

## -SYLVIA-

Martha.

Her eyes are quickly glancing and they seem to find their way back to Arthur in constant little looks. She stands too close to him. Her hair is so obviously dyed.

“I didn't know you taught, Arthur. Why can't I get any lessons?”

“Yeah, well, it's just a little side thing I have going on, that's all.”

Martha's long black hair reminds me of spilled oil. She's got a long horse face and a narrow bird beak nose. Her green eyes seem wasted on a copious use of mascara. I bet her ta-ta's are implants.

“And what's your name little girl?”

“I'm not that little, you know.”

Arthur speaks up “Oh, yeah. Martha, this is Sylvia. Sylvia, this is Martha.”

“Like Sylvia Plath? I love Sylvia Plath.”

“No, Martha. Not like Sylvia Plath. God. How morose.”

“I was named after my dad's twin sister.” I say quickly.

“It's not morose, Arthur dear. It's academic. We're talking about a genius. 'what a thrill, my thumb instead of an onion.' Only Edgar Allen Poe pondered death more deeply, and he was way too melodramatic.”

“Yeah, well I try not to be preoccupied by death.”

Sylvia Doolittle died a long time ago. She died when she and my dad were 11, or so I'm told.

“You must have an opinion on death, though.”

“Of course I do. Life is too short, and there's these horrible things called wars. Millions of people are killed by others they've never met for reasons they aren't told by leaders who don't care. One spaced little woman who thinks her white-bread married existence is living hell...nah. Crazy drama queen.” Arthur shrugs

“Oh, how can you say that?”

"I just think she wasn't too authentic about it. If you are a poet who wants to authentically genuflect towards death: you should at the very least suffer from consumption."

Dad loved his sister, and lost her. Then he gave me her name because he loved me. Then I guess I lost him. Naaaa. Too depressing. It's all this death talk.

"Anyway, it's killer that you met somebody named Sylvia." She squats down a bit with her hands on her knees. "So how old are you, little Sylvia?"

You little bitch.

"I'm seventeen."

"What? No way."

I hold my chest up a bit for my small BUT EXISTANT breasts to contour the cloth of my red tank top.

"Yes I am."

Arthur waves his hands.

"Yeah, Yeah. That's nice, Sylvia. Let's do the acquainting some other time."

"OK, Arthur, but we're still on for tomorrow, right?"

"I dunno, Martha."

"What about Saturday and-oh, oh we have to do something for Halloween. What are your plans then?"

"Martha" He exhales rapidly and breathes in just as quick. "I need to finish teaching this lesson here. OK? So give me a little time."

"OK, but call me about tomorrow at least."

"Yeah, Sure." He says "Tomorrow, Saturday, Halloween, you know. Sometime later."

I force a smile. It's about time she left. She wants Arthur. I can smell it.

Not gonna happen.

As soon as the door to the court closes the first words out of Arthur's mouth;

"Fucking Martha."

“What's her deal?”

“Check this out.”

He goes over to his bag in the corner and takes out a pen and a piece of paper. I see him write something and puts the pen away.

“It's an old W.C. Fields routine. He gets handed this pie. So he's got the pie, and he goes over to set it down.”

Arthur is making the motions as he goes through it.

“Now when he comes back up, there's a piece of paper stuck on his hand. At first he's all nonchalant, you know he waves. Tries to brush it off.”

He shakes his right hand, but has the paper slyly tucked between two fingers.

“So it won't come off, and he tries taking it off with his other hand. Wouldn't you know? It sticks to that one now, so again he starts shaking it. He tries it in his pocket. Stuffs it way down there. Pulls his hand out. Still stuck. He even tries stepping on it to get it off.”

Now Arthur's walking around with this paper attached to his shoe, and he's kicking it off, and trying to do this twist-dance thing to shake it loose. I start laughing. He picks it off his shoe, and walks towards me.

“Anyway, the point is, he tries so hard to get rid of it, but every time he tries, it just turns up somewhere else.”

I'm still smiling as he leans in close. He opens the paper. It says 'Martha.'

“Sylvia, we need to talk. Let's discuss what we are going to do from now on, you and I.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ken, Loopy, all that shit, put that all behind you. I know what you really want. Do you know what I want, Sylvia?”

His voice is so soft and sexy. Fills me with a feeling like smothering in down sheets.

“No, Arthur, what do you want? What can I do?”

“If...or rather...When Ken tells you that it's time to sell me out. When he says it's time to betray me, I want to believe that I can trust you.”

I don't get this.

"I told you, Arthur. I don't know Ken!" He shushes me down as my louder tone echoes in the racquetball court. "I know nothing about him."

"I don't believe that, and you can drop the pretense."

What damn pretense? I'm not smart enough to try to back-stab anybody. I'm about as obscure as a full moon. Even Loopy must know I'm playing him for a chump. If I knew a thing about Ken, I'd spill everything to Arthur.

"No pretense. I did my best to find out Ken. I call the number you gave me, I get Loopy. After that I've done everything I can."

He puts his hand on mine. Oh, my God! We're holding hands!

"Lead me to believe I can trust you Sylvia. Lead me with an honest spirit. There is too much at stake. Do you remember the folder you read?"

I nod.

"That's what he's after."

"Holy shit! That much?"

"Nothing you didn't already know. Now, we go from here."

Even holding my racket my hand feels so small in his embrace. It feels warm, and easy, and soft. It's something that I didn't know I was supposed to be looking for.

"Sylvia?"

"Trust me Arthur."

I'm in love. Trust me, my darling.

## -DAVE-

Sylvia is spying on me. I know it. I should have known it for some time.

Now I'm nervous. Now I'm useless. With my nerves on-end my planning, my precision and my presence are gone. What once was theft as an art form degrades into outright kleptomania. I'm stealing what I don't need, and stealing what I can't sell. It was like this the last time I moved out of an apartment.

By Ezekiel's wheel; look at this shit. A notebook from this morning, a novelty t-shirt, A chipped Bing Crosby commemorative plate.

The breakdown is from the inside out. Firstly is the thought that someone knows about me. Then comes the realization that everything about me flows right from her mouth. Finally it all pours into the ears of a man who would risk 80 grand and jail time just to strip me down and throw me to the dogs. I can't steal the high-profile stuff. I don't need the paranoia.

Sylvia or Arthur need no excuse to bust me.

The worst part by far is what I've passed up: wallets, DVD players, car stereo, purses, hand-held games, cell phones. I had opportunities, and I walked away. Nobody is watching over my shoulder but the good Lord. There's no reason to be apprehensive but I am and I can't move on. The last time this came up, I packed my things and fled. I'll never hold my head up high ever again if I do that in the face of a high-school girl.

I invite her to church again, she agrees. I have to shake this fucking monkey off my back. I have to corner Sylvia.

All I've got on her are some photos from a locker room, and that might not be enough, might not even trace back to her. I must find more dirt.

So early Sunday morning we're in church. Father Lendez gives his sermon, and for the most part it's like last week's drama never happened.

"Do any of you want to have a deeply religious experience?" The Father says "Would you wish to ponder and attempt to comprehend the vast mysteries of the universe, and the transcending love of our Lord and savior?"

Two ladies were in the pew in front of us last week. They have moved clear to the far pews, closer to the pulpit, and in unfamiliar territory. This is a huge deal. Weekly parishioners who go for two months or more might as well label their seats. They're yours. That's your place to sit on Sunday morning. You woke up early and arrived on time. That's your seat. People will stand over their seat, lean over people and pews but refuse to move away from their spot. Making anyone abandon their seats is a major effect, almost cosmological.

“Sylvia, do you have a fake ID?” I whisper

“A what?” She asks

“If you want this shattering experience of realization, I tell you to mow your lawn.”

“No.”

“Not even a fake driver's license?”

“I don't have a car.”

“Come back to my place after the service.”

“Why the Hell should I?”

“Shhhh” I say with my open palm drawn low. My whisper goes even more airy and quiet  
“Because you know Arthur DeLobb. Because you're lying to me, and you're spying on me right now.”

“When I was in seminary, I was under a professor by the name of Dr. Wolkstien, who taught Greek Epistle Translation. An aging, balding portly man who's crown was roughly 5 and a half feet from the ground. I still think he was one of the greatest lingual Geniuses of the world. I believe he spoke 20 languages total. In his lectures he would always have his hands folded over his belly, and he would just talk. No books, no references, he'd just go. I asked him once, on a spring day what he thought the secret to knowledge was. He, of course, quoted a favorite passage, Proverbs 1:7, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge.' and hastily added 'You already know that.' I asked him his personal feelings on how to attain knowledge.”

Father Lendez shifts, clears his throat and he steps in front of the pulpit. I poke Sylvia who is looking off to one side.

“Always have questions. Fearing the Lord is the root of it, but asking all manner of queries is the pursuit of it. Questions come first, answers second, so if you always have questions you'll always be a step ahead of anyone who thinks they have answers.”

He returns to the pulpit.

“Whenever I mow my lawn, back and forth, for as long as I need to, the big questions start tumbling about in my mind. I find our minds are most active when our bodies are active in the most tedious of tasks. Consider King David; sitting upon his throne as portrayed in our Old Testament reading for today. All the while in this mundane day he is thinking, and pondering.”

“What makes you think I'm a spy?” She asks, finally

“Because you know Arthur DeLobb and because you are prepped to throw me into some big trouble.”

“And so we come to First Chronicles chapter 17, verse 1. The opening verse tells us that he has settled into the palace. The royal throne of Jerusalem is his. Saul, who hunted him for years is dead. The Arc, which had brought him such grief when he first tried to retrieve it is now placed in the tabernacle. He's got nothing to really do, now, but sit and think. I like to imagine him in the same frame of mind as when I mow my lawn.”

Sylvia leans in real close, so that I hear more of her breath than her words when she whispers.

“OK. So I told Arthur what I found out about you, so what? He's not even after you. He's after some other guy. Says he's a tall, dark and handsome cowboy type.”

Fucking what?

“You mean Ken?”

“Bingo! If you really want to sort this out-”

“Shhh.” I signal, she pulls back a bit.

“Honestly, Loopy, Ken's the one that gets boned in the end. Give him up. You can get out of this trouble. Why are you being so cautious?”

“Because you know Arthur.”

“It paints a picture in this scripture, David asking "What am I doing here, when the Lord God almighty, maker of the Universe is sitting in a tent? Why do I have a Palace and the Lord does not!?”

“Look, Sylvia, if you do want to discuss Ken, then we do it on my terms.”

“David.” Father Lendez says softly

“I do know Ken. I can tell you everything about him.”

“David.” He says again, trying to put emphasis upon it.

“Here's what to do: Come to my place after church, I can print and laminate a fake ID, We'll discuss Ken and Arthur on Tuesday. Someplace more secluded.”

“David Simon-Fisher!”

He looks directly at me, his big wide beardless face and black hair, his grinning scowl coming to a sharp line of focus.

“Yes, Father?”

“No repeats of last weeks shenanigans. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Father.” I reply “As clear as the good word.”

He's not the kind of priest that tolerates chatter. Even in evening service. The quick burst of alarm and sweat melt away cold into me, leaving me flushed red and humble, as he resumes.

“Right. Now where was I? King David has nothing to do. All his needs met, he looks for a task, a question to be answered. He longs to fulfill the will of God.”

Sylvia leans over towards me.

“David?”

“Sssssssh!”

## -ARTHUR-

Chad comes over. We get high, again.

"Dude, I love your fucking house, man."

Today - Sucked - Cock.

Traded early on 5,000 shares of grain futures. Son of a bitch topped off 10 points higher by the end of the trading day.

I've broken out the hooka and it's time for a hit of watermelon tobacco and super skunk. I breathe in and it's a bubbling rush from the water-basin, that flows smooth into me. I'm like the caterpillar in Alice and wonderland. IN wonderland. I blow out coughing.

I ditched work early and had a fateful run in with the last guy I was with; Dale. Everyone called him Dodge. He's about as eccentric as fags come, flamboyant dresser occasionally in drag. He's got a lot of 'I'm here, I'm queer, get fabulous' attitude. He's as loud as train breaks.

So he ran into me in the music store; and I didn't even see him coming. He didn't even say hello, just stood next to me and waited for me to notice. When I finally did, reluctantly, He turned with one hand on his hip.

"So there you are!"

Four months of no calls, no returned messages, no more escapade trips to his families summer cabin-Basically I dumped him. Only in a very de facto way. He treats it like I just wandered off to another part of the music store.

"It's confession time, Arthur. I cheated. Sorry."

"That's OK, I guess, Dodge, since I've given parking meters more commitment than some of my old flames."

"Yeah, but this was pretty bad. You never met Romero, he was...well anyway, he invited me to go with him and some friends on a trip to Jeddah."

"Jeddah? Saudi Arabia?"

"It's heaven on earth. Guys are everywhere and they'll just cruise right up to you, no problem, and they like tourists too."

"You went drilling for oil in Saudi? Don't they chop your dick off for that?"

"You'd think. You would. But they actually have a grasp on tolerance. The Islamic morality police over there, god bless them, they don't allow mix-gender company outside of families. So, if a girl is not your mother, daughter, sister or one of your 50 wives you can't be seen with her. So there's no dating, no make outs, no prom. They don't allow much of what we see as traditional romantic options, so pretty much whole town quietly said yes to alternative transportation."

"Well, go figure."

"You seem distant, baby."

I should start dating out of state.

He was wearing his nipple-lishous spandex shirt with silver sequin etching a cowboy/western design. His pants are tight Italian leather, and his shoes are cheap Brazilian hemp. During a bad spot of depression four months ago I vowed to never see him again. I thought he was cheating on me, because I was cheating on him. By the time I recovered from the drama I wasn't anxious to get back together with him, I wasn't jealous or hateful, I just didn't care anymore. I'd moved on, and that's how I felt today in the store. It's over. I told him so, and then went back to work. He called me a bitch at full volume and left me biting my tongue.

My brain feels like it's getting massaged.

The second half of my day was equally grating. Marvin Curosa, the antique collector needed some more insurance. Every blue moon he'll call and the rest of my day becomes living hell. He's an old friend of my dads, and works with him out of camaraderie. Really, I don't think the company has enough money to back his coverage. His property and the kind of rare goods he buys are way too pricey. Not that we'll ever stop doing business with him, because he's got more money than God.

When he calls, he never wants to speak to the same person. Never wants to umbrella any of the policies. So when he buys much shit all at once it means he might call up fifteen times, to speak to fifteen people about fifteen different policies.

This happened to be today.

'Mr. Curosa. Mr. Curosa, again. Marvin Curosa, I called earlier. Curosa, here I'd like to talk to someone else. Is there anyone else there? I hung up on that stupid twat, didn't know what she was talking about. Mr. Curosa, again. I think this is the last thing. Hi. Marvin

again, I forgot to mention.'

I have to space-out the service reps he talks to, so that there's a 4 person gap at least between times a rep can talk to him again. We only have so many, and if he gets the inkling that he has spoken to a rep a second time, he transfers back to me and wants to talk to dad. Jesus Christ, it's a nightmare. He doesn't want any one person to be able to ID his antique collection, and apparently he has no idea that they're all stored on one list in a database, anyway. But the ass-backwards, obnoxious, stupid customer is always right.

After work I had a pounding headache. I got home, and dad and I are having dinner and I tell him my spiel that I need to move away. It's my time. I'm 28 years old, dad, enough is enough.

"Well, son when you demonstrate to me that you can control your spontaneous habits I will consent to that."

My father never got around my manic bipolar depression. All he can think about are the occasional screw ups: That time I went to my cousin's wedding in ripped bleach-spotted jeans, a t-shirt, sweater and a bow-tie around my bare neck. When I got that 120 MPH speeding ticket at 3:00 AM downtown. My weekend life. You know? I don't give a shit anymore.

"Dad, I don't want to live at home at the age of 30."

"Arthur, I didn't come home for us to argue." He said. "You've got everything you need right here. Like it or not, you have issues that are...uh...extreme, and there's no call for anything...Not destructive, that's not the word I'm looking for."

"Oh, my God." I took my plate and left the table to go to my room. He's so fucking paranoid. I haven't attempted suicide for five years now. No one gives me any credit for the emotional balance that I have maintained, they only point out the moments of weakness where I haven't.

No-one has any right. I can live any way I want.

I started the doomsday fund to do just that, show Dad I could manage something; make money, be organized with my life. Then as the years went by, my big show-off project, I kept it all a secret. I have a new need for it now. My last boyhood rebellion.

The aroma of the ganja and tobacco is like a watermelon big as a medicine ball. I breathe out smiling, feeling the warmth and flavor of velvety smoke.

"Dude." Chad says, "Let's watch a movie."

The Three Weasels 2-4

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