

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: POSTERITY

To get leverage over me, Mark told David that I had been spending time with Linda.

“I told you to stay away from the actors.”

“She approached me.”

“It doesn’t make any difference how you met her, stay away from her.

“I really enjoyed our conversations. And I really didn’t see the harm. The script was done. I had little contact with Mark. I wasn’t trying to interfere with his movie.

My portrayal of Rebecca challenged many of her assumptions about acting. We met at a bar close to the set.

“I’ve been told to stop meeting you.”

“The CIA found out.”

“I thought that they’re not supposed to be doing domestic spying.”

She smiled.

“Your book seems to suggest that our sense impressions are incompatible. There is no way that how I see the world can be made to accord with how you see it.”

“But the image of Rebecca leaves such a dominant impression on the reader.”

She observed, “But you go back to the bar, and she’s not there. It not like you can make her appear at will.”

“Does that mean something?”

“You take her appearance as a sign that this is her bar. Every time you head back there, you expect to see her there again. But she has a different game plan.”

“I admit that I don’t know her.”

“But she gives you every indication that she will come back. And you really believe that she’s watching you.”

“I’m only part of her audience. We watch her. And she stares into space.”

“I know.”

“But doesn’t acting give you a way to communicate that connection?”

Linda answered, “I always thought that it did. I know that sounds really naive. But I thought that underneath it all, there was this fund of common emotions. And all that a good actor had to do was tap this well.”

“You doubt that belief.”

“That’s what Rebecca is all about. She’s elusive.”

“She’s elusive only because I don’t want to play her game.”

“She knows that. So there’s no way to get you to fall for one of her traps.”

“So there is a common foundation for our experience.”

“Only because you want to believe it. Your novel is all about the futility of that belief.

“I could never get to know Rebecca.”

“The closer that you get, the more that she’ll pull away.”

“What’s wrong?”

“You bring too much knowledge to the table. If you’re going to try to translate that to pool, she’ll get you to make mistakes. She’ll wear you down to nothing.”

I wondered, “How does that affect how you play the role?”

“I make it seem that I’m giving of myself. But there’s part of me that is always hidden.”

“Is there a reason for that?”

“Of course there is. But I’m not going to tell anyone. Especially you.”

“Isn’t that just a game. Do I really care about pool?”

“Oh you do! You think that she’s cosmic. You want to know if she is aware of some special portal to the heavens.”

I loved what she was saying. Was all this just for the role? She seemed understand my quest so well.

“How do you think about this personally?”

“I thought that David warned you about this.”

“I’m not going to report you to David,” I told her.

“How do you know that I won’t?”

“I really don’t care. I’m not working on the movie anymore. I want to know.”

“But that is part of the mystery that I need for the role. I don’t want you turning me into Rebecca.”

“You do have a point.”

She had beat me to another stalemate. I still didn’t have my question answered. We had only scratched the surface.

When I saw her again, she seemed a little quiet.

“What’s wrong?”

“You’re not using me because you can’t get close to Rebecca.”

“Not at all.”

“Do you really like me?”

“I love our conversations. They make me want to write again.”

“Were you thinking about quitting?”

“Not at all. But Mark is such a prick.”

She had her own strategy, “I make the best of things. You know that I’m going to have to go back to LA.”

“We’ve hardly gotten started.”

We had hardly scratched the surface. I wanted to learn more.

“You can call me. I love to talk.”

“Any roles coming up?”

“I want to take some time off to do live theater.”

After she left, we didn’t talk a lot. She always meant to call me. But she was incredibly busy.

I had just come back from David’s. I forgot my phone so I was surprised that it rang just as I walked in. I thought that it might be Linda.

I picked up the phone. The conversation took off on its own. I didn’t recognize the voice.

“Who is this?”

“My name is Cleo.”

“I don’t know a Cleo.”

“I found your number.”

“Found it how.”

“Linda was in my acting class. I heard that she was in a movie. So I went through her phone.”

“Did she know?”

“I waited until she went to the bathroom.”

“Why did you call me?”

“I heard that it was your book.”

“There’s not much that I can do.”

“I want to play Eve.”

“Eve is thirteen or fourteen. How old are you?”

“I’m twenty two. But I look really young.”

“That young?”

“I really do. I can do what you want to get the role.”

“I’m not doing the casting.”

She had kept me talking all this time. I wondered why I didn’t hang up. I don’t know why, but I agreed to meet her. She was right. She looked about ten.

“So you like playing this game with older guys. You pretend that you’re a kid.”

“You wrote about that kind of thing.”

“Cleo, that is fiction.”

“But you must have thought about it.”

“I thought about it. Of course, I wrote about it. But it’s nothing that I can imagine for myself.”

“But the thought crossed your mind.”

“What’s your point? Why did you bring me here?”

“You wanted to meet me. You wanted to meet little Eve. Did you bring me my apple?”

“I’m not a pervert. I’m going to go.”

“No you won’t. You want to figure out why you came all the way here.”

She was teasing me.

“I really have nothing to do with the movie.”

“You can still get me the role if I’m right.”

“It’s not up to me. Don’t you have an agent?”

“He can’t do anything.”

“Do you really have any experience?”

“A lot more than Linda. You’ve never seen me on TV?”

“I don’t watch TV.”

“That’s a little weird.”

“I write. I read. I have a life. So what do you want from me?”

“You know what I want. And I know that you’re a pervert.”

“I write. I have life. I’m a normal guy.”

“Don’t tell me that you haven’t thought about it.”

“I came here to help you get a role. So what is in your favor?”

“I’m good at what I do!”

I knew that Mark would never sign her up. He probably had someone else in mind. I

wasn't sure if there was anything that I could do for her.

Cleo had told me about a party.

"I'm not going to be there."

"Why did you tell me about it?"

"You looked like you could use some fun."

She was right.

I had a beer in my hand, and I was leaning against the wall. She was bopping to a Rick James song. Each time that I moved, she started to bump against me.

"Do you want to dance?"

"I'm not into dancing."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I write."

"My ex did comic books."

"I write novels. At least, I try."

"I feel as if I have a lot to offer the world. My name's Nancy. I want to be in your novel."

"It doesn't work like that."

"But if you write about someone, they'll be remembered in the future."

"Yeah," I mumbled.

"I want to be remembered in the future."

I had no idea what she wanted.

"You can make me live for ever. I want to be part of posterity."

"You'd probably have more luck if one of your friends wrote a song about you."

"I'll be make it worthy your while if you put me in your book."

She was a little tipsy and slurring her words. He perfume was potent.

"It's not like I take dedications. No one may ever read what I write."

"Why do you do it?"

"I have to do it. It makes me feel whole."

"I want you to put me in your book."

I felt as if she wanted me to run a banner for toothpaste in my book.

"Do you find me pretty?"

"You're a real charmer!"

You're not laughing at me."

"I'm not that kind of guy."

"What kind of guy are you?"

"An artist."

"I draw. Want to see my pictures. You could come back to my place."

"I'm not that kind of artist. More of a truth teller."

"I hate liars."

"I lie when I need to."

"I don't really like that."

"Sometimes the only way to tell people how things are is by telling them how things aren't."

“I don’t know what that mean. I just want you to put me in your book.”

Nancy had a healthy smile.

“I need another drink. Then I can tell you all about myself.”

She could barely keep herself upright. And she came back spilling all the way. But she stayed on her feet.

“When you write about me, don’t say that I drink too much.”

So you want me to lie!”

“I’m not drunk.”

“You’re having a good time.”

“Let me help you. Let me tell you about myself. And you can write it down. I saw you write something down earlier.”

“That was my grocery list. That’s all the writing that I’m going to be doing for the rest of the day.”

“You’re not going to write about me. I didn’t talk to you all this time if you don’t put me in your book.”

“What’s your name again.”

“Nancy, Nancy Jones.”

I wondered if I could really make room for Nancy Jones.

David was heading out for conference for the weekend.

“I’m going to be in North Georgia. No phones.”

“I’ll be okay. Now where are you going?”

“It’s called a I Confess Workshop.”

“A religious retreat?”

“No, it’s totally secular. But it’s all about owning up for thing that we’ve done in our lives.”

“You can’t own up if you haven’t lived it up.”

He was defensive: “That’s not how it works. This is about really being sorry how you may have screwed things up.”

“A Who’s Sorry Now Conference.”

“This is serious stuff. It’s the next wave. Pretty soon you’ll be logging on to the site, and everyone will be revealing the worst things about themselves.”

“It just sounds like more of an impetus to be an asshole.”

“You can’t be fake. That’s part of the routine. Everyone challenges everyone else. You can’t hide behind your bull shit.”

“But that’s bull shit in itself.”

“Steven, you don’t know what it’s like. You could use a little soul-searching.”

I had no idea what he meant.

“What are you talking about? Has Mark been complaining again?”

“We’ve got some pages in here from the novel.”

“What’s the big deal?”

“This is early stuff. Versions that I never saw. Way before the stuff that you showed me.”

“What’s the big deal.”

“I don’t know. I’ve got to get to the bottom of things.”

He was scaring me a little. I had no idea where this was coming from.

“David, you’ve seen everything that I’ve done. You had me edit from the get go.”

“I have no idea what it is. But it looks like an earlier draft of some of the pages.”

“This is all after the fact. Someone is doing a good spoof.”

“That’s what I thought. But I did want to run it by you.”

I wouldn’t take the bait.

“I’m not going up there with you.”

“That isn’t what I meant. We can’t deal with it now.”

“So you’re going up there to confess. I’m sorry, David.”

“Don’t make fun of me. You need more of a conscience. Your head’s been pretty big lately.”

“Mark didn’t make my work any easier.”

“It was money.”

“So do they give you absolution at this thing.”

“It’s not religious.”

“But you don’t want all this sin bottled up in you.”

“That’s why they get you to talk about it.”

David was getting his wish.

“I think that it is the end of the world. And you get first crack on Judgement Day!”

David had discovered an outlet for his frustrations. I festered in my own bile. Things weren’t going to be any easier for me. I just needed to get away.

It took a while before David got back to me. I just hid out for a while.

I ended up meet David at his office. He wouldn’t talk on the phone. He told me that things were serious.

“How was your retreat?”

“It’s not like you think. You should have come.”

“I was busy!”

“Not with Linda?”

“She finished up, and went back to LA.”

“It’s been a few days since I’ve been back. Did you disappear.”

“Yeah, in my own way.”

“You probably know why I called you in.”

“I have no idea.”

“Those pages that I told you about. They were only a preview.”

“A preview of what?”

“The whole book.”

“What book?”

“Your book!”

“I told you that it’s bull shit that someone put together after the fact.”

“I was contacted by the guy’s lawyer.”

“It’s extortion pure and simple. Go to the FBI.”

“He has proof.”

“There is no proof.”

“It’s on his hard drive.”

“Big deal! He put it on.”

“It’s been on for years.”

“That’s impossible. There’s stuff in the book that didn’t happen until recently. There is no way that he could have a version of the book. Not only is he questioning me, he’s doubting you. You watched me as it developed. It’s based on talks that we had along the way. There is no way that someone wrote this a couple of years ago. Get rid of him.”

David was cautious, “All your bravado could get us into court. We could owe him loads of money.”

“The book hasn’t done that well.”

“He’s not that stupid. He knows all about the movie.”

I was aggressive “Likely story. He’s a dickhead. Do something about him!”

“I don’t think I can. That’s not how we work.”

“What do you want to do?”

“We could try to settle.”

“If he’s legit, which he isn’t, why would he want to settle?”

“What do you mean?”

“He’d want to shut us down completely. But he has no claim. So he’s trying to bluff us. You give him an inch, and he’s won. Stand up for yourself. Didn’t this meeting conference you anything?”

“How to be more diplomatic!”

“You can’t give in to extortion.”

“I don’t know, Steven. He may be right.”

“You know that he isn’t right. And you’re giving him the opportunity to fake you out. Don’t lose your nerve.”

I wanted David to do me right. I had done all this work for me. If that wasn’t enough, Cleo showed up at my place uninvited.

All along, Cleo had wanted me to play the part of Brian.

“In the digital age, the deviant has to do so much more to elude the watchful eye of the state. Massive data bases keep track of your every move. The freak is the mutation of the thirst for omniscience. He tries to imitate the voyeuristic impulses of the state. He lives among us, but he stays hidden. He knows that he will eventually be caught so he exists in this eternal limbo between light and shadow.”

She reminded me, “It’s not just that he does what he can to avoid detection. He makes every effort to assimilate.”

“He is one of us. A friend and confidant.”

“His temptations are so much greater than ever. Billboards invite him into a world that is out of his reach. He does everything that he can to maintain proximity.”

“Are you afraid?”

“I am all too familiar with his act.”

“So you play along?”

“I live my life. I don’t let it affect me.”

“But it does affect you. You see your role entwined with his.”

“Only when I act.”

I probed, “So you don’t let it affect your personal life.”

“What do you want from me? Would your conscience be cleaner if I admitted that I have a history?”

I didn’t understand her: “How would that affect me?”

“It would give you an excuse. You could claim to be helping me.”

“I didn’t get in this for that sort of thing.”

“You want it both ways. You want the privileges of the voyeur, but you won’t admit that your behavior has an effect on other people.”

“Like you? I told you that I couldn’t help you get the role.”

“I have my own contacts. That’s not what I’m talking to.”

“Are you here as avenging angel?”

“You want me to be the child with the adult voice. You think that purity is a virtue. It only means that I’ve stayed hidden from the world.”

“So you do want something from me. Rescue. Forgiveness.”

She became more focused, “Is that what you have to offer? Are you the high priest of the modern age?”

“How is that?”

“Trying to make the deviant normal. Giving people an excuse for spying on their neighbor.”

“They don’t need my permission.”

“Permission granted. The gratification of the nosy neighbor.”

“I’m not really into vigilante behavior.”

“No, you’re the monster trying to escape the mob.”

“I don’t see it either way.”

“But you want me to say that it’s OK. You want divine forgiveness.”

“I’ll take whatever you can give me.”

“Do you have a script?”

“Mark did the script.”

“Steven, that’s not what I’m talking about.”

“What do you want from me? I don’t know who you are. You find my number in a friend’s phone. And now you are trying to become part of my life.”

She had an answer, “You want me to satisfy your curiosity. You want me to tell you that your worst perversions are okay. That’s Eve’s role.”

“But you’re not Eve.”

“I’m better. I resemble the part. But I’m perfectly legal.”

“It’s not as if I’m paying you.”

“Would that make it all right? A private performance.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Steven, you have to figure out what you mean. You want the world to reflect back to you as your fantasy. Do what comes naturally!”

“That’s not really me.”



“Are you afraid of your remorse? Quid pro quo. You get something. I get something.”

I challenged her, “I have nothing to do with the movie.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about. You’re a writer.”

“Do you want posterity too?”

“Steven, is that your offer?”

“Do you want me to redeem your transcendent soul?”

“Isn’t that Brian’s offer?”

“That’s not my offer. I just want to know if that’s what you’re after.”

She appeared to acquiesce, “I’ll take what you have to give.”

“I’m not really here to horse trade. You’re the one who’s been pursuing me.”

“Are you sure? That’s not my story. You went through Linda’s phone and found my number.”

“Why would I do that? Why would I randomly pick out your number. Oh, Cleo. I guess that I’ll harass her.”

“I can’t tell you how the perverse mind works. That’s your territory. You did a whole book about it.”

“My book wasn’t about perversion. To the contrary.”

“But Brian thinks that Eve will give him eternal knowledge. You think the same of me.”

“I don’t get my life confused with my characters.”

“What do you get it confused with? I can tell you everything that you want to know. I know the world inside and out. Isn’t that what you’re looking for, Steven.”

“I just want to be left alone.”

She spoke louder, “Why didn’t you leave me alone?”

“What do you want?”

“What do you want? Do you want me to scream in ecstasy? Do you want to see my face when I come? Do you want me to tell you that you were my first? Steven, I will be your fantasy!”

“I’m not like that.”

I was a writer because I could distance myself from the world that I observed. More than ever, Cleo broke that barrier.

After my ordeal, I went back to David’s office.

“Hi, who are you?”

“I’m here to see David.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Steven Fisher, the writer.”

“Another writer.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Chris. Let me see if I can get you in to see David.”

When I finally got in his office, he wasn’t all that gracious.”

“Steven Fisher. Let me see, did you have an appointment?”

“I’ve never needed an appointment before.”

“Who’s this guy Chris?”

“He’s my new writer. He’s working on this two thousand page novel. Good stuff. Now

who are you? What do you want?"

"David, I'm Steven Fisher. Don't you remember?"

"Remember? Oh yeah. You're the guy who claimed that he had written Chris's novel."

"What is this shit?"

"Chris has proof."

Things were going crazy!

"Proof. Who is that little weasel."

"A great writer."

"What are you saying?"

"Steven, you've got some great ideas. But you don't know how to handle the pressure. I need you to fill in the details of what you write. You can't have these long aimless conversations. You need to learn to describe the world. What people are eating. What they are wearing. Their shoes for instance. You have to learn how to describe their shoes."

This was incredible.

"I'm Steven Fisher. I wrote this long novel that you helped me edit. Then you found me a publisher. And we're making a movie from the book."

"You pitched me a story idea. I thought that it was good. But your writing needed a lot of work. So I gave the story to someone who could write. And now he's finishing a really great book."

"That was my life. Those were my ideas."

"Just because you read his book and act it out doesn't make it your story. It's the writer."

"He stole my idea, and he stole my book."

"That's not how he tells it. And he has proof."

It continued like this for a while. I wasn't getting anywhere. I needed to get out of there. I needed to get out of this life. I had depended on him. And he had sucked my insides out. This was worse than a romantic break up.

"I am going to be living in my car. I'm going to be picked up for vagrancy. I'm going to get arrested."

"If you really want posterity, you can be the Last Man!"

"How will that help?"

"Steven, what happens when you are no longer an actor, but only the act of an actor."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

I had no idea who I was talking to. The remnants of a dream.

"Steven, I need to see you in my office."

It was David. I wondered if he had more news.

When I arrived, he had coffee and doughnuts for me.

"I have some great news."

"Better sales on the book. The movie is almost finished."

"Better than that. I'm going to identity camp!"

"What the hell is that?"

"They give you a whole new identity. You can get rid of the old you and start again."

"It's sounds like dying."

"It doesn't happen to you. It happens to the it that you are before it happens."

“Like the Last Man Project.”

“You got turned down for the Last Man Project.”

“I didn’t think that I applied.”

“I thought that you were waiting for a new body.”

“Just like you’re waiting for a new soul.”

“Come with me to camp. It’s going to be fun!”

“It’s not the fun that I need.”

“You don’t know what it’s like.”

I had a question for him. “I was in here the other day, and there was this new guy Chris. Where’s Ginny?”

“She’s out for a couple of weeks. Visiting her family. He’s a temp.”

“He didn’t seem to know anything about my book. He couldn’t find my files.”

“I’ll help him out. By the way, this girl Cleo has been asking about you. Do you know anything?”

“No.” I seemed to hardly acknowledge his question.

“She’s not another one of those actresses?”

“I don’t know her.”

“She had a really sexy voice.”

“Perceptive of you.”

“You do know her.”

“I told you that I don’t.”

“Are you sure?”

“David, you have your identity camp. What do you want from me?”