

9. MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Ginger confidently took a seat at the bar. She had a long day at work. She worked at a restaurant. She hoped to meet her friends here. But even if they didn't make it out, she planned to have a good time.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"I've already got one."

"What are you drinking?"

"A vodka martini."

"A girl coming up in the world."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Take it for what it is."

"You meant that as a compliment."

"Of course. Sorry, my name is Roger, Roger Grimes."

"Ginger Windsor."

"That's a pretty name."

"What do you do?"

"I'm in banking."

"Which part?"

"The part that prints the money."

"I didn't think that banks printed money."

"It was a joke."

She sniffs at the joke, almost as if he speaks another language.

"Do you like working in a bank?"

"It beats painting houses."

"Did you ever paint houses?"

"A few times when I was in college."

"Where did you go to college?"

"University of Michigan."

"You're a long way from home."

"I came down here for work."

"I went to college for a little while."

"You didn't finish."

"I want to go back. I still like to read. Mostly mysteries. A little supernatural thrillers and the like."

"Stephen King."

"I like stuff that's a little more romantic. I just read this book about this guy who brings over a bride from Russia. And she was all involved in this intrigue."

"Sounds like some crazy stuff."

"It kept me entertained."

"I wish that I had more time to read. I took some English classes in college. I liked Southern Literature."

"I guess that it's a natural that you moved to the South."

"I have some family down here. My parents live in Chicago. And I have a sister in Indiana. But the real money is down here in Georgia."

"You don't work for your family."

"No one really owns banks these days. But my grandfather got me the job. He's retired now. But he was the reason that I moved down here."

"Old money."

"Old enough."

"Wow, someone who didn't earn a fortune through the internet."

"He did make a lot of money in finance. And I've done pretty well on my own."

"So what are you doing in a place like this? Are you feeling a little suicidal?"

"I just came looking for some fun."

"You may end up finding trouble."

"Is that a promise?"

"Don't tell me that a slick guy like you doesn't already have a girl."

"I do. But we're sort of on the outs."

"What did you do: make out with her best friend?"

"More like she made out with her best friend."

"A guy?"

He nods his head.

"Maybe you've got a thing to learn about Southern girls."

"We've been together for a few years."

"And you've trusted her all this time."

"I just don't know."

"It wasn't meant to be. If there's anything that I've learned from reading books is that you have know when something's meant to be."

"Spoken by a true fortune teller."

"I may strike you as a little freaky, but I know what I'm about."

Ginger really turned him on. She was mysterious. A little weird. Who knew what she had in store?

Ginger was trying to take it slowly. She had sat in this seat many a night and seen her share of heartache, hers included. Roger did seem different. He wasn't as desperate as the guys that she usually met. But that made her a little desperate in her own way, as if she had something to prove.

He wanted to dig more, find out who Ginger really was. He needed to feel a little more secure about things. He loved the strangeness. But he realized that he was entering unfamiliar territory. He didn't want to crash and burn.

He reviewed the night so far. All of this had been random. He hadn't sought her out. He just chose an empty seat at the bar. And she couldn't have been looking for him. She was already sitting there. It was all convincingly accidental.

"So you're not looking to get married."

"If it happens, that's all well and good. But I don't see it in the near future."

Ginger wore a little more makeup than he was used to. And her hair was cut in a little more severe way. She dyed it to look darker.

He found her wild side amazingly appealing. What went on this place? It seemed more like a coven and less like a bar. He figured that he was being initiated into a secret society. The group survived on sex rituals. Ginger played the part of a dominatrix.

"I told you that I'm a simple girl. You're trying to make it seem as if I'm all unusual. It's not as if I'm an ax murderer."

"You get along with your parents."

"My father lives up north somewhere. My mother remarried. But that didn't really go to well. So she lives on her own now. She has sisters down here. She's doing OK."

"So you moved out when you started college."

"I moved out when I was old enough to get a job. And I went to college while I was working. But it was hard. I didn't really know what I was doing."

"You are going to go back."

"Of course."

She felt a little intimidated by all this talk. As if she was lacking in the character department. But she kept on as if nothing had happened.

She wondered if he had learned what he was searching for. He seemed just as friendly. But he started to get a little more suggestive. She had the feeling that he was rushing things. As if he needed to seal a deal at work. His touching became slightly provocative. She had to push his hand away a couple of times.

"It is getting late."

"I guess."

"I like to leave the bar before it closes."

"Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Somewhere?"

"Come back to my place for a drink."

She knew where this was heading.

"I've drunk a little too much for one night."

"Live a little. Celebrate."

"Another time."

"I didn't get your number."

"You know where to find me."

He knew where to find her. He had been briefed about her haunts. He hoped that he was catching her on a good night.

"Cinderella?"

"What?"

"Watch out that you don't lose your golden slipper."

She looked down. Her shoe was wedged into a railing by the bar. She would have lost it if she moved.

"Thanks."

"My name's Patrick. What's yours, lovely lady."

"Holly. Although you can call me Cinderella."

"What are you drinking?"

"Too much."

“Another won’t mar your perfection. What will it be?”

She hesitated, “Vodka cranberry.”

“Coming right up.

She wasn’t looking to get picked up, but she took one look in his eyes and she was hooked. She soon waved her friends off. She had work to do.

“What do you do, Patrick?” she listened intently.

“I help out in the family business.”

“So what are you doing in our humble dive bar.”

“I was looking for a princess like you.”

“You can flatter me all night. I’m all ears.”

“Holly, what do you do?”

“I’m a student. My parents have big plans for me. Although I’m more of an artist.”

Holly used her art to comfort her in her other adventures. She had middling talent and a flair for the outrageous. She lived her life with a particular intensity that she could never transfer to her canvases. Perhaps, because she accepted those weaknesses, she had adapted herself to something more mundane. She was majoring in English Literature.

“It doesn’t hurt to spread your wings.”

“I’ve got to warn you. I’ve been pretty serious with this guy for almost two years.” She was having too much fun. She wondered why she told him.

Patrick seemed undaunted, “How serious?”

“We’ve been talking marriage.”

“You seem too young for marriage.”

“That was my thought. I just wanted something to show my parents.”

“What does your fiancé do?”

“He’s not my fiancé yet. He’s in pre-med.”

“Long hours and no life.”

“Exactly. Now kiss me.”

“What?”

“That’s the game that we were playing. Every time that you take a shot, you have to kiss me. You know: Kiss Me Kate!”

“You’re making this up. And your name isn’t Kate.”

“Just give me a peck on the cheek. It’s all part of the game.”

He looked at her intently and held her in his arms. He braced her as he kissed her with everything that he could muster. It seemed as if everyone was watching what had happened. The world seemed to turn around them.

“Now that was a kiss!”

He seemed a little embarrassed as if he had played his cards too easily.

“Get me another drink.”

“Coming right up.”

From that point on, she had no doubts where this was heading.

The next morning she was completely convinced. None of it had been a mistake. It was just that so much had happened in a short period of time.

“You’re living in a hotel!”

"I'm just down here and business."

"Your family."

"Yeah, they're down here. But I live in Maryland. Maryland."

"I'm going to move here."

"I hope so!"

"I wasn't trying to trick you."

"Of course, you weren't. Oh well, I guess that's my luck."

"Luck?"

"I told you that I had a guy."

"Had, have. I don't know pretty much of anything."

He kisses her.

"I hope you had a great time."

"Where are the rest of my clothes?"

"Are you leaving now? No breakfast?"

"I have to be at my parents."

"What?"

"We're going out for brunch."

"I can call you!"

"You're going to have to do more than that."

"What do you mean?"

"Last night, you promised me the world. I'm expecting that."

"Do you want it all in a day? The Lord took seven days."

"OK, a week, I want the world in a week. And we can rest together on the seventh day!"

Ginger sat at her familiar perch on the bar. A well-dressed man sat next to her. He was trying to get up his nerve to say something to her. He kept giving her those looks trying to size her up. She just smiled at his uncertainty.

"You still haven't got it right."

"What are you talking about?"

"I've seen you in here before. And you're always the same clumsy self."

"I've never been in here before."

"You left with this knock out. Some college student. She was in 12-inch heels. She looked like a fashion model. She almost lost her shoe."

"Oh, Cindy. I forgot about her."

"You forgot about her. Didn't you kiss her in the middle of the floor for I don't know how long. A century?"

"Maybe."

"Did she dump you already?"

"She's got a guy."

"You're going to let that stop you."

"There's family money."

"All the more reason to use you talent to see where it will take you."

"I don't think that I can play in that league. So who are you with all the answers?"

"I'm Ginger."

“Patrick.”

“Well, Patrick. I’ve got a job for you.”

The more that he sat with Ginger, the more at home he felt. He wasn’t much for all this whirlwind stuff anyway.

“I told her that I had family money. I’m down to my last couple of hundred. I’m in a hotel. I came down here to interview for a job. I’m getting nowhere.”

“You got pretty far with her.”

“Her parents would have sniffed me out in a second.”

“Admit it. You’re a con artist. You had your mark. And you let her get away.”

“I didn’t think the thing through.”

“You just needed to keep dazzling her.”

“Like your doing to me.”

“Spoken like a true con artist. No, honey, I’m just giving you a shoulder to cry on.”

“We can start with the shoulder and go from there.”

“I’m not looking to get picked up.”

“It’s not whether you’re looking. It’s how things end up.”

Ginger didn’t like how things sounded, the rubbing together of two wooden nickels. What were they going to do as a team. Share their war stories.

“Ginger, I want to know everything about you.”

“You’re going to have to do lot of kissing before I get around to doing any telling.”

“Let me get you a drink.”

He wanted to know what made her so uninhibited with her body.

“Sunny, I’ve never been with a woman like you before. You’re just so free. So proud of your body. You’re unafraid to push yourself. You’ll try almost anything.”

“You’re quite the lover yourself. You know how to be gentle. But you aren’t afraid to let it get a little rough.”

She didn’t even put her clothes on. She pranced around the room naked as if she was still putting on a show for him. Her whole body turned him on. He could hardly look at her without getting aroused.

“I want to know everything about you. How did you get to be this way? I wish that I could read your sex diary.”

“It’s not at all a pretty story. I was almost a runaway. I used to spend all night out looking for trouble. I hung around gas stations waiting for guys to buy me beer. A couple of times I actually went with these men back to a motel. I let them do all these things to me. It taught me a lot early.”

“You never did anything for money.”

“Nothing like that. I tried to be careful. When it started to get a little bit dangerous, I ran back home. But that wasn’t much better. So I moved to the city. I lived with one of my cousins. She smoked a lot of weed. And I got a job.”

“Did you finish high school?”

“Eventually. And I tried to do a little community college. Then I got a good job. And it’s been OK ever since.

“Never any steady loves?”

“Nothing to speak of. I’ve been trying to recapture the magic of my teen years.”

“That seems pretty tough.”

“What’s all this stuff about a sex diary?”

“Just an idea that I once had. Keeping track of all your encounters. Tracking all the ups and downs. Mapping the body. What gets you off. And what really gets you off.”

“Sounds wild. Almost like some kind of science.”

“I like the sound of that.”

“Techniques on how to get the most intense orgasm.”

“I’ve got spam mail about shit like that.”

“There’s got to be new techniques.”

“I think that we’ve explored most of those.”

“Sometimes I feel that I’m on the verge of something mind-blowing. Like the secret of why we’re here!”

“To fuck each other’s brains out.”

Mrs. Henderson stared at him straight on.

“So you found her?”

“That’s what you wanted.”

“I want you to kill her.”

“What?”

“I told you. You met Vince in that restaurant. And he had an assignment for you. You weren’t being hired for your penis. You’re going to have to kill her.”

“But why?”

“She’s the only thing that stands in the way of my husband’s money.”

“Are you going to kill him, too?”

“He doesn’t have long to live.”

“And he knows that?”

“He knows what he needs to know.”

“I didn’t think that you really wanted me to kill anyone. I thought that this was just some power game that you were playing with your daughter.”

“Willy, either you kill her, or someone is going to kill you.”

“Don’t you have enough? She’s your own daughter.”

“She’s out of control. There’s nothing that I can do to influence her.”

“How much can you have? You’re rich enough.”

“It’s not all my money.”

“What do you want that you can’t have? You practically have everything.”

“My husband makes all the decisions. And now she’s working with him. They’re trying to hide all his money.”

“How greedy are you?”

“It’s not greed. You don’t know what it’s like. You have nothing. I’m just protecting what I have.”

“You’re trying to make it seem as if someone is persecuting you.”

“I can’t help it if that’s the way that I feel.”

“Don’t you have enough money? What does it take to make you secure.”

"I barely have enough. I could lose it all tomorrow."

"You have loads of money. How much is too much?"

"You never can have too much. To can never be too safe."

"Spoken like a true maniac. No wonder you want to hurt her."

"I've planned this out for a long time. Now she is the only thing in my way."

"Your own daughter."

"She has become a monster. It's as if only she knows the one thing that can get under my skin. And she's going to do her best to dig and dig her."

"I know her, and I can tell you that she's not at all like that."

"Has she got to you as well?"

"What are you talking about?"

"She's messing with your head. You have to do it before it's too late."

"You make it sound as if she's the monster. But you're the one who wants me to kill her."

Roger understood that things were getting a little crazy.

"Holly, you're going to have to be a lot more up front with me."

"I really don't think that I've been hiding anything."

"You've been telling me the truth."

"I've done my best to share everything with you."

"Have you really?"

"What on earth could you be referring to? We've talked so much that I can barely speak. I've told you about every guy that I've been with. Everything that I've done with them."

"Some of that I don't want to hear about it."

"So what is the big problem?"

"There are some important things that you left out."

"Like what?"

"Just things in your past."

"I don't live in my past."

"If you can't escape from your past, you're condemned to relive it."

"Oh shit! You put a curse on me!"

"Quit being silly about this."

"I can't help it."

"I have to know!"

"Know what?"

"Why did you run away from home?"

"What are you talking about?"

"There must have been some reason that you're the way that you are. All the erratic behavior."

"Do you have me confused with someone else?"

"What do you mean?"

"I never ran away from home. I'm the farthest thing from erratic that you can get. I'm even more stable than stability. I have every moment of my life planned out. It would probably do me good to leave home sometime."

“There’s nothing in your life that you need to change.”

“You’re talking crazy. It’s like you don’t know me.”

“I don’t think I can take this anymore.”

“Take what. I spent most of my time studying. I’m in a pre-law program at University of Maryland. What more would I have to do to get my life together?”

“And what would you do if I stopped talking to you?”

“What is bringing this on.”

“What would you do if we stopped talking?”

“I’d cry for a long time.”

“Is that all?”

“I’d feel very sad. Eventually, I would get into my sadness, and then I would just move on.”

“Maybe it would be better if we spent more time apart.”

“Is that what you really want?”

“I don’t know what I want. What am I supposed to want?”

“I can’t give you answer. You’re telling me that, and I can’t even give you the answer for myself.”

David needed to catch his breath as he left the building.

“Did you miss the elevator?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You walked down all those stairs.”

“It’s not just that. I think that someone is after me.”

“Pure paranoia.”

“I’m not kidding you. Someone is trying to kill me.”

“Why you?”

“That I have no idea. I’m basically living on the street. I have no money to speak of. What would someone gain if I was dead?”

“Maybe it’s an old grudge.”

“Like in a horror movie or something.”

“I’m not kidding.”

“Did you get pushed down the stairs?”

“No, the elevator’s not working.”

“So you think that someone is trying to kill you just because your elevator is not working.”

“Someone was hanging around your door.”

“The UPS man.”

“How did he get in the building?”

“Someone let him in.”

“So why didn’t he just leave the package inside the door.”

“He couldn’t. He needed a signature.”

“It’s not that!”

“Did he have a gun?”

“I’m not sure.”

“The UPS man is carrying a gun.”

“Someone followed me home last night.”

“A mugger.”

“You have an answer to everything.”

“And you’re making up things as you go along just to prove a point. No one is after you.”

“You can’t say that.”

“You’re asking me to prove the negative. There is no evidence to support your case.”

“I’m getting fucked over by someone. I came to you for help. And now you’re making light of the situation.”

“I want to keep an open mind.”

“How open? I’m telling you the truth, and you refuse to consider if I’m right.”

“OK, let’s go over the actual evidence. We can analyze if there are actually any reasons to believe that you’re correct.”

“What would really prove the case? If I took a bullet.”

“I could follow you around to see if someone else is following you.”

“That sounds good. You follow me. You protect me. And you jump in if I need your help.

“I do need your protection.”

“Why don’t you just stay in your apartment?”

Roger and Pat were heading out for a game of serious action.

“If I look like I’m in real trouble, I need you to come to my rescue.”

“Rescue?”

“If I’m surrounded by a flock of hot women, I want you to keep me from drowning.”

“I thought that we got over that kind of thing in high school.”

“So what are the stakes here?”

“Roger, I don’t think that we’re here to play the stakes. Here we get away from all the bull shit of our lives. We break the mold.”

“Pat, she breaks the mold.”

“She’s got to be with someone.”

“Look around. I don’t see anyone.”

“I see everyone in this place. They’re all waiting for her to make a fault. Then one of them will just rush in to the rescue.”

“So what are we here for?”

“To raise the stakes.”

“What about her?”

“She’s raising the stakes.”

“How does she do that?”

“What do you see when you look at her? She talks to the heavens. She stops time in its tracks.”

“It’s just silly to exaggerate like that. It’s not healthy.”

“Pat, romantic love makes the world go ‘round.’”

“By making the rest of mankind insane. She could never live up to that kind of billing.”

“She can live up to it, and more.”

“Roger, you’re making it even harder for me to ever approach her. Besides, how could she ever be as great as you’re trying to make her?”

“I’ve got an eye for that sort of thing.”

“But how many variations can your eyes pick up? And there could be millions of variations to her personality.”

“That’s when you need to jump in the game to verify the probabilities.”

Pat wasn’t sure what was actually going on here. It was as if he had just been released from solitary. His eyes were just starting to adjust.

“I noticed you from the other side of the room.”

“You and your friend were making quite a spectacle of yourselves.”

“We were actually that bad.”

“I thought that it wasn’t kind of cute. I just wasn’t sure who would approach me.”

“I guess I got set up.”

“What did your friend tell you?”

“He gave me words of encouragement.”

“Did he give you some money so that you could buy me a drink?”

“Do you want a drink?”

“Sure. Rum and coke.”

“You are quite the sweet tooth.”

“I’m just getting revved up.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. We’ll figure that out before the night is over.”

“Are you sure that I’m the right guy?”

“You made the approach.”

“What if you’re not the right girl?”

“Right girl?”

“I was supposed to meet someone. What’s your name?”

“Sunny.”

“Not Holly.”

She shakes her head.

“I’m not sure.”

“I can do Holly!”