for physicians some eight years earlier. He mentioned that even though he had filed the initial forms he never had received his check for outliving the odds.

And, that his policy was for a payout value of fifty-thousand dollars.

"I imagine those extra fees will have added up over the years of your employers' lack of timely payout on my policy. I have the same lawyer as he does." He pointed to the older Pierce. "Oh, and now you agree he's who he says he is, Big Benjy can vouch for who I am, so if you have another of those forms..."

Pervis Jarvis crumbled to the ground, whimpering.