

## 9. ALL CAUGHT UP IN MYSELF

Angie has just been running. She is in shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt. Angie's husband has earned a great deal of money in biotechs. She is young very young. She got married before she finished college. She has become accustomed to a life of leisure. She has her dark hair pulled back. Her long legs are prominent. I imagine her rubbing her lithe body against me. She is entirely confident about her body. She hooks her leg against mine; I can sense the warmth of her body.

"Benny, did you hear what I said to you?"

I am distracted while I am vacuuming her pool.

"I'm going to get something to drink. Can I get you something?"

"Angie, I'll have a coke."

"I'll be back in a minute."

She comes back with some drinks and chips.

"Thanks, Angie. You're making me feel great."

I have committed to exploring my attraction to her in my imagination. I will not touch her. She gives me a big smile.

"I had a great run. You'd probably feel a lot trimmer if you if you took up running."

"I don't mind the gym. I'm not really a runner."

She stands tall in her gym shoes.

"There's really nothing that works to make you as sleek."

"I swim when I can."

"Swimming doesn't give you as good results. You can just see the difference."

She glows with that effect. Her muscles has that spare look. Nothing is wasted.

In a sense, I imagine us as pioneers ready to start a new life. I am willing to forge this beginning. To forget everything that has gone on before. I have been living my life as a renewal. I am ready to engage that option again.

Why would Angie want to turn her back on her wealth? She is so comfortable the way that she is. Comfortable maybe, but hardly satisfied. This time, I am not going to give in to some confused argument about sex. How romance can rescue her from her doldrums. This time is different. I don't want to ruin it by crumbing the play. We have to work it out in natural time. Not rush it with some illusion about our physical compatibility.

I am captivated by that freshness on her part. She is just waking up to the world. Her eyes work to take it all in. We are face to face. I take deep comfort from the fact that we have nothing in common with my past difficulties. More reason to start anew.

"We haven't been in this place that long."

"Angie, it's a great place."

"Stupendous. It's like my dream home." Her dream home with her dream guy. This is where the ennui starts to set in. She has married an idea. As it becomes more tangible, she has her doubts. But her husband makes it all seem so perfect. She doesn't want to doubt her love. She can't turn her back on his success. It is real. Anything else would be a plunge into darkness.

I don't even want her to play around with the thought that we could fool around as an outlet for her to release that unresolved pressure. She might think as my offer as an imposition.

It is the only way out for either of us. She might see her life as radically different than mine. I have been an explorer. I know this world from TV. But I have worked to make it real for myself.

She is curious. She has dreams untried. She needs a push. That is why I am here. And it can happen.

“Josh has made me so happy. And when I get bored here, he takes me on trips.”

“Are you working?”

“I have plans to finish college. Now, I try to keep myself busy. I’m always reading. Benny, do you read poetry?”

“In my native language. It’s almost another world to me now.”

“Poetry gives us purpose. It makes us whole. You need to read more.”

Is her reading only a consolation for a world that she can do little to control? It is getting out of hand for her already. The poets promise her escape. And she returns to her same world. For a while, she made it her paradise. She now realizes that it only shelters her from what she wants to see. But she is more than a little afraid of that side of herself.

We sit across from each other like chess players in a stalemate. There is no next move. Every new move is only a return to the game which is a draw. Under these terms, there is no victory. She has to be willing to risk.

She doesn’t want me here to tell her that it is not love. She doubts herself. She questions Josh’s motive. But love is the thing that papers over the difficulties. She will not let me remove the veil I need to be more circumspect. Tell her what she wants to hear. I just have to accelerate the process.

I am the pool boy. I live in a world of suggestion. It cannot relate to what she is doing from day to day. What she is going to do tomorrow. It is all about a more intense today. How can she turn her back on her future for something that I am offering her.

I offer a future that is a sum of all these wonderful todays. She looks at me with her probing glance. She wants knowledge. She wants to live her poetry. Her life is not radical enough to take that step. When she travels with Josh, she travels as a conqueror of new lands. She is not taking that step in to the breach. I welcome her to make that choice. To enter a wasteland and make of it something based on her wits.

She will not venture into the desert of her mind without some kind of promise. She wants to be pushed in that direction. What can do that?

As a pool boy, I have learned the art of the seducer. In the fullest sense, I have used my method to reveal something else so illuminating about my clients. They have been able to step out of their mundane existence and enter a world of high drama. But each woman has given up so much to play that game. For Angie, I am suggesting another dream. I need her to take that fatal step herself. I have to build upon conviction.

I have to live her poetry. When she sees this as the critical next phase of her life, her path will be automatic. She will not be able to resist.

She already feels a longing deep in her soul. I have to convince her that this feeling is even more profound. I have to touch her in a different way.

I can use the imagery of the body. I can poetically engage the seducer’s art. Our bodies have already touched. She taps me on the back. She pushes herself so that she is spread across me.

Her body comes to rest against mine as if we are jostled together in a crowded subway. But all this is imaginary. What we want. What we dare not do. Only contemplate. The love making has to originate in the soul, not in the body.

This is a tall order. She is already taken by her Josh. His success has been hers. She has pinned all her hopes on his pony. And she only hopes that it will continue to take her to the heights.

She is afraid to ask him the real questions. Just as she is afraid to explore her doubts with me, She is not ready to plunge into the gulf. She does not want to contemplate the darkness.

“You don’t really care what’s inside a person unless it matches what’s inside you. You end up living inside out.”

“You can’t pretend that you can read me like a book.”

“Benny, it’s just like you’re inside is out.”

“Do you have x-ray eyes.”

She smiles, “That’s no philosophy for life. You don’t care about anyone.”

“What do you expect? That I have some secret about life that I can offer you in my wisdom?”

“You’re the one who’s trying to drain my youth from me.”

“You’re the one who decided to get married so young.”

“I’m not that young. You’re just pissed that I’m not free for you.”

“You’re as free as you want to be. Marriage never stopped me before. It doesn’t have to stop you.”

“Contrary to what you think, most women take their vows seriously.”

I try to contradict her, “Everyone wants to believe. You all start out like that.”

“Benny you can wait all night and nothing is going to change.”

She leads me up the narrow passage to her roof. You need a rope to ascend the last view feet. The house is already built on a hill. From the roof, you can see down into the valley. It is a clear night.

“I always feel so free up here. Like there’s nothing to stop me from what I want.”

She is lying on her back looking up at the sky. I move close to her, almost as if to kiss her. She pushes me away.

“This is surprising to you. That there is someone that doesn’t need you as much as you want them.”

“That’s not it at all Angie.”

“Benny, what are your ambitions?”

“Do you expect me to take stock of my life as I’m talking to you?”

Angie challenges me “All that you can think about is trying to kiss me. You need to have a plan for your life?”

“After kissing you. I’ll just see where that leads.”

“It’s not going to lead anywhere because I’m not going to do it.”

“A little kiss won’t matter.”

“There are no little kisses. Not with you anyway.”

“Just a friendly peck.”

She questions my motive, “Even then, you’ll try to compare it to something else less

meaningful. You'll want to kiss again just to confirm your first impression."

"Can't you just enjoy what you see?"

"The only reason that you can relax is that you know that I want you. You want the same thing. You can just live off that fact."

I move my hand close to hers. She moves hers away.

"Benny, you can't take a hint."

"It's not a hint. You're being too obvious."

"I need another drink."

We decide to go back downstairs.

"Let me get you another drink, too."

When she comes back with the drinks, she sits across from me and stares.

"What are you doing, Angela?"

"I'm seeing what you're made of. Can you take the pressure?"

"What pressure?"

She focuses on my strategy, "You've been doing a much to me. You've been testing me out to see if I'll crack. I like my life. I love what I have. And you want me abandon all that to sleep with you. You have to be kidding."

"You're making a bigger deal of this than you have to. Why mention it all the time? If it's not what you want to do, then forget about it."

"You keep bringing it up."

"You're the one playing this staring contest."

The next time that I came to clean her pool I wonder, "Are you mad at me?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You acted so weird last time. Now you're giving me the strangest look "

"Benny, it's how we always act towards each other."

"What are you saying, Angela?" I'm leaning against the pole for the pool vacuum.

"You want something from me. And you know that I can't give it to you. But that really has little affect on you."

"That's not true."

"Benny, if you were a friend, you'd let it go."

"Angela, you continue to bring it up."

She is now standing right next to me. Her face has an excited expression.

"You can think what you want in your head. But in the real world, nothing is ever going to happen between us."

"It's already happening."

She moves away. I can feel the tension.

"You're just making that up."

She turns her back to me and looks at the water.

"If I tossed down this vacuum and took you in my arms right now, what would you do? What could you do?"

"I'd push you away. I'm telling you how I feel."

"But your body is saying something else."

"Benny, if you want to think that, fine. It's your fantasy."

“The fantasy is that you’re feeling nothing.”

She turns all the way around and puts her hands in the air.

“What was that?”

“I was stretching. Trying to take us out of this silly place.”

“Take us somewhere where we can say what we really feel.”

“Josh will be home in two hours. Then I can express how I really feel. I’ve shown you too much of myself.”

“You can’t turn your back on love.”

“Love? You bed every one of your customers, and you think that you can speak of love.”

“If I did what you said, I’d never have a business.”

“Benny, a pool service offers escorts to lonely women. I’m not lonely. I just need a clean pool.”

“I’m doing a credibly good job.”

“Are you implying that you don’t need my supervision?”

“I’m not implying anything. I tell it like I see it. And I see what I like.”

“I’m flattered. But that’s how far as it goes.”

I feel a little insulted. Why don’t I just leave. She is standing behind me. It is a hot muggy day. I know that she is close to me, in back of me. I can feel her body heat, warm, moist. She is sweating still from her workout. I want to rub myself against her wet body.

She goes over to the table and dries herself with the towel.

“Why don’t you swim while I’m here?”

“I don’t know. I like to run. I’m not big on swimming. I’m glad that we have the pool. I use it. But not all that much.”

“Let’s go for a swim.”

“You just want to see me in a swimsuit.”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

She gestures as if she is slapping me..

“You’re a bad boy.”

“I can’t help it if I am.”

She is gone for a while. I finish the vacuuming. I assume that she is coming back in her suit. She doesn’t. She enjoys my frustration.

“Benny, I’ll see you next time.”

Josh is away on a business trip.

“Benny, I’m lonely. Can you come over.”

I’m free, and I decide to head over there.

“You want a drink?”

“Not yet.”

We sit across from each other nervously. She gets up to put on some music.

“I’m going to need a drink. Are you sure that you don’t want one?”

“If you’re going to have one, go ahead and get me one, too.”

I know that it might look a little awkward if she is the only one drinking amongst us.

She has just finished making some gin and tonics for both of us. She is holding her drink in her left hand. The music is playing in the background. She starts to rock to the beat. I am

halfway across the room, but I can feel the swaying of her hips. She gives me a big smile.

The tonic and lime is a little sticky. Her hands are sticking together. She licks her two middle fingers. Then her pointing finger. Then she smacks her lips as she licks her thumb. She takes a sip of her drink to soften the sweetness. She again looks over at me. She is performing for me. She now moves her feet back and forth. She is no longer restrained. She wants me to move along with her.

I am still a few feet away. She moves closer. Her steps are now exaggerated as if she is trying to teach me how to move. I am drawn to her coaxing. At one point she comes over to me and puts her hand on the back of my neck. She then retreats and goes back to her comfortable rocking.

“Come on, Benny. Let’s see you dance.”

“I don’t really dance.”

“You’ve got to try.”

I am almost breaking down a wall just to let myself go. As I move I sense that she has become more open with me. She again walks over to me and is tapping out the beat on my back. She is almost doing a chant to the music. She alternates between moving closer to me and then retreating back.

I slide over to her so that we are completely face to face. I want to kiss her. She is giving me as much as she can without actually touching me. I can feel the tension build. Then she heads back to the wall where she supports herself as her legs move back and forth.

“You dance pretty well, Benny.”

“Angie, you’re not bad yourself.”

I imagine myself kissing her as she remains pinned against the wall. But there is that barrier that separates it. It becomes more extreme as I get closer to her.

“I’m going to get another drink. You want some more.”

“I’m still nursing the first one.”

She comes back with a drink for herself. All the dancing has made her thirsty. She takes a serious gulp from the glass. And then puts it down. Now she wave her hands in the air as she twirls around.

“You like that, Benny”

She poses.

“I always wanted to study dance.”

“You still can.”

“I need to finish college. Just do something.”

“You’ve got talent. You probably could do anything that you want.”

“I know that. It just gets a little frustrating here. Sometimes I feel that my life is over.”

“You’re so young.”

“Benny, don’t I know that. It gets crazy. I have so much time on my hands. Then I get involved in something really silly. Like finishing an antique table. Then I have no time for anything at all.”

“You just need a system.”

“That sounds scientific. I’m not scientific.”

She walks back to the kitchen to get another drink. She doesn’t even ask me this time. I

try dancing when she has left the room. I just seem sort of clumsy while she has gone. I can pick up on her movements, but I have trouble in making sense of it when she is not there.

She comes back with her drink. She is shaking her hands around and is on the verge of spilling the drink.

“Benny, you are kind of cute. You need to settle down.”

“I think that I would if I found a girl like you.”

“What does that mean? A lot of guys say that to me.”

“You have that quality that makes a guy want to settle down.”

“I am settled down. I’m married. I want to be a little wild.”

“You want it both ways. You get a little wild, and when I respond, you run back to your marriage.”

“I’m not going to have sex with you on the pool deck.”

I am very close to her. I almost whisper, “Let me take you up to your bedroom, and I’ll fuck your brains out.”

She waits there for a long minute. The lets her stare wander off.

“I need another drink.”

She is starting to fade a little. It shows in how she is walking. When she comes back, she is not so lively. She sits down in front of the couch. I am now sitting behind her.

“Benny, I feel tired as hell. I think that I did too much.”

I don’t want to hear about her life of leisure. It’s been a busy day for the pool boy. It’s already late. I keep hanging around hoping for something to happen. She is in her own world. She holds her drink on the ground and sets her head back.

“I feel really sleepy all of sudden.”

“You’re really cute.”

“Stop that, Benny. I’m too trashed. I don’t want you taking advantage of me. I’d only hate you for it in the morning.”

“We could do it again in the morning to get over that.”

“I haven’t even called Josh this evening. He probably wonders what I’m doing.”

“I don’t think that he’s worried in the least.”

She hardly hears me. She is woozy. Her head drops for a moment. Then she catches herself. She likes to drink, but she isn’t a very good drunk.

“Benny.” She mumbles.

But it isn’t long before she is passed out in front of me.

I sit there rather uncomfortably. I don’t want to leave. Not at this point. I’m not drunk. But I am too tired to drive.

I look at her passed out before me. I want to kiss her. Nothing more than that. I move so close to her. She doesn’t notice. She is out cold. Her lips have that innocence. She would kill me if she knew what I was thinking. I can’t.

I realize that I am very tired. I am on the verge of passing out myself. I settle back in the comfortable couch and am out like a light.

The next morning she seems pissed. She makes coffee for both of us. I have a job in a couple of hours.

“We should have never done what we did.”

“What did we do?”

She is very curt, “I let you stay here. I passed out.”

“Nothing happened.”

“It doesn’t look like that. If Josh even knew.”

“We were having fun.”

“It’s his house.”

“It’s your house too.”

“He worked for it.”

She feels shame. But she know that the night took her other places. She can’t forget that.

“Are you working this morning?”

“I have to rush off soon. Is Josh coming back tonight?”

“No, he’ll be away a couple of more days. But I don’t think that it would be a good idea to get together again.”

She knows that we have already come too far. Another round, and she will have lost her ability to hold back. She doesn’t want to be really sorry.

She gives me a hug as I leave. I do not want to let go. I want to sleep with her in an almost chaste way. Just lie next to her in a tender embrace. I am getting too sentimental.

The day’s work seems to take forever. I slept, but I feel this residual fatigue. Every time that I expend some effort, I lose energy.

I am only thinking about my time with Angie. I want to play it cool. But the fire is hot. If I don’t strike now, she will have time to cool her ardor. It is another muggy day so she can’t have forgotten all that feeling from the day before. The humidity has given it time to soak through the skin. Now she must be hot to the touch. I am overwhelmed.

She is adamant about me not stopping by. She only relents when she realizes that she doesn’t want to be alone. I am very much benefitting from Josh’s absence. She has come to depend on him so much to overcome her doubts about herself.

“I was swimming just before you got here. Too bad that you missed it.

She is in a skirt and a t-shirt. She is barefoot.

“I made us some dinner.”

I feel almost domestic sitting across from her at the dinner table.

“Do you often eat dinner with your clients,” she asks.

“Not in their homes. Not while their husbands are away.”

“Benny, if I had sex with you, it would mean so much to me, and hardly anything to you.”

“It would mean everything to me.”

“No. It wouldn’t. I’m married. I love Josh. It would be the first time that I’ve betrayed him. And I can never be with you. So you’d end up finding someone else. And I would mean nothing to you.”

“You can’t say that. You don’t know how we’d feel about each other after we’d been together.”

Angie protests, “But we have this special thing between us. It’s almost magic. It would ruin it.”

“The only reason that I’m here is because you want to sleep with me. Otherwise, you’d take tonight to read a book.”



“Benny, what are you saying?”

“You know what yesterday was. And that’s why you told me not to come back. But you knew that I would convince you.”

“You promised that you’d be good.”

“But you want me to do the dirty work. Then you can blame me for what is going to happen.”

“You seem so sure of yourself.”

“I’m sure of you. I can see what you want. You’re even squirming in your chair. There’s only one remedy for that.”

We stare at each other. Then she starts to eat again.

“Benny, there’s more to life than sex.”

“It’s all part of a whole. The sex is like the glue that holds it together.”

“That’s sort of poetic. It’s also smutty as well.”

“You can’t have it perfect. Just do what you feel. It will all work out.”

“This is his house. He’ll know. The house will betray me to him.”

“That’s a clever way to put it. It’s his haunting.”

“That’s how I feel.”

I sense that she gets off on denying herself. The tease. It gives her a sense of power. She doesn’t even need the sex. This is her orgasm.

I want something more. I am aching to touch her. The more that she holds me back, the more that I am drawn to the sex for its sake. But I really like her. This is making it so hard.

“What if we slept in the same bed, but didn’t do anything?”

“Benny, we almost did that last night.”

The house seems so comfortable. I am starting to think that this is my life. I am not a visitor. I have assumed his life. I help Angie with the dishes.

“Are you going to make yourself an after dinner drink?”

“I tried that last night; you saw where that got me.”

We are again sitting across from each other in her living room.

“What do you want to do?”

“Angie, we could watch a movie.”

We put on a film. She cuddles next to me while we watch.

“What is this?”

“I don’t know what it’s called. It’s some romantic comedy that he bought.”

She lets me put my arm around her. She ends up falling asleep while we watch the movie. I end up turning the movie off. She is still asleep. I arrange her so that she is spread out on the couch. Then I decide to leave.

I my car, I curse another missed opportunity. She wanted something to happen., but she couldn’t take the chance. I really enjoyed being with her. I am starting to forget about everyone else but her. Even Sofia seems remote. I left my phone in the car, and now I notice that she has called. It’s now too late to call her back.

The next night Angie meets me out for tacos. She wants to avoid the confinement of her house.

“What did you do today?”

“I completed the table. I did the stain. I let it dry. And then I buffed it. It looks great.”

“I can stop by and see it.”

“Not tonight.”

“You want to show it off don’t you.”

“For me, it’s enough just to talk to you about it.”

“Talking about it’s not the same as seeing it.”

“That will have to do.”

I have to make it back to the house.

“Benny, you need to appreciate just hanging out with me. You don’t want to ruin it.”

I have my desires. I don’t want to deny myself. Not at this point.

“I really thought that I was getting through to you.”

“You have. You really have.”

She is right. I know that she is. But that makes me want her more. I want her to sicken of her life with Josh.

“Benny, I want you to tell me. What can you offer me that’s any different than what I have. If it’s worse, I’ve already had that before I met him.”

“You seem so restless.”

“I live with that. It makes the great times so much better.”

“Let’s get some ice cream.”

We walk over to the ice cream store. I watch her lick the pistachio cone. She green cream swirls around on the cone. She makes a funny face.

“This has to be good enough for you.”

It is. That face. That touch of the clown. When Josh comes back, I’ll miss spending time with her.

“Aren’t your days going to be free?”

“Aren’t you working?”

“Not everyday.” I feel that will be my refuge. I’ll find days to be free with her.

I add more, “There’s also the time when I stop by to do your pool.”

That evening I want to show up unannounced. I have this vision of her yielding without constraint.

“Do you mind if I stop by?” I talk to her by phone.

“I told you that it’s not a good idea. Josh will probably be back in the morning.”

“We’ll be finished by then.”

“Finished what?”

“Hanging out!”

Her voice is comfort enough. If I console myself with these small favors, then I am becoming like her. I’ll miss what makes Benny Benny.

I need to see her without a doubt.

“Benny, the only reason that I let you come by is that I needed to say this to you face to face. So when we see each other again, we’ll understand what’s really happening between us.”

“What is happening?”

She needs to explain herself, “I just don’t want you to take advantage of our friendship. I’ve given you this time because I trusted you. And you haven’t tried anything funny with me. I

want to keep it that way. I need you as a friend. If things change in my life, you're the first one who I'd call. But the only reason that I let you get so close is because I don't want you to destroy anything that we might have shared."

She seems to be playing her last card. I need to outplay this gambit.

"I think that I'm in love with you."

"Benny, that's all fine. I'm already promised to someone else."

"That was before you met me. This changes everything."

"I only let you get so close, because I knew it couldn't go any further. You'd never be right."

"You said..."

She interrupts me, "I know what I said. But if you were with me, you'd find someone else as soon as we lost that magic. That's your style. You can only be so daring and attractive for that reason. I need my quiet."

I am right next to her again. The kiss seems to beckon.

"Benny, I'll let you kiss me. But it has to stop there!"

I move close to her. She moves away.

"I'm not going to play your game. I give an inch, and you take two more. Benny, you're trying to wear me down by making me do all the talking."

I ache with desire. She is only making herself more revered. If I could only end this, I could head over to Brenda's and file it away. She wants immortality.

"Do you know what you're doing?"

"Benny, I'm not stupid."

When I leave, I can't think about anything else. I don't want to head to Brenda's. I can't just work this out. I hate how much power she has over me. For once, someone is really challenging me and not simply giving in. I still take it as a contest. I don't know any difference.

When I get home I call Brenda. I need to explain.

"It wouldn't have been a very good time anyway, Benny."

"Are you saying that I can't stop over?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

I hate the fact that she's denying me. It would be much easier if she wanted me to come over. Then I would feel that force. I'd have something to distract me from Angie if only for a few moments. But it's not like that at all. I am believing it too much. I hate this about myself. I don't know how to turn it off. I had left Angie's with all this confidence. Now it is completely the opposite. I feel the low down. I need a beer. I need to take stock.

The night is rolling over me like this dark cloud. It's getting in my head. I can't stand it. Would I inevitably feel the same way if Angie was with me? Is this what she is afraid of? I can hear her now.

"Benny, you don't want me. You just want me to end your troubles. Once I'm with you, you'll just feel that blackness all over again.

It always used to seem sunny here. Now it is always nighttime. Even in the daylight, I can feel the storm rolling in. There's a breeze tonight. I lie on my bed and feel it cool me down. There are a hundred suns burning inside of me. I can barely keep still. I let the cool air quiet me down. Angie's image is burned in my mind.