

16. KAROLINA'S RESOLUTION

Joy has been keeping track of my recent endeavors. She seems pissed.

"You have this one chapter where you imply that Audrey would willingly invite this psycho in her home. And you're working on this book about Toni where you make her seem like this junk whore. Then you have these fantasies about killing one of the true voices of our generation, Ross Stevens."

"I'm portraying uncomfortable aspects of everyday life."

"You make it worse so that you can justify your point of view. Or you select out the really weird to further justify your sick sense of humor."

"In your own way, Joy, you are encouraging me."

"You really are a child."

I have to go back to LA to jump start my film career. They really do like my book on Zack. So my manager decides to pursue the film that has already been in development.

"What about that girl that you were working with?"

"Jennifer Fisher. I thought that if I waited long enough that she would go away."

"Go away! She's the money behind the picture."

I meet with Jennifer at a Chinese restaurant to discuss the script.

"Are you going to eat?" she asks me.

"I've eaten at home."

"I hope you don't mind if I eat."

"Not at all."

"It's not as if we're going to have a relationship. I know that some guys put me in a picture just so that they can get in my pants."

"I didn't think that we were."

"I'm not saying that I'd rule it out. I just don't want anything coming from your end."

"Of course not."

"Also, I get complete rewrite privileges on the script."

I have little confidence in her ability to write anything. Much less a script of mine. But I bite my tongue. I am taking one for the team. I'm not sure of what her intent is with regards to the film. At some point, it seems that she wants to turn the work into one of those fluff soft-core pieces that she is so used to. She wants to bare all for the camera. At other points, it seems that she wants to eliminate all sexual reference in the script. Clean it up for family audiences to go along with her squeaky clean new image.

"This is a mature picture, Jennifer. It's not a porno. But the theme is adult-oriented. You take away the sex and you lose all the desperation that motivates these characters."

"Desperate, honey, I have never."

If she's not desperate, then why isn't a major studio knocking down her door with a great script."

"I appreciate that you're getting involved in this project. And I know that the movie probably won't be made without your help. But I'm not going to bow down to your pressure. Jennifer, dear, I'm an artist."

Jennifer finally may be listening to my critique. If she doesn't, I am going to walk. I

don't care how much money she is willing to sink into this picture.

When I next see Jennifer, it is at the same restaurant. She claims that her script has become damaged, and she needs a new one.

"I was sitting on my float reading the script. I was really trying to make sense of what you told me. I'm an artist too! I moved slightly, the float turned over, and the script ended up in the pool."

I consent to printing her out a new script. Maybe we're starting to see things eye to eye.

"You really want things your way in the world."

Her accusation hits me out of left field. "I have meager tastes. I think that I'm a pretty easy guy to get along with."

"This is the hardest that I've ever had to work for. Usually guys do whatever I tell them."

"This is not about me or you. We're making a movie. I want it to be good."

"I don't understand your script. You just seem sort of insulting towards women."

"I'm trying to expose the kind of treatment that girls put up with all the time."

"But you seem to be inventing new kinds of torture. All the girls seem to have loose morals. And they get gossiped about and blamed for that sort of thing."

"That's really not what the script is saying."

"I feel as if I'm playing some kind of whore. That male viewers will just get off on seeing me on screen."

"There's really a purpose for everything that happens in the movie. It's not just a dirty movie."

"Life just seems cheap and easy in your world. People have feelings. I know everyone thinks of me as a party girl. And I admit that things are pretty easy for me. But I don't deserve the bad reputation that I have."

"I've always thought that was an act for publicity."

"It is. I am very serious about my craft. I've taken acting lessons. I am in workshops all the time. I read a great deal. I just can't make sense of this stuff that you do. Everything jumps around all the time. The only thing that holds any of it together is the sex. It's porno for intellectuals."

I'm not sure if she's the one who loves saying it or if I'm the one who loves hearing it. But I am getting a kick out of her weak protestations.

"Jennifer, you love the role. If you didn't, you'd be back in Idaho peeling potatoes."

"Actually, it's Iowa shucking corn." She smiles.

Maybe I'm making some progress.

She shops alone. She stares through the faces. She seems lost.

"May I help you?"

"I'm OK."

"I could help you with those packages."

"Why, thank you. You seem so nice."

Back at her place things get a little nasty.

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because I can. You let me in."

"Who are you?"

“Mr. Stevens.”

“This part of the script makes no sense. She’s going to invite this guy that she doesn’t know back to her place.”

“That’s the whole point. She embraces danger.”

“So if I asked you back to my place, you could explain it in more detail for me, Mr. Jones.”

“Jennifer, you know that’s not my name.”

Jennifer is teasing me. At least she is in a more playful mood. Maybe we really will get this movie done.

“You still didn’t really answer my question.”

“The only reason that you came back here was to hurt me.”

“Why did you ask me here? You wanted to face your fear.”

“Fear is not something that you face. It’s caused by something real. You just have to eliminate the cause of the fear.”

“So you’re trying to say that she lures him back to her place so that she can hurt him. Is that the point of the movie?”

“It’s supposed to be ambiguous. Sort of a cat and mouse game.”

“They’re both a little off of center.”

“You could say that!”

Jennifer is starting to turn me on. I feel as if I am becoming like every other sleaze who graces the Sunset Strip.

“You want to come back to my place, and we could run more of these scenes.”

This seems too good to be true. “I don’t think that it would be a good idea. You barely know me.”

“I could get to know you.”

“It’s not going to make the acting any easier.”

“You never know. It could be a start.”

She is rubbing her finger up and down my cheek. I can hardly resist. Business is business.

There’s always been a thought that psychic powers seem to accompany traumatic events. Just as in an earthquake, these tectonic plates rubbing together appear to free long-dormant energies. It seems that Karolina’s trip to Utah inspired just such a change in her. This is not to say that she hasn’t felt like this before. But her experience in Utah is just the catalyst to reacquaint her with former psychic experiences.

When she was younger, Karolina always felt a presence. This feeling would manifest itself when she was walking alone in the woods. She also suspected that the house in which she grew up was haunted. Her sister and her parents never believed her. But her own belief subsisted. There were too many strange occurrences for her to explain rationally. Things disappearing. Strange lights in dark rooms. Noises without reason. All of it added up.

The most extraordinary aspect of Karolina’s powers seemed to be an ability to predict the future. This ability was never seriously focused. But it did serve as an influence on her early years. She remembered a camping trip that a neighbor family invited her on. In fact, she was excited about the trip. She even had her parents’ permission to go. But when the time came for

the trip, she had the worst feeling about it. She hid in her room and told her parents that she was sick. It was a fortunate thing that she stayed home. The family got in a car accident. It wasn't inordinately serious. But everyone was injured. From serious bruises to broken limbs. It wasn't a pretty sight.

Joy is becoming particularly angry at my narrative about Karolina. I told her about meeting Karolina when I was in Utah. These new details are just too much for Joy to stomach.

"This is the kind of shit that Hollywood does all the time. It takes special effects and cheap coincidence and implies divine intervention. The only intervention is Hollywood skimming off money from your wallet. It's always these innocent Pollyanna types who get visited by an angel. It just fosters a cultural eugenics that we suffer day to day. Toe the mark, look the part, or off you go to the glue factory!"

"This is her experience."

"And you validate it retrospectively. Get her to predict the stock market or a horse race and we can make some real money."

Now Karolina again feels the earth move beneath her feet. And she can sense the psychic shock waves roll in upon her. Karolina gets the inkling that something weird is going on. She can't ignore the feeling. And the more that she concentrates the more a picture starts to emerge.

"He's taken her hostage in her apartment. You have to find him before he does something worse."

Jamie asks, "Is that all you know?"

"I think that he met her at work."

"Where does she work?"

"A big department store."

"Do you know anything else?"

Once the psychic's voice accuses, there's no reason to doubt her. You don't even need a trial. She's the prime witness for the prosecution."

"Don't be so quick to dismiss her. What if she is right?"

"You don't that for sure. You really don't know a thing."

"She seems very convinced."

"You've got to tell the police"

"The police are already involved."

Jamie drives Karolina down to the police station. They are at first skeptical of her story. But the more detail that she offers, the more it starts to make sense.

"We've been looking for this guy. I even went by her work to ask her questions. She should have listened to me. She was protecting him."

"The police are just as much in the dark as she is. There is no hostage. It's just an excuse to hurt an innocent man."

"When they finally find the woman who he is holding, she'll be dead. Unless Karolina can help them get to her immediately."

Karolina does her best to offer more details about the hostage. She has to become the woman in order to find where she is being held.

It's been a long day at work. Audrey has arranged things on the shelf. There are a number of empty boxes on the floor that need to be taken to the trash. They are cluttering

up her work area. She gets Vanessa to cover her while she clears them out of the space. It's not as if she's going to get anymore customers for the rest of the day.

"Thanks, Vanessa. It's looks like smooth sailing here on out."

"Still about an hour left. Did that guy come back?"

"What guy?"

"The one who was looking for you at lunch."

Audrey gets a chill just thinking about him. He's talked about coming over to her place. She really wants to meet him. She knows he's dangerous but that doesn't stop her from wanting to take him back to her place. He's not going to try anything against her.

The desire just flares up for her. She can't help it.

As she does the final work for the day, she hopes that he might show up. It's not the guy. It's that detective again.

"I heard my friend came by."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Your co-worker gave me the news. Quit giving me shit. I know everything that's going on."

"I really don't know what you're talking about. Some guy came here looking for me because he had a complaint about a purchase. Vanessa tried to handled it. But she doesn't even work in this department. She was covering me while I was at lunch."

"I could make up something and take you down to the station."

"I could sue you if you don't quit harassing me. I'll have our manager call down to your supervisor. If you don't have anything important to tell me, you need to leave."

"I could give you a warning. This guy is dangerous."

"More dangerous than you."

"Don't make light of this. It's a serious situation."

Audrey doesn't want to ignore the officer. But he's just such a pain. He really doesn't have anything to go on. He's becoming a pest. Audrey is not sure what she can do to shake him. This is hardly the first time that he's come by. And as far as Audrey knows, Vanessa could be wrong about the guy who came by today.

When she goes out to her car, there's someone waiting for her.

"I came by earlier."

She jumps. "You scared me. Don't do this to me. Come by while I'm still in the store."

"I thought that you were being watched."

"I was. That guy was there again asking questions. He says that he's a cop. I just think that he's jealous of you."

"I know that guy. I hope that you ignored him."

Audrey reassures him, "I didn't say a thing. Do you want to come back to my place."

"I'm not sure. It's not really a good idea."

"Don't be silly. I can get you some food. Get in the car."

Without hesitation, she lets him ride back to her place. When he gets upstairs, she makes him a snack.

“I’ve eaten already.”

“I’ll get you dessert. Cake and coffee.”

“Sounds great.”

“That guy really must have it in for you. He had nothing but bad things to tell me about you. He claims that you find women at bars and drug them. Take them back to your place and then do these awful things. And then you kill the women in the most awful ways.”

“You don’t believe him.”

“No, not at all. But he seems to have a lot of evidence.”

“I think that’s his job—to come up with stories. Then he builds the evidence around the stories. He’s got that sick kind of mind.”

“What about the women?”

“I bet they’re women that I’ve met. But he’s the one who does his share of harassing them. How many time has he been around to see you?” He settles back on the couch and eats his cake.

Audrey is in her room changing. He can barely see in the doorway.

“That sounds psycho. Does he hate you?”

“He’s sort of a loser. Women aren’t very friendly to him. I guess that he’s a little envious of guys like me. It just takes one time to set him off. To put him in a rage.”

“But he’s a cop.”

“They’re sometimes the worst. That’s why they become cops. It gives them the opportunity. And they can hide their deviance.”

She comes back out in a more comfortable dress that she wears around the house.

“You seem to know about this all to well.”

“Come sit next to me.”

“I want to get something to eat. You’re the one who’s already eaten.”

“We could go somewhere.”

“Not this late. It’s almost 10.”

He looks at his watch.

“I’ve got some things to do. I probably should go.”

“You told me that you wanted to come up here.”

“You invited me up.”

Something is making her feel uncomfortable. Her door seems miles away. There is a strange pallor to his face. She can feel that mask come over him.

“I want you to stay.” She is trying to hide her suspicions. “Do you want more cake?”

“I’ll take another cup of coffee.”

She gets him the coffee. Then she puts a dinner in the microwave.

“This is what I have to live on.” She smiles.

He tries to smile back. He is looking more uncomfortable.

“Is everything all right?”

He squirms in his seat. “I really should go. I should have never come up here.”

Things are really turning for him. He’s trying to maintain himself. But he can’t.

He finds that he's giving over to the same old feeling.

"Do you want some Tylenol. Anything that might make you feel better."

"I could use a drink."

He can tell that it's starting again. The alcohol will calm him down. It will make him forget what he has to do. She seems so appealing. He thought that about her when he first saw her in the store.

For the moment, Audrey seems distracted. She goes to the window to try to get her bearings. She looks out at the skyline. Some of buildings seem close enough to touch.

"I could use a drink myself. It will put me in the mood."

She has no doubts why she brought him up here. It's just happening too fast for her. The drink only make her sense it accelerating around her. For him, it's enough to give him the confidence to do what he has to do.

She works her way through the dinner as she sits across from him. The alcohol is going to her head. She's on her second drink. She took the first on an empty stomach. This is nothing new to her. She's taken guys up her before. Guys that she's met at the store. She listens to the bull shit stories. It's just an excuse so she doesn't have to be alone for the night. She knows that none of it will last past this one night.

She warns him, "You better get out of here while you can."

"Don't you think that I know why you asked me up here?"

"Then lets take care of what has to be done."

He is a little hesitant to follow through. It's been a while.

"I think I know where she is. She lingered at the window just long enough for me to get a heading." Karolina has popped up with the excitement. "I could find her place with my eyes closed."

"Tell us where it is."

"I can't tell you where it is. But I could show you. If you take me back to the mall, I can find it from there."

Karolina needs to go with her feeling while it is still fresh. The interrogating officer takes her in his car. Another car follows them.

From the mall they take a left. They travel a couple of blocks.

"Take a left here."

They keep driving.

"Look over there. That window. She was watching from that window." He stops the car. They both get out.

They rush over to the door, and find the bell. "It's got to be 4-C. Audrey. Her name is on the buzzer."

They ring the bell.

"Who is it?"

"It's the police. May we come up?"

"What's this about?"

"We want to make sure that everything is all right."

"I'm OK."

"Can we come up?"

She lets them all come up to her place.

“I’ve been in all evening since I got back from work.”

“You didn’t meet a man from work?”

“Not at all. I’ve been alone all night.”

“Can we look around?”

“I don’t see what the big fuss is about. But go ahead.”

Karolina is just watching as all this is going on.

Audrey asks, “Are you with the police?”

“No, ‘I’m the one who reported this. I’ve been here before. Not really. But in my vision. I know that it was tonight. But there was a man here. He threatened you. Then he started to hurt you. I thought that he killed you.”

“I’m all here. Nothing happened to me.”

“I could have sworn that you were injured”

“You’ve got the wrong woman.”

“I recognize the apartment. And that window. I know that view. You stood here and just stared out. I’m sure of it.”

“Yeah, I did stare out at the view. I was thinking about my life. How things have just got out of control. But that’s all there was to it.”

The police apologize for the intrusion. The lead officer has met Audrey. He’s been down to the store to ask questions. But it’s another dead end lead.

Karolina asks her, “Do you mind if I stay? You could get me some coffee.”

The officer looks at her. “I don’t know what the hell is going on. But if you find anything else, come back to the station. I know you had a feeling. I had one too.”

Once the officers leave the apartment, Audrey does her best to welcome Karolina.

“So you had a vision about me.”

“I did. I remember a coffee cup in the cupboard with a shaggy dog on it.” She goes over to the cupboard and opens it. The cup is there. There’s a plate on the shelf and another plate in the sink.

“Someone stopped by for cake.”

“I made myself a snack. I ate at work. But I was still a little hungry. So I had some cake. So what was this vision that you had.”

“There was a man in the apartment. He was doing something to you.”

“I haven’t had a man here in quite a while. That’s definitely a story.”

“I suppose that it is. I got everything right. Except the guy isn’t here and you’re all right. This is almost like a parallel universe.”

“This is the only life that I’ve known. Have you had other visions like this?”

“There’s one of this boy with big eyes. He seems to have special powers like me. He’s about four or five. But he’s wise beyond his years. He can do math and read and speak other languages. His parents are both impressed, and they feel that he’s a bit of a freak. But I feel like he can do bigger things. He can solve the problem of the inevitable.”

“What is the problem of the inevitable?”

“It’s this math problem, actually probability. It explains coincidences such as why someone can win the lottery more than once. Or how someone can keep winning with pick three.

Or how a player can win at the gaming tables. Or how to score big on the stock market. It's the big secret."

"If you have the vision, then maybe you can solve the problem."

"I've been trying. But I keep getting it wrong. Look at what happened with you."

"You've figured out the right place. It's just the wrong events. You just have to shuffle it all together and deal it out all over again."

Karolina tries to feel relieved, "I don't know if I can take any more of this kind of thing. It's already been pretty frightening."

Yes, it has. There's little that Karolina can do to protect herself. Audrey can only die once. But Karolina feels as if she is going to die again and again.

"I never really wanted this power," she tells Audrey.

"You never know how it might benefit you. Maybe you can solve that math problem of yours."

"I'm doing my best. Just as I get close, I feel it dissipate in my hands."

"That's no reason to stop now."

Karolina looks out at the city from her apartment. She had been marveling at the skyline earlier in the night. She asked that guy up who she met at work. He had already come by to see her a couple of times. She finally felt safe enough to invite him over. He had declined her offer.

She puts her shaggy dog coffee cup on the shelf. She wanted to do some school work. That is why she drank the coffee. But it wasn't enough. The burst only lasted a little while.

As she begins to fall asleep, she thinks about the problem of the inevitable. What makes the numbers bounce back and forth and finally resolve on a resolution.

"If you hear my words, you are already dead."

There is a woman on a balcony screaming as if she is talking to a large crowd. Karolina is the only one there.

"What the hell is this about?"

"If you hear my words, you are already dead."

"I didn't ask for any of this."

The woman doesn't respond.

"If you are dead, you will not be able to wake up. Heed my words while you can."

None of it makes sense. Is this a dream or another revelation?

My agent hooks me up with this producer. Jennifer is going to bring half the budget to the picture. But we need to convince this producer.

"I get my cat to wander around the table. When it finds a script that it likes, I know that it's the one for me."

"So am I cat-approved?"

"I'm not sure. It just sort of wandered around yours I really like your bit about the kid."

He seems to be passed out in the car. He is parked in the high school parking lot. His windows are rolled up. Music is blaring.

"Someone needs to get him out."

Everyone is ignoring him. No one seems to care. They are all rushing to class.

"If he stays in there, he's going to die."

"I think that's the ideas."

“Are you going to bang on the window. Don’t you want to rescue him.”

The windows are all fogged up.

“It’s his free choice. If he wants to die. I’ve got to get to class. Why don’t you stop him?”

“I don’t even know him. I’m not really here.”

“That is a great scene.”

“The cats like it?”

“I like it.”

“So are you going to give me the money?”

“Is Jennifer Fisher going to get naked?”

“I think that she wants to do a serious role.”

“Serious! My cat wants to see her naked.”

“Of course. Jennifer invited me up to the house last night.”

“Was it good?”

“I passed. My cat told me that it wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“Why are you making fun of me?”

“You are a successful producer, and you’re telling me that your cat made your decisions. What is the last script that it approved?”

“A story that I took from my life. It’s about this cop who is stalking me. I went out with him. Now he’s got it in for me.”

He decides to stop by her place after work.

“I answered all your questions the last time that you were here. He hasn’t come by again.”

“But you slept with him.”

“I don’t have to answer questions like that. Maybe you should go.”

“You’ve got a great body. For a woman your age, you really take care of yourself. And you like to show off. Those short skirts with the heels. And the low-cut tops. You’ve got nice breasts.”

“You’ve got to leave now.”

“You know what it is with cops. We can do pretty well what we want. And when people complain about us, no one seems to believe them. No one is going to believe you.”

“I think that I’ve got enough on you to get you suspended. And when they investigate you’ll be thrown off the force and sent to jail.”

“Dead birds sing no songs.”

“You are a sick fuck.”

“That’s why you let me in.”

He pins her body between the fridge and the counter. He attempts to kiss her. She dodges his advance. Then she reaches under his pants and grabs hard. He kisses her deeply.

“She should have known better.”

“Joy, we can’t all be psychic.”

“You really go for that violent shit.”

“I just feel that there’s this destructive side of desire that we ignore. Sometimes it just creeps up on us. Or we hold on forever. It’s all the same. Even satisfaction is temporary.”

“Did cat woman approve the script.”

“She’s thinking about it.”

“What about Jennifer, every boy’s wet dream?”

“She’s going to make the movie.”

“And if you don’t get the money, you can always take your video camera up to her place for a private screening.”

“I’m not that kind of guy.”

“I’ve read your books. I know what turns you on.”

“I’m more interested in the problem of the inevitable that Karolina’s working on.”

“She’s not the first, and she won’t be the last. It’s an illusion.”

“You mean that she just needs a good man.”

“That’s your way of thinking. Besides, isn’t a good man hard to find?”

“No, it’s a hard man is good to find.”

“Is that what Jennifer taught you?”

“She taught me how to solve the problem of the invincible.”

Karolina stares out her window. She knows that he’s out there. And if he’s failed this time, there are going to be others. What motivates him? Why is his frustration so deep-seeded? He gets a kick out of drugging woman and bringing them back to his place. She is sure that she’s met him before. She’s just trying to figure out where. She is going to find him.

The next day Karolina heads into work early. She feels as if something is going to happen. The woman from the night before has left all these empty boxes in the work space.

“I thought that she was going to clear these out.”

Karolina puts the fragrances on the shelf. It is going to be a long day. She is hoping for some surprises.

“Don’t I know you?”

“I’m just here part-time. You’re probably thinking of the other woman. She’s older and taller. I’m still a student.”

“Is she working under cover?”

“I’m not sure. She definitely is working on something.”