

11. THE WEDDING PICTURE

My wife is in the backyard. She's wearing heels and a short skirt. It really turns me on. As I watch her from the kitchen, I lean over so that I can get a better glimpse of the window. I reach my hand into my pants and start to finger my penis. I run my eyes up and down her tanned, smooth legs. They glisten in the later afternoon sun. My penis is getting hard. I imagine pulling up her skirt with my teeth. I feel so confident. I am coming out of myself. I have never felt it with such power. Even inside her, it has never turned me on like this. I can feel my head spinning. I want to slam my other hand against the pantry. I am so fucking turned on.

As I massage harder, I slide myself into her. I can't contain myself. The stimulation is so extreme. I almost feel that I am gagging. I am so free. I rub harder and harder and harder. She will not turn to face me. I don't even know what she is looking at out there. She might as well be anyone in a short skirt. I am concentrating on my own bang. This explosion. Surface after surface giving away until I am so deep in my fantasy.

It is this constant roar. And I just descend in its tumult. I let myself fall. Suns detonate in my inner eye. I am blasted. And the burst will not stop. My whole being just blooms. And I renew myself just by staring. Becoming part of what I see. Painting with my hands, with my desire.

There is no pretense here. I am totally jacked by the experience. I cannot share this with her. I have been confined with my feelings. It is driving me crazy. I melt. I flow together with her. I kiss her neck as I sway inside her. I want to climax. I need to counterbalance this feeling with my attraction to her body. It only raises the ante. I will have to get way more excited just to balance the intense stimulation that I feel.

So I am even more turned on than when I started. And this feeds my desire. I increase my stroking. I am relentless. There is almost a twinge of pain in my movement. It makes me long more and more for a resolution. I am an artist. I am attuned to her form. It strikes me deep inside as something so perfect. And I watch her right before me. The definition of her muscles. I repeat my viewing so that it is justified by my touching myself. But I am already beyond that. I sense that she is reacting. She twitches her leg. I feel that she is responding to my caress. That tickles me from within. I am charged. I whirl in the electricity. I am shocked. I want more. More and more. I am exploding. It is a blast. I am beyond all beyond.

The intensity is so great that it does not subside. I only give in to it more. I ooze. I flow. I am a river. I gush.

I am waking up as I have never woken up before. I pierce the guise of the everyday and pass into another realm. I am full excited. My arousal is without an equal.

There is no coming down. Even down is an upward flow. So it all twists around and around as it ascends as it descends. I am so high that I am afraid to look down. I float.

I step off. I am flying. So elated. My enjoyment takes another form. I stutter in these waves. I embrace the tides. I am again afloat.

I hold my breath so that the resolution can be more intense. I feel the flow pulse through my body. The spurting. Again the tumult. I am knocked back by the quaking. The earth shakes. This has no equal. I am concentrating on her smooth legs. What I see is part of me. She is part of me. I am her.

My whole body surrender. I give in.

After my climax, I want nothing to do with her. I head for the shower. I wash and towel off. I need a nap. I need to sleep separate from her. She has inspired me to the heights. That is all that I want from her.

In her face, I still notice that immense joy that first attracted me to her. But there is something intensely repulsive in her gaze. In this, I detect only rancor. She wants to be praised. She seeks jubilation. She hopes to be adored. I will not give her what she wants. She will be refused.

What has happened to our idyll? She is being cut out of the picture.

I meet Manny at the Dunwoody station of MARTA.

“I’ve seen what you can do, Walter. I want you to teach me. I hope you don’t mind if I tag along.”

This could be the death of me. I allow him to be my sidekick.

“Just don’t get in the way.”

“I promise.”

This may be the greatest mistake of my life. I sense that he may have been sent by Mr. Fisher.

“Walter, I need you to teach me everything that you know about sales.”

“I’ll do what I can.”

“You know that a salesman is a remunerated form of lying. You offer something that is never what it is supposed to be. You create entirely from belief.”

“Whatever you say, Manny.”

He has the most wonderful sense of the entirely inappropriate. What a klutz!

“You really should keep an eye on that wife of yours. She’s going to mess around with some guy if you don’t watch it.”

I don’t even sleep with her. I can barely think about her in a sexual fashion.

“I’d give her a good lick if I had the chance.”

I am glad that he does not. I feel as if I need to refuse her. Manny will spare no effort at appearing crude.

“Sales is like having a go with a girl. First, you turn her, then you spurn her.”

“Thanks for the advice, Manny.”

“It sounds like your life, Walter.”

“What are you talking about? Don’t you have something better to do?”

“You invited me along.”

“That I did!”

He decides to keep following me around.

Walter, I have a strategy. I want to make you uncomfortable. I want to make you hate your life.”

“I don’t hate my life. I just hate you.”

“How can I change you? How can I make you take a turn for the better.”

“I don’t want to think about the cosmos. Then I’ll just become a loser like you.”

“Walter, you need to take my advice while you still can. If you don’t you’ll lose it all.”

“I’m not into these moral resolutions. I have a house, a wife, a life. You’re some guy

hanging around on the subway bothering people.”

“I’m a poet and a visionary.”

“What do you see? Death. The end of the world. It’s going to happen to all of us. I just don’t see it happening to me any time soon.”

Majestic is an articulate street poet. He first tries to hustle me for a couple of bucks and some cigs. I’m not really buying his act. Then he recites this epic poem. All rambling and shit. Still it is brilliant. It’s about this girl Angel. She has the power to change the world. She talks to God. She has powers. She is ready to unleash them on the world.

I note every detail in his exposition. It is original. I follow her background from the streets of Atlanta to Las Vegas. She is a saint among sinners. A sinner among saints. She is tested. She is destroyed by her friends. She is used by people that she meets. This is the cross that she bears. She does not give out.

She makes money on the street. She is clever. She plies her craft. She is a story teller. She needs to make her listeners sympathetic. She takes what they will give her. She tries to keep herself pure. But it is not easy. She is weak. She faces dangers. Men take advantage of her. But she learns. She becomes stronger. She enlists others to think the way that she does. This is the beginning.

I decide to write down the story. I embellish it. I make it clearer. I make it my own. I find an agent who is interested. She finds me a publisher.

“Kris, am I really going to get an advance.”

“They love the book. The supernatural-religious angle is the rage. Everyone wants to believe in something. It’s like a religion. It tells everyone that it’s OK to be who they are.”

“A selfish snob.”

“Something like that.”

I feel elated. This is going to be great for me. Sales has been getting me down. I need a new job. Ariel takes it well. Although there is still this distance between us. I can’t touch her.

I am watching a DVD. It shows a naked woman. It really turns me on. It reminds me of watching Ariel in the back yard. I feel as if I am eating candy. It gives me this love burst. I want to touch myself. The woman twists her body around. It is her suggestion. I sense that she is inviting me. I take her invitation.

This is like nothing that I have felt before. Her body seems built to give pleasure. Every muscle, every gesture seems to intersect this same point. The charge. I am falling under her spell. I want this like nothing else. Ariel is upstairs sleeping. Let her sleep. This has nothing to do with her. It’s not as if I’m looking for another woman. It just gives me a rush to look at the woman on the screen

She lets me in on her hidden secret. She poses for me. She is calling me to follow. I can’t help myself. Every inch of her flesh comes alive to the touch. I sense the fire. She is so hot for me. I have dwelled on that image. I am mesmerized.

She gives me the impression that she would give in to my offer. I propose. She resolves. She bounces up and down. I want to touch her. I am touching her. She coos. The rhythmic breathing. We both hear the same music. She is leading me along.

“Are you OK?”

I imagine Ariel walking around upstairs. It is nothing. I can feel myself slipping into my lover. Why does Ariel seem so distant, so elsewhere? I want the immediacy that I am feeling now. I want to feel it pulse all over my body. I know that I once felt that way for Ariel. She still gives me a kick. But I need to keep away from her. I don't want to give her the satisfaction. I only feel more powerful like this.

I meet her just over the Wyoming border.

"I was traveling with this guy. He just left me here. He took my stuff."

"I feel a little hesitant about taking a passenger. I'm on business."

"It will be OK. I'm Angel." I decide to take her to Idaho.

She tells me about how she has visions. I really don't believe her.

"God really talks to me."

"What does he say?"

"He says that the world is really fucked up. That you're really fucked up. He lets me taste people. Like their DNA."

"You mean their sperm."

"No, their personality. Everybody has a taste. Like coconut. Or strawberry. Walter, you're almost like rhubarb. A little tart."

"Really. And what do you taste like?"

"I taste like pussy. That's why you picked me up."

"I'm glad that you can reduce someone to something so basic."

"Isn't that what makes you tick? Why you're running from your wife, Ariel?"

"Who said that she was named Ariel?"

"You told me."

I don't remember telling her a thing.

She lets me eat her out at the hotel.

"I don't want you inside me. But you can do anything else."

"I thought that you never touched her."

"It just sounded better that way!"

"That was part of your alibi!"

She's into kinky stuff. She wants me to tie her up.

"Walter, I want you to choke me."

"I'm not really into sick stuff."

"If you do it, I'll let you fuck me."

"Are you expecting money for all of this?"

"I need money."

"Great."

She asks me to put a plastic bag around her face.

"I want you to fuck me in the tub while you're choking me."

I feel so aroused when she is telling me this.

She keeps talking, "I read about this writer who was into this sort of thing. It just went too far."

"That's what I'm afraid of. That you won't be able to save the world if this goes wrong."

I get the strongest hard on just thinking about this. I don't want to follow through. It only

makes it better.

“Walter, stop.”

Is this all part of the game? I stop. I want know part of this. She is still in the tub. She is moving around. The bag is on her face. She can easily untie it.

They find her the next day suffocated in my room.

“I didn’t do any of this.”

“He used an alias. He paid cash. He planned to do this from the start.”

Angel looks over at me.

“I want you to let me off up here.”

I drop her at a truck stop. I get some gas, and she disappears.

“Walter, people don’t start off sick. They somehow get trained that way.”

“Aaron, you’re just full of excuses.”

“So what made you go over the edge. Was it losing your job?”

“I’m still working. I’m doing fine.”

“What was it? What made you a sick fuck?”

“I’m just an ordinary guy.”

“So where’s Angel?”

“She’s at this truck stop. I left her at a truck stop.”

“Not in your room. The night clerk saw you both together.”

“What are you? Some kind of cop.”

“It’s the organization. We could use you for the organization.”

“What is this bull shit?”

“Someone had to clean up behind you. Now we know that you’re as ruthless as all of us.

Who is it next? Your former boss.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You hate him for what he did to you.”

“He just promoted me. I’m working my way up my own organization.”

Aaron is interrogating me at a bar near Boise.

She is in the bathtub with the door closed. I’ve paid for the room. I go in there and take off my clothes. I love her body. It smells like cinnamon. Each piercing, each tattoo is a kiss from the gods. It is her magic. She is a bird in flight. A rose petal falling. Mysterious words.

The sacred. Her stigmata. She is blessed. I taste her insides. I am really feeling powerful. Ariel is part of another world. I don’t want to go back. I want to talk to the universe

I give her money to help her out. She stays with me. I protect her. We go from hotel to hotel across the Northwest. I feel like she is part of me. Aaron continues to follow us.

“What are you doing?”

“Where is she now?”

“She’s in the room asleep.”

Aaron is sitting on my car.

“Get off my car.”

“Where else am I going to sit?”

“You’re fucking her?”

“Are you the cops?”

“Are you sure that she’s even eighteen?”

“She feels like it.”

“That’s not a good enough line for the cops.”

“I think that she’s almost nineteen.”

“Good answer.”

“What do you want from me? Can’t you leave me alone?”

“You’re fucking all these women because your wife is sick. You’re trying to tell yourself that you’re immortal.”

“Aaron, you’re such a total idiot. I made my wife sick so I could test myself. So I ‘d have an excuse to be with all these women.”

“You’re pretending that I’m bad.”

“You’re no different than I am. You just have your wife come on to all these different men. It makes you seem more powerful. Admit it. You just want to fuck every girl that turns you on.”

“I’m not weak like you, Walter. I know my limits. I know what I can have.”

My neighbor Henry stops by. I talk to him from the threshold of my front door.”

“I just got laid off.”

“That’s terrible.”

“It was. But the Organization is helping out. It’s almost like the government.”

“Is there anything that I can do? I could lend you some money. What’s a good neighbor for.”

“You’ve got to come over some time. You have to meet my wife.”

“Henry, I didn’t even know that you were married.”

“Evangeline works nights. So she’s sleeping during the day a lot.”

“I’d love to stop by with Ariel.”

“I can tell you everything that I’m doing. How I can still manage.”

When I close the door, I have this big feeling in my heart. That’s what neighbors are for—to help out each other.

“Ariel, Henry lost his job.”

“That’s terrible.”

“But he has some friends helping out. He invited us over to dinner. I didn’t know that he was married.”

“Yeah, I met his wife. She was really nice. But a bit of a test.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know the short shorts and heels. The low-cut blouses.”

“Is she in shape?”

“Don’t you want to know. Save it for dinner.”

I hope that I’m in town when we get together. I have to go to Denver for business. What is this Organization?

Ariel wonders, “Why don’t you ever pull my hair like in your movies. They always fuck from behind.”

“I like to look at your face.”

“I hear that it’s better that way.”

I flash back to my time with Angel. She stretches out on the bed until her flower is nice and visible. My mouth is watering. I am hard. She takes me with such grace. She is so excited. I glide inside. I run my hands through her hair.

“Pull hard! Fuck me hard!”

I can't go back to Atlanta. It is already a sham. I need someone to take care of Ariel. I don't want any harm to come to her. But she is a liability.

“Is she still sick?”

“Aaron, she never was sick. She had a bad cold. That was the worst of it.”

He is waiting outside my door. I know that he is there. I am going down on Angel. I stare at the hummingbird tattoo.

“I want you inside me.”

The inside and the outside. I want to see with the inner eye. To pass into the other world.

“You fucking stole my story.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your novel came out. You stole all that stuff from my poem.”

“Who is this?”

“It's Majestic.”

“What is this about?”

“You listened while I recited my poem. Now all this stuff about Angel is in there.”

“That was real stuff. I met her in Nebraska. At a truck stop. I gave her a ride.”

“That is bull shit.”

Ralph finds me at the cubicle in my office.

“I have those wedding photos that I touched up. There's this weird guy in the background of all of them.”

I have no idea what he is talking about. I toss them in my briefcase. I have to be in Denver tomorrow.

“Have you found Angel?”

“What are you talking about?” I am talking to my boss.

“I sent you to Denver to find the girl. She's our only witness.”

“You told me that you needed this package.”

“That was just a way to get to the girl. We're in the midst of trying to resist a takeover. If you don't find her, you'll lose your job. We all will. They'll be no job to have.”

It's my boss. I swing a baseball bat to cut him down. I hear the wood crack against the bone. He falls. I keep swinging away. I propel the bat with the swivel of my hips. It feels great. I bang and bang away. Thud! His cries are now whimpers. The scum. I toss him in the ditch. I slam his face a few times. I see all the blood. What a kick. Fuck, fuck you!

I come out of the hotel room. It's Aaron. He's on my car.

“They found your boss's body.”

“I didn't do it. He said that there was a takeover fight.”

“That's bull shit. You did it, Walter. And then you took all your money out of your account and took off.”

“That's not true.”

“Ariel found out. She sent me out here to find out about you.”

“You’ve never met her.”

“Who do you think that she was with in Bermuda?”

“What is this? Tit for tat. I do your wife so that you do mine. Where does it stop?”

“I just talked with her. If I was in a contest with you, I’d never catch up. With Jenny and Eva and Angel. Where does it stop, Walter? You have to go back and face the music.”

“I’m not going back. Never. I can’t go back there. Not now.”

“You killed your boss.”

“He talked to me on the phone before I got on that flight.”

“That’s a lie.”

“Aaron, you’re not exactly the type to call me a liar. I know what’s going on with the Organization.”

“What Organization?”

“You’ve recruited my neighbor, Henry.”

I think that it is a member of the Organization. One of Henry’s friends. He holds a gun on me. I’ve heard that I can break his finger if it’s jammed in the trigger. It is. I’ve never practiced this. If I make a mistake, the gun will go off.

“Walter, you’re time is up.”

“That doesn’t make sense.

“I’m Mr. Fisher. I’m writing this story. And you have to die now. You’re the villain. You thought that you were the hero. But you’re really the villain. Sorry about that.”

“I don’t want to die!”

“You’re not immortal.”

“Yeah, but the world ends when I’m gone.”

“That’s not the story that I’m writing.”

“It’s the story that I’m writing. You’ve left out some details. Mr. Fisher. You really couldn’t do the suffocation scene in the tub very well. And Angel kept getting away on you.”

“What is she supposed to do?”

“I think that I’m supposed to settle down with her.”

“There’s too much tension between you. She wants something that you can never offer her.”

“There’s the whole Evangeline story,” I remind him.

“What has that to do with Angel?”

“I want to say that it’s the same person. I can’t get all the scenarios to match.”

“Why?”

“Angel gets sick. She has to disappear.”

“Angel’s the wild card. You throw her in whenever there’s a problem.”

“But she never makes it to Atlanta.”

“You mentioned the Angel-Evangeline connection.”

“I still haven’t figured that out.” I think that I am getting one over on him.

“Walter, this is about you. The end of your story. The end of your life.”

“Look how good I am. You need me around.”

“That would make me the villain. But girls like the things that I make them do.”

“You pull their hair.”

“Acrobatic sex positions.”

“Mr. Fisher, that could give you a heart attack.”

“It did. I was revived. But in your story, you won’t be so lucky. Walter, the problem is that everyone now wants what only the really special people deserve. I’ve been banging your Angel. Giving her loads of money. She’s going to get killed. I’ll get all the pleasure writing the scene. I’ve got this young actress to enact it with. She’s not even eighteen. If I get caught, I’m going to jail. But I’ll kill her too, and blame it on you.”

“Ariel always bothers me when I’m planning the weirdest shit.”

“That’s why I divorced my first wife. After she had given me enough money. You know what your problem is, Walter. You have all these disembodied conversations. It just takes an editor like me to take your conversations and place them in a real situation. Boom! I get totally a different resolution from you.”

“The wrong resolution!”

“Where are we now?”

“We’re on a beach. You have a heart attack chasing me.”

“Walter, you’re already finished.”

Henry and his wife stop by for dinner on Friday. After some swordfish in a butter sauce, we head to the living room for after dinner drinks. I pull out the wedding album.

“My friend Ralph had these pictures redone. They look so great.”

I open the book.

“I know how this thing can usually be so boring. But look at this.”

Henry and Evangeline crowd around me. Ariel is sitting on the couch. I look over at her.

“Are you all right, Ariel?”

“I think that I ate too much. I don’t what it is.”

“That picture doesn’t look like Ariel. You still look the same.”

Evangeline agrees. She adds, “Who’s the guy in the background?”

“That’s my brother.”

Ariel queries, “You never told me that you had a brother.”

She drags herself over to take a peek.

“That’s the weird guy that I’ve been seeing. And that’s not my picture.”

“I’m sure that’s our wedding.”

“What has he done? He’s put someone else in my place.”

Henry interjects, “That woman looks really familiar.”

He looks up at Ariel and shakes her head.

“Ralph is really fucking with us, Walter”

“Ariel is right,” Henry observes.

Evangeline proposes a new theory, “That’s from your first marriage.”

“There was no first marriage.”

Henry asks, “Are you sure?”

Ariel has her own version, “I don’t really know at all. For all I can see, he could have been married before. It wasn’t like he came with a stamp that said new and unused.”

“I wasn’t married before.”

“I can’t say that for sure,” she maintains.

“Are you feeling better, Ariel?”

“I still feel sick. But that’s not the reason that I’m questioning those pictures. The guy is you. But the woman is someone else. It’s not me. I have two other witnesses here who see no resemblance.”

“She looks a little like you. How I remember you.”

“You’re being silly now, Walter. There is no resemblance because she is unequivocally not me! End of story.”

This is really freaky. I feel as if I have had another life. First there is the encounter with Mr. Fisher and now this.

“Henry, you told me about the Organization. Tell me more.”

“I work as a contractor. I told you that. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Evangeline shares her insights, “He doesn’t even like clubs or group bowling. He’s not a team player.”

I stare a bit too long at Evangeline. She has great lips. They are a hot pink.

“Sometimes I wonder if I am living the wrong life.”

“Walter, that’s too complex for me,” Evangeline adds as she stares me in the eyes. I look over at Ariel. She is feeling ill. Her eyes are closed.

“I should get my angel up to bed. Sorry to cut it short early.”

“We’ll do this another time,” Henry reassures us.

With all the problems with Ralph and Majestic and Mr. Fisher, I get another file on my computer. This is after another mysterious power failure.

I’ve forgotten your wife’s maiden name.

“Her name is Brady.”

“That’s not the name that we have you registered under.”

He marries Angel Butler. She turns up dead in Omaha. He leaves Omaha under suspicious circumstances and moves to Atlanta. The case remains open on Angel.

MAIDEN NAME = XXXXX

“Walter, I think that someone is trying to tell you something. They’ve caught up with you finally.”

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He can’t manage to get in the game. He doesn’t have what it takes. It could be that he loses his job. She cleans out his bank account.

THE DECOY: ANGEL

“You’re going to have to play Angel if we want to catch him.”

“He’s not going to admit to killing her.”

“He didn’t kill her. We did. But we want him to feel guilty about it.

They are all watching a show. The singer is playing the piano. I can only watch the audience. He makes me drowsy. A girl in the crowd is staring me. I approach her after it is over.

“I’ve seen you before. My name’s Angel.”

“Of course it is.”

She is standing on the corner talking to a friend. She wears an elegant sandal. It enhances the delicacy of her foot. My eyes follow up the well-defined calf muscle. I stop my

car and walk over to her.

“I want to kiss the back of your knee.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s a beginning?”

“You’re a freak.”

“Will you do it for me?”

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“Just get the money in my account. I can take it from there.”

She is passed out in the washroom. The hotel clerk sends someone up to check on her.

Sees it can’t pay for it. A0

It looks so good. Just stare long enough.

She stares at me. She gives me a signal. I walk over to her.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m going to talk to that girl.”

“Sucker, she’s with me.”

“Are you with this guy?”

“Yes I am. What is it to you?”

“What is that punk ass going to do to take care of my child?”

“Nothing really. Nothing at all.”