

## 11. JUST DESSERTS

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I’m trying to remember that face. I’m an artist. I want to capture your splendor for the canvas.”

“You’re shitting me.”

“I just move my hand in the air, and I can sketch your lovely outline.”

“This kind of stuff doesn’t work with me.”

“You’re still listening.”

“I want to see how far you’re willing to go.”

“I told you that I’m an artist. I can sense your inner charm.”

“I can too. Why do I need you to create something that exists independently of you?”

“I see things in a more profound way.”

I just moved in to the apartment building. I am trying to accustom myself to living here. Who are my neighbors? Jim Cavaliere knocks on my door.

“You’re the new guy.”

I nod. I guess that he has something important to tell me.

“Where you from?”

“I lived in Boston. But I’ve been in Atlanta for quite a while.”

“Where did you used to live?”

“In the Highlands. I had a house. But it got too expensive.”

“This place is nice if you like being out of the way.”

“You sound like you’re hiding out.”

“We all have to be on guard. You never know when it’s your time.”

I have visions of the Apocalypse. G man busting down the door to my apartment.

“You have a girl.”

I smiled back.

“You know that there all against us.”

I can’t be sure if he’s talking about women or the government. Maybe he thinks that the two are connect.

“It’s the Federal Reserve. They’re working with the all-world government. Look at the UN. Pretty soon there is going to be one currency.”

“Do you have some gold stashed away?”

He laughed and looked at me strangely. “It’s nothing to joke about.”

“Suppose not.”

“You don’t know what they’re up to. Blowing up things. It could be you next!”

“Yes, it could.”

“I don’t pay my taxes anymore. Everything is off the books. You’ve got to start somewhere. I don’t even have a computer. If I use the internet, it’s at the library. And I have to wear a disguise because they have cameras everywhere. It’s all part of socialism that’s taking over America.”

I wonder if he is a member of some organization. It all sounds pretty shady. But I don’t want to accuse him of being off his gourd. He probably has good reason for thinking what he

does.

“It’s all going to make sense in a little while.”

What is the appeal of conspiracy theory? Times are desperate. Work often reinforces our isolation. It’s hard to make friends. Harder to convince someone else that there’s something worth fighting for.

“Fair taxes!”

Whatever you say!

“Some people get really upset about conspiracy theory. They think that it is a serious impediment to serious political discourse.”

“Conspiracy nuts prevent rational discussion about issues.”

“Take the case of the CIA involvement in the drug trade. It was first dismissed as conspiracy theory. There were numerous articles on the subject. And everyone thought that it was just some crazies behind it. They even had Congressional Committees set up to debunk the idea. It was only later on that the facts came out. The powers-that-be do all in their power to prevent us from constructing a serious narrative about what really goes on with the government and the corporations. So everything comes out in fragments. People get pissed off because they get a raw deal. Wages are cut! Benefits are slashed! They want someone to blame. And the picture gets so muddled. Conspiracy theory offers an explanation. The system is just too hidden for many people to see the whole picture.”

“Why does conspiracy theory have such an appeal for the right wing?”

“There are many people who are disenfranchised. They don’t want to appear that they have been totally excluded. They get sucked into a false patriotism. They think that it’s a simple matter of taking back America. So they want it both ways. A strong chauvinistic US international presence. And a weak local governmental! Except for the police. Send the authorities after someone else. The ne’er-do-wells! The lazy welfare recipients. The crack addicts. The foreigners!”

“So what’s the shit about aliens?”

“It’s just a further level of governmental cover-up. To see the real cover-ups, it would be necessary to create a more self-conscious self. Someone who could question his old allegiances. Instead, it’s easier to invent aliens.”

The class discussion gets me thinking about my neighbor. He is so vociferous about governmental interference. But he would probably be the first to report on me if he thought that I was an undesirable.

“You do what?”

“I teach a college class.”

Something akin to spreading International Socialism!

I close my door so that I can continue my commitment to the conspiracy. After all, it is really happening to me.

I hear noises coming from his apartment late at night. It seems to be a lot more than television.

“How do you hear about these stories? Do you watch the news?”

I don’t have a television. I haven’t figured it out yet. But I guess that they monitor how we watch TV. Like our loyalties. I used to think that they put a chip in the TV that measured the

frequency of what we watched. And it was connected to a device that broadcast that information. But I took apart a TV, and I didn't find the device. So I realized that it was more than that. It's all about behavior. They have all these messages. Secret messages where they tell us to do things. Then you do what they tell you. And you get in all kinds of shit because what you do."

I have this vision from the fifties of the G men monitoring everyone's activities.

"The conspiracy is more universal than we think because it exists nowhere and everywhere at once. That is why it is so easy to dismiss. It's hard enough keeping track of all the government-sponsored mercenaries. Private organizations that monitor our communication. The conspiracy nuts have finally been satisfied. But they do little of the basic analysis that would unearth the actual forces that move the government and the economy. They have to look elsewhere. They accept too much of the transformation of the country as a given. It is too thorough to get them thinking. It's there to protect free-market competition. No, they're more worried about the IRS. Or the local librarian. They can't see the forest for the trees."

"But you sound the alarm worse than they do? So we turn off Fox News. What next?"

"Part of the game is not giving in. But the plot is everywhere. So we have to be more vigilant."

*"He was in his suspended relaxation device. There was a card that identified who he was. He was an animal in a bag. And I wanted to let him know what I felt about him."*

*"Did you hurt him?"*

*"I just put a scare in him. But he was still breathing."*

*"Then what happened?"*

*"I had to go back to my seat. When I got back, he was gone."*

*"Damn! Where did he go?"*

*"I was on an airplane. There was nowhere to go. I had his identification card so that they could wake him up. I was afraid that I had left some evidence that would connect us."*

*"He is one of those conspiracy nuts."*

*"He's worse than that. He's one of the truly hateful curs. He takes half-truths and uses them to incite the public. It wouldn't be a stretch to call him a murderer."*

*"So you took out your wrath on him. How did you ever escape?"*

*"I don't know if I did. I tried to hide the card! I thought they might have gotten it all on camera."*

I am starting to think like my neighbor. I am sure that they are doing something in my dreams.

*"I just wanted to take it all back."*

*"Where was he all this time?"*

*"They were trying to revive him from that device."*

*"Did they succeed?"*

*"He walked around the cabin. He was looking for me. But he had no idea who I was. The fear of the Lord had been struck in him."*

*"You really think that he's going to change his ways."*

*"I'm not sure what he's going to do. I just had a blast torturing him."*

*"Do you think that we can be put in jail for our dreams?"*

*"What are you asking me?"*

“They can’t read our thoughts, can they?”

“Not directly. But they can figure out what we might be thinking just by how we act.”

“They can do that sort of thing.”

“I sometimes see people following me.”

“You wish. You’d like to feel that sense of danger. No, they do it in more subtle ways.”

“Maybe they do nothing at all. They are just so overwhelmed that all they can do is laugh about it.”

*“You want to be declared illegal. It will make you think that you have a sense of purpose.”*

*“Nothing that I do rises to that sense of importance.”*

*“What is the role of conspiracy in the narrative process.”*

“She is such a goody-goody!”

“She’s planned for this day from the day that she was a kid.”

“You could put a pin through her bubble.”

*The reading works pretty well automatically. You can find a garment off the rack that will satisfy your need for new stimuli. You put it on, and it’s just your style. All that you need to overcome the blue streak that has got you down.*

*“I know what it looked like in the store. And I know how it makes me look. I use it to construct the body.”*

*The only person who could wear such an exquisite piece is a true artist. She understand the perfect balance between form and function, idea and its execution.”*

*“No one else would look as good in this dress.”*

*“What does it say about you? Who did you vote for in the last election? Where do you recycle? Do you help the homeless? Do you give to charity?”*

*All the imperfections of the present are refashioned by a new attitude.*

*“What is this? Swan lake!”*

*“It’s a disease that starts with the assumption that every problem can be solved by spending money.”*

*“Are you saying that it can’t?”*

*“Sometime you just have to confound the world!”*

*“Those little boots must mean something!”*

*“How the world is being transformed into a new society of the infinitely creative?”*

*“Painting, sculpture, poetry, and music.”*

*“Note how those heels shape the arch of the foot.”*

*“More meditations on the aerodynamic.”*

*“I guess this is the challenge of the two worlds: the world of geometry and the world of design.”*

*“Does that make design a plastic art?”*

*“It’s a subset of sculpture and a cousin of painting!”*

*“I’d rather stick to geometry.”*

*“Photography.”*

*“The creation of the truth.”*

*“Science means that the designs all have a downloadable catalogue.”*

*"You know how the story works...you have to act the part!"*

*"How do I do that?"*

*"It's in the clothes!"*

*"Explain that!"*

*"How else can we get people to do what we want and make them think that they're making their own choices?"*

*"I don't know! You could drug them!"*

*"We've tried that before!"*

*"What's the problem?"*

*"They end up liking it too much and asking for more."*

*"I guess that was the start of all the problems."*

*"I just want to know how I'm going to feel when I wake up in the morning."*

*"We could help you with that."*

*"I'm not sure that I want that kind of help."*

*"You can't fix this kind of thing naturally."*

*"Meditation helps me with most problems like this."*

*"Things have to get really bad before you're willing to make a change."*

*"Confusing!"*

*"You've been hiding things from me. Now you've got in a mess, and you want me to help you out."*

*"I was trying to have an identity of my own."*

*"What did happen?"*

*"I don't know how to explain. Things just got out of control. And it felt so good."*

*"Have you thought about therapy. You could give me a call when you've got things together."*

*"If things are rotten on the inside, it only takes a while before they work their way to the outside. Your paradise is about to be repossessed. What are you going to do about it?"*

*"It's hard to turn down a deal like that."*

*"What are you saying?"*

*"Did you show up to solve my problems? Or would you like to create some new ones?"*

*"You have too big a mouth to make any friends that last."*

*"Who needs friends that last. I just need to get through tonight."*

*"What about the morning?"*

*"Are you offering to pay for my breakfast?"*

*"What?"*

*"I guess it's all downhill from here on in."*

*"What happened to that neighbor of yours?"*

*"Mister Conspiracy!" Oh, he went on a vacation. Some kind of ghost-hunting retreat."*

*"Do you use vanilla extract perfume?"*

*"Does that make me scrumptious?"*

*"Do you have a food fetish?"*

*"I just like desserts."*

*"Are you going to go out with me or what?"*

“Can you make Belgian waffles?”

“I can’t turn off my desires like a faucet.”

“Sounds like a plumbing problem. You can’t get the faucet going like your desire.”

“I can barely hold my own life together.”

“It’s the government’s fault.”

“It doesn’t take a lot to try to change your life.”

“I’m running out of friends.”

“So where’s that drink?”

“We’re not going to change your life in one night.”

“A good massage might help.”

*This is the most important chapter in your new novel, and you’re not taking the suggestions very seriously.*

*“I’m a little lost at this point. The grand plan doesn’t seem very good in trying to hold together this story.”*

*“I could use a witch to keep the interest.”*

*“That isn’t what they had in mind.”*

*“But if she’s a witch, she’s going to have to work extra hard to make money. After all, she is starting with an inferiority complex”*

*“I thought that it was an inferiority complex.”*

*“Makes no sense!”*

*“I’m brushing my teeth, and I turn around, and there’s this giant spider crawling on me. If I hadn’t have seen it, it would have bit me on the neck.”*

*“I’m looking for a honey who can look and act the part.”*

*“I can look and take the bite!”*

*“You are a dick!”*

*“You are!”*

*“Where is my book?”*

*“I discover the meaning of life, but there’s really no one that I can tell.”*

*“You could tell her!”*

*“What are you going to tell her? That you’ve been on the moon.”*

*“You know about my astronaut past!”*

*“Am I boring you?”*

*“You’re the one who’s fallen asleep while making love!”*

*“It happens to the best of us.”*

*“You need to learn how to calm down.”*

*“What did you say to her?”*

*“I told her that I went around the world just for her.”*

*“Did that work?”*

*“She smiled. And then she told me that she had to go back to her friend.”*

*“So I got fired!”*

*“From life!”*

*“There is a hospital that you could visit. They could get you on the right track.”*

*“Who is going to pick up my bar tab in the meantime?”*

“Try flattering her. I hear that she has a fortune, and she is willing to use it.”  
 “My life’s going sort of bad too.”  
 “Probably cause by something that you ate.”  
 “Should have skipped the French fries.”  
 “I thought that you were staying away from fast food.”  
 “Is that the best offense that you can muster?”  
 “You really weren’t that good. I get a lot better from the paper boy.”  
 “I could deliver the *New York Times*.”  
 “I don’t read that rag. It tries too hard to make me believe in Santa Claus.”  
 “You can be helped.”  
 “I know. Just buy me another drink.”  
 “You get your big chance. And you really don’t measure up as a man.”  
 “Give me another chance. I’ve tried some of that old-time tonic!”  
 “Maybe I need a new face.”  
 “You still haven’t figured out the puzzle.”  
 “I’m not writing a book about aliens.”  
 “You’re still looking for rescue late at night by some deus ex machina.”  
 “It’s the poet inside of me.”  
 “*You’re never going to catch up with your own desire!*”  
 “*I can’t love every guy who wants to get into my drawers.*”  
 “*Then just love me from afar!*”  
 “*You don’t know what it is to have a healthy relationship.*”  
 “*In my world, it’s still a contraction to put the two words in the same sentence.*”  
 “*You made me laugh!*”  
 “*Does that count for something?*”  
 “*You like living dangerously?*”  
 “*You do too?*”  
 “*No, I just wanted to give you some credit for a job well done.*”  
 “I come here to get better, and you send me home worse. And you make money trying to give me advice. Just pour me another drink.”  
 “I thought that you quit.”  
 “I’m trying to stay on top. And you want to tempt me.”  
 “I’m doing the best that I can.”  
 “This was my home.”  
 “You fucked up. You didn’t know the difference between business and pleasure.”  
 “I made pleasure my business.”  
 “No one can do that well for very long.”  
 “Do you know how to smile, or is that scowl painted permanently on your face?”  
 “You are such a creep?”  
 “I’m still good at it?”  
 “You have a way!”  
 “If I commit myself to changing my life, I can be rewarded by a date with a celebrity.”  
 “You have to turn your life on the straight and narrow before I’d even consider being with

you.”

“There is a chance of turning this into a love story.”

“Keep hoping.”

“I thought that you were making me an offer.”

“More like a carrot on a stick!”

“I like the carrot!”

“Keep working that stick. Imagination is the better part of valor.”

“Huh?”

“You can’t make it to heaven on good intention.”

“Just wear that fancy perfume of yours.”

“The perfume is a reminder of something deeper and more lasting.”

“A hole in the heart!”

“Someone has been listening!”

“I was just thinking about you.”

*“Here’s the story of Polly Purebred. She played checkers so well that she got her reward.”*

*“What do you want to do?”*

*“I want to overthrow the system that gives little Polly her reward.”*

*“She has worked so hard. And she planned on being the Checker Queen since she was a kid!”*

*“Good fuck! I don’t give a damn.”*

*“You just hate her because she’s a girl, and she’s getting the success that you think that you deserve.”*

*“No, I’d hate her if her name was Paul. I just think that rewarding her for playing checkers is such a tawdry way of making things right in the world.”*

*“You’re not going to have a revolution based on envy.”*

*“What would you prefer? That I put a brick through a chain store window. This is not about envy. It’s more about the possibility of envy as a human emotion. All your mythic bull shit that makes you never answerable for the final resolution. That is why I hate you and Polly and Paul and anyone else of your ilk.”*

*“I just got on the wrong bus, and I can’t figure out how to get home at this time of night.”*

“My world is falling apart, and I’m scared.”

“Take a breath.”

“Of what? The air is making me choke. I can’t even drink my problems away.”

“This isn’t about your problems anyway.”

“Tell me what should be my concern.”

“The conspiracy.”

“That is where I came in.”

“The more that you worry, the more scared you’ll be.”

“Give me something to really worry about!”

“I was almost there, then my phone got cut off.”

“We could pretend.”



“I need more script. I’m running out of lines.”

“You are accident prone.”

“Do you think that she really likes me?”

“She’d have to be more of a celebrity so that she could bear the burden of your fucked up personality.”

“Explain!”

“You either need a better audience, or you need a comatose to sit there, smile, and just listen.”

“I can tell that you got what you wanted.”

“I got a nice outfit. What did they give you?”

“A year’s supply of caramel nut treats.”

“Does it have a name?”

“I’m trying to ignore the influence of corporate hegemony on my diet.”

“Give it a couple of minutes. Then swallow.”

“I didn’t know that was part of the training.”

“We’re about to go to a commercial so you better spit out what you wanted to say.”

“There’s a guy and a girl, but really no chemistry.”

“She could slice cocoanut all night long, and that would be enough for me.”

*“We could end it with a psychiatrist. He could come on and explain the character’s affection for his mother. How it all ended badly. He just seemed to sabotage his own success.”*

*“I never really like the psycho-analytic resolution.”*

*“The problem is caused by a myth.”*

*“The one with the stick, or the one with the mirror.”*

*“The one with the fizzy drink.”*

*I hate it when people think that there’s some other reason for making the world go ‘round.’*

*“It’s not what’s inside your head, dear Horatio, it’s what’s inside your wallet.”*

*“It’s always bigger when bigger is better. And always better when bigger comes later.”*

*“We are so big now, that there is nothing to contain it.”*

*“That’s called the fucking universe.”*

*“Or fucking the universe.”*

*“Is that how the aliens came to be?”*

“I have seen this stupid movie.”

“You could watch it again.”

“I have watched it way more than again.”

“Then we could analyze it. I have to write a paper on it.”

“I could recite the script even without playing the movie.”

*“Who is the ghost that writes this tale?”*

*“It writes on its own!”*

*“That is why they call it a ghost!”*

*“Why would you need a ghost?”*

*“Because you’re life is so fucked up that you can barely manage to speak a single complete sentence. But it’s so exciting that it would make a great story.”*

*"I know the words to all the songs."*

*"So does the ghost that writes!"*

*"The ghost writer,"*

*"He's so much more than that. He writes the story before it happens."*

*"He has two hours to finish the story."*

*"Then what happens?"*

*"Cinderella has to go back to her ashen hovel."*

*"Is this bull shit?"*

*"You can't steal your best friend's lover."*

*"You can if you're a dickhead."*

*"We are going to insult everyone that we know before this story is over."*

*"I still don't know what is the point."*

*"That a good writer can bring out the best in the worst!"*

*"So even if you are lacking social skills, you can get someone who can fill in for all your deficiencies."*

*"Isn't that what motivates most writers? They create these sexually-prolific protagonists who make up for their own shortcomings as men."*

*"Does it ever work?"*

*"They all act really glib with girls. Only the most naive believe their shit!"*

*"I use a vanilla-scented perfume."*

*"You smell like dessert."*

*"I can't believe anything that you say."*

*"I thought that you had a lot more to say."*

*"You are a dick."*

*"The sky is falling!"*

*"Good time to sell umbrellas!"*

*"Steel umbrellas!"*

*"You are a humorist."*

*"Do you close your eyes when you kiss?"*

*"If you do, you're going to miss the end of the world."*

*"Do you get easily jealous?"*

*"Of the universe."*

*"This girl is a good girl. Not one of your cheap stripper whores."*

*"You spend all your time telling me how you hate the objectification of women. Then you get the chance, and you start accusing my female friends of being whores."*

*"You're trying to defuse the situation."*

*"Oh no! I have a confession."*

*"What?"*

*"I made a mistake. I told her about the conspiracy."*

*"They're testing you."*

*"In the next section, I am going to go off on all my enemies. The Pollys and the Pauls who create these difficult situations for me."*

*"At any moment, you could be a Paul!"*

“Are you looking at that ass?”  
“Definitely a Paul!”  
“Behind every desire, there is a desire for serenity.”  
“I’m still waiting for dessert.”  
“Get a knife, and go cut it yourself.”  
“I’m afraid of knives.”  
“Then just carve a piece off with your hand.”  
“I’m really hungry!”  
“Take two pieces.”  
“Why not just take it all?”  
“You’re trying to sugar-coat things.”  
“That’s the role of the ghost-writer.”  
*“I’ve got this down to a science!”*  
*“What do you do next?”*  
*“Look up at the stars!”*  
*“Is this your telescope?”*  
“Yeah!”  
*“What do you use it for? To look at the stars?”*  
*“I actually spy on a neighbor.”*  
*“That is really psycho.”*  
“There are things that you shouldn’t joke about.”  
“Some lines that you shouldn’t cross!”  
“Like friendship. You don’t sleep with your friend’s lover.”  
“It’s like dessert. You just take it. And then you want a little more.”