

2. TAKING A BRIBE

Once I am out, I get a call from one of my buddies who has some work for me.

“What is this piece of shit?”

“It’s a good script.”

“Where did they write this? On the shitter?”

“Do you want the job? It’s not as if you’re swimming in money right now.”

“I feel as if I’m selling out my integrity. I never would have done anything like this before I checked myself in.”

“Just think of it as penance.”

“It’s not as if I really did anything wrong.”

“Are you forgiving yourself, now?”

“Honestly, Ben, this is terrible. I’m not sure if I can do anything to add.”

“You’ve had your share of problems. Just put yourself in the story.”

“I’m not going to tell my story for this kind of money.”

“Do the work. Take the money. Then you can worry about putting your own script together after you’re done.”

“I’m going to have to drink a lot of Jack Daniels to see me through this crap.”

“I thought that you were cured of drinking.”

“I was in for a behavioral problem.”

“So why are you so ornery?”

“Because you’re not asking me nicely.”

“If I stroke it, will you think about it.”

“If you even think about touching it, I’ll just have to pull out the ABC’s of chastity.”

“That felt great!”

“I’ll do the job, but I’ll be holding my nose all the time through it.”

“I’ve got this girl, Jennifer, who can help out. I’ll send her by.”

“Let me get going. Then you can send her by.”

“Do you want me to call you, or should I just have her stop by?”

“I don’t want anyone stopping by unannounced. Give her my number.”

“She’ll call you on the weekend.”

I already did a read through. And it made me feel ill. So I don’t exactly relish going through the ordeal one more time. I guess I have no choice. I have become accustomed to this lifestyle. And Ben is indulging my excesses. For all my taking stock, I haven’t changed all that much. I had thought that temptation was over. But who am I kidding? It’s not as if I just finished up at the seminary. My time in has almost made me more dissipated than ever. I’ve focused my attention on my own pleasures. Even as I have been denying them, I have given them more credibility.

If I was doing physical labor, I probably could distract myself with my efforts. Here I am writing about someone with an over-inflated ego. That’s why Ben has been encouraging me. I could try to infuse the script with that sense of cynicism which now pervades all my thoughts. That is why I have been tainted. So Rachel has done her job. I just wish that I could have got with Michelle. And I know that my lingering desire is just one of the many signs that I still have

a problem. I hate to admit that I'm incorrigible. That would only give guys like Ben more ammunition. At least, I've tried to swear off the old gang.

Jenny seems perfect to get my mind off my problems. She has just graduated from college in film. She has been doing editing work for Ben while she was in school. So she is a little seasoned. And she doesn't take any crap. She is ready to make me get to work.

"I'm not an alcoholic."

"But have you been drinking?"

"I haven't been home long enough to do much of anything. I have looked at the script."

"Ben told me as much."

"Who's writing this kind of shit these days?"

"I think that they have a couple of people on it already."

"You know that we're not getting any credit."

"He's going to pay us!"

"You haven't been doing this all that much."

"He told me that you were a teacher."

"But I've done a little more writing than you have. I do have a list of credits."

"Where did all that get you?"

I wonder how personal I should get with her. We are working together.

"I don't need another therapist."

"That's not why I am here. But if you want to talk about it, I'm all ears."⁴

"I thought that we had work to do."

"Sure. But it doesn't hurt to get to know each other."

"Some cocktails would help."

"Ben warned me about you."

"About what?"

"He said that you fashioned yourself quite the ladies' man."

"That makes me sound like an amateur."

"He said that you crashed and burned."

"Is there anything that he left out?"

"Quite a bit. But I don't want to give you a big head."

"Whoa! I'll take that as a compliment."

"Compliment given. But that still doesn't help with the script."

"I don't think that anything could."

"Ben's not going to like that."

"Think about the whole premise of this movie. This guy has been a total dick. She has him dead to rights. And she still goes back to him."

"Love counts for something."

"No woman in her right mind is going to go for this kind of shit."

"It happens every day."

"Show me a woman who believes that, and I'll have a hell of a weekend."

"I thought that you were a headhunter for women like that."

"So you're giving me more credit than I deserve."

"You're not superman. I guess Ben was wrong."

“You’re probably the kind of person who believes the weather girl when she gives a forecast.”

“My umbrella’s never further than an arm’s reach.”

“I was thinking about sunny skies.”

It is time to get down to work. And we are still dancing around the project.

“Are you thinking about a major revision.”

She puts me on the spot.

“We got hired to do a job. If Ben wanted to soft-pedal things, he would have done it all himself.”

“Is that why they call you *the hatchet*?”

“You’re still trying to work me with flattery.”

“All the better for the point that we both have to come down.”

“I thought that he sent you to keep me entertained.”

“I expected you to be ready with notes.”

“I am.”

I pull out my annotated copy of the script.

“I’ve got my notes on my computer.”

I turn my lap top towards me.

“Shit, I am impressed.”

“You should be.”

I can’t even believe myself. But I have committed myself to this job. So I need to take the work seriously. I also don’t want to give her a head start. That will only make her think that she is gaining on me.

“So they want to send this girl undercover. They need to give her a story. Help her blend in.”

“I thought that they handled that pretty well.”

“That’s the first glaring weakness. She’s just a face. A designer dress and a tight body. But no vulnerability. There going to see through her right away.”

“If they see her weakness, they’re going to exploit the hell out of it.”

“That’s the whole point. They need to believe that she’s one of them. That her life is such hell that she can’t go back to being straight. That she’s condemned to a life of villainy. That she’s got it worse than they do.”

“That’s going to put her more on the line. She’s going to have to go through a lot just to convince them. It’ll take its toll.”

“She can’t be a goody goody.”

“But if she gets in too deep, that’s going to create this intense rivalry.”

“She wants that. She wants the sparks flying. She just has to hold back a little. That way she makes them do all the work. She offers them an outline. She fills it in.”

“I don’t see it.”

“Don’t tell me that you’re identifying with the role.”

“I’m not. She can’t let them see her weakness. They are pros.”

“So is she. She is hard as nails.”

“So all this is a cover story. How can she be so believable?”

“She’s a good actress.”

“If it’s not real, they’ll break her down.”

“She has a past. Not as lurid as her cover. But enough to get her going. And they do the rest. She knows how to use her body.”

“You’re back to the hottie in a designer dress.”

“More of a tease.”

“Is this how you see women?”

“I don’t pre-judge. I let everyone set their own trap.”

“Kind of you!”

“I call them how they see them. Everyone has the potential for good.”

“And you want to drag that potential down to the sewer.”

“We’re talking about a movie script.”

“But aren’t you betraying a little of yourself?”

“I’m more concerned about what she’s betraying. All the other stuff is extra.”

“Don’t you reveal yourself in your writing?”

“What of it? I’m here to get a job done. This ain’t college. I can’t worry about my motivation. I’m here to do a script. To give the characters the motivation that they lack. Anything that I can do to get it done is extra.”

“You are a tease.”

“Jennifer, I can be all kinds of things. That’s not the point. It’s fun sharing banter with you. But Ben is expecting us to finish this.”

“Good point. I’m just not all that convinced that this girl can play both ends against the middle. She’s supposed to be virtuous.”

“She’s working this game for her own angle. She’s looking for an opening. It’s that way from the beginning.”

“She has an assignment.”

“Her assignment is only a guide. In the field, she has to make things happen as she goes along. She has to take risks. She learns to improvise.”

“Improvising can get her killed.”

“Improvising is the only way that she can save her life.”

“So she’s going to sleep with the guy.”

“I’m not saying that!”

“You’re saying that she has morals.”

“Those are your words. She makes do.”

“Does she even know who she is?”

“She’s someone who survives. Who comes out on top.”

“I’m not even sure what that means. If you just keep shaving the truth, you have nothing.”

“Jennifer, it’s the other way around. You make your truths from the moment. How things make sense here and now. All the rest is frosting.”

“I like the frosting.”

“So does she. But she realizes that’s the thing that’s going to get her killed.”

“But she assumes too much. She takes the law in her own hands. She gets too lax just to

get close to her prey.”

“That’s why she’s good.”

“And why are you good?”

“Because I try to get under the skin of my characters. I want to know what makes them tick.”

“But you’re telling me that what makes her tick for now may end up being a distraction.”

“So be it. There are no absolutes.”

“That was said with conviction.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Said by a guy who’s used to getting what he wants.”

“What he deserves. I see it more as I get what I deserve.”

“Like a villain.”

“If that’s how you want to paint me.”

“You like to have fun.”

“I’m not that sure what that means anymore.”

“You’re pretty sure for Linda.”

“Linda?”

“The girl in the script.”

“Oh yeah. I wasn’t sure who you meant.”

“You knew a girl named Linda.”

“None well.”

“That seems equivocal.”

“I never went out with a Linda.”

“But you did think about her.”

“I’ve thought quite a bit about the girl in the script.”

“Do you have someone in mind?”

“I don’t know. Someone a little like you.”

“I’m not the kind of girl to take chances.”

“Do you have a guy?”

“I’ve got a fiancé.”

“Quite respectable.”

“I am the respectable type. Not the kind of girl to take chances.”

“You don’t mind coming over to a stranger’s house.”

“This is business.”

“You’ve been asking me quite a lot of questions for business.”

“I’ve been trying to size you up. To pick your brain.”

“And what have you figured out.”

“That I’m quite naive. I have a lot to learn.”

“So why are you getting married? You should have answered all those questions.”

“I found someone that I love. We’re going to answer those questions together.”

“What happens when you realize that his answers aren’t yours?”

“I highly doubt that’s going to happen. We haven’t had any problems in the past. Nothing to speak of. That’s why I’m so confident.”

“But you’re telling me that you have a lot to learn. You come into an adult situation, and you become flustered.”

“I’m not flustered. I just have to admit that you’ve been running rings around me.”

“I love the act.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re a pro at this. And hubby doesn’t know a thing.”

“What are you saying?”

“I wish that I could tell you that Ben warned me about you. But he didn’t say a thing. He just told me that this girl, Jennifer, was coming over to help with the script.”

“What’s the problem?”

“No problem at all. But you do this little trick all the time. The meek house-frau who flirts with the big bad wolf and then runs back to Daddy.”

“I find you insulting. You are vulgar.”

“You didn’t come here to learn anything. You know your game.”

“Honest. I’m not about any of that.”

“You’re cute. Cute as a button. Linda. You’re a perfect Linda. I know the school marm act. But it’s all there.”

“I’m not an actress I swear.”

“I know that. You have all the charm. Nevertheless, you avoid the camera. You are brilliant. I only wish that we could show that on screen.”

“I’m all confused.”

“You do have to play confused. That’s the next stage in the script. I haven’t been sitting at the computer for nothing.”

“Is this something about the script?”

“Can I touch you? You’re perfectly lovely. I’m just not sure that you’re real.”

“That kind of thing doesn’t work anymore.”

“Do you want to be touched, Jennifer?”

“I thought that you were calling me Linda.”

“Do you want to sleep with me, Linda?”

“Is that line in the script?”

“Let’s talk about the script. Do you have notes?”

“I have a few.”

“I have the rewrite on a disk. You can take it home with you.”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“Hubby’s not going to distract you?”

“He gives me space.”

“Of course he does. Otherwise, you’d show him the door.”

“For a writer, you don’t make yourself very clear.”

“If I made myself any clearer, you might take offense.”

“You don’t think that I’m up for the job. You’re not going to say something bad to Ben.”

“I only have great things to say to you. It’s not like that.”

“Explain it to me.”

“The college girl has gone cold. How can we warm you up?”

“Maybe some coffee.”
 “Not a drink.”
 “I don’t like to drink in the afternoon.”
 “So you do get out on your own.”
 “I don’t understand.”
 “You go out for drinks.”
 “Yeah!”
 “Would you like to go out for a drink?”
 “I just said that I don’t like to drink in the afternoon.”
 “I didn’t mean now.”
 “I can’t really go anywhere at night without my fiancé.”
 “So you’re going to bring him here.”
 “I don’t get it. You’ve been really obscure for the last few minutes.”
 “We have a lot of work to get done. And we really can’t do it all during the daytime. So you’ll have to work into the evening. Are you going to bring Raymond with you?”
 “His name is Brian.”
 “Brian. Good name. So Brian is going to tag along. Is he a writer?”
 “He’s studying law.”
 “Law. The script is full of legal issues. He could offer his advice.”
 “You’re teasing me now.”
 “Do you like to be teased?”
 “I want to see your revisions.”
 “I want you to do more than that.”
 “How is that?”
 “I need you to do more than just look at what I wrote. I want you to get involved.”
 “You were calling me Linda. I almost felt that I was part of the story.”
 “Yeah, I want you to feel the part. Have you ever slept with a man that you didn’t love?”
 “Excuse me.”
 “Isn’t that what this script is about?”
 “Sorry. I wasn’t sure what you meant.”
 “Have you ever slept with a man who you didn’t love?”
 “Sure, we all have. But not often. I’ve always wanted to believe that there’s more to it than just the sex. I’ve made mistakes. I’m just not the sort of girl to go looking for it.”
 “So Linda is the sort of girl that goes looking for it.”
 “Maybe.”
 “She goes looking for it because it satisfies something deep inside her.”
 “Go on.”
 “For her that something could be something like love.”
 “That sounds like a weakness.”
 “How so?”
 “To believe that sex could ever be the same thing as love.”
 “Brian makes you feel that way.”
 “Like how?”

“He turns you on. He knows how to touch you.”

“What’s your point?”

“And you know how to touch a naked man.”

“What we do makes sense because we love each other.”

“And if you didn’t love each other.”

“I’d question why we were together.”

“So it’s more about the love.”

“It is the love.”

“Not the physical thing.”

“The physical thing is part of the love.”

“You’ve never had that physical ache.”

“I’m human.”

“What do you do about it?”

“I try to put it in context.”

“Does he put it in context? Does he ever push you to that point when it’s so extreme, so animalistic that you just wonder if there is any kind of love that could possibly contain that feeling.”

“Why are you asking me this?”

“We are trying to get to Linda’s motivation.”

“But you are trying to tell me that she puts on a front. That she fakes this feeling just so that she can get some guy to be interested in her.”

“I’m trying to tell you that thing can’t be faked.”

“Then she doesn’t know how to be honest.”

“You can be honest.”

“I can.”

“You’ve never had doubts.”

“I’ve had loads of doubts. That is what love is. It fills in that space between doubt and certainty.”

“You know how to touch your naked man.”

“I do what I can.”

“If I asked you to do the same thing to me, what would you say?”

“You wouldn’t ask. You respect my commitment.”

“I do. I just want to know how far you are ready to push to understand what this script needs.”

“Are you telling me that I need to sleep with you if I’m going to understand what this script is about?”

“I’m telling you that there is part of yourself that you better understand if you’re going to get this script right.”

“How do I do that?”

“How do you touch a part of yourself that has never been touched?”

“You are telling me that such a thing really exists.”

“I’m telling you anything that I need to so that I can make my point.”

“That you want to sleep with me.”

“We are talking about the script. Why are you getting distracted?”

“No one’s talked to me like this before?”

“Do you like it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“You’re opening a part of yourself that is new.”

“Great!”

“You do like it.”

“I’m not sure if I’m allowed to like it.”

“You admit that this is a part of yourself that you have closed off. How can that be?”

“I guess I haven’t been that open.”

“You’ve been holding back part of yourself.”

“Maybe.”

“How does your fiancé feel about that? Of course, he doesn’t know. And you’re telling me that you don’t know. So two wrongs make a right. But you still don’t know. Do you want to know?”

“Know what?”

“What it’s like. I could show you what it’s like.”

“By sleeping with me. It wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“You don’t play around.”

“I don’t cheat if that’s what you mean.”

“Cheating. Isn’t that what he’s doing by closing off part of your experience?”

“I don’t even know if you’re talking about something specific.”

“What would you do if I kissed you right now?”

“I’d slap you, and then I’d consult a lawyer.”

“Why don’t you call Brian right now? He could advise you on your best course of action.”

“I don’t need to consult him.”

“So you know what to do on your own. You wouldn’t consult your lawyer. You’d just slap me. Sounds like a small price to pay for a little kiss.”

“Are you always so abusive with all your women?”

“I didn’t know that you were including yourself among my women.”

“I’m not!”

“What about this script? Do you think that you have some idea of who Linda is?”

“I’m trying.”

“But you have to mull over her situation a little more.”

“I have a lot to think about.”

“So we’re finished?”

“We are? I thought that you were going explain something to me.”

“I thought that I already had. Anything more, and we’d have to really act out the script. And I’m not prepared to do that.”

“I don’t want to come off as too innocent.”

“As Linda feels. She doesn’t want to let on that she has a sense of justice.”

“Fair play!”

“Exactly. You’d feel bad if you slept with someone that you didn’t love.”
 “Something like that.”
 “What if you fell in love with someone after you had sex with them?”
 “I’d only feel ashamed. I’m with a man.”
 “Imagine that you weren’t with a guy. Could you fall in love with another man after you had slept with him?”
 “Does it work like that?”
 “If the sex was so fantastic.”
 “It never is like that.”
 “Never.”
 “Not with a man that I don’t know. I’d just tense up.”
 “If I touched you now. Just touched you, would you tense up.”
 “It’s not like you’re a perfect stranger.”
 “We just met a little while ago, and already you’re thinking about me touching you.”
 “You wanted me to get in character. You were asking questions about Linda.”
 “And you’re doing a great job at that. So you wouldn’t mind if I just touched you.”
 “Not like that!”
 “A little touch! See, I don’t bite.”
 “Would you bite?”
 “What? When?”
 “When you kiss.”
 “Are you sure that you want to talk about this?”
 “I’m just following through on the seduction scene.”
 “Does she imagine that she’s already with another guy?”
 “That’s what makes it undercover.”
 “There is a betrayal going on.”
 “There is always a betrayal. She knows it. She has to know it.”
 “And he does too?”
 “He believes it. But he can’t know. That is her advantage. She is pretending.”
 “He is too.”
 “But she knows. He’s just guessing!”
 “Are you going to tell him?”
 “Him? What?”
 “Are you going to tell him what you’ve been thinking?”
 “What have I been thinking?”
 “That you want to be with another man.”
 “I would never tell him.”
 “You are a naughty girl.”
 “What are you thinking?”
 “That he must suspect. How does he not find out?”
 “I do what I need to do.”
 “Why the act? Why don’t you just say what you want?”
 “It wouldn’t be as fun.”

“It’s not all about fun. You have to believe what you’re doing.”
“I don’t have to believe it. I just have to enjoy it.”
“And you’re not going to leave him?”
“Why should he? It’s not the same thing.”
“But he can never take you to that point.”
“It’s not about that. I’m with him for security.”
“And these other guys. What if they fall in love with you?”
“I never let them. I don’t fall in love with any of them.”
“You give so much of yourself. How can you hold back like that?”
“I don’t hold back. I just don’t let it affect me in that way. That is why Brian will never know. I never share that part of myself with him. It’s almost as if it doesn’t exist.”
“It does exist. It’s what makes you crazy.”
“I know that. I just make sure that he won’t.”
“That’s why you understand Linda so well.”
“I guess.”
“You can work from my notes.”
“I suppose so. Do you want me to go?”
“For now.”
“Should I come back?”
“Yeah, I need you to come back. Not tonight. I don’t want to think about this tonight.”

Do you know how I started out in this business? As a doorman.?