

11. DIPLOMACY

“Angela, what are you reading?”

“*Beyond Sensuality: The Twentieth Century Woman.*”

“It’s one thing reading that kind of thing at home. But this is a press conference. You don’t want to be associated with that kind of thing.”

“What are talking about?”

“Your candidacy hinges on presenting a wholesome image to the people. This kind of thing just isn’t going to fly.”

“I think that voters will admire my independence.”

“Independence, right. But you need to be practical. Nobody wants to get to upset about things. Even if it’s in your favor, it’s just going to leave them paralyzed. If you’re going to have any hope with these voters, you have to reassure them. Make them feel that you are their friend. You are their friend.”

“I’m doing what I can.”

“You need to be careful of Vanessa. She’s going to catch you in the worst scandal.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Just keep her away from you husband.”

“I’ve got nothing to worry about Vanessa.”

“Listen to me, Angela. This could be life or death.”

“You’re exaggerating.”

“I’ve had investigators working on this. I don’t want to embarrass you, but I have pictures.”

“I trust my husband. Vanessa is my friend. This is all nonsense.”

“There’s more to it than you know. You have to trust my judgement here. That is why you hired me.”

“I hired you to deal with the campaign.”

“The campaign is all about the person.”

“And I’ve been totally up front with you, with the public.”

“But you don’t even want to be associated with this nasty business.”

“This is an invention by my opponent.”

“This is real! Vanessa is conniving.”

“It makes it sound as if she has an agenda.”

“She will do whatever it takes.”

“It’s not like that it all. If anyone has a tendency to wander. It’s me.”

“That’s nonsense. You’re just making excuses for her. Did she give you that book?”

“She did. But that doesn’t mean a thing.”

“It’s probably her bible. A book about meaningless affairs.”

“That’s not what it’s about.”

“I’ve heard about the controversy.”

“That’s nonsense.”

“Didn’t the writer used to work in the adult film industry?”

“Nothing of the kind. She did research on adult entertainment for her Ph. D. in sociology.”

But she never, never worked in porn.”

“That’s not what I heard. She did some suspicious stuff while she was in college to pay for her schooling. That’s how she got in to the whole thing.”

“That is silly. Did you have investigators looking in to her private life too?”

“There are loads of things about people that are a matter for the public record. Open your eyes.”

“That is what I’m trying to do by reading this book. I have to be a candidate for all the people. I can’t lead a sheltered life.”

“I’m not asking you to do that. But you need to use some discretion. You’re not talking about visiting a homeless shelter.”

“I need to broaden my perspective.”

“Vanessa is a little too radical for the voters.”

“Are you telling me that I need to abandon my freedom of association?”

“You have a freedom. But if you use it in the wrong way, it could mess you up.”

“That sounds silly.”

“It may sound silly, but it’s reality.”

“Not my reality.”

“Polite society doesn’t take too kindly to deviance.”

“Voters want individuals. Not half-baked images put together by PR people.”

“They want something to believe in. A truth. A promise to get them out of the difficulties of their everyday lives. If you give them the feeling that you think that you are better than they are, it will just turn them off.”

“That’s not what’s going on. I just want to offer a clear and honest voice.”

Angela,

I need to warn you about Vanessa. She is up to no good. You may think of her as a friend, but she is doing things behind you back that are going to hurt you in the long run.

Ray

“Ray, what is this note about.”

“Vanessa can’t be trusted.”

“She’s my friend. What are you talking about? I’ve known her for years. She’s never taken anything from me.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. She has designs on your husband.”

“We’re all friends.”

“Friends? I think that she’s trying to get you back for something that happened in college.”

“That sounds like one of those bad horror moves.”

“It is a horror.”

“I’ve got a great husband. And Vanessa is a true friend.”

“This is not a good time to have to deal with a scandal.”

“There won’t be a scandal.”

“You really have no idea what is happening!”

“It’s not that bad.”

“No, it is.”

“Ray, you just have a terrible opinion about people.”

“It’s not just an opinion. It’s a reality.”

“You get this idea about people. Then you start to make things up to go along with that impression.”

“It’s not just a feeling.”

“I trust my husband. It’s the one faith in my life. I have no doubts about our life. You don’t know what you are talking about.”

“I’ve got facts. I’ve had investigators working on this.”

“I don’t care what your investigators say. They are wrong.”

“They’re not wrong. I know what’s going on.”

Vanessa,

You have to break it off with Angela’s husband. The voters are not going to take it well if they discover about your affair. It will be a mortal blow to the campaign.”

Ray

“Ray, what are you talking about?”

“Are you denying your affair.”

“I’m telling you that my business is private.”

“You’re running for public office. You no longer have a private life.”

“He and I are friends. Nothing more.”

“Have you slept with him?”

“What are you asking?”

“Have you had sex with him?”

“I feel as if I’m being interrogated by the police.”

“The voters will be a lot harder on you.”

“That’s silly.”

“You still didn’t answer my question.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.”

“You’ve slept with him.”

“We’ve met for drinks.

“Without Angela?”

“It was no big deal.”

“I know how you get when you drink.”

“Are you calling me a lush now? I thought that you were working for me.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. I just want to be extra careful.”

“And?”

“You have a few drinks, and you get a little flirtatious.”

“There’s a big difference between flirting with a guy and actually sleeping with him.”

“But the flirting can be the first step. Especially if there’s nothing to hold you back.

“Ray, I’ve always wondered. Do you have a crush on me?”

“Vanessa, that is not the issue. Voters already have questions because you’re a single woman. They just take one look at you and wonder if something else is going on.”

“Like what?”

“They fear for their own husbands. Unless you come off as the local librarian.”

“Are you telling me that I need to change my image?”

“Just tone it down.”

“I’ve done everything that you’ve advised.”

“I didn’t advise you to sleep with Angela’s husband.”

“I didn’t sleep with him.”

“Have sex with him or whatever you call it.”

“I never had sex with him.”

“You may think that you can fool the voters, but you can’t fool me.”

“What are you saying?”

“You had motive and opportunity.”

“So what!”

“You’ve always begrudged her success. She has a loving husband, a great job and a beautiful home. You set your sites on destroying that. The problem all goes back to high school.”

“College.”

“Whatever.”

“It goes back to college. I never knew her in high school.”

“Do you hate me for something? When did this start. In elementary school. When we were kids together.”

High school.”

“I never knew you in elementary school.”

“Ray, do you have a crush on me.”

“What are you saying?”

“You have all this concern about my private life. You probably think that I’m having this secret affair.”

“Are you?”

“I’m the one who wonders about you. Why are you never with anyone? All you think about is my life.”

“You hired me to be your campaign manager.”

“But your interest seems to go beyond my political life.”

“I have concerns. The voters have concerns.”

“I don’t understand.”

“They see an attractive woman. They wonder why she isn’t married.”

“I’ve never met the right guy. Not yet.”

“But it looks strange.”

“I’ve got my career. I’m a serious woman. I don’t need to be beset with false rumors.”

“Are you having an affair?”

“You should know. You seem to know everything about me.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“I’ve been so burdened by work, it’s driving me crazy. I don’t even know what sex is anymore.”

“All ths talk about you and Angela’s husband.”

“It’s just talk. I’ve met him once or twice.”

“That seems like a nice way of avoiding the topic.”

“You can follow me around if that’s what you want. I’m not doing a thing.”

Things are getting a little crazy. Angela has to know. They say wives can tell about their husbands. I never meant for any of this to happen. I’ve been alone for so long. He came on to me. I’d met him once or twice. I saw him in the street near my office. I hardly recognized him. He came up to me.

We went out for a drink. That is how it started. I hardly ever drink. When I do, I get a little flirtatious. Things happened. I couldn’t help myself. It felt right at the time.

We met again. We’d go back to this hotel. He was really paranoid about Angela. I just felt lonely. He took advantage of me.

He pretended that he’d leave Angela. It was too easy for him.

“I don’t think anyone is going to care that much about my personal life if I can get them a break on their business taxes. We can create these commercial tax-free zones. They will encourage development in some of the more run-down parts of the city.”

“The voters still expect the appearances of virtue. It’s like trusting your money to a financial officer with lavish personal spending habits.”

“That not a very good analogy.”

“It fits.”

“Not really.”

“And you think they really are more worried if you’re in bed with the developers than with Angela’s husband.”

“I’m not in bed with either of them. I’m just trying to do what’s best for the city”

I never got that much attention in high school. I was more worried about my studies. All that I heard about was Angela. When her husband started to show me attention, I wasn’t sure how to act. I just felt that he really cared for me. I couldn’t tell that he was trying to act out this Casanova thing.

“I thought that you didn’t know Angela in high school.”

“I didn’t. I knew of her. But we never met. And when we finally met, she totally surprised me. She was full of all these insecurities. She had no idea what she wanted to be for a career. She was always asking me about boys. She wasn’t anything like I thought her to be. Sure, she had her shallow side where she only cared for a new outfit and such. And she was a

fanatic about her weight. But all that concern for her appearance for her own insecurities. She hung out with all these guys who she really didn't like. It was just part of her lack of confidence."

"So now you're using that knowledge against her."

"Not exactly."

"But you are with her husband."

"We're friends, but we're not intimate."

The first time that he kissed me, it was such a surprise. It seemed like a mistake. As if he thought that I was Angela. So I didn't say anything. And then he touched me. And it felt so natural.

"You really have no problem with this."

"None at all."

"But you were getting all anxious when you got accused of doing the bidding for lobbyists."

"It is benefitting the community."

"Is that all you can say?"

"I'm not going to pretend that it might look strange. But it may be our only hope of winning."

When we first slept together, I felt so guilty. But I needed to hide it from Angela. It was this crazy thing. I fell asleep feeling so privileged. After all, he was showing interest in me.

The more that we did it, the more excited that I felt. I just couldn't stop. I hated the fact that I was doing it. But when he showed up, my hands were all over him. I loved every inch of his body. I understood why she was the way that she was. When you have a guy like that, you'll do everything that you can to keep him. He just made me feel complete.

I couldn't think about the fact that he was going to go back to her. I really couldn't think about anything else. It turned my world upside down. He stole my heart. All that I could think about was sex.

I wish that I had had more experience. I hadn't. I was a babe in the woods. And I didn't know what was going to happen next. I didn't want to become hysterical. I tried to resist him. But it all made me sex crazy. But it was all focused on him. Other guys did nothing for me.

All I could think about was sex, sex, sex. I thought he was the same. And he told me that I was so much freer with my body than she was. We explored. We took the time in bed to get to know each other. I felt that I had to do the utmost to please him.

Sometimes he was mean. He'd talk about going off with other women. I was afraid that he was going to tell Angela.

"I know all about what it going on with you and Angela's husband. I've got hard evidence."

"They're not even married yet."

"They're engaged."

"He said that he was going to break it off."

"You believe him."

"Ray, what do you want? Are you trying to blackmail me? Do you want to sleep with me?"

“I just want you to be fair with yourself.”

I knew that this was never going to stop. I needed to quit it cold turkey. I couldn't. I just expected this disaster to follow. All the signs pointed to a worse situation.

“The press are going to get a hold of it.”

“Are you saying that I need to preempt them.”

“You won't be able to see him again.”

“Are you my rehab counselor.”

“You need someone to tell you.”:

“Like my dad.”

“I'll do what it takes.”

“Thanks for nothing.”

Angela,

You need to quit this loose living. Your fiancé is going to break it off with you. It won't look good for the voters.

Ray

“Ray, that is sheer bull shit.”

“I want to help.”

“You are interfering in my life.”

“I want to be a friend.”

“I don't need that kind of friend.”

Ray is right. I can't let him find out. But he hasn't been the same recently. I don't want him to dump me. I can't help it if he can't give me what I need. That's just the way that things are.

After sex, he'd want me to cuddle. And I'd just want him to go. He'd exhaust my energy. He'd leave nothing for me. I made excuses. He'd want to get together after work. I'd tell him that I was sick. Then I'd go out by myself and pickup some random guy. It became a habit. I hated myself for being that way. But that was my character.

It only got worse. I tried to carry something on with another guy. I was actually with my friend's lover. It was nasty. I felt that I was morphing into this monster. Guys knew. They could smell. They'd chase me. And I'd oblige.

I know that I'd try to deny it. It didn't work.

“You look like a girl who likes to fuck!”

“That kind of line is never going to work.”

“You just have that lost look. Like someone who only comes alive in bed.”

“That's just what I need.”

All the time I wondered what would make a girl stay with a guy. I was claustrophobic when he was with me. So be it.

I wanted to break off the engagement. He didn't believe me. He just thought that I was being weird. Or that something strange was going on. Like I needed help. I just needed to be on my own. I loved the challenge. I wanted to see how long this could go on without getting caught. I was sure that he'd never find out.

I was getting good at the game. It encouraged me. I felt invincible. I did it because I could. It was my prerogative. I wasn't going to let anything stop me.

Angela

You can't trust Vanessa. She is going to make a move on your fiancé. It is not going to be good for the campaign.

Ray

"Did you make a pass at Vanessa?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You made a pass at her and she rejected you."

"That's nonsense."

"She told me."

"I did nothing of the kind."

"She rejected you, and now you're trying to darken her reputation."

"That isn't at all what happened. I caught her. I threatened to reveal her. And now she is trying to fuck with your head."

"Nothing is going on with Vanessa."

"I've got evidence."

"She told me that you would say that."

"You trust your fiancé."

"I'm not really sure who I should trust."

Ray is such an idiot. I am using Vanessa as a patsy. Making it look as if it is all her. And my fiancé doesn't suspect a thing. No one does. I am too good. Ray is spending all his time trying to find dirt on Vanessa.

I know that he wants to sleep with her. And she has rejected him. But it's really not like that. Nothing major. It's all working in my favor.

Down deep I wonder if he wants to sleep with me. It's like I wouldn't give him a go. It would be a challenge. But I am not going to sleep with my campaign manager. It would be too easy.

I'll keep my fiancé on a chain in the hope that it will help my reputation. It really doesn't look that credible to seek public office as a single woman. Otherwise, women will suspect that I am on the make for their husbands. If only they knew the half of it.

I got into politics because I have this drive. I need to satisfy it. But it doesn't end there. For each little victory that I've achieved, I've wanted some kind of reward. So I've continued to look for new men. Non-stop. It's part of my game. I'm not sleeping my way to the top. More like I'm sleeping these guys to the bottom. Better luck next time.

Sure it's a domination thing. And it goes back to my mom. She got put down by guys all her life. My father abandoned her.

None of this shit would ever happen to me.

"You've made up this story of being the poor little rich girl. It was like something happened to you while you were young. What was that story about you being abandoned by your father?"

"It's wasn't a story."

"What do you mean?"

"He threatened to leave all the time."

"Why? Because his wife hid the remote. Really what was the worse thing that happened to you in your life."

"It doesn't work like that."

"What?"

"You just want an easy answer for everything."

"If there is an easy answer, admit to it."

"I'm not a whore because my mother is a whore."

"I never called you a whore."

"You implied it."

"Do you want to just quit?"

I want to quit it all. My engagement. My job. My life. I want to end all this stupidity. Maybe a good fuck is what I need. I've just become too accommodating. I've made these big plans. But I've never lived up to them. I've been too cautious.

I need to take that first step. Define myself. My fiancé doesn't love me. He just sneaks off after sex. He might as well be having an affair. It really is looking bleak.

What do I need to do to change things?

"Thanks for calling. It feels good that you're thinking about me."

He doesn't realize that I've just been with some guy.

Angela,

Evidently you are reaching a critical juncture in your political career. There are real questions about the loans that you took from Barnes Transnational Investments. It is good that these loans are in your husband's name. He may have to take the hit for you. This will first mean denying that you know anything about his financial activities. The people love you. They have never taken well to him. If he needs to be sacrificed, so be it.

At first, I advise you to stand by his side. You can make claims how love conquers all. Later you will have to cut him off. Set him adrift in the raging sea. No one will give it a thought when he goes under.

Ray

"Ray, you meant this to happen to me."

"What are you saying?"

“That you never liked me. That you always thought that I was bad for Angela.”

“You became a millstone around her neck.”

“We were in love. You can’t say that.”

“It’s the truth.”

“The loans were your idea.”

“Actually, they were Angela’s. She was out to get you all along. I guess it goes back to high school when you threw her over for Vanessa.”

I realize that it couldn’t be more perfect. Ray and my husband are going at it. One will leave. And the other one will be so weak that he will no longer be a nuisance. It couldn’t be better. What do I need to do next to transform things?

I’m going to have a press conference to deny that I knew anything about the loans. Of course, it was my idea from the beginning. I even suckered Ray into believing that it was his suggestion. In the end, I will disgrace my husband. And Ray will be the one who eventually admits to his wrongdoing. I will replace him as my campaign manager, and that will be that.

It is funny through it all. My husband was almost crying in his arms. He didn’t even know that I had been with another man that night. It was a total embarrassment for him.

He is going to be totally crushed. It will be the perfect revenge for those years in high school. I know that makes me sound petty.

Vanessa,

Angela is going to try to blame you for the mess with her husband. Keep away from him. Keep away from her.

Ray

I felt overwhelmed. The feeling washed completely over my body. I could no longer help myself. He touched me, and my will just dissolved. Each kiss seemed to last forever. I became completely absorbed by the illusion. It only made me more vulnerable to him.

I was discovering something new about myself. The sensation was too much to deal with. I tried to hold myself together.

His whispers made me float through space. His words were like commands. My entire body went numb. A strange paralysis. I could feel that I was getting carried along by these energies. I started to move. I did what ever he expected.

I could sense him folding back the layers of skin. There was a natural quality to his gestures. I did nothing to restrain him. I went along.

I could feel us merge as he joined with me. It all felt so pleasurable. No discomfort.

He was now part of me, body and soul. I longed for his touch. I only felt whole when he was inside me. I could feel the universe revolve in our connection.

I knew that if I lost this paradise. I would be devastated. I did everything that I could to retain our connection. Even in our my most intense darkness, he brought me to the light.

I had difficulty concentrating in school. Work seemed constant boredom. Nothing but

our time together held any interest for me.

He realized his power over me. It added to his pleasure. For brief moments, he felt the same loss of control. But he hated that powerlessness. And even if it hid up to the secrets of the universe, he resented what he was giving up. He tried to create problems where there were none.

I had always felt that I was just going through the motions. That I was burdened by this incredible pain. And when I was with him, all that changed. So I didn't want to give up on that thing that held the two of us together. I could feel the change tearing me apart.

“What do you want?”

“I don't know.”

“How about a story that gives you the sense of control?”

“What do you mean?”

“That I was this young vulnerable girl. Some guy screwed me over. And that I've been trying to take it out on the world since then.”

“Does that story work for you?”

“I can tell that it works for you.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“That you really don't care what is going on with me as long as it fits with your desires.”

“You really think that I am that cold.”

“What can you say in your defense?”

“I'm not that good at making excuses.”

“It would be as good a time as any to come up with something.”

“That I hate my wife. That I'm in a loveless marriage.”

“That sounds good. Then if you're wrong, you can always go back to her.”

“You want it that way. It will make it easier to hate yourself.”

“This has never been about me. You just want a good story to keep it all in place.”