



Brady Ritz is a cranky but sympathetic retired newspaper editor who writes snarky satire under an assumed name. When he is outed, his humiliated wife leaves him alone in their Naples, Florida golf community, and almost everyone shuns him.

Someone Better Than You: A Comedy of Manners

By Barry Knister

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Someone Better Than You



A Comedy
of Manners

BARRY KNISTER

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To contact Barry Knister, please email him at
bwknister@sbcglobal.net

1

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“I suppose you’ll be all right.”

Surprised to be spoken to, Brady Ritz turns quickly. “Of course I will,” he says. “Your old stepdad’s a hurricane survivor.”

Your *old* stepdad is meant to generate sympathy, but Jane has already turned away. Now she’s fiddling with the collar on Madison’s preppy polo. Give the kid a puppy and a fishing pole, and she can model for the next L.L.Bean catalogue.

But what’s really on Ritz’s mind is how Jane has stopped calling him Daddy. He is her stepfather, and she’s thirty-two, but Jane has always called him that. Really, he thinks, watching her, what would it cost you?

A voice goes on mumbling over the airport’s PA system. A security guard glides by on a Segway. The soft, pliant voice and the scooter’s smooth whirr remind Ritz of how nice he’s been all week. How quiet and helpful, anxious-to-please. That’s really all anyone wants from you, Ritz thinks. To be nice, homogenized. Denatured.

Thick black hair curtains her face as Jane adjusts Madison’s barrette. The little girl is staring vacantly at planes outside the observation window. One of them will fly her and her family back to Michigan. Ritz’s son-in-law is off to the

side, holding Madison's younger sister, Ashley. He is explaining something and points to the plane.

Ashley and Madison. God. But of course Dan is responsible for the grandchildren's trendy, gender-neutral names. He talked Jane into it, just the way he's lecturing his four-year-old. Dan points again, and Ritz studies his son-in-law's cornball mutton chop whiskers. His bored, all-knowing tone of voice. The graphic on his tee shirt shows projectile vomit landing on a kitchen floor, painted with the name of a band. *Blech*.

"Okay, that's us." The PA voice is still echoing as Jane lifts her daughter. Ritz reaches down for the canvas bag at her feet, but Jane grabs it and straightens. "It's easier this way," she says.

"All right."

Lounging now in the bucket seat formed by her mother's body, Madison turns to regard him. She knows something is wrong, but hasn't asked questions.

"Goodbye, Grandpa."

"Goodbye, Maddy."

When Ritz moves in for the parting hug. Jane hesitates. But she is conventional like her mother, and relents. As the three now form a clumsy embrace, Madison taps him on the neck. "You have a mole," she says. "Right here." She taps again below his right ear.

"Would you like one?" he asks.

"Like what?"

"A mole."

"No."

“I could get you one.” Brady winks. “From the Mole Hole. A big one with red lumps and green slime.”

“No!” He sneaks a peak. Is Jane suppressing a smile? “Grandpa’s being silly,” Madison says. “You can’t buy moles.”

“The Mole Hole is a store, honey.” Jane steps back from him. “A gift shop in Naples. Moles are little animals that live in the ground. We’ll read about them at home. Grandpa is just being grandpa.”

Little animals that live in the ground, Grandpa just being his silly old self. Brady smiles and pats Madison on the head. Before, whether or not what he said was funny, Jane laughed her girlish, life-enhancing laugh. Not now, he thinks. This is the new Jane, the postpartum nanny. The schoolmarm mom who lost her sense of humor.

Dan has come from the window. He shifts the four-year-old on his arm and moves in for the second pro-forma hug. “Goodbye, Brady, thanks.” Ritz’s answer is muffled by mutton chop whiskers. They unclasp, and everyone starts moving toward security check-in. The week is ending without his having made a case for himself. But why should I need to? he thinks. Why do they always shoot the messenger?

As though she agrees with him, little Ashley starts whimpering. Without breaking stride, Jane reaches out to smooth her cheek. Unlike her preppy sister, Ashley is dressed for combat in a camouflage tee shirt and bib overalls. Ritz is sure she chose her costume this morning to fit whatever drama was still going on in the dream theater occupying her small,

coppery head. *She* would say *Yes!* to a lumpy mole with green slime.

“Stop!” They all turn at the concourse. “No!”

“Come on, honey—” Dan holds her close and keeps walking in his slow, measured way. “You know we have to leave.”

“No, Daddy, we *don't*.” Ashley adds a theatrical catch in her throat. “You know we don’t, Dad... You say nothing... is cast in stone... We don’t have to leave... it’s not cast in stone, it’s *not*—”

The parents exchange knowing looks and keep walking. *Cast in stone*. Brady keeps pace behind them. A strong surge of gratitude passes through him for the only person who gave him the time of day all week. My precocious little ally, he thinks. My co-conspirator

“No! No! No!”

Not allowed beyond the rope, he watches her struggle. As Dan hands over his driver’s license, Brady remembers her last Christmas in a church basement during a children’s play. The arrival of Baby Jesus was followed by a small robed figure. Ritz’s program described her part with political correctness as a “wise person.” Ashley first pointed to the straw-filled manger, slowly lowered her arm, and faced the audience. “It’s plastic,” she said. “Not a real baby.” *Perfect!* He started to clap, but Ritz’s wife grabbed his hands. She held them fast as the Wise Person went on about the polyvinyl chloride reality of Baby Jesus, until a humorless Nice Person led her away.

Dan is cleared and steps to the moving belt for luggage. “Okay, ‘bye.” Jane sets down Madison.

“Promise to call when you get home,” he says.

“All right, I promise.”

“You have window seats?”

“Always. The girls insist.” Jane un-shoulders her backpack. “You always got us window seats,” she says. “We loved it.”

“We’ve had lots of good times, Janey.”

“That’s true, they were.” Jane reaches down and again hoists Madison. “Good times.”

“I like to think—”

As though ready for this, Jane reaches out with her free hand and places her palm on his chest. When he places his hand on hers, she slips free. She grabs up the bag and backpack, turns with her daughter and walks toward the TSA counter. Madison looks over her mother’s shoulder, and waves.

2

Words Are Deeds

In fifteen minutes he is on southbound I-75, heading back to Naples. Ritz isn't happy, just relieved the visit is over. He can still feel Jane's palm pressed flat on his chest. According to his wife, promises made to the girls and non-refundable tickets are the only reasons they flew down.

Brilliant sun glints off cars zipping past on his left. Semis, pickups, stake trucks hauling pavers and mulch. How many grandfathers are driving home after taking grown children and grandchildren to airports? Some are basking in the warm afterglow of the visit, others de-compressing with a sense of relief. He wonders how many are driving home with a sense of regret.

Rising on both sides of the Interstate are the berms and retainer walls of golf communities. The remaining land in Collier County will almost certainly become more of the same. For more grandparents. Brady lives on a golf course, but he no longer likes the game. Even before everyone stopped playing with him, golf had gotten old. His former partners are still at the Monday-Thursday-Saturday regimen. He sees them from his second-floor balcony, tooling down the ninth fairway in Shriners-parade golf carts.

He adjusts the rearview mirror.

Yes, even before what he calls the Cold Snap, Brady is sure he was tired of golf. Tired of the right-wing, anti-Obama

“humor” that went with it. Bored by endless talk of TV shows he never watched. The same stretch of fairway now led to the same emerald-green carpet of bent grass, followed by buffet tables and chafing dishes and tubs of iced beer. The same forced enthusiasm over good shots, or feigned anguish at robbed opportunities. No one plays with him now, but Brady is convinced he was already done with golf.

Expressway traffic is light and he is on auto pilot. Jane appears to him in her mommy jeans and jersey top. Cradling Madison, she grabs the canvas bag and straightens.

It's one thing to earn a modest living by pedaling tourists around Mumbai or Hong Kong. But here, in the First World? With blank-eyed children riding behind in a cart as the coolie mom pedals and talks on her cell phone about why she decided to shave her head? Doing all this in heavy traffic, with every other driver a texting adolescent, or a blotto senior citizen weaving his way home after Happy Hour at the American Legion?

He called the column “Suburban Pedicab Parents.” Never mind that what he wrote is true: the carts *are* dangerous. So what? His wife says that’s the column that broke the camel’s back for Jane. When she and Dan ride their tandem bike, they pull the girls in one of the rickshaws.

Taillights are going on up ahead. Brady takes his foot off the gas, and slows to a stop behind a pickup truck. No more dad or daddy, he thinks. Jane is the only young person he takes seriously. How could someone so bright and talented turn her back on him over something so trivial? Being turned into a scapegoat by Republican retirees still in love with Ronald

Reagan, he gets that. At first, he sort of *got* his wife of almost thirty years leaving him out of embarrassment. But bright, talented Jane? Over a few jokes in two or three of his columns? No, that doesn't compute.

His phone buzzes. That will be Natalie. Before she left him, she made Ritz put a cell phone in his car. In "Arrested Development," he called cell phones a millennial substitute for teething rings and nipple pacifiers. He takes it from the dashboard.

"Did you get them there on time?"

"And hello to you, too." When his wife doesn't answer, he says, "No, Natalie, I sold them. A human trafficker made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

"What about fruit? Did you make sure they took home citrus?"

"There wasn't room. The white slaver said they could eat all the tomatoes they want out in the field. Tomatoes are fruit."

"You didn't remember."

"I remembered."

"No, Buzz. 'I had other things on my mind and forgot,' that's what you always say."

Yes, he forgot, but Brady says, "I did not. I got them there on time, I remembered everything. I remembered the kiddies' shells from Sanibel, I remembered the hats and stuffed animals I bought them at the zoo." Like *old stepdad*, stuffed animals are meant to gain sympathy.

"Did you get the fruit at Green Thumb? You didn't, you went to Publix."

“Natalie, for God’s sake spare me the organic party line. There was no way they could take fruit. Organic or genetically modified. It looked like Ellis Island, people in steerage with everything they own.”

“You always criticize their clothes,” his wife says. “It’s superficial.”

“I’m not talking about clothes.”

“‘People in steerage’? Of course you are. You always say Jane and Dan look like the homeless. You say millennials have no sense of occasion or form.”

Brady releases his seatbelt, and shoves up to see ahead. All the taillights are still glowing. He sits back down with an oddly strong wish his wife would believe him. Please just let it go, he thinks. Not so far back they still laughed at each other’s jokes. They were good together. Now, it’s all lectures and fault-finding.

“Not including whatever they checked, I counted four carry-ons. Backpacks, Bean bags—”

“You never appreciated what was involved in traveling with children. Every time we took the girls somewhere, you complained.”

Brady clucks his tongue. “You’re unpacking a little baggage of your own,” he says. “Here we go with the only-child gambit, the know-nothing stepdad routine.”

“Don’t you dare, Buzz. I never said that except in jest and you know it—”

Natalie starts coughing, and covers the handset. She has sinus trouble every May and June. In the silence, Brady wonders whether she *did* mean it. Early in the marriage, she

joked about “a certain privileged only child” who had never needed to consider others. Maybe she actually believed it, he thinks. Believed not growing up with siblings or raising “little ones” made you oblivious to others.

“All right, I’m back,” she says. “So, they went home with no fruit.”

“Everything but. Are you all right?”

“I’m fine, it’s pollen. You should know. Alex died.”

Ritz eases back with the phone pressed to his ear. The news shouldn’t come as a surprise. Alex Brubaker’s been sick a long time with prostate cancer. But it shocks him. As he has many times, Ritz sees his best friend’s ravaged face inches from his own. We had unfinished business, he thinks.

“You might want to send Betty a card, or call,” Natalie says. “She told me she enjoyed your early columns.”

“Right. The ones before I got carried away, as you put it. I’m sure you two had a good talk. I’m sure you and Jane talked all week.”

“Of course we talked, Jane and I talk several times a week. Why would we stop just because she’s down there?”

“Talking about me,” he says. “You know what I’m saying.”

“It wasn’t easy for her. You should be glad they came at all. I wouldn’t have.”

“You don’t.”

“That’s different, and you know it,” Natalie says. “If you want to know, I defended you. I told her Alex encouraged you to use your own name.”

“And? What did she say?”

“Jane said—” His wife clears her throat “—she forgives you, but things can’t be the same.”

It disappoints him. Frustrates him. “That’s her version of forgiveness?”

“I want to ask you something.” Natalie’s voice has dropped into the register she reserves for serious matters. “And I want you to think before you answer.”

“My cognitive powers are on full alert.”

“Why didn’t you talk to her? Why leave it up to me?”

“Because I did nothing wrong,” he says.

“That’s no answer. You had Jane with you a whole week, and never explained yourself. Tell me why.”

“Explain what? I did nothing wrong,” he says again. “It’s a simple matter of pride. I had a harmless hobby. I wrote a jokey column for a little magazine. I told the truth as I see it, and my ‘best friend’ sucker-punched me.”

“I don’t believe you.” Natalie coughs. “You keep calling it harmless truth-telling, but you hurt people. And you know it. And please stop blaming Alex. It’s your name on the book, not his. You’re always talking about the real world, Buzz. That’s the real-world reason you said nothing to Jane. For a whole week. Do you want to know what she said?”

Hurt people. Brady hates the word. “Does it matter?” he says. “You’re going to tell me.”

“She drew a comparison to Native Americans and photography.”

“Uh huh.”

“She said they feel their souls are stolen when someone takes their picture.”

“That’s unalloyed nonsense,” he says. “What about all the shutterbug tourists visiting Indian reservations? Their casinos are wall-to-wall with surveillance cameras.”

“Maybe they aren’t Indians,” Natalie says. “It doesn’t matter, you’re missing the point on purpose. People somewhere think you take their souls when you take their picture. Jane feels the same way. You took what was hers and made fun of it.”

Brake lights are blinking off ahead. If his talented stepdaughter thinks he stole something from her, Brady regrets it. But he still can’t see why a few words matter so much.

“Fine,” he says. “I used a few details in something I wrote and didn’t ask permission. Why can’t she let it go? Why can’t you? You say I’m critical, you call me petty. So are you, Natalie. So is Jane and everyone at Donegal. Why can’t any of you just forgive and forget?”

He is already mouthing his wife’s answer. “You don’t understand and don’t want to,” she says. “*You’re* the one who won’t let it go. You criticize everyone and everything, and still don’t get how hurt people feel—”

Memorized from many such calls, Ritz goes on miming his wife’s words. Traffic is starting to inch forward. Good. When she calls, it still gives him an odd boost. Even when they fight, it restores a sense of connection.

Judgmental. Hurt. Feel. Bobbing his head to the rise and fall of his wife’s voice, Brady puts the shift lever in Drive. In his view, American culture is buried under a steamy compost mound of emotion. Of soap opera feelings and self-pity. If I were God, he thinks, I would create a lexicological delete key.

The first word to go? Feelings. Just imagine—he nods in agreement——every reporter denied the word, each and every time he shoves a microphone in someone’s face. Every talk-show host, every right-to-lifer or pro-choicer. *How does it—* and nothing. Just a blank space requiring thought.

“—because words are deeds, and they can hurt—” Good, *words are deeds* comes near the end “—and when those words are remembered, they hurt all over again.” There it is, Brady thinks. Word Number Two on your cosmic delete list. Hurt. You hurt me, you hurt my pride, my ego is one big hematoma, my feelings are stuck all over with voodoo needles—

“Stop—” For no reason, *voodoo needles* triggers him. “Let’s cut to the chase,” he says. “Why are you still in Michigan? Five months, Natalie, this makes no sense. That’s it, I’m flying up. What’s actually going on?”

“No, Buzz, please don’t. We went through this last week. It’s something I have to work through alone. I’m not sick, please don’t fly up. I keep thinking how long you kept your secret from me.”

“Not that again,” he says. “You can’t be serious.”

“Don’t you see? What kind of marriage is that? I’m trying to get past it, but I haven’t. Not yet. You weren’t unfaithful to me with another woman, but you were unfaithful.”

Last week she said the same thing. “Not telling you I wrote satire for a little magazine makes me unfaithful? Do you have any idea how drop-dead crazy that sounds?”

“I have to go,” she says.

“You already did that, in January. One week after our anniversary. Our twenty-eighth if memory serves.”

“No, Buzz, someone’s at the door. He’s here to tuck point the chimney.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“Bricks fell off,” she says. “It’s lucky no one was hurt.”

Brady takes his foot off the brake pedal. Another *Hurt*, he thinks. And still calling you unfaithful for not telling her about *Grumble*. It makes him furious, he has to move.

“Now I like that—” He checks his rearview mirror before swinging left and accelerating. “I like spending money to keep people from being hit by falling bricks. I get that, Natalie, I really do, a brick on the head actually *hurts*, you *feel* it, that’s the real-world, life-threatening—”

She ends the call. He clips his phone on the dash and eases back on the gas pedal. Ahead on the right, a Jeep is nose-down in the culvert. Facing forward, Ritz remembers his wife on New Year’s Day. She is standing at the glass door wall in the family room, looking out at the swimming pool.

Are you here by yourself?

It’s a joke between them, the first words he ever spoke to her. But Natalie doesn’t answer. She is holding his book, wearing the black silk pajamas he gave her for Christmas.

3

Cupid's Swizzle Stick

"Are you here by yourself?"

They were standing in the smoky lobby of *The Detroit Post*, and she was wearing black. She looked at him a second before turning to her left. Her right. Brady felt himself blush. "You got me," he said. "Except for these two hundred other life forms, you're here all by yourself."

"One of them is my date," she said. "Gwen Nolan from accounting. She broke up with her fella and asked me to come with her. My name is Natalie McTavish."

"Brady Ritz." They shook hands. He wasn't the kind who took the initiative with women, but he liked looking at her. And her use of a retro word like *fella*.

"How about you?" she asked. "Are you a life form all on your lonesome?"

Brady liked that, too. "Exactly," he said. "I'm another one of those fellas, but in reverse. I got my marching orders on Christmas Eve." Her neutral-on-first-meeting smile slipped away. "Don't misunderstand," he said. "I probably had it coming."

"I think that's mean." Now she was frowning. "Telling someone it's over on Christmas is wrong. Unnecessary. Whatever you did or didn't do, that's intentionally cruel."

Taking what he'd said so seriously left Ritz not knowing how to answer. They sipped their drinks, and waved away the

smoke being generated by a crowd of two-pack-a-day newspaper types. *All on your lonesome* was not a common expression. Was she talking about herself being lonesome, or did she mean he looked lonesome? If she meant him, Brady Ritz looked to her the way he should: like a man dumped by the latest in a widely-spaced series of women who thought he was funny and liked him for a few months, then didn't. The latest had left him to attend the 1982 *Detroit Post* New Year's party on his own. On his lonesome.

"It sounds as though you speak from experience," he said finally.

"Yes, I've had some, but nothing very mean. I'm thirty-two, divorced, and have two children." She was now looking at him with a flat, no-nonsense gaze. "Experience has taught me it's good to get that out there up front," she said. "I manage the office for a group of lawyers. All of them are big on bow ties and Porsches."

"How old are they? Not the lawyers, your children."

"Five and three. Anne and Jane. Their father wasn't a bad man or a mean man. Just not a very reliable one. After we divorced, he went to Montana. He died in an accident."

It was a lot to digest in the *Detroit Post's* smoky, crowded lobby. Ritz had never met anyone so direct. So candid.

"And you?" she asked.

Aware now of her narrow waist and broad shoulders, Ritz followed her shorthand approach. He was thirty-six. He had grown up on the city's west side, gone to Mumford High School and on to U of M to study English, then to grad school. After he dropped out, a friend had gotten him in at the *Post*.

“What did me in at Michigan was grading papers,” he said. “For a tenured professor who could almost write his name in the dirt with a stick. That, and teaching freshmen. You know you shouldn’t teach when your students’ elbows keep slipping off the desk.”

It was a canned speech used before in similar circumstances. Alex Brubaker, his friend at the *Post* had gotten Ritz a flunky job as a gofer and mail sorter. Ritz had now worked for the paper for eight years. No siblings. His parents were both dead, and he hadn’t been married.

“I assume you no longer sort the mail,” she said.

“Correct. I’m a copy editor. Now I fix what reporters write. My nickname is Buzz, short for Buzz Cut. Because I make them shorten their stories.”

Natalie smiled. “Are you good at it?”

“Compared to my teaching skills, yes,” he said. “The younger reporters call me their fixer.” She smiled again. “McTavish. You’re Scottish?”

“I’m actually Polish with a dash of German,” she said. “It should be Mazurkiewicz—” she spelled it for him. “Except the clerk on Ellis Island couldn’t manage my great grandfather’s name. According to family lore, the clerk said, ‘D’name’s McTavish, now move along, next in line.’”

Ritz laughed. She had given the Ellis Island clerk a convincing Brooklyn accent. “My great grandparents just assumed that’s how it was done here, so they kept the name.” He laughed again. McTavish to replace something unpronounceable, something much easier to record in a ledger. “I

wonder—” She held out her empty glass and Ritz took it. “It’s an Old Fashioned.”

He headed for the bar. McTavish for Mazurka-something. Brady loved it. They gave you a new name in the New World, and if you wanted to stay here, you kept it. He passed a woman doing her best to look like a movie star. She was holding her wine glass in an affected way, picking up and putting down her aching, spike-heeled foot. Natalie McTavish knew better. No dumb shoes or makeup. No look-at-me clothes to mar what he already thought must be her very good body. Just a plain black cashmere sweater and slacks. Small hoop earrings. Women grad students at Michigan had all seemed to emulate the fashion sense of Emily Dickinson, or some notable figure from the Third World like Indira Gandhi. And her smile. He even liked what she was drinking, an Old Fashioned. No one knew what they were anymore, but she did. He got two, and elbowed his way back. When he neared her, Natalie’s smile was one of welcome.

“Thank you.” She took the drink. “Do you want the garnish? I never eat it.” An offering, Ritz thought. An invitation. She pinched the stick with orange slice and cherry, and as she brought it out, Ritz reached for it.

“Oh God, I’m so sorry, I didn’t—” Beneath the orange and cherry, the stick’s pronged end had jammed under Ritz’s thumb nail.

“No, it’s me, I was clumsy.”

“Please, Brady, hold still.” She steadied his hand, then gently pulled the stick free. It hurt, but he sipped his Old Fashioned in a manly show of indifference to pain. She had

spoken his name. A drop of blood oozed from his thumb. She peeled the napkin from the bottom of her drink and held out the glass. He took it and balanced it in his good hand with his own drink, then watched as she reached in her glass and fished out a piece of ice. Wrapping it in the napkin, she now pressed it in her palm around his thumb.

“Androcles and the lion,” he said.

“What? Oh, yes, clumsy Androcles, I’m so sorry.” She kept her fist wrapped around his finger. “I’d like my drink now.”

By the end of the hour, Ritz was seeing them having dinner in his favorite restaurant. And she was funny. “The girls and I were in this ice cream parlor, next to a table of nuns. The twenty-something waitress comes to the nuns’ table. ‘Hey, guys, are we ready to do the deed and order?’”

At midnight, horns and buzzers went off. People cheered and began singing Auld Lang Syne. It wasn’t at all like him to make the first move, but he stepped closer. Natalie didn’t back away. They kissed lightly and parted, but he held her arms a moment before letting go. At the end of the night, she agreed to go out with him.

In the following weeks, Ritz and Natalie discovered they were compatible in terms of both their bodies and minds. Unlike other women he’d known, she was funny. Good with words. She was no prude and enjoyed sex, but preferred it with the light off. So did he. They liked the same food and music. Neither of them smoked. Equally important, Natalie told him her daughters liked him. “They declared you to be ‘weird, but in a good way,’” she told him.

He took her to the Detroit Symphony (with cellist YoYo Ma), then to a Billy Joel concert. “Do you know what Chuck E Cheese is?” she asked on the drive home from Billy Joel.

Ritz shook his head. “Well, no, why would you? It’s the girls’ favorite place, but you need to understand. If we go, it’s not your kind of thing. It’s for families with small children. Think in terms of a stress test.”

Before picking them up the following Friday, he prepped himself with vodka and breath mints. He had read up on Chuck E Cheese, and now knew what Natalie meant by stress test: a demonic pizza parlor built around an inflated, bubble-like structure full of elementary-school-age children being monitored by the damned, their stunned parents. As Anne and Jane ran off to find their circle of hell, he knew Natalie was watching him. Would he bolt? Have a seizure? It was a test he wanted to pass. He gripped the edge of the table and did his bug-eyed, dazed-by-sonic-overload look. She smiled with relief, then gave the look back at him, and mouthed *thank you*.

After ten months, she was still with him. How much this had to do with the practical needs faced by a single mother Ritz wasn’t entirely sure. But on nights when he stayed over, Anne and Jane seemed glad to see him in the morning. When he asked Natalie to marry him, they were seated on a bench in a shopping mall. He treated the moment as a jokey retail transaction, to mask his fear of getting turned down. Natalie hesitated, and looked bleak. “Would you want us to have children?” she asked. “I know myself pretty well. I worry too much with Ann and Jane, and I know in my heart it would be a mistake to have another child.”

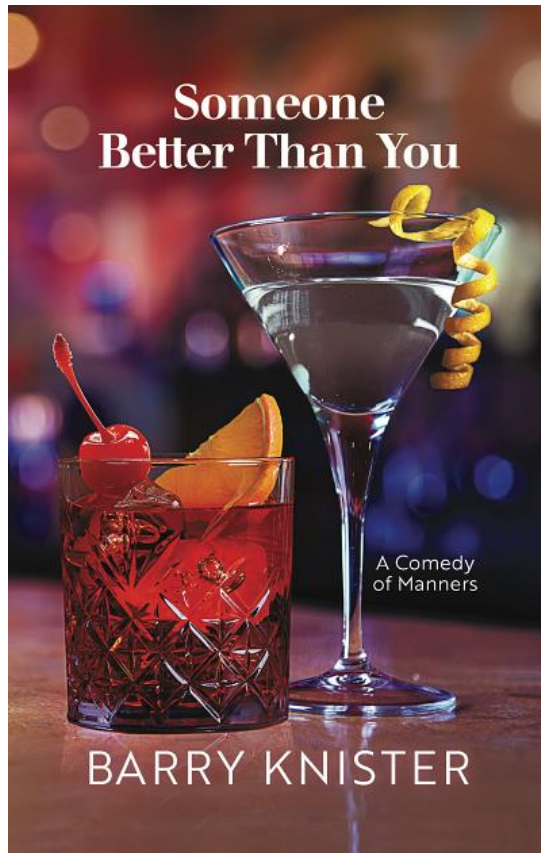
Ritz had some recollection of growing up, but his parents were gone, as were his aunt and uncle. He had no brother or sister to compare notes with, and his memories of childhood were more like snapshots or postcards. But he remembered how protective and cautious his gentle accountant father and librarian mother had been in raising their only child. Remembered with remorse how much they had worried about him. And how he had exploited their fear to get his way.

“Why would I want a child?” he said. “You’re a package deal.” Natalie grabbed his lapels and kissed him. It was true. He had never felt a need to pass along the Ritz genes.

BIO

After a career of college teaching, Barry Knister is now focused on writing fiction. His first novel, a thriller about Vietnam Vets titled *The Dating Service* was published by Berkley. More recently, Knister's psychological suspense series follows the career of journalist Brenda Contay. *Someone Better Than You* is a distinct departure from his crime novels. Knister lives north of Detroit with his wife Barbara.

Thanks for reading. Like all writers, I am grateful to those who still enjoy the magic of turning words on the page into meaning. I hope you will consider writing a review, and that you visit my website, www.barryknister.com, I welcome emails at bwknister@sbcglobal.net



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Someone Better Than You: A Comedy of Manners

By Barry Knister

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