

## 10. OUT TO DRY

In the morning a government car pulls up. Two agents get out. They show me their ID's and ask me to accompany them. I call Rob so that he can cover a job for me. They don't tell me what is their business. I don't put up a fuss. I take for granted that I need to come with them. I am driven to a building that bears no government markings. I am led to a room where I meet Ramon and Steve.

"What are you both doing here? Am I in trouble?"

Steve speaks first, "Far from it. We've got a deal for you."

Ramon joins in, "We've got this failed business. The head of the company was involved in all these illegal money laundering schemes."

"It's a construction company. They install pools."

"That's why we thought of you. The company was a front for these other investments. But it's still a solid company. Think about it."

"I'm going to be building pools as well as maintaining them," I wonder.

"There's a couple of really good guys with the company. It won't require too much of an investment. You can get it a bargain basement price."

"Tax dollars at work."

Before I go through with the deal, I decide that I have to learn the business from the inside out. This means working on the construction crew

All the arrangements have been made to become part of the crew. A few days later I show up early in the morning to begin my work. Phil Delaney is the supervisor. I introduce myself. I am on a crew of five other guys.

I am immediately assigned to help dig up the sod. I feel as if I am back on the Country Club detail. It is still muggy out. I am sweating like a pig. Mud now covers my clothes. Later in the day, they decide to get me operating a bulldozer. I should be wearing a cowboy hat.

Phil shows me how to work it. I sit next to him while he demonstrates. He has me work it for him. Everything seems perfect. He jumps down. It is my turn to work without him standing over my shoulder. The next thing I know I have this bulldozer heading backwards towards the house. Phil is running behind me.

"The brakes. The brakes. Push the fucking brakes."

I start to panic. Everything is going wrong. I am pushing every button. The scooping arm is going up and down. Now the bulldozer has come precariously close to the house. I react just in time. Just inches from the hitting the house.

Phil jumps back in the cab and moves the bulldozer back to where we are doing the work.

"It's probably against my better judgement, but I'm going to let you back in there." He goes over everything twice. He has me demonstrate it again and again.

"Now it's your turn."

Soon I am starting to dig the hole for the pool. I dig the dirt and then load a nearby truck. It beats actually getting in the dirt and being all muddy. I also feel this sense of power. This is better than being a pool boy.

I guess it's a lot easier for me to adjust to my new work since it is temporary. It seems like a great deal. I am going to love managing this company. I learn one of the tricks of the

trade. It best to have as many jobs going as possible. This means bidding on five or six jobs at once. Then you start digging as soon as you can. Then you just leave this empty ditch in the yard. It not as if they can just fill it in. In the beginning you make it seem as if you're going to complete things right away. But then you just leave them hanging on. When they're about to give up, you show up like the shining white knight and finish the job. Then they think of you as a rescuer, not as a shoddy contractor. It's so much easier than being pool boy. There's just none of the tender loving care.

After my time served on the crew, I meet Ramon at his place one evening.

"Ramon, where do I sign up for the job?"

"There's still a lot of paperwork."

"This is brilliant. So you guys are going to help me with financing."

"We are going to make it happen for you."

"This is brilliant. Now the CIA is into the construction business. I feel like I'm joining the Mafia."

"Never say anything like that. It could get you deported."

"Ramon, it's just a joke."

"They really don't understand humor."

I meet with my accountant the next day. Terry's office is meticulous. He is looking at his folder on the deal. His computer displays other pertinent detail.

"Benny, this does seem like a good deal. But there are some questions about the construction company."

"I think that's probably due to the fact that they've been trying to skim money off the top to keep their other operations going. But the basic assets seem solid."

"You might be spreading yourself thin. You're depending a lot on this loan. Right now the maintenance business is in good stead. You've expanded well since the commercial have been running. This could be a big headache."

"Terry, if I don't make the deal now, I'm not going to get this opportunity again. I'd have to expand hundreds of times just to generate the necessary capital."

"But if something goes wrong with the construction. An earthquake, storms, then you've really lost all you investment."

Terry appears sure of himself. He sits back on his office chair. I am leaning over the desk. This all seems to obvious for me. But he is trying to convince me of his doubts. I don't want to ignore him. I guess that I'm still giddy from operating the bulldozer.

"What's the worst thing that could happen?"

"The construction business could drag down the maintenance business. You'd be strapped for cash. You might have to sell everything."

"That's not going to happen."

I am confident. I don't want anything like that to happen at all. I have risked everything for the pool business. For over a year, I have built things gradually. But I need to follow my dream. That means more than having this one business. I need to expand while I can. Terry sends me away with a pile of papers to examine. I wonder if this is how I want to end up. I've already become more busy since the commercial. This will mean more work. I will have to hire a business manager. And other office staff. This will become a mega-operation. Before the

week is out, I am signing papers. I feel like it is a sentence, hopefully not a death sentence.

Having another arm of the business is liking having a hundred more headaches. One of the crews fails to show up at a construction site on one occasion. They have assumed that the weather will prevent work. I have to pull a bunch of pool boys off their assignments so I can cover the job. I now own big trucks and bulldozers. Serious equipment. I feel like a general from a small country leading his troops into battle.

I am chilling out on a lounge chair at Angie's.

"Benny, you have become like any conqueror. Your downfall is in the offing.

"Who are you supposed to be, Cassandra?"

"You should never be too proud."

"You could be proud of me. I feel like I've done something serious for once."

"Where's the mythic love-maker. You look all tuckered out."

"I still can receive. You can give me a massage."

"This is probably a good moment to offer to make love with you since you can't possibly take up on the offer."

"You are cute." I want to make a gesture towards her. I am too tired to raise my hands.

I think that I've already seen the worst. Little do I know. I get this new guy handling the bulldozer. I thought that I was bad. He causes a water main break. Damn!

I've got to deal with the possibility of municipal fines. The pipe has to be fixed. We have a muddy mess to clean up. It is a total nightmare.

After work, I sneak over to Brenda's. She has just been swimming. The water glistens off her.

"Benny, you're giving me the look of someone who's been isolated on a desert island."

"I have been isolated. And then buried in mud."

She seductively dries herself off with her towel.

"You need to clean up. You're a mess."

I tell her about my headache.

"You poor boy. Now you know what it's like to run an empire."

"I could use some caring from the empress."

She is impressed with my new acquisition. But she still thinks that I look like a mess.

"I probably shouldn't allow you to hang out on the deck looking like that."

"I could take off my clothes."

"Not today, Benny."

She looks so appealing in her revealing two-piece. I actually collapse on a lawn chair.

"You could do this at home."

"I know that I could. But the scenery's not as good. And I don't have a pool."

"You'd disturb the pH balance if I let you jump in now. You should know that. You're the pool guy. At least, you were in another life."

"That's hardly true."

"Benny, you're messing up the pool area."

"What do you want me to do? Let me just take my clothes off."

"I already told you no."

She is lying on her back on a lawn chair. She has already taken off her swim suit top.

“Let me rub some lotion on you.”

“I’m not going to be out here that long.”

Her bikini bottom hugs her ass. I want to slide my hand underneath. She seems so resistant today.

“Do you want me to leave?”

“That sounds like a good idea.”

I am striking out badly. It’s not as appealing being a construction boss. Despite the setback, I won’t let it get me down. I have enough at work to think about. It used to be that I would do a referral if a customer needed major repairs. Now if the pump is acting up, I can schedule a session where we can tear up a deck and redo the pipes and install a new pump.

Before long I’m subcontracting for these large developments. I’ve got a community pool at one. A couple of house pools at another. I get a loan for more equipment. There’s always something new going.

I call Elsie. I want to hang out. She thinks that I have more work for her. We meet at a local bar.

“You want to do another commercial.”

I answer, “Sometime. But not too soon. I have all my money tied up. I’m doing pool building now.”

“The mob is involved in pool building.”

“I’m not in the mob.”

She develops her idea, “You will be. Then you’ll want to hang around with a different class of girls. The next thing I know, you end off bumping off some girl’s guys because she won’t play ball with you.”:

I laugh, “That is the silliest thing that I have ever heard.”

“I just don’t want you shooting up my place.”

“I’ve never even carried a gun. I’m a pool guy.”

“See! Even you no longer call yourself pool boy. You’re a wise guy.”

“I thought that *I* watched a lot of TV,” I remark.

“I need to keep up. I might be on a show some day.”

Probably not any time soon. She could use some more work in commercials.

She asks, “Are you going to give me a ride back to my place?”

“Are we going to have some fun there?”

“Maybe another time, Benny. I’ve got a friend coming over. Benny, you’re not like you used to be.”

“I don’t think that I’ve changed that much.”

“You’re just not as appealing as you once were. Maybe if you were in the mob, I wouldn’t mind hanging out. But you’re just a construction boss.”

“But it could be a front for the mob.”

“Quit playing with me Benny!”

A couple of days later, Sofia agrees to meet me for lunch. When she enters the room, I feel that electricity that first drew me to her.

“All your other girls have told you to take a powder?”

“What are you talking about.”

“If you’re calling me then something must be wrong.”

“That’s not it at all.”

“What is it then?”

“I miss you.”

“Benny, you do have a heart.”

“For what it’s worth.”

After I tell her about my expanded business, she changes her assessment.

“So now your heart is worth more than ever!”

“You could say that”

“That still doesn’t change anything between us.” She stretches out her long legs. She is wearing a short skirt and gold shoes. I want to reach out and touch her.

“What are you saying?”

“You know what I’m saying. You’re still expecting that we’re going to go out. That you’ve finally settled down. You’re more of a risk than ever.”

“I don’t get it.”

“The more money that you have, the more that you’ll try to buy yourself out of a bad situation. You know that you never have to really work it out. It’s on to a fresh face.”

“If you believe that, why do you even meet me.”

She shines, “Benny, I like you. There’s no getting around that fact. But I really can’t change for you.”

There’s still this sinking feeling when she says that to me. My new empire doesn’t seem enough of a consolation for her not being with me.

“Are you ruling things out?”

“You just have more growing to do. You’re still just a big boy.”

There was a time when I’d rush off to another girl to pretend that this wasn’t happening to me. Now there is no easy solution to how I feel I don’t want to give up. But I also don’t want to be alone.

I call up Angie.

She asks, “Have you taken a shower since work?”

She is teasing me.

“Yes, I have.

“Then you can come over for a little while.”

“Where’s Josh?”

“He’s away.”

“He seems to be away quite a bit.”

Angie wants to be assertive, “You hardly ever call. And when you do, he just happens to be away.”

She has been sitting out by the pool when I arrive.

“Come on out. I’ll get you a drink.”

“You’re not drinking alone these days.”

“It’s not a big deal to have a drink while I’m by myself. I don’t need a drink babysitter.”

“I’ll be your babysitter.” I’m all excited.

“Thanks, but no thanks.”

She gets me drink and brings another for herself

“Benny, you know that you have this thing. A girl can’t help herself when she’s around you. But in the morning she only hates herself.”

“So what’s been stopping you.”

“I look around this house. It’s all Josh. It reminds me how terrible I will feel. That’s enough to hold me back.”

“I’ll have to get you over to my place.”

“Home is a state of mind.”

“I’m trying to unlock your mind.”

She is making me work so hard. I wonder if that is inspiring me.

“Benny, I never hear you talk about your family. Do you keep in touch?”

“I told you about my brother. He plays polo for a living. I call my Mother every week or so. I talk to my Dad. I’ve thought about bringing them over. We stay friendly. But the reason that I moved here was that I wanted to be independent. I wanted to get away from my former life. I don’t think about it too much.”

“That seems sort of sad.”

“Is that what America is about? Starting all over again.”

Before I moved to the States, I lived how my parents expected me to be. But I was raised on American TV. That was my true heritage. Now I finally had the chance to live up to that sort of life. It is ironic that Angie is so concerned about my finally when she is hardly forthcoming about her own life.

She was raised by her mother after her parent’s divorce. That is why she is so attached to Josh. At the same time, she can never really give herself to him. When he is out of town, it is almost as if he ceases to exist. The only trace of their connection together is the house. I feel strange witnessing this. Whenever he is gone, she almost expects me to be there. But then she refuses to acknowledge how I feel about it. For once in my life I really feel involved in another person’s psychology. It is different for me.

Elsie’s predictions about my life end up coming true in the form of Jason Levy, a cheap hood. Jason is in a suit two sizes too small for him. He is wearing brown loafers. It is a humid day, and he is sweating like hell. He pulls his car up on the lawn and walks over to one of our sites. He introduces himself and then starts yelling.

“Like man, that’s my bulldozer.”

“What the hell are you talking about.”

“Are you Benny?”

“Yeah, I’m Benny. What do you want?”

“Benny, that is my bulldozer. You owe me money.”

“You’re making no sense.”

“I lent Charlie money. You have the bulldozer. You owe me the money.”

“I bought all this equipment legally.

“There are more things that people do with bulldozers than dig pools.”

The little twirp is threatening me. I want to take care of him here and now. I instead decide to stall him.

“I’ll make good, Jason. I have to finish this job today.”

As soon as he leaves, I'm on the phone to Ramon. I'm racing over to see him. He's at home.

"What kind of deal did you get me?"

"Jason Levy. That creep should be in jail. I'll take care of it."

I end up keeping the bulldozer. I never see from Jason again. Sometimes the government knows how to shut people up.

I am sure that Elsie would have got a kick out of the whole experience. It also happens so quickly that it seems like something that I just made up.

I call her with the intention of sharing my story.

"What is it now Benny?"

I tell her my story.

"He never pulled a gun on you?"

"Never!"

"It didn't really happen, did it?"

"Sure it did!"

She agrees to let me come over.

"Let's see where he hit you."

"He never hit me."

"If he had hit you, where would he have hit you?"

"Probably in the head. But he was such a little twirp."

"You should have popped him. If you're a real man you would have hit him yourself."

"Let's just say that I made him disappear."

"Benny, you need a new suit. You need to show off."

My construction business is doing well. But I don't want to push things. We only have a little bit of cash on hand. A lot of our money is tied up. I know the risks of spending it all too soon.

"Benny, don't be boring."

Her low-cut blouse is pulled over a push-up bra. She lets this do the talking for her!

"Heavens if I'm boring."

I can sense both of our interest waning. I can sense that this is the feeling that she maintains on the set. She is expected to perform on cue time after time. She has a duty even if her mind might be elsewhere.

With me, she almost feels that it's a duty to satisfy herself. I am starting to forget the sheer physical pleasures. I am torn between Sofia and Angela. Brenda has put me off from resolving that contradiction in bed. Now when I have the chance with Elsie, I don't feel it.

"I can just suck you off, and you can go."

"Elsie, I don't want to feel that way. I'm not paying you for a service."

"You're a wise guy. It's part of your protection racket."

"It is a racket."

I feel like I am giving in. The industry has barely allowed Elsie to vocalize her feelings of being put down. Instead, she has learned to create more and more elaborate games to respond to her resentment. It is a lot harder for her to express how she feels towards me. She thinks that I am part of an elaborate game. That money is now involved. That it was always about some

kind of dominance on my part. At the same time, she doesn't want to give up her independence with her partners.

This is more so after our commercial. It gave her the belief that she might do more serious acting. This was always her dream. It has been a while since she thought about things in this way. And there has been few results to show. She is back acting in the same run of films. Her new-found celebrity has only enhanced the exploitation that she has always felt.

Elsie doesn't want to give in to that feeling. This would only bring her down more. Ultimately, she wants to see herself as an entrepreneur. That she is the one who abuses her clients, the viewing public. That they can only engage a tiny margin of her attention individually. That way, she protects herself against her fans. They can only own part of the whole, the part that feeds their fantasy. But the fantasy has little to do with her reality.

Here is her problem: she expects the treatment accorded her as a star. She wants to believe that the fantasy is real just for her own benefit. Her fans have such a minute part of her that they control nothing. But she commands their total attention.

I liken her pursuit to my expansion into the construction industry. She is the pool girl. I have always felt this. But she cannot go to the next stage. She cannot construct her image. That was our link. It did not bear fruit. Now she has been abandoned to something less than this. She is somewhat mortified.

She is still somewhat of a child with regards to pleasure.

"Come on, Benny, give me your dick."

I am again on the set of an adult movie. I am handing her a shovel to dig a deeper hole for the new pool. That is my function. To give her a needed tool.

I really hope that she might pretend more. That she could say those words that I want to hear from Sofia. That she could be affectionate in the way I need from Angie. She is none of those things. She had been playful. Now she is mechanical. I wonder can I do the same.

I feel that I have been holding myself back in the hopes of some reward. There has been none. When I come inside her, I feel all the flood gates have been opened. The flow allows me to release all the energy that I had spent on Angie. It feels really weird. I want this to mean something more. So does Elsie in her own way. For her that now means a true reward. Some form of professional advancement. I am feeling a little helpless in that regard.

She expects me to have the endurance of one of her co-stars. Even my former excitement is a thing of the past.

"Benny, you are becoming a limp dick. Are you in love?"

"Not really."

"What then?"

"I feel a little distracted."

I realize my mistake. I believed the very ethos that motivated Elsie all along. That image can convey every attitude about a person's psyche. But the clever cat and mouse of Angie and the insightful play of Sofia both reveal that there is another aspect to human interaction that exceeds Elsie's understanding.

I need another distraction. There is a feeling that I have about sex that no longer applies with Elsie. I will have to return to her once I reacquaint myself with that more expansive vision. When I can again give myself to sex for sex.

I decide to spend more time on my own just exploring. I actually have a little time on the weekend. It is a working Saturday. But I am going to do nothing on Sunday so I have my night to party.

I am already playing a more upscale lifestyle. I don't want to waste my resources, but I am able to step up in the world. I no longer have to drive a company truck all the time. I allow myself a few luxuries. I have not achieved my brother's flair. But I try to blend in on the dance floor. She is next to me demonstrating her skills. I am seduced by the feeling of total liberty that informs her movement. She doesn't hold back a thing. She is almost zealous in her assertiveness. She wants to convey how much she likes sex. She want to make a public confession with her body.

I am excited.

I move myself closer to her until she is sliding her body against me. I discover an ease of movement on my part. After dancing with her for about fifteen minutes, she gestures to me that she is hot. I offer to buy her a drink.

"I'm Benny. What's your name?"

"Kim."

She has been meticulous with her makeup. She has none of the grace of Sofia. She is not natural like Angie. But she has my attention now. Her dance makes it apparent how much she likes to show her body. It has none of the tone that I am used to. But she substitutes a raw sexuality. She is not bashful about expressing her confidence about herself. She is relentless in expressing what she wants.

"What do you do Benny?"

"I do pool construction."

She smiles, "You're in the mob. You can tell me. I've got relatives."

"No, I really do pool construction."

Unlike Elsie, there is nothing mechanical about Kim. She is uncomplicated. She really believes what she does.

She kisses me by the bar. She is rubbing her body against me. But there is no subterfuge on her part. She totally believes what she is doing. For tonight she is giving all of herself to me. There is nothing in our way. No hindrance to pleasure.

Another night, and it might be different. Tonight, she wants to share herself with me. I no longer feel like the pool boy. I'm some guy that she meets in a bar. Someone with desires that she can relate to. She is equally driven.

The alcohol helps the vague intimacy that we share. It convinces that there are so many things in her life over which she has little control. That is why she does not hold back. For the moment, I find this so gratifying. There is a sense of endlessness in her naked body. But as I travel along these smooth surfaces, I miss the complexity of Angie. What can I do?

In a way, Kim has gone out with the express purpose of meeting some guy that she would take home. Down deep, she wants to believe that this will amount to something more than this. She feels that she has been circumspect about her choice. She has found someone with his own business.

There is a world where this would have been the beginning of something more permanent. For me, it has only shown me how much I want something else. But as I hold Kim

in my arms, this seems like the only thing that I am living for.

I know that it is not. I do not want to feel that she is pathetic. She is not. But I am only going to make her feel that way if I tell her my actual motives. I have not been looking for a stand in for another girl. She is not a body double. I am just having difficulty getting beyond the physical intensity of our meeting.

I almost shame Kim for being so immediate in giving me what I want. But she has already given me her dreams. So many people want that same thing. They look for the opportunity to share their dreams. That is why I am now so good at my new job. Very few people really want to swim in their new pools. The pool is an expression of status. I offer the easy access to that expression. Welcome to the world of privilege.

Some other guy would be overwhelmed by the intensity of her desire. I only find Kim maudlin. I hardly give her emotions time to flower. I am focused on something else. I am using Kim to reassure myself about my feelings of alienation. Sex has become my monster. I just want some way to placate it.

There is a point when I am insider her that I feel the temptation just to let go completely with her. I hold back. There is something that I refuse to give her. She offers me total pleasure because she does not hold back.

When we separate the next morning, I have again taken advantage of her weakness. I feel that I can turn her on. It is worse than one of Elsie's movies. I am feeding off of her vulnerability. That is what keeps me hard for so long.

That evening I rush over to Angie's. I am fortunate enough that her husband is again away.

"How did I manage this?"

"He's been here all week. And you've been fucking those whores of yours."

"You have no respect."

"Do you?"

She is still teasing me as she berates me. I wish that I could draw some satisfaction from her attitude. It adds to my frustration.

"Get me a drink!"

"Get your own damn drink. You want someone to wait on you. That is your supreme wish."

"I really don't know what I want."

She is too close this time. I am living for this dramatic moment.

"Angie, I'm falling deeply for you."

"Nothing can resolve that feeling. Even if I wasn't with Josh, I couldn't be with you. You've got trouble written all over you."

"You have to have that sort of trouble if you want to live."

"I'm doing what I can to try to live."

He ends up getting us both tall glasses.

"I admit, Benny, that Josh isn't enough for me. But you would only destroy me along with yourself."

"I'm not on a downward spiral."

"Of course not. If your life was that transparent, I could help. I can't."

“So what is going on?”

“I admit that we both want each other. And the simplest thing would be to go upstairs. But I can tell that you’ve been with someone last night. And someone else the night before. I could never trust myself with you. I’d always feel that my least failures would throw you into the arms of another woman. Benny, you can’t acquire people like you can businesses.”

Her thin runner’s frame appeals to me intensely. I just want some kind of satisfaction to take away. That only causes me to drink more.

“That’s going to become *my* problem if we stay together.”

She gives me a stare as if we have already spent the night in each other’s arms. It seems like the logical step to go upstairs arm in arm. She does not. She collapses on a chair with her legs in the air.

“I still have the house. I still have Josh.”

“And the fact that he is away so much.”

“I have accepted that as part of the bargain.”

“The temptations get worse. The desire to resolve it all in drink.”

She is defensive, “Benny, I’m not going to become an alcoholic.”

She starts to walk away to prepare another drink.

“What are you going to do instead of that?”