

X-Rated
A Novel of Manners

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to Evandro, Evan, Sampson and Coco, without whom the completion of this manuscript would have been far less joy-filled.

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CJC

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SUMMARY

X-Rated: A Novel of Manners is a social novel set in 2005 depicting the antagonism between an aging father and his ambitious daughter. Their reunion after a ten-year estrangement takes place on an affluent island off the coast of New England, in a community embroiled in a subtle class struggle between the “haves” and the “have-mores.” While the “X-rated” in the title refers to the major themes of the debate around pornography which structure the father-daughter narrative, the “manners” indicates that the primary concern of this novel is the dynamic between family and society.

As a retired X-rated filmmaker, seventy-year old Seth Scott struggles to restore the cultural relevance he earned thirty years ago as the premiere auteur of the Golden Age of Porn. He nostalgizes the “art form” that he and a handful of other male directors inducted in the Seventies and sets out to write a memoir in defense of the aesthetics of porn to remind America of the revolution he instigated. Unfortunately, as his literary agent informs him, he is no longer the icon he once was—not only has pornography changed, but the topicality of it as a memoir is outdated. For this, what he believes will be his final masterpiece, he needs to regain the public’s interest.

The unexpected arrival of his daughter Colette interrupts his plans, however. Unbeknownst to Seth, Colette has returned in an effort to instigate her own revolution—as a pornographic filmmaker in Eastern Europe. Knowing that a “have-more” has built a house next door to her father’s, she intends to solicit financial backing to launch her project. Complicating this matter is Colette’s inability to determine what her own vision looks like—what her directorial “gaze” is as both a woman and a distinct entity from her father.

The novel alternates between Seth, Colette and other major characters through the limited third person perspective. Subplots including a sixteen-year-old’s brash coming-of-age and an eager reporter’s determination to expose the class warfare brewing under the surface flesh out the primary storyline and explain the social backdrop.

Ultimately, as a novel of manners, this story portrays the clash between tradition and modernization in a variety of ways: socially—between old money and new money; artistically—between the Golden Age of film and the mass production of it; culturally—between a young girl’s coming of age and an old man’s loss of virility; and familially—between a father jumpstarting his waning legacy and a daughter initiating her own.

PART I

Chapter One

1975 was an exceptional year for the making of an X-rated film.

For my wife and me, it was a phenomenal year, not only for the premiere of our first feature-length film (*Nights of Rio*. You might know it as *Riooooooh!*), but also for the personal, emotional and artistic triumph—well-publicized you might remember—that I, filmmaker, underwent.

I evidently “embodied the spirit of the times,” although certainly none of us knew that while we were in the middle of it. They say now that I—we—“stepped into the fray” of the moment now called the Golden Age—zipless fucking, deep throating, doing Debbie in most major metropolitan cities. It was wholesale revolution. We were men—visionaries—armed with our 16mm cameras documenting the frontlines for Middle America. And Middle America was so grateful that the congressional committee Nixon relied on to make us prosecutable ended up agreeing with us.

I quote from a statement I hired a calligraphist to copy in 1975:

No evidence to date that exposure to explicit sexual materials plays a significant role in the causation of delinquent or criminal behavior among youths or adults.

It still hangs at the entrance to my study, in the house where I raised my son and daughter, still in the original frame custom ordered by my wife. It’s been hanging there for thirty years.

Now, before you trip over yourself accusing me of memory loss or dementia, I

know Nixon wasn't president in 1975. We started shooting our movie in mid-1974 and, in fact, halted production for the day on August 9. (My agent wants me to remind you/inform you that that was the day after Nixon's resignation speech. He left the White House at noon that day by helicopter.) That was also the day we gave our nine-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter their first taste of champagne. I wonder if they even remember it.

And yes, I know Nixon didn't appoint the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. He's not particularly remembered for his stance on smut. But he made it clear at the time that he hated all of us. This is what he said:

I have evaluated that report and categorically reject its morally bankrupt conclusions and major recommendations.

The Commission contends that the proliferation of filthy books and plays has no lasting harmful effect on a man's character. If that were true, it must also be true that great books, great paintings, and great plays have no ennobling effect on a man's conduct. Centuries of civilization and 10 minutes of common sense tell us otherwise.

The Commission calls for the repeal of laws controlling smut for adults, while recommending continued restrictions on smut for children. In an open society, this proposal is untenable. If the level of filth rises in the adult community, the young people in our society cannot help but also be inundated by the flood.

Pornography can corrupt a society and a civilization.

So there you have it. I have been my entire adult life morally bankrupt and the corrupter of civilization.

1975 was my fortieth birthday. This is what sets a man's soul on fire—not his march towards mortality but his ambition for legacy. Men have made their fortunes by this age, industrialists, poets, vanguards, and revolutionaries alike. The only difference between them and me, as far as I could see, was that I was stricken with a blinding, driving obsessive vision of my future and blessed with a perfectly sculpted, exotic twenty-five-year-old Brazilian wife. I said in one interview that she was my gift to the men of the world. Not a lot of people liked that. But a lot of men did.

My wife and I premiered our little X-rated film in a small screening room at the MoMa, just ten days after my birthday. No, I'm not delusional. Back then New York was filled with cinephile clubs, men and women devoted to the art of cinema—all cinema—and the freedom of expression. We so-called pornographers didn't just peddle our filth in Times Square. We had backers in high places.

When Astrid and I entered the crowded room, a good twenty minutes into the cocktail hour, we were swallowed up by artists, critics, ingénues, curators, and other filmmakers, who swarmed around us trying to make conversation about technical or aesthetic things. They were mostly men, wearing corduroy jackets and shell necklaces, bearded and long-haired with tufts of chest hair jutting up from the v-necks of their sweaters, pipes or cigars lodged between their fingers. Most of them were anchored solidly in middle age, like me, and just about all of them were visibly uncomfortable, due, I thought, to their proximity to the exotic and forbidden fruit draped in an emerald green dress dangling from my arm.

Astrid never liked my saying that. She claimed I exaggerated the romantic ministrations of middle-aged men. I spoke of them—of us—in platitudes.

The women who were present—girls, I called them, although many were my own age—wore their long hair uncomplicatedly down their bared backs, some—the younger ones, the actresses—were snug in halter dresses that clung and draped to the floor and revealed bony shoulders. The more exotic girls—black, Puerto Rican, Mexican—wore their dark hair in afros or braids or tight curls, potent signs of a licentious nature to be sure, and adorned themselves with wooden beads and oversized bangles. I spent moments glancing around the room, wondering if the women all felt even momentarily inferior in Astrid's presence. I knew all the hype that women were awakening and raising their consciousnesses, and I was a big supporter of their liberation, but I didn't believe they weren't still vulnerable and childlike and insecure about how they measured up to other girls. I felt a palpable tenderness towards them. I still do.

But they ask irritating questions.

"Isn't it difficult? Watching your wife make love to a stranger?"

Wanda. She was pale-skinned and apple-cheeked and raven-haired. Just twenty years old in a gold lamé haltered pantsuit. She held a glass of champagne in one hand and gestured with a mushroom hors d'oeuvre in the other. She didn't stand straight but rested her weight on one leg, producing curvature in her spine—a model's pose. Finding herself at the side of the filmmaker, she smiled in a pretty way, a wide-eyed, ambitious way and I recognized something there—perhaps a blinding driving obsessive vision of her future. I remember our exchange well. It was my first director-actress barter.

"Not *to* a stranger," I said. "*With* a stranger. There's a big difference."

My tone was educational. I tended to be bombastic back then, that was just how the press wanted me and I complied even when the press wasn't paying attention. Wanda, like most girls, resented the condescension. I used to use the same tactic during photo shoots when I worked for gentlemen's magazines—the indignation in a young girl's face is a powerful aphrodisiac. It throws them off-guard, makes them petulant and unsure, and it makes them vulnerable. That's what the camera loves.

"And it feels fine," I told her. "Thank you for asking." Her anorectic eyebrows arched. But I continued. "Some artists use paint. Some artists use celluloid. Astrid...she uses her body."

As I said it, I looked at Astrid, standing nearby, in conversation with men who were journalists, men who asked her things (and published things) like whether she preferred male lovers or female, and whether she and I were monogamous and if so, why. They wanted her justification, in her own words, in a *woman's* words, as to how the rage of the feminists against our coterie was so misguided. And they wanted her approval, as men do, of their fascination.

Wanda also turned to look at Astrid, with what I could see was wide-eyed disinterest. But I kept going.

"Now, see, they'll ask her about freedom of speech," I continued. "They'll lead her, or provoke her, into making comments about prudish American morality or unconstitutional censorship. But they'll ask her nothing about her performance. Nothing about her acting. They don't see beyond the act. Yet the filmmakers are the ones being accused of exploitation. Just look at them clinging to her every word, foaming at the mouths, ready to pounce. And she'll say the things they want to hear. She'll give them their condemnation of American hypocrisy."

"Why?"

I smiled at her. It was a contrived curiosity.

“Because she’s brilliant,” I said. “And because she happens to believe it all. But this—all this—isn’t about politics.”

“No,” she agreed. “I hate politics.” She finally put that mushroom hors d’oeuvre in her mouth.

“Do you?” I probably said, “Good girl.”

I exchanged our empty glasses for full ones from a passing tray, and handed one to her. Her clear expression of joy indicated her belief that she had accomplished something. And I admit, I was enjoying it.

“Just about everyone in this business is missing the point,” I said.

Wanda drank, waiting for me to finish.

“When you watch a film you want to *feel* something. Don’t you?”

“Definitely.” Her tone suggested that “feel” was a visceral verb.

“The only way a viewer is going to be moved is if you get right inside his head.” I tapped lightly on my forehead. “Show him what he imagines. Go *beyond* what he imagines. Show him what *you* imagine.”

The girl nodded.

“That’s what I do. I bridge the gap between subject—” with that I put my hand on her shoulder—“the one doing the watching. And object—” with my other hand I gestured toward Astrid—“the one being watched. See?”

That night I was testing out what would become my *auteur* philosophy.

Her eyes followed my hand to Astrid. Her brow had creased just slightly.

"I'm an artist," I concluded. "Not an activist."

Wanda nodded.

"But couldn't you do that with someone besides your wife?" she said. "Wouldn't it be easier?" She moved an inch closer to me.

Brava! I adored her pluck. Women's liberation was heady stuff in young girls.

"I haven't met anyone yet who could do what Astrid does. She doesn't just *act*. She *re-*acts. Her art is in her performance. Her eyes. Her lips. Her shoulders. Her entire body. Attuned to one supremely gorgeous act. How lucky we are to be able to witness it."

Oh yes. That was all true. Call me a womanizer, call me a misogynist, call me an opportunist. But Astrid was my entire soul.

"But what about your kids?" she said.

"What about them?"

"Aren't you worried about what this will do to them?"

"What *what* will do to them?"

"Having a mother who's a porno star," she said as if it were obvious.

I laughed.

"My dear, is that what you think this is? Look around you. Are you sure you know where you are?"

Wanda finally stood up straight. I eyed her expectantly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't know who misled you, but this isn't pornography. Sex isn't exploitation—it's freedom."

“So you think it’s all right for children to see their mother fucking other men knowing their father was in the room filming it?” Her voice was over-inflected with incredulity, teetering into unflattering naiveté.

“I don’t expect my children to see this film. It’s a serious film for thinking adults. There are no magical flying dragons in it. However, upon their reaching adulthood, perhaps not much older than you, it’s likely that they’ll take a peek at it. Out of curiosity, I would think. But they’ll regard it with an adult perspective at that point. The audience for which this film is intended.”

It was well-rehearsed—I had been preparing similar statements for several months. It’s not enough to do the art. One must *speak* the art.

“But she’ll *always* be their mother,” Wanda said. “I wouldn’t want to see *my* mother doing that. Not at any age.”

“A certain maturity must be cultivated,” I said. “Not many women can do what Astrid does. It takes more than a willingness to undress.”

For a moment I expected her to rebut, but her shoulders seemed to deflate. She had an elfin willfulness but lacked the spark to ignite it. At that point the lights flickered announcing the five-minute mark. She told me she needed to find her date, and went off in search of him. That was typical of American girls back then. All fire and huff but no sensitivity to real plays of power. I suspected Wanda had read *Fear of Flying* and was confused.

For the most part, the audience remained transfixed through the entire seventy minutes of the film. Just about everyone fidgeted. Their faces, front-lit by the flickering of the projection, were glazed, their eyes heavy-lidded. Even the older women in the room, the ones

nearing my own age whose skin was starting to dangle under their jaws (like mine) and whose hair was starting to coarsen around their faces, even they had gone limp in their seats. It was wondrous. It was triumphant. I created that. *We*, both Astrid and I, created that. We squeezed each other's hands throughout that premiere—I think it was the most simpatico we had ever been up to that point. That premiere changed us. It defined us.

From my seat in the back, I had the perfect view of just about everyone. But my eyes kept returning to Wanda a few rows in front of me. I could see her in profile, sitting next to Conrad Craig, the middle-aged paunchy magazine publisher who had brought her. His arm was draped over her bare shoulders, his sausage-like fingers encased her in his grip, and she sat very still, a practiced stillness, as if she were sitting for a portrait. She had a fine nose and a strong chin, very pretty, very angular. The kind of girl who disrobed automatically and waited to be looked at—endured it. If she was affected by the film she wouldn't show it, wouldn't know how to show it. Connie on the other hand, shifted in his seat, gripped and un-gripped the flesh of her shoulder, licked his lips, moved closer to her—as close as theater seats would allow.

But Wanda, she was frozen. Even in the presence of this glorious document that showed her what her life *could* be like for her—sensuous, erotic, liberated. *She* was unmoved. Rigid and unyielding. There was no question that in a few hours she would be having sex with the man who brought her, and from what I knew about Conrad Craig, it would involve drugs and multiple partners. But Wanda was the kind of person who would get no pleasure out of it, no real pleasure, I mean, except that of having defied her parents and probably her entire upbringing. That of proving she was a progressive, forward-thinking young woman, “taking

charge” of her “sexuality” by merely going through the motions. Like that was some kind of victory.

The sad thing was that there, right in front of her, magnified several hundred times was Astrid, not that much older than the girl, unself-consciously delighting in her prowess, gyrating slowly on the beach to a bossa nova with rivulets of water cascading down her long body. It was breathtaking. It still is. Even after thirty years.

I thought surely Wanda would witness this and her eyes would open. There was freedom in this—not the stagnant freedom that Conrad Craig’s magazine empire could froth up and parade around in front of a packed courthouse at an obscenity trial. But legitimate, erotic freedom. That’s what I thought the power of that film would do.

Halfway through, Wanda left her seat and walked out of the screening room. Connie didn’t even turn his head to watch her go.

I sighed deeply for her. Right there at the premiere of my first movie I felt I was failing her. Failing all young girls.

“A masterpiece,” Connie told me later. He, Wanda, Astrid and I stood together in the little lobby after the screening while everyone around us made polite small talk. He demanded that Astrid consent to an exclusive interview with his magazine—second in circulation to *Playboy*—that he promised would make her a household name in mainstream America. He had that kind of pull, he confessed to both of us, an influence that no other man in the room could claim.

“Are you actually going to interview me?” Astrid asked him. “Or are you going to sit me on a stool naked and make me talk about world peace?”

Connie guffawed. He loved her. True to his word, he did make her a household name for a while, which she hated and I loved. It’s no lie that she was the reason the film did so well—well enough to have an intergenerational cult following and a twentieth anniversary screening. (More on that later. Much more.)

Connie wrapped one arm around Astrid’s waist and the other around Wanda’s, squeezed the two women tight and told the girl that if she fucked half as well as the character did in the film, she wouldn’t have to work a day in her life. Turning to me, he lamented the lack of joie de vivre and imagination that drained so many young girls whose futures could be so bright.

“You don’t need to make conversation, honey,” he said to Wanda, “when slobs like me are just dying to spend all our money on you. Burn your bra, baby—I’ll support you.” He cupped her breasts.

“Don’t believe it,” I said to Wanda. “His third ex-wife is in the process of taking whatever’s leftover from the first two.”

“That’s true,” Connie said soberly, his hands still massaging Wanda’s flesh. “But I’ve still got my magazine and the bitch can’t touch that. If it weren’t for me,” he spread his arms wide, taking in the entire room, “none of this would ever have been possible. I made porn what it is today.”

Wanda turned a triumphant face to me.

“Yes,” she said. “*Porn*. Because that’s what it is.”

Connie looked at her, confused.

“Of course it’s porn,” he said. “Who said it wasn’t?”

“He did.”

“Come on,” he said to me with another guffaw. “The only difference between *Riooooooh!* and *Deep Throat* is the four blocks between here and the World Theater.”

“It’s *Nights of Rio*,” I corrected.

“Not after I get my hands on it. In the next issue, it’s going to be *Riooooooh!* on the front cover.”

He was still laughing when he tugged on Wanda’s pantsuit and led her to another group of pipe-huffing men and their bare-backed dames.

We didn’t know it in 1975, but Connie Craig’s penchant for porn pun would eclipse our own title and become the favorite of the Golden Age. Even twenty years later, at its anniversary revival festival in Boston, I would still be correcting Conrad Craig’s over-pronunciation and he would still be rolling his bloodshot eyes in dismissal.

That night in Boston he pulled me into the lobby after the film had started for a smoke.

“We’ve both seen this thing a thousand times,” he said. “Let the kids have a go at it.”

The kids he meant were the college students in the audience—for some reason, not a lot of my original fan base showed up for the festival. Here were young men with slicked back hair wearing, of all things, rumpled rented tuxedos with Converse high-tops, or torn jeans with holy boots. The thick beards of the Seventies were replaced by trimmed goatees and random tufts of facial hair just below their lower lips. There were tattoos and piercings in abundance on both the males and the females.

“Sorry to hear about Astrid,” he said, lighting his cigarette. “She was a class act. Through and through.”

I muttered a thanks—we were both uncomfortable acknowledging Astrid’s recent passing. She had been only forty-five. I thought at the time she would have appreciated that revival. Now I’m not so sure. We both had come to love our privacy and the events of that night put my name back in the spotlight.

Even Wanda, who had disappeared sometime in the 80s, resurfaced amid all the press that followed. She too got her name in the spotlight again.

But Connie kept his eyes on the floor while he took his first puffs. The twenty years had been rough on him—he’d put on weight, grew jowls, and his nose was puffy and red with burst veins. He was slowly losing his magazine empire but was riding the final crest until it subsided. I think he was on his fifth wife.

I don’t know if it was his intention to ask it or if he was straining to make conversation but he said,

“Let me ask you something. All these years you’ve been fighting me. We’ve been at opposite ends of this whole thing. You say one thing, I say another thing. You do one thing, I make it better.”

I gave him a laugh, waiting for him to get to the point.

“For twenty years people been calling it ‘Riooooooh.’ And that’s a good title. It’s funny. It’s playful. The way this stuff should be. Not pretentious and full of itself like it thinks it’s doing something important or some shit like that.”

He looked at me sideways.

“So what’s your problem with it? You walked on that stage tonight with your chest all puffed out. You know, correcting me like that doesn’t make me look like an idiot, it makes you look like an asshole. All these kids, your new fan base, by the way, since the old one is dying out—sorry. Jesus. No disrespect meant. These kids don’t give a shit about your *auteur* ideals.”

He just about spit it out.

“And also by the way, you’re welcome.”

He had been instrumental in getting *Nights of Rio* this anniversary revival.

“You didn’t do any of this for my sake,” I told him.

“Maybe not, but you’re sure not hurting from it.”

“No,” I said.

“All right then. So when are you going to lighten the fuck up? Nobody’s buying into this beauty-of-the-art-form crap anymore. That worked for you in the 70s. This is the 90s. What else you got?”

I watched a young couple stumble across the lobby of the small theater, groping their way to the bathrooms. Before they could enter, a tight-lipped beefy guard in a security vest blocked the vestibule door, prohibiting them from going further. The drunk young man with his hand inside the girl’s shirt pleaded with the guard to let them pass. I heard him offer the girl to the guard in exchange for ten minutes inside the men’s room. The girl was indignant and tried to storm off but the young man cooed in her ear and placated her. When he realized he wouldn’t get anywhere with the guard, the young man took the girl outside and around the side of the building.

I’ve always been a proponent of spontaneous public sex but this made me grit my teeth.

Connie laughed and shook his head as he took another drag.

“He’s so drunk he won’t even be able to get it up. That’s why I always stuck with coke. These stupid kids don’t even know how their own equipment works. And they’re the ones running the show now.”

“Well,” I said, trying to be logical. “They’re all here for some reason. They came to see *this* film so they must see some merit in it.”

“They came because I told them to in the pages of my magazine. I called it retro porn. See the movie that started it all. They love all that throwback vintage shit. They probably think this is all so quaint, like a summer cottage out by the lake. It’s old-fashioned. Tame. They’re feeling all proud of themselves because they’ve seen so much more and they’re so much more advanced than we are. Jesus. To them we’re just a couple of dirty old men. They don’t know the first goddamn thing about revolution. If it weren’t for us, their asses would be hauled off to jail by now. They don’t have a fucking clue.”

He stubbed out his cigarette.

“Anyway,” he said. “No more of that art shit.”

I haven’t seen Connie Craig since. Obviously, I remember everything he said that night. Not because it was profound or prophetic—it turned out it would be both—but because I decided that night to retire. He was right about two things. Nobody cared about the art shit and nobody had a fucking clue. And I didn’t have it in me to be a dirty old man.

Chapter Two

2005

He's an old man, standing on the beach, naked and majestic, saluting the sunrise. It's early May. Seven days before the bedlam of the daffodil festival will thwart his mornings with the sea and usher in the high season for the island. Seven days from now he will force himself into trunks for this daily ceremony, and endure the charade of modesty until Labor Day.

For thirty years he has maintained vigilant sunrise swims, suffering only the last five years, maybe six, with the possibility that unsuspecting tourists, fancying themselves beachcombers, could stumble upon this particular stretch of beach so relatively isolated for so long. It makes him irritable, which makes him curmudgeonly, which makes him feel old, and that is precisely the reason he's out here in the first place, day after day, nakedly saluting every god he can think of with every ounce of flesh he still possesses.

Seth steps quickly into the surf until he's submerged to his shoulders. The frigidity assaults him like a bruise, but he bears it with a primal virility. His seventy-year-old body slices through the water, he thinks, with murderous grace, strikes through the waves with the tireless stamina of ancient heroes, submerges and resurfaces with the relentless agility, the lithe sleek and the silvered velocity of an Olympian—the untethered, universal, unconquerable man in motion.

He emerges from the water red-skinned and panting, his duel with the corps of aquatic gods satiated. Toweling off with vigor, he turns his body toward the sprawling lawn of the adjacent property, finally complete after two years of massive construction. Most of the houses infecting this tip of the island, this previously unfashionable tip, are newly constructed, multi-

million dollar things, the owners of which appear only during yacht season, June to September, and even then only sporadically.

He hasn't set foot on the property since the construction began, but he's watched its progress from the beach—the clearing away of decades of untamed brush and the hauling in of landfill for the leveling of the yard into three distinct tiers. The enormity of the undertaking, the fleets of architects, engineers, consultants, designers, laborers and above all, wealth it required, was staggering, even for this island playground; yet for all its massive girth, it will house only two people, hedge fund manager and second-wife.

He sees what he thinks might be a figure in white at the top of the long stairs that connect the landscaped yard to the beach. He assumes the slender figure is a woman and he assumes the woman has seen him, and is in fact watching him as he towels off. He turns to face the sun now hovering over the water, and with the towel at his feet, does a hundred jumping jacks.

They make a nice image, he thinks, a young woman huddled in white, standing in the distance with her arms crossed, and an old weathered man, dripping with the chill of the water, roaming free on the beach. His long, still-lean body isn't the stuff of housewife desire anymore, he concedes that it's lost a certain snap of sinew, but where the skin is loose, it is tanned and where necessary, things function. When dressed he can pass for sixty—a necessary, vital distinction for a man who carries the pinched and debonair profile of an Updikeian New Englander, given to unfortunate skeletal resemblance. He has no illusions about his appearance—he spent a lifetime filming healthy, robust bodies entangled and intertwined in all possible positions, and the last years of his wife's life watching hers wracked and ravaged by

illness. That he isn't bent or immobile with arthritis, or walking with a cane, or attached to a mobile breathing apparatus is a cause for rejoicing. Every jumping jack is a celebration.

Morning ablutions over, he flings the towel over his shoulder and walks, stalwartly, back into the house—his single-level 1975 ranch with a cedar deck, floor-to-ceiling windows, sloping fifteen-foot roof and iconic mid-century furniture. Oversized for its day, dwarfed by the loom of the bloated Cape Cod next door.

As he showers, Seth feels the weight of curtailed sovereignty blacken his mood. His morning worship of good fortune, compromised every May by impending herds of daffodil devotees but restored every September by the mass exodus of the summer renters, might be falling into legitimate jeopardy with the arrival of these new neighbors—if there's the possibility of their taking up year-long residence.

He hasn't met them yet, this Tom and Lillian Tomassian, but has heard the repeated mention of their arrival by other residents—the real estate agent whose commission season has thus far been unprecedented; the dockmaster whose ire indicates their two-hundred foot Lurssen, a megayacht, is due any day; the members of the Daffodil Festival Committee in a frenzy over the plunder of plantings, and the teenaged waitresses at the café whose glee over the parades of extravagance has no ebb.

As he pulls on his khakis, he eyes the hulking estate through his bedroom window—just far away enough that he can't see through its mammoth windows or hear voices carry in the breeze, but close enough that it's always directly in his line of sight. They may have erected a perimeter of young shrubbery for unassailable privacy, but the greenery is still undeveloped and Seth's second story is high enough that he has a direct view of their side yard and their lap

pool—a stolid, massive structure, edged in an authentic stone giving it the appearance of having been carved into the side of a cliff.

At the moment, the woman is swimming laps, taking leisurely breaststrokes, gliding from one end of the pool to the other, lingering at the ends before turning back. Her careless strokes, her yielding motion, seems to him a smooth and uninterrupted femininity, unbothered and unconcerned with a will to conquer. He follows the arc of her arms below the surface of the water. In his sense of the rightness of things, she is the embodiment of dispassion and ambivalence. She would be amused, as his wife had been, by his idea of triumph in a battle with sea-gods. Astrid never admired Seth's morning labors. She chided him for attempting, in his quest for domination over the physical world through self-inflicted tests of stamina and endurance, a feeble male simulation of the ordeal of childbirth. He had never told her that the accusation troubled him, disrupted his sensitivities. One could not be a high-minded artist if one's wife knew truths about one's vulnerabilities.

The woman stops in the middle of a lap and begins to tread water, a trend Seth has noticed more and more in the swimming pools on the island—water aerobics, his friends' wives tell him. He's loathe to give in to a lesser artist's interpretation but this constant, repetitive motion and the lack of thrusting momentum does indeed strike him as passive and subordinate, also juvenile, ineffective, and a gross waste of time.

He turns away from the window. He considers befriending her, this Lillian Tomassian, inviting her to join him for sunrise triumphs in the formidable Atlantic, to introduce her to the wild and uncontained natural state of swim: man and water. At the very least it might stave off any official complaint she might make with the town council regarding his uncontained

condition of jubilation. But it might also free her. Expand her. Enlarge her from the singular to the universal. From the domestic and the tame to the carnal and the unrestrained.

In the kitchen, he pulls out a bottle of bourbon from the cabinet over the coffee maker. He pictures the two of them swimming side by side, toweling off in unison, parts of her erect and parts of him shriveled. Another magnificent image. He imagines the two of them explaining to her husband over cocktails the blasé innocence of it all. He imagines the husband blustery and taken aback, but, if never quite convinced, eventually resigned to his wife's streak of rebellion.

He sits at his kitchen table, an original Saarinen, spreads out the newspaper, fills a coffee mug halfway with bourbon, reclines in his favorite Eames chair, and takes the first bracing swallow of morning sacrament.

Chapter Three

A similar situation had occurred in the late Seventies when he and Astrid had befriended the Farquarsons. Dan Farquarson had been their son's merit badge counselor, training the troop of boy scouts in the skills of boating, and sportsmanship on the golf course. Lola Farquarson had been a fifth-grade teacher before she got married and occasionally substituted at the elementary school on the island. They were a martini couple, a caliber somewhat slightly more self-conscious of their entitlement than the more gregarious scotch or bourbon couples. She had a beautiful, untrained singing voice which she occasionally unleashed on the groaning and dehydrated congregation of the Protestant church, on those Sundays when she herself wasn't groaning and dehydrated and clutching an ice pack to her forehead.

The Farquarsons considered themselves a progressive couple. They were liberal-minded and they abhorred Nixon's obscenity crusades. They often told the story of how they had stood in line to see *Deep Throat* in Times Square and swore on a dozen Bibles they had seen Sammy Davis Jr. in the line ahead of them. They were clearly thrilled by this evidence of their own transgression, and although they didn't mention they had left after thirty minutes—not because their values had been compromised but because they just didn't *get* it, it was so *adolescent*—they relied on the story to plump their credibility as a modern couple.

When Dan Farquarson heard the report from his son that the troop had decided to hike the beach at sunrise, to gather shells or identify constellations or perform some other sanctioned scout activity and had stumbled upon Seth Scott doing jumping jacks in the altogether, he felt a sinking in his gut. The Scotts were by far the most progressive, most modern couple on the island. It was a challenge to appear to be more liberal, even as liberal, as

the maker of X-rated films. And to have seen those films, to have seen Astrid Scott immortalized in the act of coupling when the Farquarsons rarely had the lights on to see themselves engaging in it, and yet converse pleasantly with her over a four-course dinner at the club, was a testament to how very important it was to the Farquarsons to be so modern. He was chagrined that it would be this act of mere nudity that would ultimately unravel him, after everything he'd seen and done and appeared to endorse.

He discussed his apprehension with Lola, expecting her to side with him. She'd been quiet at first—so much so he was worried her hangover would render her unable to appreciate the delicacy of the crisis—but eventually she shrugged and said oh well. He followed her from room to room that day, expounding on all the reasons Seth Scott's implacable nudity was unacceptable: it was out in the open, not isolated in a dark theater where children and the easily depraved were forbidden entrance; it was on virtuous, pristine island terrain, not in the seedy, grimy, debaucherous Times Square; it was real, it was physical, it was actual, not celluloid, not projected, not fantasy. It was the innocence of their son, for God's sake, it was the future of their marriage; couldn't she see what was at stake?

Lola had gotten exasperated and told him that if he felt so strongly about it, he should confront the Scotts and demand whatever it was he thought he should demand. But Dan agonized too long over it. He should have acted swiftly. By the time he could bring it up a month later, feigning nonchalance, his voice had been irresolute. Lola had rolled her eyes. Seth clutched Dan's shoulder in violent camaraderie and told him Astrid had already seen to the curtailment and forced him to endure swim trunks from that point forward. Seth then launched into such a spectacular narration of the freedom thus denied him that Lola, in a compromised

state of sobriety, had insisted the four of them go to the beach immediately and swim freely in the moonlight. Dan had demurred, ready to forsake his role in this modern marriage, but the three of them dragged him along and he sat fully clothed on the beach while Lola, Astrid and Seth disrobed and frolicked. He felt that he would never recover. Lola had bested him, Seth had exposed him. He was a fraud.

He lingered in the marriage for another year then extricated himself slowly the next. He let it seem, at parties, at parades, at dinners, but especially in the presence of the Scotts, that he was amused by his wife's wild streak, that he found it charming. He tried to forbid his son from going to the Scott's house, but Lola dismissed his prohibitions, called him a prude, suggested he had repressed homosexual feelings toward Seth, suggested he had been molested by his own father. The divorce had been arduous and expensive, but afterward, Dan Farquarson began telling the truth about *Deep Throat*. Lola was furious and served him with cease and desist papers citing breach of confidentiality, defamation of character, slander, anything she and her lawyer could draw up. But nothing stuck. He was a free man.

Seth had disapproved of the whole ordeal. Dan's revenge had been lowly and traitorous. Even if Lola Farquarson wasn't Seth's favorite person, he appreciated her need to maintain the appearance she had cultivated and her outrage that the man she'd trusted had torpedoed it. The whole affair rattled Seth, the efficiency with which a family could deteriorate, moment by moment. He was sure Astrid had noticed his sudden vociferous insistence on family dinners, family outings, family leisure time, family walks along the beach, family meetings, family ping-pong, family daffodilling, but she never mentioned it.

Chapter Four

In the early hours of the afternoon, Seth's nap is interrupted by the sound of an engine pulling into his drive and the slam of a car door. He hoists himself off the couch and stands at the window in his study, looking down onto the driveway. His daughter. She wheels a large suitcase behind her, bends to pay the taxi driver, and as the cab pulls away, looks up toward the window, meeting his gaze. She stands for a moment before she smiles and waves.

He also stands for a moment, his coffee cup in hand, before he returns the wave, pleased and yet not pleased at this unannounced arrival, curious and suspicious about what would compel her to leave her haven half a world away.

Colette is a lissome woman, willowy limbed, broad-shouldered, well-muscled, pleasant-faced, and strongly calved. She has grown in to the best features of her dark-skinned Brazilian mother and Nordic pink-hued father, features that for a long time during her adolescence seemed as though they would never reconcile. Seth wondered if both Colette and her brother Oscar would forever look like walking dichotomies of battling chromosomes and immiscible bloodlines, startling, provocative and mystifying to passersby. But both of his children, now in their middle-age, glisten, exude an exoticity that is, for them, effortless for the very fact that it is unconscious. Like their mother, they were born with it and unlike their father, they're careless with its use.

Despite that, Seth is always glad, for the fact of their exquisiteness alone, for his children's visits—he unabashedly admires the living presence of unretouched beauty in his house and claims his prerogative as an artist to value their striking aesthetic in person, particularly as it is partially his own face he admires in theirs.

Colette's face, however, as she lowers her head and moves toward the front door, is not quite glistening. She looks older than her forty years in an unplaceable way—something in the strain of the smile, the downward pull of the eyes, the gaunt of her cheek. Seth wonders if she's ill.

Because of this, he opens the door exuberantly and the two embrace for a long moment before Seth says he's surprised to see her. Colette pulls back, that frown reappearing between her brows, cocks to her head, and stoops to lift her small suitcase, the kind of restless fidgeting Seth knows is an evasive tactic. Colette has a habit of detracting questions with physical gestures, a habit she picked up from her mother whose gestures, tinged with gazelle-like grace, warranted distraction. Colette's, suggesting a taut spring vibrating just under the skin, seems tainted by menace.

"Didn't you get my email?" she says, as she moves past Seth into the house. Before Seth can answer, she soliloquizes about the raw beauty of the island and its frigid cold despite being May. "Main Street's like a ghost town," she says putting down her suitcase. "Now I remember why I left."

Seth says nothing, waiting for the eventual diminution of chatter.

"So," she says, turning to face him. "Still flouting the codes of decency out there on the beach?"

"Every morning," he nods.

"The new neighbors must love that."

"I imagine I'll find out soon enough."

"Oh? You mean you haven't met them yet?"

“Just waiting for the right moment.”

“Lucky I came when I did.”

“Is it?”

For the time being, her charming smile quiets his instinct to interrogate her choice of communication. Begrudgingly he admires her strategy. Possibly the only reason he ever gives his email address to anyone is so he can delete any message upon receipt, without opening it or deciphering the coded name of the sender. He calls this his daily expurgation, the ritualistic expulsion of the irritating presences that threaten to crowd his life. It’s a perverse glee but not without warrant—anyone who knows Seth Scott knows to call.

His daughter does indeed know him well—if she had called, he would have demanded to know why the sudden interest in springtime on the island and there would have been no visit. Eliminating the possibility of a wasting illness bringing her here, he’s beginning to suspect an unannounced trip without the excuse of Christmas could be some kind of preventive surveillance, a check on Dad’s mental acuity and bodily functions.

Sending an email almost guarantees Dad will be taken by surprise when she shows up, maybe disoriented, maybe showing early signs of dementia. He imagines that somewhere in the recesses of her case Colette has a stack of pamphlets ready to pull out should the subject of retirement communities come up.

“Well,” she says, lifting the small brown paper bag of groceries at her feet, “let’s get some muffins made.”

He stands on the threshold, watching his daughter walk into the kitchen, with, evidently, the intention to bake. He shuts the door slowly, raises the coffee cup to his lips, and, pausing

while he hears the crumple of the bag and the setting of items on the counter, downs the rest of the bourbon before he turns to follow her.

Colette still knows the kitchen as if she had spent the last ten years pulling out baking dishes, flour sifters and basting brushes, as if making spontaneous muffins were an inescapable phenomenon of being present in the kitchen of her youth. Seth eases himself into a stool at the center island to watch her assemble the hand mixer she found in the recesses of the deep pantry and retrieve a set of silver mixing bowls that Seth can't be positive he's ever seen before. He appreciates the spectacle of his prodigal daughter returned, as it were, to the breast of her mother.

In this setting, it's hard to believe she's been gone for nearly ten years, gamboling from one European city to another, sending intermittent postcards from places Seth will always think of as suspiciously Soviet, darkly Yugoslavian, or vaguely treacherous. Her details were always elusive, glossing over her involvement with international production companies and film festivals, but as far as Seth can tell, she's managed to stay out of labor camps, prostitution rings and white slave trades, so he doesn't press for information. He only wonders about her perpetual single status, her pit bull-like aversion to coupling—she doesn't seem to be narcissistic or otherwise psychically damaged, so it's a mystery to him why she avoids the very thing he'd always been so careful to instill.

He had been partially pleased that she chose a career path so similar to his own, and, since it was in his fortieth year that he'd had the foresight to make what would become his breakthrough film, his legacy-maker, he is ever mindful of the fact that both she and her older brother are at that ripe age now, poised to burst into their own flowering. But he's uneasy that

his daughter has chosen the one field that would force her to rescind her feminine soul: clearly she has forsaken all else to make her mark as an auteur—he has bequeathed her that relentless ambition. But his own experience taught him that women in the movie business, in *this* movie business, are rarely solvent behind the camera, and even as a child, Colette had refused to take direction; she wanted always to be in charge.

“How’s business?” he asks her.

“Good. Coming along. I’m working on a new project. Hope to get it off the ground by the end of the year.”

That’s all she’ll say and all he’ll ask.

Suddenly there are muffin tins on the counter and she’s spraying them aggressively.

“You seem to know where to find everything you need for these spur-of-the-moment delicacies,” he says. “Have you been secretly living in the backyard all this time and using the kitchen while I’m asleep?”

“I’d rather admit that than tell you that nothing has changed in here since Mom died.”

He lets a wistfulness seep into his voice: “No. Everything’s changed,” he says and lets his eyes sweep the kitchen as if seeking Astrid’s cocoa bean body against the expanse of white Carrera marble. But not wanting to seem as if nostalgia has taken a debilitating hold on him, he insists that whatever propellant-based spray she’s emitting onto the muffin tin she must have smuggled in with her, it couldn’t have been ten years old—its packaging is too new and the nozzle too operational.

“Ipso facto,” he says, “either you’re an illusion or you snuck in here last night and planted all these things to make me think I’m going senile.”

Colette smiles. "I doubt you'll ever go senile, Dad."

He looks closely at her face—is she testing him?

"I appreciate that vote of confidence."

"Do you?" she says, her face taking on a faraway look that means she's only half paying attention.

"This looks like enough muffin batter to feed the entire island. We'll never eat this many," he says.

"Well, whatever we don't eat, we'll take over to the new neighbors."

"Oh?" He taps his finger on the counter. "Why the interest in my new neighbors? Is this your way of recruiting them to spy on me in your absence?"

"Are you doing something that should be spied upon?" She's manhandling the stainless steel bowl, violently agitating the ingredients with a whisk.

"Sadly, no," he says, inadvertently letting the wist back in.

"Besides, I doubt a basket of muffins would persuade anyone to keep tabs on you. We'd have to get them a car or something."

"A car. That's the last thing those people need."

"Those people?" She sets down the mixing bowl and pours milk into a measuring cup.

"You already disapprove of them? It couldn't be because of their staggering wealth, could it?"

Seth sits back in the stool and crosses his arms over his chest.

"What do you know about the state of their wealth?" he asks. "Have you been keeping up with current events on the island? The island you've devoted your entire adult life to avoiding?"

She looks at him over the rim of the milk-filled cup.

"It's hard to miss," she says, indicating the house through the windows.

"Okay, but you couldn't have seen that house from the ferry. Yet you show up here with a muffin agenda."

"I flew in this time."

"Even more so, then. I've never known the flights to make a detour around this side of the island. You couldn't have seen it from the plane."

"No," she says nonplussed. "I just meant that I didn't take the ferry this time. And I picked up the muffin mix because I thought you might like some muffins. These are the same kind Oscar and I used to make with Mom. Remember?"

He doesn't. There had been a conventional division of labor in the Scott household; what happened in Astrid's kitchen tended to stay in her kitchen. If he had ever been plied with the gastronomical handiwork of his progeny, he's sure he praised it, but couldn't recall ever having seen its assemblage.

"Then," she continues, "when the cab pulled up in front of the house, I saw the looming monstrosity next door, and I figured you and I probably wouldn't eat two dozen muffins by ourselves. Thus, two birds, one stone."

"Why didn't you just buy muffins at the bakery?"

"Dad," she warns. "Stop interrogating me. It was an impulse. That's all."

"An impulse," he says quietly. Of all the things Colette Scott could be called, impulsive, by her own admission, was not one of them. He wonders if her sudden attention to adjusting

the racks of the oven indicates her realization that the word, coming out of her own mouth, is the flaunting of a red flag.

“Well, I’m sure they’ll appreciate it,” he says, rising from the stool. “Let me know how it works out.”

“You’re coming with me,” she says calmly. Confidently.

“Is that right?”

“Yes. You’re their neighbor. Not me. For all they know, I’m a stalker.”

“I can write you a letter of introduction, then, if that will help you do whatever it is you’re doing with those things.”

“No, Dad,” she says, her voice softening, almost imploring. “I thought we could do this together. The way we would have when Mom was alive. Remember? Like a family.”

As they look at each other across the center island, her t-shirt streaked with flour, her face guileless, Seth feels like he’s being accosted by his green-eyed daughter. She evoked the word.

“Fine,” he says.

Chapter Five

It's difficult for Colette to gauge the level to which the impotent rage she unleashes on the butt of her cigarette is directed at herself, her father, or the caprices of the universe. She sits on the patio in the dark, her eyes roving the illuminated outline of the Tomassian estate, seething, calculating, replaying her father's words before he left for dinner an hour ago:

"Whatever you're trying to do here," he said, "you need to do it smarter. You're being too impulsive."

She listens for signs of life from the Tomassian place. If they're in the house at all, nothing to indicate it is visible from the outside. During the few seconds she had been efficiently handled at the front door by two staff members during the muffin debacle, Colette realized the expansiveness of the interior would mean that once inside, occupants would be shielded from all things external. The two young women who answered the door were young, barely twenty, barely able to convey a sense of authority when one reached for the basket and the other informed the visitors that she would see to it that the Tomassians received the package forthwith.

"Delightful," Seth had said. "Forthwith is the best way to enjoy muffins, I've found."

As she relinquished the basket into the girl's hands, Colette said, "We're not delivery people. We're neighbors. We're here to welcome the Tomassians to the neighborhood. Those are homemade."

"Do you have an appointment?" said one.

"No, no. No. We just brought muffins."

"Mrs. Tomassian has a very full schedule today."

"How is that possible?" said Colette. "This is an island. It's a giant playground."

"You'll have to call her personal assistant to set up an appointment," said the other.

"Personal assistant? We live next door. I made those muffins. They're still warm."

"I live next door," Seth interrupted. "This woman is a polite stalker. You're right to put her off."

The two young women were backing away, easing the door into its shut position.

"We'll be sure she gets the basket," one of them said as the door closed.

"Well," said her father, turning from the door. "Not making herself very neighborly, is she?"

Colette sees it now. She'd been hasty in her assumption that the modus operandi of island life would provide its own greasing of the wheels. She had grossly overestimated the likelihood that the Tomassians had come to this island for quaint summers and quiet respite, not when they owned a two-hundred foot boat and a ten-bedroom estate. These people, with their household administration, personal secretaries, social appointments, and multiple conveyances of high-speed travel weren't here to escape from the pressures of the world but to house the pressures in more comfortable lodgings. A stranger on the front porch laden with unsolicited food would of course be dispensed with swiftly.

She leaves the patio, too cold to sit in the dark. Her father hasn't returned from his dinner and the quiet house, on the dark street, with the even bigger house looming in the distance evokes a gothic potential for waywardness and malfeasance. It reminds her of every day of her childhood, creeping through rooms vacated by adults, discovering troves of unidentifiable objects with mystifying purposes while parents snored far, far away.

Her head is throbbing. Barely home twelve hours and her body is already protesting, like the heroine of a bad memoir—the typical cosmopolitan, ungrateful daughter literally sickened by her return to the past.

“The house was empty,” she says aloud, “but the bottle was full.”

She thinks of herself as slinking over to the wet bar. She pours a lethal dose of amber liquid into a highball glass and shoots it down.

Her throat and stomach burn. Aside from muffin batter and airline peanuts, nothing else has been in her system but cigarette smoke and black coffee for nearly a week. She can’t remember the last time she’s slept more than a couple hours in any given night. But despite a constant buzzing haze and short temper, she feels strong. Sharp. Alert. Finishing the glass, she forgives herself for the muffin miscalculation.

Chapter Six

Colette wanders through the empty house, absently running her hands over furniture and walls. The double doors to her father's study stand open at the top of the stairs. Its brown wallpaper, white wainscoting, tan carpeting, oversized built-in shelves and gleaming brown leather couches beckon—the room of the proto father. It's only been ten years since she's leaned against this door jamb, surveying his world. But ten years ago she had done it innocently. Now her invasion is pointed and ominous. Somewhere in this room is the answer to why she's at this juncture in her life. Somewhere in the rows of photographs nailed to his walls, the collections of magazines, newspapers, film reels, art books, paperbacks, leather-bound novels, and bossa nova records, the arrangement of Japanese shunga prints, the archived diaries scrawled with notes, the antique wooden filing cabinets, the locked desk drawers, somewhere in this detritus of his life is the reason for hers.

She sits in the executive chair behind the massive desk waiting to feel subsumed, again, by the force of his life. She reclines, puts her feet up on a pile of stacked papers, swallows the last of her re-filled bourbon and stares at the ceiling. He had just fallen into the whole thing. An amateur photographer in 1965, trolling the beaches of Ipanema, documenting the libertine chaos of Carnaval, unmarried, a hippie from the streets of Haight-Ashbury, blinded, so the story went, by the gorgeous apparition of a beach goddess, a tantalizing, exotic, brown-skinned, lusciously perfect feminine deity emerging from the water. She was sixteen years old, he was thirty. He whisked her away, out of the lush tropical world and back to the States to be his muse, his bride and the mother of his children. The ideal situation for a man in love and a man in need of exploitable beauty.

How easy it had been for both of them in that era. How impossible it all seems now, to become an icon.

Her eyes shift automatically to the photo on the wall that had always been her favorite: Seth sitting in a high director's chair, in a tight black turtleneck with a white silk scarf and a light meter hanging around his neck, his dark hair long and curled around his ears, his expression earnest as he leans forward, as his hands gesticulate, as his lips form words; the object of his attention a young blond woman with hair piled high and cascading low, her pert nose and concerned eyes taking in direction from her eminent director, her body wrapped in a shiny, clinging satin robe tied with a diminutive bow, her legs corseted in high black boots with pointed toes. In the background was the arm of a boom microphone. Snaked on the floor was a tangle of cords. Not their mother, but an ingénue—Wanda Dixon, the second woman Seth Scott made famous.

He had only to sit back in those days and the media came after him, desperate for his words. Without hiring a PR manager or retaining a publicist, he had gotten his name everywhere—film clubs, erotic reviews, talk shows, film schools, art societies, documentaries and of course the magazines. That photo had been in mass distribution in the 1970s.

How carefully he must have cultivated the whole thing, Colette thinks. How shrewdly he must have anticipated the addictive mass appeal of his charming nouveau-romantic libertine persona. Spouting the philosophies of Truffaut and accompanied by the erotic perfection of his Brazilian post-pubescent sugar plantation heiress; no wonder he conquered the decade.

Colette shifts her feet on the desk, inadvertently jarring the mouse. The large computer

screen shoots to life, calling up a page of written text with the title *Man, Myth & Legend: Memoir of a Revolutionary*.

She gets a sinking feeling in her stomach, already agitated by the bourbon.

“Oh Lord,” she says.

She scrolls through several pages, surprised that the story of her father’s life can be organized so neatly by earnest reflection.

She reads:

My films and photographs speak for themselves. They speak of a life in pursuit of natural beauty and natural physical expression. The public calls me innovative, but I surely didn’t invent the luscious form of the human female. If I have done anything, I’ve perfected her image, literally, in celluloid. And my public has approved.

“God. So it’s come to this.”

The man had made a production of his life and, now, at seventy, close to the end of things, it seems he will do the same with his death. Seth Scott isn’t the type to fade away.

Both she and Oscar made it possible for Seth Scott to claim he was the devoted family man and the consummate artist. Without his kids, he would have been just another Hugh Hefner, a peripheral, secondary copycat, lingering in the man’s shadow, forever runner up. With his kids, and his exotic wife, he became legendary. The Holy Grail of manhood: two doe-eyed children, an uninhibited exhibitionist wife, and untrammelled professional success. A self-made man who had it all, plus the company of a multitude of nubile, young, unclothed women taking his direction, hanging on his words, eager for him to make them his next big star.

He had an adoring, rabidly loyal fan base, but he also had moral crusaders, staunch feminists, presidential committees, moral majoritists, and even members of his own family harassing him, trying to legislate him, convicting him of obscenity, trying to get his kids taken away. But Colette and Oscar were dutifully shielded from that morass of publicity. Their father whisked the family out of the fray in 1976, bought a plot of land on the undeveloped portion of the island, and built an abode befitting an avant-garde and his brood, filled with modernist paintings and furniture. He then retired his twenty-six-year-old wife from her celebrity.

If her mother had been resentful of it, Colette never knew it. Astrid Scott, in her first and last feature film, was immortalized, and until they were teenagers, neither Oscar nor Colette had any idea.

Colette was a Girl Scout. Oscar was a Boy Scout. They took tennis lessons, sailing lessons, and golf lessons. They learned practical skills like baking, swimming, time management, and interpersonal communication. They read voraciously.

And while Seth and Astrid nurtured their children's curiosities, groomed their talents and instilled family values, they left gaping crevices of discoverable things for the young wayward children to occasionally stumble upon—the books, magazines, photographs and videos in their father's unlocked study; the bizarre vibrating contraptions swaddled in protective felt that sat on shelves in their mother's closet. These were things that confounded their friends, things that had the aura of dark taboo, things that were vastly fascinating because they were discovered, like precious and powerful treasures, and, because Seth and Astrid felt that their children deserved honest, open answers to their questions, and because they could

hardly be hypocritical about the naturalness of the erotic sphere, these were things that Oscar and Colette learned the function of at very early ages.

Colette had only once asked her mother what a sinister looking, heavy, metal device with a hand strap and a short plug was for. The answer had been a long, detailed discourse on the sensitivity of the clitoris and the multitude of aids a woman could employ for stimulation. Although twelve-year-old Colette believed she understood the function of the mysterious body part, she was unclear as to why this information was something no one else in her grade knew or could even conceive of. She appreciated her mother's candor that day but resolved to keep further discoveries to herself, content to rely on her own industry to acquire explanations. Her twelve-year-old sense of superior knowledge required an equally superior discretion and she felt, even then, that she didn't want to be at the mercy of her mother's tutelage.

Zippering herself into one of her father's warm-up jackets, she leaves the house an hour later on her way to town. She remembers the winding road as being dark and potentially treacherous, an inviting game of dare she and Oscar used to play when their parents were expecting company. Now, occasional streetlights pop up, illuminating large swaths of asphalt and endless rows of lush daffodils.

The words invade her head:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;

She grits her teeth in protest. She forces herself to think of anything else. Anything to oust the litany of unwanted verse.

She turns her gaze to the Tomassian house.

Ten years doesn't seem like such a long time to be away from a place, but the transformation on this island has been enormous. This house, with its swollen façade, is closer to the summer cottages of Newport—palatial compounds requiring massive maintenance and constant attention. It's a peculiar antithesis to the leisure Colette associates with her childhood.

She had known this, of course, before she even got on the plane half a world away to come visit her father. She had known it before she'd hatched this plan for her return. She had seen the Tomassian house in glossy color photographs in the international architecture magazine she picked up one idle afternoon in Budapest's Fovam ter, the afternoon her legacy began to taunt and harass her.

Lillian and Tom Tomassian. In the hyperbolic praise of architectural journalism, they were the saviors revitalizing the tired, shabby, stuffy, unsophisticated and uninteresting traditions of the arrogant island. They brought new life, new style, new energy and new wealth. Staggering, unprecedented wealth. They hired a European architect, not a New England one. They imported all their materials. They eschewed any references to lobsters, mariners, fishing nets, clams and canvas. They designed a formal dining room to seat thirty. They built an elaborate three-tier deck with a fire pit, surround sound and fully outfitted kitchen. They expected to entertain liberally. They were not concerned with accusations of plunder.

In that moment, turning page after page of architectural minutiae, Colette had been inspired. The bathroom fixtures for the master bath alone were twenty thousand dollars. It was

obscene and mind-boggling and this obscenity was merely yards away from her father's house, from the house she grew up in and would someday inherit. These people were her neighbors.

Very quickly she drew up a business plan—staggering American wealth would always seek an investment opportunity overseas, particularly in newly capitalist European countries. And the Hungarian adult film industry, still suckling on the milk of American capital, was ripe.

She knows, like her father had known in 1975, this is the time to strike. After ten years coasting through the upheavals of Eastern Europe and shuffling from film festival to film festival, she knows the time is right for just one breakthrough film. A legacy-maker.

She has considered turning the industry upside down, doing for an unsuspecting young Brazilian cliff diver what her father had done for a naïve plantation heiress, of taking a muse and making him an icon. But the world isn't ready yet. She has to infiltrate first. Amass capital. Then slowly, subtly, dismantle things from the inside out. Create a world dominated by the vision of Colette Scott.

That's the difference between father and daughter, she thinks. Whereas Seth Scott fell into his calling by accident, and whereas he considered it a calling, Colette deliberates over hers and considers it a strategic business plan.

She turns onto Main Street and heads for the bar on the corner.

Chapter Seven

The washed-out blue of the Miami sky under which we filmed was not the cobalt blue of Brazil's. The pale yellow beach was no match for the golden expanse of Ipanema. But the glorious contact of sun on Astrid's long, willowy body, the softness of her magnificent breasts glistening with droplets of sweat, the whiteness of her teeth against the dark roasted almond of her skin—it was pure visual decadence, the likes of which not even Vadim and Bardot had achieved.

Astrid had been skeptical about the opening shot—I had filmed her body from every conceivable angle, intercutting long, full-body shots with slow-motion close-ups of her breasts vibrating to—what else? “The Girl From Ipanema.”

“It's overkill,” she said. “They'll get bored.”

“I assure you, they won't,” I told her.

I explained that full frontal, rather than full rear, was preferred by American audiences, and even referred to Masters & Johnson's report that *proved* stiffened nipples were a sign of female orgasm having taken place (since there was often doubt).

Behind the camera, I was as mesmerized as the day I met Astrid, on a beach in 1965, topless and natural and surrounded by boys. She had been sixteen then, the rebellious heiress of a sugar plantation. Because I was fourteen years older than she, I took the reins as her protector, leading her away from the childish pranks of cliff divers and beachcombers. She had been attracted, as all goddesses are, to bad boys. But I was not a bad boy. I was a serious, artist who, following my artistic temperament, fell madly, deeply, wholly in love with a gorgeous creature and took her away from her magical land.

Her character's name was Giselle—twenty-five, widowed, childless, a part-time artist's model. Giselle had been married very young but her older husband had recently died, leaving her with their small but desirably located apartment on the beach and just enough money so that she didn't have to compromise her leisure by working as a secretary or compromise her virtue by working as a hooker. Her loneliness was palpable. But her encounters left much to be desired. Would she never find the man who would satisfy her inner needs? Of course she would. But only after many attempts with disappointing lovers.

Astrid's decision to record the dialogue in Brazilian-Portuguese and add English subtitles was genius. Not only did it guarantee the film's stature as something "foreign" and thus artistic by default, but it would also give the critics a fallback theory about the nature of text and visuals, of the intensely voyeuristic act of watching private moments while reading private words. It forced viewers to ping-pong between the two, keeping them worried about missing something, heightening their excitement by heightening their anxiety. It virtually assured repeated viewings.

Immediately after her bossa nova dance in the setting sun, Giselle stood in a kitchen, over a stove, wearing a sheer cover-up—white to contrast with her dark skin. The steam from the pot made her damp robe cling. Although it wasn't clear what she was cooking or why or for whom, it was obvious that her earlier exertions on the beach had left her restless. She picked up her phone, and, in montage, spoke in Portuguese to a series of unseen friends, inviting them for dinner. Whether or not her impromptu invitations were accepted would remain a mystery until after she took a long, steamy shower.

The shower scene had been the trickiest to shoot. It could not be merely another shower scene. Astrid could not be merely stroking her body with soap bubbles. I agonized for days, wondering what deep, psychological conflict could be alluded to. I considered symbolic implications, textual motifs, *mise en scène*. I wondered what Buñuel would do.

I wanted the scene to resonate with meaning, or else the whole thing would be just another disposable piece of utilitarian fluff.

“Utilitarian?” Astrid asked me.

“Yes. Functional. Used for a purpose. Then cast aside.”

“And what purpose would that be?”

I knew she knew what I meant—her English was impeccable. But she was goading me.

We were three weeks into the shooting schedule. Miami had been the only logical location for a film taking place on the fabled beaches of Rio, but it was fraught with technical disadvantages and a seediness which permeated all things. I had already compromised integrity on a multitude of shots, relying on the miracle of Astrid’s body to divert attention and energize mystique. But the shower scene could not be compromised. It must be authentic, revelatory, but sweet and pure, like a sixteen-year-old virgin.

She asked me, “But why do you care what they *do* when they watch the film? As long as they’re watching it?”

“I’m not making that kind of film.”

She was sitting at the little kitchen table, spreading jam on toast, stirring cream into coffee, her face backlit perfectly by morning sun.

“*We’re* not making that kind of film,” she said.

Oscar and Colette were outside on the tiny patio with the teenaged girl we hired to watch them during the shooting. For brother and sister, they got along remarkably, impressively well. Astrid attributed that to their Brazilian blood—Americans were insular and competitive; Brazilians, she said, were capacious, generous, and full of spirited love.

I stood in the doorway, coffee in my hand, leaning against the jamb, watching them play with their toys.

“We’re making the kind of film that our children will be proud of someday. The kind of film that starts a legacy.”

Days later, we were lying in bed, the room lit by a half dozen candles—a nightly ritual to fortify inner peace. Oscar and Colette were asleep in the room across the hall. We could hear their soft snores.

I was still debating how to shoot the shower scene. Astrid finally asked me,

“What do men think about when they think of a woman alone in the shower?”

“Insatiability,” I said immediately. “Frenzy. Uncontrollable ecstasy. Self-knowledge. Independence and abandon.”

But there was more to it than that.

“Vulnerability. Dissatisfaction. Loneliness. *Yearning*.”

“All that?” she said.

“It’s the crucial moment of the film. It establishes everything.”

“Maybe you’re overthinking it,” she said. “After all, women in the shower don’t have those kinds of thoughts. Really, we don’t think much about sex at all. If you wanted to be truly authentic—”

“This isn’t a film about thinking. It’s a film about feeling. It’s a film about seeing. The way I’m seeing you now.”

“Tell me what you see.”

The bedroom was like a cave, shadows from the candles flickering across our bodies. The kind of lighting requiring a slow shutter speed and a large aperture.

Her clavicle: “A dip like this.” My finger traced it. “An indentation here and a pool of shadow.”

The swell of her bicep: “A little mound of flesh.” I squeezed it. “Rising up out of the skin.”

The interior bend of her elbow: “This sweet, sweet vulnerability.” I pinched the skin, brought it to my mouth and kissed.

“And dainty childlike fingers. Like spidery delicate legs.” I squeezed a knuckle. “But bestial. Grasping.” I placed her hand on my shoulder and, with my fingers over hers, squeezed my own flesh. “Insistent,” I said. “Like a clutching voracious animal.”

That was the first time I worried that the camera wouldn’t do her justice. I had been studying her face for ten years—the way every kind of light hit its angles. I had studied her body—the way its eagerness contradicted the innocence in her expressions. I had studied her gestures—not graceful, not elegant, but *truthful*, expressive, natural and unforced.

She was nothing like American girls with their self-conscious pouting and wide-eyed stares of blankness, and their underdeveloped, prepubescent, androgynous bodies. Astrid had a body that seethed.

I had known it even in 1965. So unconscious of sex, so free of inhibition, so effortless, unassuming, and at sixteen, so needing approval. But with breasts already full and soft, promising a *lifetime*, legs already sturdy and long, hips and pelvis narrow, alluring and *untouched*. I had known even then that I would teach her things, guide her into her full allure, and in return, I hoped, she would blossom into an unstoppable force right in front of my camera.

As a director, I filmed moments, events, narrative arcs. Things with a beginning and an end, things that were more than just static frozen pictures. Capturing Astrid in angles I had studied while we made love, while she slept, while she showered, while she cooked, and feeding it to an audience—that was an intoxicating position.

So, during the filming, I willed myself to feel like a stranger watching Astrid for the first time. I purposely underlit the shadowy hands of the men who caressed Giselle's—Astrid's—smooth skin since they were stand-ins—I called them metaphors—for my own hands. From behind the camera I coached them. I often stopped them and placed their fingers in just the right spots on her breasts, on her thighs, told them just the right maneuvers, just the right degree of pressure, and trained the camera on Astrid's face for the moment when just the right exquisite murmur was released. I didn't want acting. I wanted truth.

I believed at the time that my destiny lay in capturing the sensations of the tropics.

In bringing to whitebread middle America the pure sensuality of dark, exotic, uninhibited Latin American love, the way that I'd experienced it when a tantalizing young lady took my hand and followed me off the beach.

At some point during the filming, I had a revelation that that fateful encounter on the beach in 1965 hadn't really been about love, nor about art. I wasn't in Rio, after all, by accident—the world's most beautiful beaches, the world's most beautiful women. It was territory to claim. And I hadn't been so much of a romantic nor so much of an artist that I hadn't been bowled over by the thought of utterly possessing such a stunning creature.

Although mine was not the body on screen, I was in full control of every shot, of every detail, of every hand that touched Astrid's face, of every lip that touched her breasts, of every body that lay pliant beneath her. Astrid wasn't the artist. There could be no mistaking that every breath taken, whether on screen or in the audience, was due to me. *This* was my mastery. The stunning creature was nothing but raw material. A vessel. My hands brought her to life, my lips found the spots, my fingers squeezed, and fondled. My voice stirred her or calmed her. My eyes watched her.

Chapter Eight

Pete's at the bar. Of course he is.

He sits at a table with four other people, much younger, much livelier. Colette stands outside, watching the group through the window—a band most likely. They have a gaunt look about them. Pete is sprawled in his chair, his legs spread wide, his expansive gestures dominating the conversation, his hair sandy brown, cut long and starting to thin on top, his jawline still sharp and his complexion more weathered than the last time she'd seen him. All eyes at the table are on him.

The rest of the group is in their early twenties, Colette guesses. Three lanky pink-skinned boys, their thin bodies lost under graphic t-shirts and jeans, their faces hidden by unkempt hair or bushy goatees, and the lone girl in jeans with black knee-high boots, a sleek, short bob of Egyptian black hair caressing her heavily made-up Mediterranean features.

The young lady is confident. She lounges liberally and watches Pete with the ease of familiarity. Instantly Colette knows they've slept together. She wonders if the young woman has slept with anyone else at the table, whether even one of the three boys would be able to keep up with her daunting, bristling swagger, and if that pitiable soul is sitting in anguish at that table realizing the certainty that Pete most definitely has.

What her father would have done with an image like this! A beautiful shot, no doubt, especially through the window with the wind as the only soundtrack, the camera witnessing a pantomime of exchanged glances and movements fraught with tension. But Seth Scott's images were distant and superficial, emblems of the beneficent male oh-so-sensitive to the quiet wonderment of the female form. He would have shot a series of close-ups of her features: her

lips, red and moist; her eyes, wide and innocent; her fingers slowly twirling a strand of her hair or playing with a long chain around her neck plunging into her cleavage; a straw slowly being inserted between her parted lips, a sudden giggle with a thrown-back head revealing a long neck.

Missing the point. Always missing how ferocious young girls are. Not voracious. Not insatiable as the middle-aged men of the Seventies so wanted young girls to be. But utterly and destructively ferocious.

Her father, the consummate director, filmed his own fantasies, recorded his own ideals of womanhood and manhood with impunity, manifested his own desires with the force of certainty, with no qualms, no fears about being exposed or laughed at, no anxiety about being psychoanalyzed or diagnosed by a public ready to condemn the sick vagaries of its artists. Colette isn't so eager to test her public by putting herself on display. She hesitates to document so nakedly her own desires. Perhaps because she grew up having to know her father's.

Pete stands up from the table and walks to the back toward the restrooms. In this temporary lull, Colette enters and finds a stool at the bar where she can watch the group in the mirror on the back wall hanging over the rows of liquor bottles. She waves over the bartender for a bourbon, on the rocks this time since this is number four. She studies the Egyptian-haired girl discreetly in the mirror. A marvel of composure at such a young age. How could Colette capitalize on that—harness the girl's natural ferocity, tease it out of her, put it before a camera and let it unspool? What could Colette offer her, entice her with, to convince her of the entrepreneurial opportunities in Budapest? How did her father do it on that beach in 1965?

She only knows the facts: her mother had been sixteen, topless and natural and surrounded by boys, the rebellious heiress of a sugar plantation. Because Seth had been fourteen years older than she, he took the reins as her protector, leading her away from the childish pranks of cliff divers and beachcombers. He was a serious, thirty-year-old artist who, following his artistic temperament, fell madly, deeply, wholly in love with a gorgeous creature and took her away from her magical island.

Fidgeting with her glass, she wonders if it's necessary for a filmmaker to fall in love with her muse.

"Well, if it isn't the kid sister of my best friend."

Pete has taken the stool next to her. In a final glance in the mirror, Colette sees the girl follow Pete's movements with her eyes without any indication of disappointment on her face. The girl knows Pete will eventually seek her out. She seems not at all threatened by Colette's presence. Colette smiles at her. She smiles back.

Turning to Pete, she says, "The more things change..."

"Hey," he shrugs. "You're only as old as the youngest drummer in your band."

Colette resists the urge to flick her gaze toward the mirror again. She focuses her attention on Pete's profile. He's forty-one, the same age as Oscar, still the lean, wiry, good-looking guitarist, with thick fingers and the swell of muscles beneath his faded t-shirts. His grin is white-toothed, his eyes creased in deep lines at the corners, and he exudes a palpable rhythm, like a metronome set just below audibility, thrumming and pulsating. It would be hypnotic to groups of youth, she imagines, like the lure of a wizened sage or a loveable mascot.

"How's the jetsetting?" he asks her.

"Fatiguing. How's the band?"

"Same."

He raises his glass. They clink. They drink. The words pop into her head again.

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

"So what brings you around?"

Fidgeting with her glass again, she says, "Daffodils."

* * *

Hours later, they lie crushing the heads of yellow buds, tangled in rigid stalks, smelling the damp of chilled soil. Although they haven't seen each other since she left in 1995, their hips still fit snugly.

The spot, protected under a daffodil preservation ordinance, is nearly identical to the way she remembers it twenty-five years ago. She had been fifteen, Pete sixteen. It was the night before her birthday, also the night before the daffodil festival, and she lured Pete away from Oscar and other friends who were daffodilling an antique car for the opening ceremonies.

They had followed a narrow dirt path through the field, holding hands, accustomed to snaking their way around the dark recesses of secret spots. He was her brother's best friend, a songwriter, his head bent forever over his guitar, his fingers twitching even when he was away

from it. She was a fifteen-year-old radical-liberal, quoting Nietzsche and Steinem, planning her first study-abroad trip to Yugoslavia. As they both dropped to the chilled ground that night, he intoned the daffodil poem with lilting cadences, stringing syllables together, lengthening the iambs, experimenting with melody. On certain beats he touched her face, on others he kissed her lips.

As the victim of an artist-father's relentless sermons on the cultivations of the soul and the sensitivities of the spirit, Colette had been impatient with Pete's lyrical ministrations. But as a virgin that night, she was tolerant of them, more nervous than she thought she would be and grateful for the preamble.

*"For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."*

To their young minds, the intensity of love awaited to spring forth from the depths of their beings.

Pete yanked a stalk from the ground that night and with the flower traced the outline of Colette's face, down her neck, to the spot where her shirt began. It was a cold night. Goosebumps sprouted on her skin.

For Pete, the rigid stalks topped with delicate buttery petals were the very image of pleasure itself—the yin-yang, he told her, the male-female, the stiff and the soft. For Colette,

daffodils embodied her parents' incessant ranting about the importance of family activities. Every year they entered the festival pageants, decorated their cars, their hats, their costumes, their dogs, their yard, each other, and smiled delightedly for the gazettes and tribunes that printed photos with identifying captions. More often than not, one festivity or another fell on Colette's birthday. She learned to associate the two events, dreading them both equally.

She didn't remember everything about that night twenty-five years ago, but she recalled the thrill of being naked underneath her brother's best friend, the disappointing stab of her pricked virginity, and the damn daffodils tickling her face. She remembered his voice in her ear, reciting poems, song lyrics, lines of abstracted love, the things that seemed appropriate to him, words of coo, words of assurance.

But he's quiet tonight, breathing heavy.

In the aftermath, she asks him,

"No Wordsworth tonight?"

His hand dips under her hair to the back of her neck. Squeezing it gently, he says, "Romantic poetry really only works with teenagers."

"So you do still use it, then."

"Occasionally."

She sits up to slide her jeans on and wraps herself in the warm-up jacket.

"How's my brother?" she says, lying back down.

"Wouldn't know. He's not really a phone guy. So he says. You haven't kept in touch?"

"Christmas. I guess the twins keep them pretty busy. He's not much for emailing, either."

They say nothing for a while, laying on their backs, the length of their legs touching.

"Are you staying for the festival?" he asks her.

"Not if I can help it," she says.

"Back to Prague?"

"Budapest."

"Budapest. Right."

His hand slides under her neck again.

"So what brings you here, then?" he asks her.

She considers the question for a long moment.

"Business," she says.

"What kind of business?" he says with a hint of impatience.

"I need money."

"From your Dad?"

"No."

"Well, I know you're not trying to get any out of me. Wish I could help, but..."

"But?"

He rolls on his side, propping his head in his hand and looks into her shadowed face.

"Guitar lessons aren't what they used to be."

He pulls a daffodil out of the ground and traces the contours of her face with the bulb.

"So I know you didn't just fuck me for my money."

There's a question hovering in his voice.

"No," she says quickly. "What do you know about the Tomassians?"

"I like their boat." The flower dips to her throat.

She's quiet for a moment.

"You looking for a job?" he asks her.

"A financier."

He laughs. "Something wrong with your Dad's money?"

"He and I have conflicting opinions about which side of the camera a woman should be on."

"Ahh. A film project. Enlighten me."

"Still working out the details."

Pete shifts and lies back down, the daffodil still in his hand.

"But you don't want your dad to know?"

"Not yet."

"He's not likely to disapprove, whatever it is."

"Well, it seems he's got his hands full with another project at the moment."

"Oh yeah? Another movie?"

"A memoir."

"The Seth Scott story." He raises his hands with splayed fingers. "With glossy, oversized photographs. Good for him. Too bad it's not a movie."

The thought rankles in her loins. It's just the thing her father is capable of doing—making another film, starring himself. She stays quiet as they lie next to each other.

A comeback from a septuagenarian pornographer. She doesn't want to think about it. It's brilliant.

PART II

Chapter Nine

Seth watches her through the window of Holly's Coffee Shop. Daughter. Flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood. Inhaling deeply on her European cigarette, her short curly hair in a dark halo crowding her face, her green eyes darting back and forth, her torso buried beneath layers of shirts, her legs concealed by rough-hewn denim. Her nut brown skin creased in folds around her eyes. Her lips barely split for the tube of the butt. She purposely avoids the crack of a smile—that much, at least, he believes he knows of his stoic, serious, unrelenting, unpliable daughter.

He sits at a small table with a cup of Earl Grey, a newspaper spread on the table in front of him, his long legs stretched below, one foot resting on the rung of the chair across from him. The place is small and crowded, filled with people and conversations and leisure. Which is why Colette escaped just now for a cigarette. She seemed twitchy, he noticed. Not just restless, but seething with discomfort.

"It's eight-thirty in the morning," he had said, lightly, evenly, as if she had asked.

"It's two-thirty in the afternoon in Budapest," she said just as lightly and evenly.

Outside, she fiddles with her phone device, lighting her second cigarette.

Forty years old. The mystifying age when women become enigmas to him. Astrid had begun her sickness at forty-one, a slow deterioration that left them both weak and breathless. Everything he could say he knew about womanhood, femininity, femaleness—things that used to begin and end for him with skin, nerve endings, pleasures, the spirit of passion—all start to evaporate when he remembers the excruciating, wracking pain that overcame her vulnerable

body at this age. He has nothing to offer, no knowledge, no insight. No inroads to make with his daughter. It's ungraspable—she's ungraspable.

"Hey, Mr. Scott."

The young waitress Mona is hovering over his table, angling a coffee pot to refill his cup. He holds his hand over the top, wags the tag of the tea bag. He smiles as she apologizes.

"Mona," he says, "how long have we known each other?"

"I'll be seventeen in three months," she says, with a smile. "So in three months it'll be seventeen years."

"A magical age," he says. "You'll learn someday that everything you need to know about life, you already know by the time you're seventeen."

"Really?"

"Oh yes," he says with a nod. "Especially for girls. You have powers at seventeen that you'll likely not experience again as you get older."

"But boys don't?"

The girl looks genuinely perplexed.

"Boys think they do," he winks at her. "But for boys it's sheer stupid luck."

He crosses his arms and looks out the window.

"Okay," she says.

She steps away to return to her perch behind the counter with the other young waitress. She's a bit of an awkward girl, Seth observes, a bit plump, a bit unpolished, but with the promise of womanly curves, like her mother's. He senses, though, that her childhood is being protracted, that she's been coddled and indulged—her world, he thinks, is plumping her

with baby fat. As always, he's amazed at the difference between a sixteen-year-old American girl of this generation and the sixteen-year-old Astrid he met in Brazil in 1965. He can't imagine Mona becoming a legend.

He's suddenly acutely aware of the unknowableness of his own daughter, especially compared to the obvious knowableness of this girl-child. Even with a fifty-five-year age gap between Mona and himself, he knows this girl he only ever sees at a coffee shop more completely than his own daughter who, even when she was sixteen, completely baffled him and made him tense. Astrid said it was her Brazilian blood. She was restless. She resisted his pat idealizations.

He feared an Electra complex—surely an inevitability given the circumstances of her childhood. Her mother a great beauty, an emblem of the womanly arts, her father a revolutionary instigator of modern sexuality. A young girl nurtured in the cradle of those arms...

And what of your son? Astrid said repeatedly. You're not worried about his complexes? His deviancies? His pathologies? He has the same parents.

What is there to worry about with a son? All the world applauds a deviant man. They are the poets, the journalists, the heads of state, the David Bowies of their generations. A deviant son is bound for success. A deviant daughter, institutionalization.

What is this great anxiety American men have over their daughters, she would say, *throwing up her hands. Everything is normal. The girl is normal.*

A few years later, Astrid said, *She's the same age now as I was when you first saw me on the beach. Sixteen. Good thing I wasn't institutionalized then. You would have never had all this.*

He laments the damnable irony that his daughter would turn out to be so fiercely independent and his son so milquetoast passive.

He weighs this state of normal of his daughter. Her scheme yesterday started with a family invocation, but ended sourly, with Colette fuming. Her will had been thwarted, that was clear. Seth wants to believe she's nostalgic, that she's yearning for a connection to her past, to her family, after all her years away, to her childhood, her mother, her father. But what he knows for sure about Colette is that she's not her father's daughter. Her soul is not an artist's. He knows this is not a nostalgia-seeking mission.

Yet she had gone through his desk last night, rifled through his papers, presumably found his memoir on the computer. She was seeking something. Again he wonders if she's compiling evidence of his failing faculties, cataloguing his errant behavior, his willfulness against propriety; he wonders for a horrifying second if she was in contact with Lillian Tomassian even before this trip—if his neighbor and his daughter have been in cahoots all along, testing him, defying him to display himself as a doddering, aged fool.

When Colette returns to the table, Pete is with her. Seth stands to shake his hand, puts his other hand on Pete's shoulder and gives it a squeeze. Although they run into each other regularly, particularly here, they greet each other as if having been separated and now reunited. Seth likes Pete's energy—he likes that he commands attention. If he had been smarter about cultivating his image, about stoking a public, he could have been his generation's heartthrob. He never knew what held the boy back. Lack of a father, perhaps. An overprotective mother or an overly permissive mother. Some conflagration of events.

They all sit down and within seconds Mona is there, brandishing coffee. Colette holds her cup in the air, right under the lip of the pot Mona holds.

“Hey Pete,” she says softly.

“Hey Mona,” he says. Seth sees his features soften, as his own had done. “How’s the practicing?”

“Good,” she smiles, shrugs. “I mean, okay.”

What is it about sixteen-year-old American girls, Seth wonders, and that self-effacement. He remembers Astrid walking out of the water that day in 1965, her glorious, seething certainty, none of this shrugging shyness, this maddening need for approval.

“All right,” Pete says with a nod. “Maybe we’ll try some Clapton this afternoon, then.”

“Sure,” she says with another shrug, before turning.

“They all want to play White Stripes,” Pete says. “They don’t even know who Clapton is.”

Seth nods. “It’s your cross to bear. But you persevere.” He has a deep affection for Pete, the fatherless son growing up with a single mother and limited resources, surrounded by the children of the wealthy.

Colette leans back, surveying the two of them.

“Cheer up,” she says to Pete. “There’s no shortage of teenagers at your disposal. You’re bound to come across one or two who have a latent affinity for Cream.”

“A dismal pun,” Seth tells her. “Although not out of character.”

“It was more a double entendre,” she says. “But a heartfelt one.”

“Okay,” Pete says, raising his cup to his lips. “This is going to be a fun week.”

“Oh? You’re staying for a week?” Seth says to his daughter. “You must have a lot of muffin mix in your suitcase.”

“Is that another double entendre?” Pete says.

“No,” says Colette. “That was an accusation.”

“But a heartfelt one,” says Seth.

Mona has come back to the table, bearing a cinnamon roll on a white plate. She sets it on the table in front of Pete.

“I saved this for you,” she says. “I thought you’d be in earlier, but, anyway, it’s still fresh.”

Pete raises both hands to his heart and closes his eyes in delight.

“Mi corazon,” he says.

“I heated it for you, too. So the frosting’s all gooey.”

“I cherish you,” he says. “I will savor every morsel.”

“Okay.” She smiles, and again turns away.

Seth sees something alight in his daughter’s eyes. A smile plays on her lips and one brow elevates slightly. She knows something. Or suspects something. Or she’s amused by something. Or planning something. This flesh of his flesh is infuriatingly inscrutable. He tries to see what she sees, to inhabit her eyes, her psyche, for some access to the inscrutability.

What does she when she looks at Pete—her brother’s best friend. Pete the roving musician, stuck somewhere between 18 and 42, the long blondish hair, the earnest eyes, the tan skin, the hard jawline and high cheekbones, a romantic leading man, still, but disturbingly unchanged in twenty years, still playing in a band, still hooking up randomly, frequently. A Peter

Pan with a propensity, newly confessed, toward sex addiction. A forty-year-old woman would find this—what? Charming? Alluring? Unsettling? Would it make her feel desperately old or desperately young again?

She smirks.

But Colette, too, seems not to have progressed much beyond who she was, what she wore, how she behaved, in those years after college. He can't imagine either one of these two raising small children. Neither one of them could become a family.

Pete, gentle with Mona in his expression, his voice, his manner. Gentle in a familiar patient way, a doting way. Not unlike the way Seth had enfolded Astrid when she was the same age, the way Seth looked at her dotingly.

And that's it, he realizes. Colette recognizes it, too—a budding or ongoing illicitness, the palpable undercurrents between teacher and student, man and child. Like her father, Colette seems to be studying it, studying Pete's face and Mona's awkward gestures. And, like her father, she is amused, completely alert to it. It's the sign he's been looking for: she is his daughter after all.

Chapter Ten

From their spot behind the counter, Mona and the other waitress, Schuyler, watch Seth, Pete and the unknown woman discreetly, pretending to wipe the coffee stains off the Formica.

Schuyler says, "I'll bet she's a porn star."

Neither one of them knows what a porn star looks like. But Schuyler has said this with such matter-of-factness that Mona is irked. Besides, Mona has the idea that porn stars are glamorous and vibrant, that they have puffy hair, frosted lipstick, babyish voices, hyper personalities and sheer braless outfits. The woman sitting with Seth Scott looks like an exhausted real estate agent.

"She's wearing too much brown to be a porn star," she tells Schuyler, sure that this should be true.

"It's obviously her day off," Schuyler says with a tone that implies Mona is the dense one. "They're not required to be naked all the time, you know."

That this has come from Schuyler Carruthers, the popular, smart, pretty daughter of one of the island's oldest families, Mona's friend, but not her best friend, and the fact that it makes more sense than her own statement, irritates Mona further. But that they're debating the norm for porn actresses having coffee on a Saturday morning makes Mona feel like she's reached a personal best in terms of worldliness.

They both see Pete stand from the table and turn toward them to approach the counter.

He pulls out a five, hands it to Mona with a smile.

"See you at one," he says.

“Yep,” she nods.

The café is full, loud with spoons clinking against ceramic cups and conversations. There are high school kids, young parents, neighbors, retirees and Holly herself who moves between tables, flitting, she calls it. She stops at Seth’s table and Mona watches the mystery woman stand to embrace her, with the first smile Mona’s seen on her face. Suddenly, the scowling real estate agent transforms into someone actually pretty. Words like *vivacious* and *stunning* enter Mona’s head. Had she been smiling like that the whole time, Mona might have believed she could have been a porn star. Mona thinks now that she has a *joie de vivre*, a *je ne sais quoi*. Such a simple thing, a smile.

She and Schuyler have only recently discovered what Seth Scott became famous for thirty years ago. They knew he made movies—occasionally reporters have shown up on the island to interview him—but for the better part of their lives, his subject matter has been kept a secret from them. When they found out the truth—someone’s older brother or sister told someone’s friend and soon there was a contraband DVD changing hands, making the rounds on weekends when parents were out of town—it struck them both that they were victims of a tangled conspiracy from which they must extricate themselves. Their revolt has begun quietly. This casual identification of a porn actress concealing herself in their midst is their first official act of extrication. Their second act will be Trey Gavin’s screening party later tonight.

As Schuyler ends her shift and gathers her things, she and Mona arrange to meet before the party. Both of them have vague apprehensions about the night’s event, but they both yearn to see the movie—their first seventy-five-minute uninterrupted exposure to obscenity.

How could it have been kept a secret from them all their lives? This same man, living in their community, buying their Girl Scout cookies, drinking tea in their coffee shop, judging their daffodil floats—they know he dances naked on the beach sometimes, but old hippies do that kind of thing, they’ve been told—this same man made dirty movies with his *wife*? They’re perplexed. They can’t equate this gentle, white-bearded old man in his grandfatherly khakis with the tinny screeching voices and gross close-ups of the video clips they’ve seen online.

He seems so much more polite than that.

“Well, he’s not *in* the movies himself,” Schuyler points out. “It doesn’t matter what *he’s* doing if he’s just behind the camera.”

“Still. It just doesn’t seem like his kind of thing.”

Schuyler rolls her eyes. “Looks can be deceiving,” she says.

She hangs up her apron in the back room and reemerges with a stretched-out shoulder bag. She pulls out a book from its recesses and clandestinely hands it to Mona out of sight of anyone who might glance their way.

“Here,” she says. “Call me after your lesson.”

Schuyler’s own guitar lesson was the day before and just this morning, as the two of them brewed coffee before opening the shop, she confided to Mona that she thought Pete had made a pass at her.

“Why do you only *think* he made a pass?” Mona asked.

“Well, what does a pass look like? How do you know?”

“Well, what did he do?”

He reached across the coffee table and adjusted her fingers on the fret board, lingering, she believed, longer than necessary.

“How long is necessary?” Mona asked, wondering if he’d ever lingered with her fingers.

He held them there, pressing them firmly, for several beats, then guided her fingers to the next chord.

He’s never done that with Mona. Well, she thought, he didn’t need to. She knew how to move her fingers on the fret board. Schuyler just didn’t have the proper dexterity. Still, she wonders if Pete has flirted with her in some other way and she missed it.

Schuyler leaves and Mona stashes the book on the shelf below the coffee urns, on top of a row of coffee cups. She stands alone behind the counter, resuming vigilant attention to the coffee rings, wondering why Schuyler is getting that kind of attention from Pete.

She crouches behind the counter and lifts a silver tray from the shelf beneath the coffee pots. Holding it in front of her face, she stretches her lips wide in imitation of the woman at Seth’s table and observes her face from different angles.

“You got a poppy seed stuck in your teeth?”

Holly has come around the counter to brew a new pot of coffee.

Mona pretends to jimmy out a seed between her teeth.

“Yep,” she says.

Reaching under the counter for more coffee cups, Holly pulls out the book Mona stashed there.

“What’s this?”

“Oh, nothing,” Mona says nonchalantly. “Someone left it here. I was going to put it in the lost and found.”

Holly flips the book over to read the title. “Rainbow Party.”

The cover, adorned with seven different tubes of lipstick, all opened and revealing their cones of color, is dirty and torn and the pages are warped in places. Like Seth Scott’s movie, this book has been making the rounds.

Holly opens to the first page: “*‘Gin took the slender shaft of the tube in her palm.’* What the hell is this?” She continues reading aloud: “*‘She gave a gentle tug along the base and watched as the lipstick extended to its full length.’* I hope this doesn’t pass as clever writing these days. I will weep for your generation.”

She flips over the book to its back cover but there’s no synopsis, only an endorsement by a young adult book critic about the importance of the book as a cautionary tale despite its shocking content.

“And from you.” Holly tosses the book back under the counter. “I would have expected you to be reading Iris Murdoch or, in a pinch, Agatha Christie. When I was your age, if we wanted something shocking, we read Judy Blume. At least she could put together a real sentence.” Holly extracts a coffee filter and places it in the brew basket. “But this just sounds like trash. There’s nothing cautionary about bad penis jokes.”

“Like I said, it’s not mine.”

Holly gives her a look.

“Oh,” she says. “Then it’s okay if I just throw this away.”

“Sure. Whatever.”

Holly reaches for the book and plops it in the trash barrel on top of a pile of used coffee grounds.

"Good riddance," she says.

"Yeah. Can I ask you a question?"

"As long as it's not about blow jobs."

"What? No. Who's that woman with Seth?"

Holly looks over at the table.

"Don't you recognize her?"

"No."

Mona's just about to ask if she's a porn star.

"That's his daughter. Colette."

"Really?"

"Yes. Really. I'm surprised you don't recognize her. Oh. Well. You would have only been six when she left."

His daughter. Mona knows that both Seth's children left the island after their mother died and mysteriously haven't come back. She wonders if something equally mysterious has brought Colette back now. She wonders if Pete has something to do with her return.

When Holly leaves to go to the ladies' room, Mona quickly removes the book from the trash and brushes off the coffee grounds. Wrapping it in a paper towel, she tucks it away in her guitar case.

* * *

At one o'clock, Mona takes the stairs to Pete's apartment over the coffee shop, guitar case in her hand.

His apartment is small, cluttered and chaotic. Spending time here makes Mona understand the term functional. She's only seen the living room where she has her lessons, the kitchen and the bathroom, but she's spied a small portion of the bedroom through its cracked door—a dark chamber, she thinks of it, with a mattress on the floor and a rumpled black comforter balled up in the corner. She imagines the air is cool in there, like a deep cave with a sweet smell.

It's bohemian, she tried to explain to her mother, who, although professing ease with the arrangement of a forty-year-old musician alone in his apartment with her sixteen-year-old daughter, nevertheless presses for specific details following every lesson.

What is his apartment like? What do you do for an hour? What kind of teacher is he?

It's bohemian. We play guitar. He's okay.

Does he have plants?

Not really.

She hates being cagey with her mother but she sees no alternative. Mona can't tell her own mother that she imagines the feeling of lying on Pete's mattress on the floor of his dark, cool bedroom, of feeling radical in the absence of a bedframe, of smoothing out his black sheets around her body, of throwing off the comforter in the middle of the night, of showering in his claw foot tub, using his shampoo, his Crew hair gel, shaving with his Mach 3. Watching him eat scrambled eggs she fixes for him on his small stove with the small skillet she's seen. She

wants to do things for him—clean and cook—while he strums nakedly on the couch. She wants to dust the baseboards for him while he gigs.

But even as she thinks it, it disturbs her. Why does she want to clean his apartment? Why does she want to fix him eggs? How can she simultaneously want him to make a pass at her *and* want to dust his windowsills? She's concerned that this confusion means she's lost her sense of self-worth, the lesson in magazine articles and PSA posters attached to the cafeteria walls. Evidently girls her age are susceptible to it. She doesn't want to have lost it already, before she's learned what it feels like to have it.

But each week it gets harder to stop thinking about him naked on the mattress, sleeping while he watches her tenderly, and, sometimes, as a twist, she watches him make *her* scrambled eggs.

She knocks. She hears him say it's open. Before she turns the knob, she relaxes her face and tries to mimic the full-face smile again. Such a simple thing, a smile, contorts her face. It feels unnatural and ridiculous but she perseveres.

As usual, he's sitting on his couch, strumming. Old Sixties music plays from an LP on a turntable in the corner of the room.

"You look happy," he says.

"Yeah, I guess." She shrugs.

"This," he says, "is Cream."

"Cool," she says, still smiling, extracting her guitar from its case.

"Sunshine of Your Love."

"Cool," she says again, not sure what he's implying.

“So why are you so happy today?”

“No reason.”

Her cheeks are starting to hurt and she averts her head. The book, still wrapped in its paper towel, is laying in the felt of her guitar case and she closes the lid casually. It’s not the thing she wants to think about right now, but it’s the only thing she can think about.

* * *

Mona returns to the coffee shop an hour later, no closer to knowing what a pass looks like. Pete’s fingers hadn’t lingered over hers, even when she pretended to have difficulty changing chords. And he didn’t seem to have any special inflections when she asked him to explain the lyrics. She tried tipping over her guitar case accidentally so the book would fall out and prompt him to ask questions, but his back was turned when the book fell to the floor. She decided not to leave it there, in case he saw it and thought it was Schuyler’s.

Reaching for the broom to sweep up a trail of coffee grounds and pie crumbs, she realizes she forgot to ask him about Colette Scott.

Chapter Eleven

Soon after Mona resumes wiping the Formica counter, her mother enters the coffee shop, followed closely by a woman carrying a clipboard and lugging a huge canvas tote over her shoulders. To the afternoon coffee drinkers, Julia Drake-Thornton appears to be conducting a narrated tour, pointing this way and that, chatting non-stop. Seeing Mona, she makes a beeline toward the counter where her daughter stands. The other woman, however, takes her time, looks around, dallies.

“Hello, dear.”

“Hey.”

“Mona,” she glances behind her. “That is Gladys Osmont. She’s a reporter for the *New York Times*. She’s here to do an article on the festival.”

“Why?”

“I know you’re not a cruel daughter. I know you understand the daffodil festival is a big deal, and because I’m in charge of it, I have a great responsibility to keep it in the forefront of everyone’s minds. I know you don’t want to embarrass me in front of a reporter. Right?”

“I’m just saying. There’s nothing new about the festival this year. It’s the same stuff every year.”

“Evidently *somebody* thinks there’s something noteworthy about it. This *is* our forty-seventh year. Perhaps they want to do a retrospective.”

“What’s your reporter doing over there?”

The woman was reading fliers on the community bulletin board, postings for babysitting jobs, handyman jobs, summer cottages for rent, boat crews, subtly worded personal ads.

"I don't know." Julia sits on a stool at the counter. "Maybe soaking in the flavor of the island. Who knows with these reporter types. How was your lesson today?"

"The usual."

"Uh huh. So, what song are you learning this week?"

"Some old song. 'Sunshine of Your Love'."

"Oh? Eric Clapton. Some real music this time."

"You know it?" Mona's voice shows her surprise.

"Of course I know it. I lived through the Sixties, you know. I wasn't always the mother of a sixteen-year-old. So. What did you and Pete talk about?"

"Nothing. We just played."

Julia sees her daughter's cheeks redden. She suspects she's caught her at something but she's afraid to know what.

At that moment, Gladys joins Julia on a stool at the counter. Julia introduces her to Mona and, handing her the small menu, urges she order the pie. Gladys does so, Mona pours them both coffee, then retreats to the other end of the counter to plate the strawberry rhubarb.

Gladys begins to ask Julia interesting questions, but soon veers off the topic of the upcoming festival.

"Why the destruction of so many daffodils this year in particular?" she asks.

"Well," Julia begins. "There's been a boon in new construction in the last year. Of course, as we all know, that brings in new attitudes and new perspectives. Traditions get lost in the shuffle. New people want new things. But of course someone has to preserve the old ways.

This festival has been a tradition since 1958. It's a mainstay," she imparts. "And it's not *just* about community—of course there *is* that. But it's also a much-welcomed economic boost. The festival brings hundreds of tourists to the island even before the start of the regular season. Needless to say, our Main Street shops and restaurants and hotels all benefit from that. None of us wants to see the destruction of our famous daffodils. Nobody currently residing on the island, that is," she finishes with a diplomatic nod.

"What new attitudes are you referring to?"

"Oh," she sweeps her arms wide. "New generations. They plant privacy hedges and build planetariums and guest houses. One gentleman bought the property next to his for eight million dollars just so he could tear down the house and have an unspoiled ocean view. I haven't met him personally but I imagine he cares little about daffodils."

Gladys checks her notes.

"Was that Rainier Koslowski?" she asks.

Julia nods. "Yes. That's right. How did you know?"

"Ms. Murray-Chandler mentioned him."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I had tea with her yesterday. Right after the ferry docked. Do you know her?"

"Of course. Everyone knows Claudia. I imagine she had a great deal to say on the matter."

"She spoke a full two hours. I haven't met many eighty-year-olds, but she is remarkably spry. She mentioned a lot of other names, too. Some actually quite impressive ones. I had no

idea the island was such a draw for all these billionaires. I always thought of it as more low-key, you know? Laid back and preppy. Like Wasp-y blue-eyed families in tennis shorts.”

“Mm hmm.” Julia smiles. “So what did Claudia tell you about the festival?”

Gladys flips through her notes again. “Not much, honestly. I guess we got sidetracked. She told me one really interesting story, though. About a silver platter? Do you know it?”

“Ah. Yes.”

“She was nearly livid about the way one of the new residents poo-pooed it the other day.”

Julia has heard this story a hundred times already.

“How do you feel about it?” Gladys asks her.

Julia sees her pen is poised. It would be unwise of her to tell this reporter that Claudia Murray-Chandler is five minutes away from senility, that the silver platter episode was not the demise of civilization she makes it out to be.

“Well. We all have our quirks.”

“How do you mean?”

She shrugs. “One woman’s antique silver platter is another woman’s junk.”

“Where do you weigh in on it?”

“On what, exactly?”

“Ms. Murray-Chandler believes that the island is being infected with the virus of new money. A lot of people I talked to seem to think so.”

Julia pauses. This reporter is clever. Claudia would never use bio-medical terminology.

“Do you think the woman who poo-pooed the platter is a modern-day barbarian?”

Julia tries to gauge the level of earnestness in the reporter's voice.

"Did Claudia call her a barbarian?"

"Not directly. She said—" Gladys flips through her notes—"there's been an exchange of barbarian stories between the old-time residents. Stories about all these ostentatious and excessive displays of wealth. The monster yachts and private jets? Claudia finds it all very vulgar."

Gladys says it with undisguised glee, as if she's uncovered a scandal.

"Yes, I suppose some of the long-time residents might be feeling a bit put off by the...newcomers. As any community is bound to feel."

"But this island is so small. Do you think there's enough room for the old money and the new money to live side by side and get along? Are you worried there might be real trouble between the old families who've lived here for generations and the new ones just moving in?"

"My dear," she laughs nervously. "This isn't an Edith Wharton novel."

She scribbles this in her notes.

"Besides," Julia continues, "most of the new families have been very supportive of the festival. They're hosting fundraisers, they're donating materials. They want to keep the tradition of the daffodil festival alive on the island. I, for one, am grateful for the infusion of new blood. New blood brings new revenue, particularly the high-powered billionaire kind."

"Is there any 'new money' —here Gladys used her fingers to make quotes in the air—"on the festival committee board?"

"No. All of our board members happen to have been residents for at least ten years."

She scribbles this in her notes.

“So the power of belonging still operates on the island?”

This worries Julia.

“That’s not what I said,” she says.

“All the new money seems to have separated themselves from the old money. After all, they’ve built their own yacht club and their own country club. Do you think they’re sending a message?”

“The only message I’m getting is that they love this island as much as all the rest of us do.”

She doesn’t scribble this in her notes. She puts her hand to her chin and says “hmmm.” Her eyes pan the patrons in the coffee shop.

Julia follows her gaze. She’s proud to see she knows everyone in here—from the high school principal to Mona’s French teacher, from the retired sculptor to the ketchup heiress, from the mystery novelist to the antiques dealer to the pet groomer to the taxi driver. Julia feels her community here is warmly intact. She smiles. She looks back to the reporter. Gladys’s eyes have been caught by a commotion outside on the sidewalk. Through the windows Julia sees an unfamiliar couple, an older man and a younger woman walking a very small dog with a very loud bark. The dog has evidently seen something it doesn’t like because it pulls furiously on the leash until the woman bends to pick it up. She does this gingerly, Julia notices, no doubt due to the towering platform heels she wears and the cobbles of the sidewalk she has to avoid. As she straightens, she tucks several gold necklaces into her sweater to avoid the dog’s paws. Meanwhile, the man has been looking into the window of the coffee shop, shielding his eyes to see. He looks at the door, then the sign above the door. He says something to the woman

indicating the shop. She looks through the windows. She shakes her head and the couple moves on.

Julia takes a peek at Gladys. The reporter has something of a smirk on her face.

Chapter Twelve

Colette is having a vision. She sits alone in the bedroom of her childhood, propped on the bed with a laptop, while her father naps in his room. The annual Daffodil Committee Fundraising Dinner starts at 8 and she wants to be prepared.

For the moment she has suspended her animosity toward the festival. She doesn't know why her father offered her a ticket, but she quickly calculated the possibility that the Tomassians would be there and agreed to go. He was clearly not expecting her to accept, judging by the confused look on his face.

From what she heard, the dinner was a long, drawn-out excuse for attendees to dress up and claim allegiance to the island. Whether or not funds were actually raised, and whether or not the committee actually needed them, the adult residents of the island turned out in full regalia, gossiping and comparing yacht lengths. Colette doesn't remember ever having attended before. But if she's to persuade Tom Tomassian into silent partnership, she needs to have a plan of attack.

Quickly, before the power of the vision leaves her, she jots the idea that has blossomed on the heels of her encounter in the coffee shop with Pete and the teenaged waitress.

The film will open with a wide shot—a vast expanse of land rolling past the windows of an Amtrak train. The destination is a ranch. She places it somewhere in Montana where the age of consent for females is sixteen. The ranch, although bona fide and operational, is a well-guarded retreat for girls, a summer camp designed to provide instruction—proper, meaningful, explorative instruction—in the maturing of their sexual drives. Mothers send their daughters who then send their daughters and so on. Montana's best kept secret.

Feeling the palpable tension between Pete and the coffee shop girl—whose name she can only remember begins with an ‘M’—Colette considers what kind of knowledge girls of sixteen should possess. Despite the frenzied abundance of material available on the internet, what do girls actually know about sex? If they know nothing, how wise is it to leave their instruction in the hands of sixteen-year-old boys? Or forty-year-old guitar teachers?

So, Colette’s ranch. A cattle ranch manned by a crew of cowhands in dusty jeans with tanned faces—a fantasy intended perhaps more for the girls’ mothers, but Colette justifies this indulgence, or rather, doesn’t limit the indulgence. It’s a vision. It can be retooled later.

In the first scene, the young heroine—Jane—is seen riding the train through the expansive landscape, sitting sulkily beside her mother—Colette envisions Madeleine Stowe. Sharon Stone. Or Jacqueline Bissett.

“I’m too old for camp,” the girl says.

Her mother smiles.

The camera pans the interior of the train—various old and young people, families, individuals, snippets of conversation, the constant hum of the train’s momentum. The camera stops on a boy sitting beside his father. The boy stands and walks down the aisle toward the bathroom. He passes the heroine and her mother. Young Jane watches him unabashedly. Her mother pulls out a set of cards and hands them to her daughter.

“Go. Ask him if he wants to play.”

The daughter rolls her eyes and says nothing.

“Or you can just sit here and do the crossword with me.”

The heroine rises from her seat, takes the cards from her mother's hand, and follows in the tracks of the young man. Her mother puts away the magazine she's been reading, checks her watch, taps her fingers, pulls a flask from her purse. Smoothing her hair, she stands and walks in the opposite direction, toward the front of the car. She stops at the seat the young boy had vacated, bends slightly until the man looks up from his magazine. An Antonio Banderas. Better yet, Idris Elba. Yes, yes. Audiences love miscegenation stories.

"Your son and my daughter are playing cards," she says, lifting the flask. "Can I interest you?"

The man smiles. She sits.

Colette inserts an exterior shot as a segue—an orange glowing sunset to indicate the passage of time. Then a medium shot of Young Jane and the boy in the row she and her mother had occupied. They're both asleep, innocently, each under a red blanket, cards laid out on the table in front of them.

Cut to a medium shot of their parents, several rows away, sharing a red blanket, embracing quietly beneath its folds. Jacqueline Bissett's hair is mussed, her eyes are closed. In a close-up shot of his hands unbuttoning her shirt, his dark skin contrasts with the pale lilac silk. This is it—the ten-minute mark. Colette stops herself. Already this vision violates the conventions of American porn. But this won't be American porn, she says aloud. She resumes typing. This will be revolutionary porn. It has to be.

Idris Elba opens Jacqueline Bissett's shirt. She's not wearing a bra. Her breasts are revealed. His fingers stroke her nipples. They squeeze her flesh. His lips part, the camera pulls

back, his head bends to her breast and his lips suckle. Her head is thrown back, her neck stretches. She moans.

Colette stops again. The scene isn't working. The territory is too familiar. Film-by-numbers. This isn't the way revolutions are begun.

She stands to stretch. Already she's worried about the familiarity of her subject matter. A girls' summer camp. A dusty, remote locale. She can just picture a white-haired, rugged, denim-shirted man, leader of the cowhands, issuing a stern warning to the boys to keep them at bay all the while clearing the field for himself. She can just picture him sneaking through the forest and coming upon the girls bathing nude in a clear stream, braiding each other's hair, soaping each other's bodies, giggling, protesting when they first see him coming towards them, virtuously covering their breasts and then, after a jump cut, slowly soaping his body as he stands among them, naked now himself, while they continue to giggle. Well, of course, each girl begs him to take her virginity and he does so, knowing that at least three boys have followed him and are watching the whole scene from behind a dense clump of trees. The old man has triumphed. He has conquered. He has shown his superior virility and vanquished the younger men.

Although she bows her head in discontent, it occurs to Colette that this might be exactly the scene that would pique Tom Tomassian.

But it isn't what a sixteen-year-old girl thinks about.

Colette imagines the scene reversed. Jacqueline Bissett strolls through the woods and happens to come upon three cowhands, naked, standing in shallow water, soaping themselves

while laughing. She watches them for a while then emerges from behind a tree and walks toward them, disrobing as she goes. She stands among them while they bathe her.

And three teenage girls following Jacqueline Bissett through the forest—what would they see? The triumph of an aging woman?

She thinks of her own coming of age. True, Pete, technically, had been her first. But she had been raised with the entire sex industry on display in her father's study and her mother's closets. She read the Marquis de Sade in eighth grade—not understanding it entirely, but persevering to the end, at least sensing, somewhat, the shock of rebellion. By the time she was fourteen, she regarded sex as an act of no real significance and when she looked around her, her brother was right there.

Only a year apart, she and Oscar had most of the same friends and hung out with the same groups. They swam and paired off on the beaches, worked summer jobs lifeguarding and pouring coffee, watched their parents at parties—sometimes spying on them as they also paired off on the beaches. Oscar and Colette were inseparable the summer she turned fourteen.

But they had always been close and affectionate, even as children, Oscar making himself Colette's protector, mimicking in a suffocating way their father. At the time, Colette thought it only a natural extension of the roles they both seemed instinctively to imitate—although their parents appeared to be the darlings of daffodil festivals and school fundraisers, as children, Colette and Oscar witnessed conversations, negotiations, heated discussions in which their calm, rational mother prevailed over their hotheaded, explosive father. Thus, when Oscar protested the first time, stumbling in confused, half-coherent remonstrance, Colette spoke

calmly of the logic and good sense of the situation. Like their father, he acquiesced, like their mother, she legislated.

Uncomfortable around her since the day he got married, the two of them have never spoken of that summer. She still remembers it as the liberating event of her youth. Oscar, she knows, remembers it differently.

The following summer, she found herself sitting beside a bonfire waiting for Pete to finish singing the song he'd composed for the daffodil parade—a song that parade officials, including her father, praised as the most heartfelt representation of the spirit of the festival. At the time, she felt the same strange impulse to prevail—the same gritting of her teeth and the same pacification in her voice. Pete, like Oscar, protested only momentarily.

She can't imagine the coffee shop waitress legislating Pete. Too bad not every sixteen-year-old girl has a brother first.

But that's the reason for the summer camp.

Chapter Thirteen

“So how was your lesson?” Schuyler asks.

“Really cool,” Mona says. She’s pulling t-shirts with slogans out of her drawer, holding them up and eyeing herself in the mirror. Schuyler puts on mascara in thick clumps, wipes it off with makeup remover and re-applies it. “Pete’s teaching me this really hard song,” Mona says, “but he says I’m picking it up fast. So.”

“That’s cool. What really hard song?”

“‘Sunshine of Your Love.’ It’s classic rock.”

“Oh. I mean, if you’re into that kind of stuff.”

“What do you mean?”

“Old stuff. Stuff that doesn’t matter anymore. Stuff our parents care about.”

“Pete cares about it.”

“Whatever.”

The girls are in Mona’s bedroom, discussing their plans for the night. They haven’t yet talked about the expected event of the evening, but Mona has already told her mother they’ll be at a friend’s house whose parents will be at the Daffodil Committee Fundraiser dinner and she’ll be home late.

“I didn’t realize you and Schuyler were such good friends,” her mother had said. “I don’t remember you hanging out with her last summer.”

Mona is again uncomfortable with the subterfuge, but there’s no way to tell her mother that she and Schuyler, having worked together for the entire school year at Holly’s, have vowed

to lose their virginity by the end of the summer. Although they didn't make it a contest, Schuyler clearly believes that she will be first and clearly believes that's an important fact.

Their friendship grew slowly over the winter months when they spent most of their time behind the counter waiting for customers. They were tentative with each other when they both started back in September—they knew each other, of course, had grown up on the island together, had been in classes together, but Schuyler's family tended to take her out of school for extended vacations—to Europe, Australia, Japan, South Africa—so most of her instruction came via traveling tutors and excused-absence exams. Mona's mother seemed to dote on Schuyler when she saw her at the coffee shop and Mona was unsure whether that was because Schuyler's mother was an important fixture of the Daffodil Committee, or because her mother secretly wished Mona could be more like Schuyler—bilingual (French, of course), courteous, stylish, and knowledgeable about current events.

This past winter, however, Schuyler's parents let her stay on the island in the house by herself while they island-hopped in the Caribbean. Her grandmother, Penelope Carruthers, had also opted to stay on the island for the winter and the two of them, respectively, promised to keep an eye on each other.

When Schuyler first showed Mona the lipstick book, way back in November, she said she had come across it in a used bookstore in Hyannis while waiting for the ferry after a weekend at her grandmother's Beacon Hill house. Her grandmother was deep in conversation with the proprietor and didn't notice the stack of paperbacks Schuyler brought to the register.

"Check it out," she had said to Mona.

Mona took the book and thumbed through its pages.

“So?”

Schuyler shot her a look.

“So. It’s a book about blow job parties.”

She said it like it was a glamorous event. She said it with reverence and conviction.

Mona said, again, “So?”

“So. You can’t be a virgin all your life.”

“I don’t plan on it.”

“Well, this is a solution.”

Mona gave thought to her proposition for the rest of that shift. She concluded that there was no boy on the island she liked enough to offer that to.

“You don’t have to like him,” Schuyler said impatiently. “This is just practice.”

Mona disagreed with this logic. But she tried another tactic.

“What are they going to do for us?”

“Ugh. Hopefully nothing. I don’t want them to touch me.”

“How exactly are you going to lose your virginity that way?”

Schuyler seemed to consider this, as if she hadn’t thought about it.

“I guess I’ll just practice this for now. And then when the real thing happens, it won’t be such a big deal, you know? I won’t be all tweaked out. I don’t want to be a trembling virgin.”

That was a frequent topic between them that winter—the young adult virgin love stories in the novels and movies the freshman class was consuming. Both she and Schuyler were annoyed by what they called the tremblingness and helplessness of the heroines and the father-like authority of the males. In their AP English class they read *Anna Karenina* and *The*

Awakening in the same semester—Schuyler mostly while abroad. Mona had asked the English teacher, Mr. Hudnut, why literary heroines were so prone to suicide and fatal illness.

“That’s a good question,” he had told her, without answering it.

She surmised on her own that girls who fall in love end up dead, at least in literature.

That must be the difference, she thinks now, on her way to Trey Gavin’s party, between literature and porn.

PART III

Chapter Fourteen

The Annual Daffodil Festival Committee fundraising dinner traditionally begins at 8. Thus, the cocktail hour is usually three, hosted respectively by the members of the daffodil committee, who, upon divvying up the annual list of benefactors, set out to finagle donations, solicit personal appearances, drum up publicity, and stoke fires of enthusiasm for the grand parade, antique car show, dog beauty contest, and best hat competition.

This year, Julia Drake-Thornton has decided not to host one of these satellite receptions since, as the chairperson, she explained, she should be present at *all* the receptions, even if just for a brief time. No one quibbled over this—the other four members divvied up the remaining guest list and set about outdoing each other: an Italian wine tasting aboard a yacht, a continental cheese and caviar affair in a private atrium, an intimate unplugged performance on another yacht by a well-known folksinger from the next island over, and a backyard clam bake.

“Is that a good idea, Rutherford, a clam bake right before a five-course dinner?” said a concerned committee member during the initial planning stages.

“It’s just clams, Regina. And it’ll be three hours before dinner. I’d be more concerned about your cheese and caviar pairing. Who eats cheese with caviar?”

“it’s obviously too European for your provincial tastes. You need to get out more.”

The ritual backbiting and territorial dispute between Rutherford Benson and Regina Carruthers, another annual tradition, always reminds Julia of a George Cukor movie. She was hopeful for a very brief moment that their ritual might come to an end this year once Rutherford learned of the Koslowskis’ brusque decline of his invitation to the clam bake and,

only days later, Regina, in an attempt to poach them for her own, learned of the swift decline of hers.

They sniffed in unison: "I guess they don't care about the welfare of the island."

You would think the dual snub would unify the two of them, Julia said to the other two members, but there was a deep chasm between the socialite heiress and the modernist sculptor, the origin of which was hazy, at least to Julia.

A potential wrench in the works for tonight's events, however, is Gladys Osmont. The reporter was invited to each of the four pre-parties and the formal dinner afterwards as a means of exposing her to the festival culture, but after the sharp turn of her inquiry at Holly's coffee earlier, Julia senses a possible derailment of those plans.

Thus, when Mona informs her casually that she and Schuyler will be hanging out at a friend's house, Julia dutifully asks who and where, and dutifully responds affirmatively when told the Gavinses, whom she knows will be at the folksinger reception, and instructs the girls to have fun. She was listening, of course, but not overly concerned that the skinny, polite Trey Gavin of the lacrosse team or any of his lightweight friends would pose much of a threat.

Occupying her mind at the moment are Gladys's questions, her probing into the dynamics of the island and the alleged barbarian stories in circulation. As she dresses for the night's formal dinner (five courses including a sorbet intermezzo) to be held in the Grand Ballroom of the island's historical-register country club, she thinks about the possibility of a class divide on the island—not between the Haves and the Have-nots, but between the Haves and the Have-mores.

Pulling out the ten-year-old black sequined designer dress from her closet, the one whose seams she had to have restitched where the threads had pulled, the thought sits uncomfortably on her mind that she's not sure where in a class battle she would legitimately place Mona and herself. When her husband passed away a dozen years ago, he'd left them well-off enough for her to move permanently to the island to raise her then-four-year-old daughter in what she thought would be beneficial circumstances. What she wanted for herself was to be safe and shielded in the arms of a small-town-like community, rather than exposed to the competitive fangs and hard-edged manner of life in the Boston of the early 90s.

She was comforted, back then, by the easy-going nature of the residents—the eccentric sculptors, potterers, perfume and jewelry makers, the salt-of-the earth teachers, nurses, shopworkers, guitar players, and the aging heirs to the fading family fortunes of the Carruthers famous ketchup line, and the Murrays and the Chandlers of the infamous banking scandals—and the easy accommodation of the island. Back then, the shift to full-time island life made less of a demand on her self-definition.

But young Gladys Osmont is in the process of sniffing out a Darwinian struggle in progress. She's just enough of an outsider, and just enough of a wishful thinker, Julia suspects, to want to pen a story more epic than the quaint, human interest coverage of a weekend daffodil festival. Julia knows it's difficult for certain generations to appreciate decorating hats, dogs and cars with giant simulations of pastel flowers, regardless of the philanthropic results. There are more important things in the world, she's been told, repeatedly, by more than just her daughter—poverty, for instance, hunger, inequality, violence. Oh yes, she thinks, all the same important things that have plagued the country and all the same important protests that

have unified youth for the last century. She must seem appallingly out of date to Mona.

Probably Gladys Osmont as well.

Perhaps this is her place on the island—widow, single mother, homemaker, head-in-the-sand throwback. Why she always found comfort in the very things her generation most devalued—propriety, manners, cake decorating—and especially what her hippie older sister railed against, was a mystery to her, but she clung to her own notions of womanhood. She knew better than to try to force them on Mona—Mona reminded her every day, more and more, of her sister Audrey. She thought it would be good for Mona if Audrey visited more often, but her two visits, committed almost a dozen years ago, were such a disaster that neither of them had a desire to repeat them.

In 1993, after she and Mona moved permanently to the island, she invited Audrey. Audrey was an established professor of Women's Studies at Berkeley, having made a name for herself as a radical feminist and anti-porn critic in the 80s. She came to stay with them for a week. At the time Julia was only a periphery on the island, not yet a fixture, but even without her involvement in committee work or fundraising, Audrey railed against the futility and political irresponsibility of philanthropic dabbling in daffodils, ladies auxiliaries, and basket coalitions. Julia endured Audrey's ranting out of habit, glad that Mona was too young to understand.

Audrey had visited one other time after that, in 1995. That time hadn't been just a social visit, but a professional responsibility, she explained. She travelled across the country to attend a film festival in Boston commemorating the 20th anniversary screening of *Nights of Rio*, a movie Julia knew of only slightly and mostly through Audrey's remonstrances. It wasn't until

then, in fact, that she was even aware that the same Seth Scott who was the director of one of the most celebrated X-rated movies ever made, was the same man living not even ten miles from her. Audrey had only spent a couple days with them that time, so Julia didn't mention that Seth Scott lived on the other side of the island and she assumed Audrey didn't know.

It confused Julia more than she liked to admit that X-rated films had become chic enough to warrant an entire festival in celebration of their existence. She herself was of the same mindset as the day she and Audrey snuck into their father's room and carefully thumbed through their father's hidden stash of *Playboys*.

Julia was twelve years old, in a new pair of saddle shoes that day in 1970 when they snuck into their parents' bedroom and came across the vintage December 1953 issue with Marilyn Monroe as the centerfold. When she discovered that page, she dropped the magazine on the floor, and stood frozen in melodrama. She told fifteen-year-old Audrey that this was something they just shouldn't be doing anymore. Audrey scowled at her, irritated, not with Julia's sudden declaration of piety, but with her careless handling of their father's fragile magazine—if a single page got wrinkled or torn, she complained, they would be exposed, punished, and shamed. Even at twelve, Julia knew that was true.

Years later, Julia came to understand that she had experienced a profound shock seeing a woman in those pages who had also officiated at the beloved Miss America parade that same year. The reconciliation of those two images was too difficult for her. She wanted to keep them apart, as two different kinds of women, one that was respected, admired, and looked up to, the other a hidden secret thrust away behind stacks of *Life* and *Time*.

All these years later, Julia learned to tolerate the base fascination of pornography all around her, the trashy-art appeal it had for some people, but she preferred nice things.

Still, she could hardly avoid Seth Scott. Here on this island, there was a modicum of respect even for the eccentric residents—they were at the same parties, the same dinners, the same parades, their children played together.

It's because of this history of liberal tolerance that Julia's surprised these same residents are intolerant now of just a little money. Undoubtedly, property values have become inflated—a benefit for the heirs of fading bloodlines whose estates are now tripling or quadrupling in value, but a shame for the middle-class families whose salaries prohibit home ownership and are starting to flock off-island. Their imminent absence from the island will leave daily life in the hands of a more powerful species, she thinks, who are already importing workers from the mainland for the maintenance, upkeep, construction and cleaning of their respective land masses.

Sliding in the diamond cluster studs that were a wedding gift from her late husband, she feels a surge of protectiveness for her island. She's beginning to see what Gladys might be seeing, however misguided or misinterpreted—after all, it's not like the names on the island census are the same names as those on the Social Register of the old days—there are no Vanderbilts here. Everyone still eats at the same restaurants, rides the same ferry, bakes the same lobsters in the same lobster pots. Even the feud between Rutherford and Regina is comforting if for nothing other than its predictability.

What Gladys sees, through eyes of wonder and youth and the trickle-down residuals of Reagonomics, is the spectacle of the grandiose: the Koslowskis and the Tomassians with

endless parades of extravagance and self-indulgence and solid gold toilet seats. What she doesn't see is the history, the tradition, the family values. Julia wants her to see that tonight.

She feels a surge of confidence in the restorative power of the Daffodil Festival.

But she cautions herself—she's felt this way before.

Chapter Fifteen

When the country club opens its doors, the sky is golden-red, setting the placid water in the harbor ablaze. Moored yachts gently bobble like great sleeping beasts while yachters armed with the club's best champagne secret aboard in large groups or discreet pairs. Strains of folk music and The Three Tenors blend inharmoniously in the ears of the passersby on the long dock, in between clinking glasses, snorts of laughter, lapping pelts of water, and cawing seagulls.

It's the Daffodil Committee's annual Fundraising dinner at the oldest country club on the island. Before the dinner begins, patrons are wined and wooed at pre-parties, included in the cost of their five-hundred-dollar-a-plate tickets.

When the sun finally disappears, revelers become anxious over the sudden chill. While the men have the weight of tuxedos trapping their body heat (and setting off their tanned faces), the women in spaghetti straps or sleeveless bodices to highlight their sculpted shoulders and taut backhand delts shrug into pashminas or fur capes, as they make their way into the rosy warmth of the club's candlelit dining room, taking the encroaching night air as the signal that dinner will soon begin.

At the sound of a discreet gong, the room assembles itself around elaborately set tables. One boisterous group of about fifteen brings up the rear, loudly and indiscreetly discussing the earlier arrival of a two-hundred foot boat (no one says yacht). Its destination, says one, was that new little club the hedge fund boys threw together down the harbor. Half a million dollars to join, says another, with a snort. Who can blame them, says a third. The waiting list for this club [i.e. their own club] is over a year. The wager put in place before they sit is that none of those hedge fund boys even play golf.

Dinner begins with the traditional serving of dinner rolls and room temperature butter. Although the room is opulent, it is also a bit on the stuffy side, a conservatism that carries over into its cuisine. Portions are neither grandiose nor minute, presentation neither elegant nor austere, sauces neither too rich nor very tasty—all terribly dignified and bland, “just right” as you’re sure people must be thinking. But, the salad greens are crisp and locally grown, the tomatoes are heirloom, the dressing is house-made, the filet mignon is perfectly red on the inside and perfectly charred on the outside, the white wine is dry, the red wine tart, the port ruby, the conversation benign, the dancing gentle. Whatever they may lack in imagination, this “old money” society more than makes up for in impeccable quality.

Gladys already knows this is too much for the Sunday edition. But she’s hoping to score a NYT Magazine feature with what she knows is a story percolating just under this glossy surface.

Chapter Sixteen

Seth sits at the table in the Grand Ballroom. So far in the last two days, his daughter has shown up unannounced, has snooped through his study, read his memoir, dragged him to the Tomassian house under the suspicious pretense of family tradition, tagged along to his coffee shop after complaining there was no coffee in his house and generally ruined his mood. Because he didn't want her running amok in the house again, he suggested she come to the daffodil dinner. So here she is, across the room, wearing an emerald green dress she found in her mother's closet that hangs from her shoulders and appears to be choking her.

She's strong-willed, Astrid would say.

She's a slob, he thinks.

And her inscrutability is irritating. There was never a time during her childhood when he thought theirs would evolve into a close father-daughter relationship—she would never confide in him, depend on him, rely on him or go to him for advice or meaningful conversation, and he never cultivated it. She had the mindset that her father was an adversary, and during the teenage years when he feared an Electra complex, he did nothing to dispel that mindset. He pushed her toward independence. Maybe hurled her. The day she curled up in his lap, she was eleven years old, and asked him if he would put her in one of his movies, he felt a thing very close to panic. No, he told her. She'd have to make her own movies.

"But why, Daddy?"

She was a strongly muscled child, heavy in his lap, not thin like so many of her friends with bony knees and buck teeth. Colette was sturdy, well-muscled, with a plump of baby fat still in her cheeks. She would take after her mother—he was sure of it.

“Because. That’s what we do.”

“Mom didn’t do it.”

“That was different.” He would have said *your mother was a goddess*, a statement he made frequently to reporters to shut down any line of questioning and elicit appreciative nods. It took only once to learn that female reporters weren’t shut down so easily. This was his earliest memory of sidestepping issues with Colette, of being careful. It was his last memory of her sitting in his lap.

She hadn’t known then the nature of her father’s film career. Just that there were always young women, in photos, at parties, in magazine articles, sometimes at the house, dressed in shiny, revealing outfits with heavily made-up faces and grown men doting on them. To an eleven-year-old girl that must have seemed important. He knew that to her twelve-year-old brother it was eye-popping.

Out of habit, he scans the women in the room, his face molded into docile appreciation. The older women drape their shoulders with pashminas and jackets, some having wrapped their necks in shimmering scarves or thick jeweled chokers, their hair, thinning, dyed, coarse, swept back in old-fashioned knots or cut razor-short and accented with oversized black-frame glasses. Some with their nails long, pristine and delicately tinted, some with blunt-short uncolored fingertips. Widowed dowager Claudia with rouged cheeks and pink lips, framed with diamonds, beige tones and arched brows. Eccentric heiress Penelope, topped with a spherical crownlike hat, buttoned into a raspberry and silver brocade pantsuit, pinned with a giant tarantula brooch. All hold drinks in one hand, hors d’oeuvres in the other, all stand with charm and poise. Out of habit, he pictures them without clothes, with soft backlighting, with closed

eyes, with small smiles responding to his gentle coaxes, allowing him to position their arms, their hands, complicit with his directions while he zooms a camera in and out.

He was not a passive director. He was, in the best understanding of the term, a hands-on director. He doesn't know when his children first saw *Nights of Rio*, but certainly by 1995, they were both aware that this was their heritage. Neither accepted the honor of introducing their father at the 20th anniversary screening, and neither showed up.

Astrid had passed shortly before Seth left for the screening, and both children seemed to hold him a grudge about it. Add to that the fiasco of the screening itself, the protests, the rallies, the numerous incidents both public and private, the subsequent city-enacted ban on adult film festivals, and suddenly the coronation of his first feature-length film as a cult classic and industry standard became the first and only taint on his well-calculated career.

But this room is his vindication. Hardwood floors, twenty-foot ceilings, white wainscoting, enormous arrangements of daffodils and birds of paradise, a jazz quartet in the corner. The Grand Ballroom.

No matter how ungrateful his daughter might be, or how flippant his son, he brought them here—he gave them this. They went to birthday parties in this room, bar and bat mitzvahs, graduations, weddings, and, every year, the daffodil fundraising dinners and post-festival wrap-ups. Not bad for a seedy centerfold photographer from western Pennsylvania whose destiny had been corn farming until the day he sent in a snapshot of his neighbor Letitia sunbathing in the loft of his father's barn. He convinced her to kiss him, then convinced her to pose for him and she unbuttoned her top without hesitation. When he showed her the back pages of the girly magazine he sent that photo to, she ripped it to shreds, spat in his face and

never spoke to him again. He was heartbroken for a week, until he saw an ad in that same issue for amateur photographers to get professional credentials at a seminar the magazine sponsored in Pittsburgh. A few years later he was strolling Haight-Ashbury with a Nikon SLR perpetually around his neck, documenting love-ins until the day he found himself on the streets of Rio de Janeiro sneaking through favelas with little packets of heroin, looking for Ipanema girls.

Inconceivable that these are memories his literary agent is skeptical about. Another coming-of-age-in-the-60s memoir, she called it. Any memoir is useless, she told him, if it's not marketable, and, according to her mysterious demographic statistics, there's evidently nothing marketable in his name anymore. Do something, she said. Remind people.

Remind people of what, he asked her. They're surrounded by an endless feast of sexual opportunity every day, a liberation brought about in large part by his own hands. Not to mention 1975—that exceptional year. Already, just thirty years later, they need to be reminded? How could they have already forgotten?

Hundreds of people made porn in the 70s, she said. I didn't make porn, he said, his neck hairs bristling.

Yes, yes, yes, she said, hurrying him out of her office. The point is what are you doing now?

He leaves the dinner table and weaves through the crowded room. Colette has planted herself at the bar doing whatever mingling she can over the bartenders' uncorking of champagne bottles and soda gun splashes into highballs. She looks at ease finally, with a drink in her hand.

Like father, like daughter, Astrid would say.

He wants to shake his head and scowl, make disapproval visible, but Colette isn't looking at him. And if she were, he imagines she would respond by raising her glass in salute. Again he marvels that the entire scope of femininity has escaped her—all the grace and elegance of womanly things. Eyes don't settle easefully on her. Every gesture she makes seems to want to repel even accidental glances. She seems so very uninterested.

"That's a sight I thought I'd never see. Especially at one of these things."

Penelope Carruthers appears alongside him, her bespectacled gaze fixed on Colette. She holds a champagne flute.

"I didn't think she'd ever come back," she says.

"Nor did I."

"Is that one of Astrid's old dresses?"

He grunts assent.

"Remarkable," she says. "Not only is she here, but she's here dressed as her mother. And just in time to save the daffodils. How did that happen?"

He turns away from the view of Colette. "I have no idea. But it can't be good."

"Maybe she's had a change of heart and wants to make amends. She's at that age, now, the mid-life crisis age. Maybe she's ready to come home."

"She's come back to spy on me."

"Interesting. Why?"

"Who knows? Maybe she wants to put me away, declare me incompetent, sell the house and disappear with her inheritance."

Penelope lifts her glass to her mouth and swallows. A woman in her sixties, she has, in Seth's opinion, aged well, as the heiress to a condiment fortune might be expected to do. With a house on the harbor side, a brownstone on Beacon Hill, and a villa in Tuscany, she is the exotic personification of the Grand Ballroom—classic, architectural, a bit eccentric, comfortable.

"Incompetency is difficult to prove," she says.

"Not when it comes to sex and old men."

"At any rate, she'd have to have a conversation with you in order to declare you incompetent. She's hardly said two words to you tonight."

"She doesn't need a conversation. Just one well-placed accusation."

Penelope scrutinizes his face. "An accusation of what?"

"Anything will do. Lord knows there's enough to choose from. Obscenity. Public indecency. Delinquency of minors. Et cetera."

Penelope laughs. "Who's going to accuse you of any of that? You've been dormant for the last ten years."

Seth shrugs. "A friend. A stranger. A neighbor."

Penelope pauses.

"You wouldn't be feeling a little paranoid, would you?" she says.

"You said yourself you thought you'd never see the day. Yet here she is."

"Just because she came back doesn't mean she wants to rob you of your kingdom."

"She's not here to bring me grandchildren."

"You're forgetting you're the only family she has."

"Believe me, I've never forgotten that."

"Have you talked to Oscar?"

"About why his estranged sister just flew halfway across the globe to torment me? No."

"Maybe he knows something."

"If he knew anything, he'd call me. I think he's terrified of her."

Penelope laughs. "Such a forlorn-looking girl to inspire such anxiety. She's almost a little pathetic. Like she just needs a hug."

"The way a viper needs a hug."

"Maybe you should call Oscar. At the very least, he could stop her from having you put down and running away with your gold. If that's why she's here."

"I'm telling you, she's after something, and she thinks she's going to find it in my study."

"I suppose that's the first place one would look," she says, her attention diverted for the moment by two approaching figures—Julia and a scraggly-haired woman with darting eyes and a too-alert look—crossing the room towards them.

"Dear God," Seth says under his breath. "What fresh hell is this?"

"Could this be Julia's new ingénue? A crusader in training?"

"Surely the daffodils have been rescued enough by now. It's about time we humans got a committee to save us from the plants."

"You should lead with that."

The two women stop in front of them, Julia's evident oratory trailing off as Gladys's arm outstretches itself to clasp onto Penelope's free hand.

"Gladys Osmont," she says. "New York Times."

"Gladys is doing a story on the festival," Julia says.

"Penelope Carruthers."

"Penelope's a long-time supporter of the festival," Julia informs the woman. "In fact, she chaired the committee for a while in the 70s."

"Oh?" says Gladys.

"Yes," Julia nods. "Those were pivotal years, weren't they, Penelope? They were environmental pioneers back then. Spearheaded solar energy on the island."

Gladys doesn't make note of this. She turns her attention to Seth.

"Gladys Osmont," she repeats and clasps his hand.

"Seth Scott," he announces. He takes her hand and waits for a sign of recognition.

"How do you do, Mr. Scott?"

"Just fine," he says. He notices Julia eyeing him closely.

"I trust Julia's giving you a good story," he says.

"The whole island is giving me a good story."

"I see. A very good cause," he leans in to tell her.

"How long have you lived on the island, Mr. Scott?"

"Call me Seth."

She nods, encouraging him to continue.

"We moved here in 1975. My wife Astrid and I and our two children. It was an exceptional year for—"

"And are your children still on the island?" she asks.

“What’s that? My children? One of them happens to be here tonight, as a matter of fact.”

“Oh?”

Her eyes dart back and forth, as if she’ll pick out the one somehow.

“Yes,” he says, waiting to see if she will. “The other teaches history at a university in Vermont. Funny story about 1975—”

“And have you always been a member of this club?”

“Of course.”

“What do you think of the new country club opening up down the harbor?”

“Oh, that. Well, I suppose boys need their playgrounds,” he shrugs.

“Do you know it’s half a million dollars to join?”

“Really? Do you know how much it is to join this club?”

“No, I don’t,” she says, her ears perking up.

“That’s because we have better things to talk about at dinner.”

“Yes,” she nods, her eyes narrowing. “So you think it’s vulgar to talk about money at dinner?”

“Vulgar’s an old-fashioned word.”

“What would you call it? This practice of discussing one’s worth?”

“One’s worth in monetary terms I call boring. Now, if we’re talking in terms of cultural worth or artistic worth—”

“Or daffodils,” Julia says.

“Yes, of course,” says Gladys. “The daffodils are important.” She gives her attention to Julia.

“Do you think philanthropy isn’t as much of a priority to the—” she scare-quotes—
 “‘hedge fund boys’ as it is to all of you here tonight?”

“Plenty of hedge fund boys are here tonight,” Julia says shifting uncomfortably.

“Oh?” Gladys says, eyeing the room. “I’d love to meet one.”

“All right.”

They stand and Julia leads her in the direction of the bar where, Seth notices, no hedge-fund boys are congregated.

“Mr. Scott, I hope we can talk later,” Gladys says.

“I’ll be here all night.”

“And I’d love to talk to your daughter,” she says turning to follow Julia.

He watches them walk away, wondering what it means that his daughter is now the bigger attraction.

He sucks air through his teeth. No longer able to hold the attention of an ambitious young girl. The world, he sees, is ready to retire him, just a scant ten years after the *Boston Globe* named *Nights of Rio* the film that made porn history. Even here in this room he’s not the icon he was, not the revolutionary, no longer stylish or captivating. Here, he’s just another old man, one of four dozen milling around, bald, gray-bearded, red-faced, teasing their wives, jostling the grown-up daughters of other old men, squinting their eyes, tapping their foreheads. Seeking solace in the company of other aging men.

Most of them he's seen in golf pants and swim trunks, their freckled skin either sagging or bloated. These captains of industry, retired. They're probably all writing memoirs.

Even Connie Craig, deteriorating in a studio apartment on the boardwalk in Queens, in and out of the VA hospital with diabetes, manic depression and probably substance abuse complications, even he borrows his lawyer's laptop to chronicle his bottomed-out state in a blog he calls "Suck'n'fuck."

Seth's agent forwarded him the link to Connie's blog after she came across the posting of an open letter addressed to Seth and other men in their former circle, many of whom had been at the premiere of *Nights of Rio* in 1975, and a few of whom had managed to be present for the 1995 revival, at which Connie emceed.

"I may be a fat, sick, wheelchair-bound slob," his blog began, "but I still have both my legs and I can still eat a pussy."

His five ex-wives bled him dry. His business partner in the 80s swindled him out of subsidiary rights when his local-access midnight soft-core show went to video—then DVD. And all the girls he promoted at his burlesque theater in Times Square—whose careers he'd launched—no longer had anything to do with him.

"You fuckers," the open letter said. "Fuck you scumbags who thought that Conrad Craig was stuck in the fucking VA with a straight jacket and a ball stuffed in his mouth. Fuck you syphilitic pukes who thought that I would merely lay down and die like an old Jew in a rusty wheelchair. I am alive, my brain still functions, my dick is soft but I have a rigid tongue, and I am ready as ever to suck on pussy and give the world's assholes a tongue lashing."

“I have two real friends left. The others who have dumped me like an ex-girlfriend include Larry Flynt, Howard Stern, Ron Jeremy, Hugh Hefner, and Seth Scott. I could go on and on about non-celebrities who dumped me but since you don’t know who they are, it doesn’t matter. I need a fucking job. I had applied for a job at Pizza Hut, Walgreens, B & N (they wouldn’t hire me because I beat the rap against them for shoplifting) Do any of you have a Peep Show where I can mop the sticky cum off the floors? I will work for less than minimum wage plus a handjob.”

And from this, Seth’s agent urged him to call Connie, take a trip to Queens and make a video short (a youtube video, she said) of their reunion—two legends of porn, reliving their past, reminiscing over orgies, starlets, the power, the notoriety, the obscenity trials. That would generate some publicity, she said. Seth told her he’d think about it.

But it smacks of desperation. He knows it and Connie would know it. Worse, he’s reluctant to see in person the demise of Conrad Craig with his front teeth missing, or smell it after an extended stay in the hospital, or be asked to finance it. Connie had made his choices. Thirty years ago, he said porn was indestructible, that his strip clubs, hardcore magazine and group sex clubs were going to live happily ever after and that he would be smutking of all he surveyed—even after he lost five houses and all his worldly possessions. He lived his fin de siècle in the 70s, dispensing handfuls of pills, powder, and rubber tubes at 15-person hot tub parties with rotating guest lists, using his own magazine to document the debauchery of his life. Even thirty years ago Seth could see, hear and smell the early signs of self-destruction oozing out of Conrad Craig. He and Astrid made select appearances at select parties—Connie did make *Rioooooh!* a household word, they owed him that—but they discreetly left that scene and

bought a house on a conservative New England island with a history of whale fishing. At that point, Oscar and Colette were already ten and nine—they couldn't stay hidden in a Greenwich Village apartment and be expected to turn out okay.

Colette leans on the bar, supporting herself by her elbows, jutting herself into random conversations, smiling in a way that Seth knows must be charming, but still feels laced with malice to him. A frame that should have taken after her mother's in luscious fleshed-out curves, is instead bony, angular, and fleshless, as if self-sabotaged. While her brother, once an eagle scout and lifeguard, sits at a cluttered desk in his cluttered Vermont house consuming more calories in his immobility than he'll ever burn in a lifetime of grading research papers.

But the alternative, had they stayed in the Village, might have been an outcome like Conrad Craig's.

The last time Seth saw Connie was at the screening of *Nights of Rio* in 1995. Healthy then, though drunk and evidently delusional, he peppered his long-winded introduction with anecdotes of Linda Lovelace's blowjobs and personal proclamations of the porn industry's debt to himself and, inserting it as an afterthought, Seth Scott. The mostly young, mostly male crowd cheered and celebrated the occasion by groping passing girls. While Connie waxed on about beating the obscenity trials, about a-dollar-a-lick pussy lunch buffets in Times Square, about owning four houses, two Rolls Royces, and the most successful cable-access tv show in New York, about how even a slob like him could have sex with the sexiest women of the decade, a drunken assault of a cocktail waitress was occurring in the ladies' room by a college senior whose defense was the general atmosphere of sexual liberation. The spirit of the event encouraged it, his lawyer argued. That everyone in attendance was complicit in the promotion

of that behavior. Many months later he was convicted but, although the boy failed to grasp the fundamental accomplishment of the then-titled Golden Age and the basic definition of liberation, the press coverage elicited the familiar backlash that put Seth Scott's name on people's lips once again. He was courted for interviews. He gave measured responses that weighed the gravity of the situation without losing sight of the nature of the revival. He managed to suggest that Connie's self-serving walk down memory lane shouldered most of the blame, rather than the movie itself which was, he explained at length, a love story. He was surprised at the time that the press was mostly amenable to his defenses. The media were more interested in excoriating the officials of the film festival for lax security measures rather than the thirty-year-old classic of sex films.

Of course there were the articles rehashing the subjugation-of-women argument. Even after hearing it for thirty years, and trying to understand it, he still doesn't see how the admiration of female beauty equals subjugation. He loves women. He shared his love for Astrid with the whole world.

Chapter Seventeen

Synopsis: Told through Mona's perspective, as she, Schuyler, Trey Gavin and another boy drink margaritas and start watching *Nights of Rio*.

Chapter Eighteen

Synopsis: Told through Gladys Osmont's perspective as she interviews people at the Daffodil Dinner and gets the full story about the silver platter.

Chapter Nineteen

Synopsis: Told through Colette's perspective as she roams The Grand Ballroom looking for the Tomassians who don't show up.

END PART III.

PART IV

Chapter Twenty

1995.

The same year that Oscar Scott was welcomed into the ranks of academia, a band of rabid loyalists organized a film festival to inaugurate his father into their brand new erotic cinema hall of fame. When he heard the news, Oscar nodded at the timeliness of the circumstances which would put father and son in the same city at the same time, the latter in celebration of his tenure-track position, the former in acknowledgement of the twentieth anniversary of his infamous directorial debut.

“Hard to believe it’s been twenty years,” Oscar said to his father, while nodding.

“Your mother would have loved this,” said his father.

“Mm hmm.”

This was inarguably true—Astrid Donascimento Scott would have loved the adoration, the reverence, the strange dignity that had lately characterized the resurgence of appreciation for the “lost” jubilant films of the Seventies. She had always defended her sensitive husband against accusations of obscenity, dismissing the American moral code as so much puritan hypocrisy.

As his leading lady, however, she had much to contend with herself, from the benign label of muse to a hysterical branding as an unfit mother. Brazilians weren’t well-known for chaste modesty, she had told Oscar and his sister, pronouncing the two words with a venom that curled her lip. She may have been transplanted to this country, she’d said in numerous interviews, but she hadn’t been erased. That is, she hadn’t been indoctrinated or re-virginized

or had her frontal lobe jiggled with an ice pick. She was still the proud Brazilian daughter of a sugar plantation owner.

Although that denomination was meaningful to her, conferring upon her a cosmopolitan status that indicated participation in intellectual arenas, she would soon learn that it meant nearly nothing to the specialized public she reached through the magazines that printed those interviews (*Fuckbuddies*, *Tongue Twist-hers*, etc.) To her dying day she did not understand why American magazines' stories about her were eclipsed by stills from that film. She didn't understand moreover why they bothered interviewing her at all when what they seemed most concerned with had nothing to do with her articulate answers to their disingenuous questions, but rather with how many shots of her glistening body parts could be used to fill the remainder of the page.

Oscar didn't doubt she would be proud of this conflagration of events.

"I mean about your job," Seth said, after a long moment. "She would have been very proud of you."

"Mm hmm."

The night of his faculty reception, Oscar Scott, just over the cusp of thirty, stood in a dark suit, cut to be flattering but not imposing, in front of an assembly of academics, most of whom were at least fifteen years his senior. He felt he was being eyed with suspicion since, to them, he must be just an untried, inexperienced amateur from the East. The wariness he felt he saw etched in their faces, although mildly camouflaged by polite smiles, made Oscar acutely aware that his presence here was probationary. The department regretted that they couldn't

make the budget work so he had been contracted out for the year, one single year, and would be asked to renew for another if his work merited it. They assured him that his work on sibling incest of the ancient world was always intriguing and still a respectable field, but he wondered if he should have made it more germane to the world of 1995. In light of that, striking the right tone, he explained to his father beforehand, was critical.

The appeal was unnecessary. Seth Scott was nothing if not a striker of the right tone. *Riooooooh!* had sky-rocketed him to American icon, and simultaneously indicted him for immorality, depravity, and lecherousness. Almost from that very moment, the son bore witness to the father's construction of a persona that flawlessly demonstrated the virtues of striking the right tone. As an *artiste*—noble, educated, sensitive, intelligent, beloved, and occasionally vulnerable—Seth filled a void that, in 1975, had been bereft of a hero prince for some time. There had been the requisite comparisons to Lord Byron, to Don Juan, to Roger Vadim (also, regrettably, to the Marquis de Sade). There had been a collective embrace of his young-at-heartness and his *joie de vivre* (and also a condemnation of his juvenile fantasy of female sexuality).

Oscar felt intuitively from the age of ten that he had his own part to play in his father's persona, and had finally brought what he considered the polish of dignified academia to bear on that legacy. He was not without awareness, particularly this night, that the scholarly road he'd chosen couldn't have been more diametrically opposed to his father's, both an advantage and a triumph in terms of doing what his father always insisted a man ought to do: be his own man. Ironically or paradoxically, or perhaps neither, Oscar's sister Colette had chosen to follow in their father's footsteps and traveled the world making small documentaries about exotic

sexual practices, half anthropological, half erotic. In the European magazines that ran interviews with her she was fully clothed—although the stills from her documentaries made clear that her subjects were not.

To the observers in the well-lit faculty function room, Oscar hoped that the bond between father and son appeared exceptional, even inspirational— the handsome, well-dressed father morphing into the handsome, well-dressed son. True, where the father wore the pinched and debonair profile of a New Englander, the son expanded and darkened into an elusive, exotic sensuality, but the languorous eyes, the chiseled jaw, the studied confidence were all flawlessly reproduced.

From across the room Oscar recognized the seamless manner in which his father blended in with this university crowd. It was just possible, Oscar decided, that here, Seth Scott was unrecognized. His father of course would find that hard to believe, would say that an unlikelihood such as that would be due more to a reluctance on anyone's part to acknowledge familiarity with his body of work than with an actual unfamiliarity. Seth Scott never doubted that ninety-nine per cent of the adult population was actively if secretly involved in some kind of relationship with pornography. The remaining one percent had been shut away somewhere, sequestered from the real world and given regular doses of pharmaceuticals to induce docility and manageability. Aging was not an undignified thing, he often said, but the management of it certainly was.

* * *

The same tone would not be struck the following night, during which Oscar sat stiffly and shifted uncomfortably listening to the light-hearted, off-color speech that his father gave to a standing-room only crowd at the art house theater that sponsored the film festival. Having seventy-five minutes to kill until *Riooooooh!* ended and the Q&A began, he did what he thought sons in his predicament would do: he ducked into a bar across the street. As he exited the small theater, a group of sequined and befeathered actresses rushed to enter. He had no idea who they were—didn't recognize a single one of them; but the ushers encircled them, begging for pictures. He wondered if his father would recognize any of them—they all seemed to look the same to Oscar. They were blond and implanted (male and female), had dilated pupils, and he couldn't imagine any of them raising two small children and running a sugar plantation by proxy. Certainly there were no *artistes* among them.

His tuxedo was not as out of place as he thought it would be would be since the neighborhood was well aware of the twenty-four hour festival in progress, and the festival attendees were well aware of the bar across the street. Although it wasn't an elite or particularly prosperous part of town, events such as the twentieth anniversary of the biggest grossing porno in history were a testament to its liberal mindset, its alternative orientation, its commitment to the celebration of fiscal successes, and its accommodation of all lifestyles. The draw of adult film stars and angry protestors virtually guaranteed a hotbed of activity. The bar, the ice cream parlor, the café, the video store, the drug store (running a special on condoms) and the one-hour photo lab all planned to stay open until at least three o'clock in the morning, and had been granted special temporary permits to do so by the town's chamber of commerce.

. Many years later, Oscar Scott would say that it was a chance meeting like any other. He sat on an unremarkable stool at an unremarkable bar, wearing a tux, feeling good about his future, drinking an earned bourbon straight. He rarely begrudged his father his celebrity status, but neither did he feel completely at home in the company of his father's fan club. Most of the time he suspected his father was also somewhat discomfited at the measures to which his fans usually went in the name of their liberal, alternative, adult lifestyle. There was a quality about their enthusiasm that was disturbing—the golden-age innocence Seth Scott often waxed nostalgic over was not the predominant gloss that held this fin de siècle band of merry-makers together. There was a distinct anti-innocence, in fact, that more often than not devolved into sleaze, regardless of its tuxedoed packaging. Oscar had never felt the need to put his finger on what exactly the sleaze entailed, but he was certain it had to with a few bad apples in the Eighties who had become “desensitized” to mere nudity and, fueled by an unprecedented availability of narcotics, upped the ante.

As happens with chance meetings, Oscar looked up from his empty glass to order another and his gaze fell upon a young woman sitting on an adjacent stool. She had doubtless been there when he first sat, but he only now took stock of his surroundings. When she looked at him, he smiled.

“Enjoying the festival?” he asked her.

“Immeasurably.”

“You’re being sarcastic. Not a fan of erotic cinema?”

“Erotic cinema. Those are two giant misnomers if you’re talking about what’s playing across the street.”

"That depends on whom you're talking to."

"Or on who's talking to you."

Like a scene from a movie, he held a lighter to her cigarette and hailed a second round. She seemed a femme fatale in the purest sense—dark-haired, pale-skinned, plump-lipped, perhaps slightly drunk. But she was in no way similar to the majority of young women who populated the festival, and seemed to have deliberately taken the opposite tack by wearing jeans, Birkenstocks and no make-up.

"I'm celebrating," he told her. "Join me in a toast."

"It's hard to refuse a man in a tux when he buys you a martini. What are we drinking to?"

"Mesopotamian marriage rites and their continued currency in American institutions of higher learning."

"A noble toast."

When he drained his glass he turned fully to her.

"So what about you? You must be celebrating something, or else you wouldn't be in this bar in this neighborhood on this night all by yourself."

"I'm waiting for my mother."

"What a coincidence. I'm waiting for my father."

"Is your father at the show?"

"My father *is* the show."

"Seth Scott is your father?"

"I know it's hard to believe. How did I turn out so normal, you might ask. It was all due to a sheltered childhood with a nuclear family on a small island. Conservative New England values, etc."

"You're Seth Scott's son. Then you're probably familiar with my mother."

"Ah. Was she one of the actresses who sued us for unpaid wages or defamation of character or coercion of a minor? All those things, by the way, thrown out. Seth Scott ran a tight ship. Or the secretary who accused him of sexual harassment in the Eighties when that was a big thing? Doesn't matter. Nothing stuck. He was aboveboard. He was invincible."

"No, she wasn't an actress. And she wasn't a secretary. She's Audrey Drake. I see from your expression the name rings a bell."

"Audrey Drake is here? Tonight?"

She nodded.

"Planning a coup?" he asked. "Storming the castle at midnight?" He checked his watch.

"No. The festival organizers asked her to come. Evidently as a surprise to your father."

"He's going to be surprised all right."

He held out his hand.

"Oscar," he said.

"Melanie," she said, shaking it. "So, the son of a pornographer and the daughter of a radical feminist walk into a bar."

She sucked the last puff from her cigarette and stabbed it in the ashtray. "A situation just rife with tension. Do you think my mother and your father slept together? Sure, they were adversaries in public, but maybe, secretly, they were lovers. Star-crossed and all that."

"I suppose, if this were a soap opera, that would make you my secret half-sister."

"Yes. And wouldn't that be just like the two of them? I can't speak for your father, but I certainly wouldn't put it past my mother. It was the Sixties. From what they tell us, love was free."

"True. It *was* the Sixties. But they wouldn't have known each other then. *Nights of Rio* was made in 1975, and your mother didn't become the name of the devil until at least a year after that."

She shrugged off his logic.

"They could have known each other long before they became public figures. That wouldn't be so surprising. They could have easily slipped into a motel room here and there, for love-hate sex, just to prove something to each other. It could have been going on for decades for all we know."

"My father was devoted to my mother. He wouldn't have slipped out."

Melanie shrugged. "Sons always say that of their fathers."

"Sometimes daughters say it of their mothers, too."

"I suppose so. But that's not really the point. No, I'm convinced that your father and my mother had something going on, at least once, before your father met your mother, if you'd like. Why else would they be at each other's throats for so many years? It's the only logical explanation."

Oscar's fingers tapped the rim of his glass.

"You're studying me," she said.

"Do you not know who your father is?"

“That’s a surprisingly personal question from a stranger in a bar, but since you’re dressed so nicely and since we might be related, I’ll answer it. There have been speculations, rumors, long, drawn-out conversations about overturning patriarchal structures, but in the end, no, I don’t know who my father is. I’m almost positive that my mother knows—but she insists we’re both better off without the damaging influence of power-mongering men and their vanity over their cocks.”

Oscar nodded.

“Doesn’t that sound a bit like your father?”

“Well, if your mother’s right, all men are vain over their cocks.”

“So then you’re vain over your cock.”

“I’m a man.”

“I won’t lie. That’s disappointing. But at least we still have the possibility of transgressing taboo.”

“Oh?”

“What’s the point of having pedigrees like ours if we don’t occasionally throw caution to the wind and act impulsively? Or behave abominably as my mother would say. You’re the son of a pornographer, I’m the daughter of a radical feminist. Psychologically speaking, we can’t possibly play by the rules. It’s just not in us. We’re hardwired to transgress. And our combined lineage is like one big, irrevocable permission slip. Morally speaking, you understand. We’re our generation’s Romeo and Juliet.”

“Yes, morally speaking, that didn’t end too badly.”

“And if it turns out we’re secret half-siblings, well, how else *could* it turn out?”

“You’re a shark. I’m a jet.”

“Delicious.”

Ten months later Oscar Scott and Melanie Drake were married. Twelve months later twins were on the way.

Chapter Twenty-One

For the screening of *Rioooooh!* Seth was given a plush, crimson-colored reclining armchair the theater rolled in for honorary guests—“cinema red” they called it, or “the color of cinema.” He sank into the chair, watched his son slip quietly out, and wondered if he himself would be missed if he managed to slip out as well. He loved *Rioooooh!* as a father loves his firstborn. But he was beyond the gratification of hearing yet another audience laugh, gasp and murmur. He knew the film backwards. And it was not without its flaws.

He had intended to make it to the bar across the street without being accosted—he assumed that was where his son went. He thought this moment of slipping quietly out could become what he called one of their special father-son moments. A raising of two bourbons, a sharing of mutual congratulations.

Without the trumpet fanfare of introduction, he was just another old guy in a tux, hanging around, crossing the street for a drink. But he was hailed at the corner, before the light could sanction his crossing. He heard her behind him, a voice he knew was in attendance, advancing with the click of solid-soled shoes.

“Seth.”

He eyed the bar across the street with envy. He turned.

“Audrey.”

She approached him, her arms crossed, her smile faint, her brows raised. They hadn’t seen each other in a number of years, but adversaries often hope their opponents age gracefully and with dignity, lest the thrill of the joust be compromised by compassion.

"If you're on your way to the bar," she said, "I'll accompany you. I was headed there myself."

"I find that hard to believe."

"You shouldn't. I've seen *Riooooooh!* as many times as you have."

"Perhaps we'd be better off at the ice cream parlor."

"I don't think so. I'm a little old for sprinkles and cherries. But if you're on your way to meet a date there, don't let me keep you."

"That was obvious, even for you."

"Obvious doesn't negate effect." She paused. "I was sorry to hear about Astrid."

Seth grunted and the light changed. They stepped off the curb in unison.

"That's sincerely meant," she said. "Contrary to popular belief, I do know a thing or two about love. It was obvious how much you cared for each other."

"Is this your way of apologizing for being here?"

"I don't think I need to apologize for a public event. One whose organizers asked me to moderate. Your career is not the only one being celebrated here tonight. Besides, I do have something to do with your success. If it hadn't been for my—"

"Slander? Interference? Vilification?"

"Attention. It wouldn't have gotten nearly the publicity it did. It wouldn't have achieved even a fraction of the success. It wouldn't have been nearly so controversial."

"So I should be grateful. That's why you're here."

"Yes, you should be grateful. I could be a great deal more vengeful. But no, that's not why I'm here."

They had crossed the threshold of the bar and stepped into a hazy, smoke-filled darkness. Seth took a quick look around, spotting Oscar at the bar with an attractive young lady, before he chivalrously led Audrey to a booth near the front. His discretion was futile; he would find out later that she had done the same sweep of the bar to locate her daughter, whom she spied engaged with a handsome young man. Her acceptance of the booth was, to her, her own idea.

“You look good,” he said. “The short hair becomes you. The gray does as well.”

“Thank you.”

“I, too, look good. I was never very fond of the hair growing from the crown of my head. Glad that’s over with.”

She looked him over. “Yes. I suppose you do look good.”

It had been a strange consequence of their mutual antagonism that, as the public furor over obscenity dissipated, the two of them found their celebrity status increasingly marginalized until, ultimately, it was relegated to pop culture trivia. (Name the director of the 1975 cult classic *Riooooooh!* Name the public figure who’s relentless campaign against pornography in 1975 prematurely ended her campaign for senator in 1978.) It didn’t seem unusual to either Seth Scott or Audrey Drake that they should end up allies.

“Quite a lively crowd in here, tonight, isn’t it?” Seth said.

She glanced at the nearly empty room, at the cluster of too many bartenders and waitresses hovering near the service area, partially obscuring the view of their from the sitters at the bar. They were easily the oldest people there, in some cases by nearly forty years.

“There’s another man in a tuxedo,” she said. “Must be a fan of yours. The new generation.”

“Imagine that.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

The two of them made a striking couple in the booth by the window, side-lit by neon beer signs. So much so that the waitress whose table it was hesitated before approaching. She had recognized them both immediately—she'd knew Audrey Drake first since, as a recent women's studies major, she had just written her senior thesis on the subject of sexuality and the media. She recognized Seth Scott because the manager of the bar had distributed cheat sheets to his staff to familiarize them with the faces of the industry who might drop in for refreshment. Although committed to the principles of feminism, she was a little nonplussed to discover firsthand how pretty Audrey Drake was, even in her mid-fifties, and how much that seemed to matter to her (the waitress, that is. It might have mattered just as much to Audrey Drake, but hard-working, ambitious Janine Newbold Jones would not be privileged enough to learn that).

Unwilling to insert her presence at the esteemed table too soon, Janine turned to the bartender to explain the implications of witnessing Audrey Drake and Seth Scott having a drink in their bar.

"She's like the high priestess of anti-porn feminism," she said in an excited rush, ignoring Ben's disinterested gaze. "She, like, burned bras and staged sit-ins. She's friends with Gloria Steinem."

"So?"

Janine looked at this man with whom she had been sleeping for months. Did he know nothing about the world? About her? He gave her a wink that, rather than appeasing her, or inflaming her desire which was always so close to the surface in his presence, only proved to

her that he indeed knew nothing about the world and worse, thought that it was an appropriate time to show it.

“So? She won major journalism awards for her investigative articles on the social effects of pornography. She was on the cover of *Ms.* a dozen times. She’s a major big deal.”

“She still looks pretty good for an old broad.” He put his arms on the bar and leaned toward Janine conspiratorily. “Was she in any pornos? If she wasn’t in any pornos, she wasn’t a major big deal.”

“You’re an asshole.”

“Lighten up, Janine. What happened to your sense of humor?”

“It suddenly grew up and realized you’re a jerk.”

“Sticks and stones.” He flashed a smile and turned away to stack glasses.

It was not an uncommon type of exchange between them, but this time, on this night, moments before she was about to experience what could be a defining moment in her life, it seemed to Janine that she was seeing incontrovertible proof of his failure as a person. His utter lack of social engagement, his utter lack of awareness that a world existed outside his own, his utter dismissal—she continued listing things in her head as she lifted a stack of napkins to her cocktail tray and approached the table—of the painstaking research she had done and the accolades she had won for her twenty-five page senior thesis integrating the girl zine revolution with Valerie Solanas’s *Scum Manifesto* of 1968. She was clearly being forced into a position of re-evaluation.

“Hi. Welcome to Vy. Can I get you a drink?” She tried to ease the irritation from her voice, but she hadn’t been a waitress long and mastering the finer points of waiting tables had felt useless to her—she was sure she would be moving on from this quickly.

“I think a bottle of your finest Champagne would be in order,” Seth said. “Unless I’m overstepping a symbolic boundary between us,” he directed to Audrey.

“I’ll join you in your champagne,” she said. “But bring me a side of scotch.”

“How would you like it?” Janine professionally asked.

“In a glass is fine,” her idol replied.

Janine turned from the table, telling herself that that was indeed how a forceful, assertive, take-no-prisoners feminist took no prisoners. It was therefore completely irrelevant that the woman’s sarcasm had been unleashed on a fellow female who was, despite her barwench attire, or because of it, a bonafide feminist scholar to boot. A lesser waitress would have taken offense, she thought, would have called the woman, so typical, a bitch, and would have overlooked the masterful capacity with which she wielded her assertiveness in any—in every—situation. A lesser waitress would have felt made to swallow her inferiority and, just like critics of feminism for a hundred years, would have said that an uptight controlling bitch like Audrey Drake needed to get laid.

“Our finest Champagne?” Ben repeated. “Where do they think they are, the Riviera?”

“There are other drinks besides what comes out of a tap,” she said.

“Yes. Like the kind that comes in bottles with screw caps.” He indicated the liquor on the shelves behind him. “Not corks. How long have you been working here again?”

“What do you mean?”

“In twelve months, have you ever seen a single bottle of Champagne anywhere in this building?”

Janine stammered. “But this is a special event. We’re a fully stocked bar. We have thirty varieties of imported and domestic beer. How come we don’t have Champagne?”

“Because we’re a fucking bar, not a day spa. The real question is how come you don’t know that. That’s generally what a waitress’s job is—to know things like that. Things like inventory.”

“You do know who Seth Scott is, right? Shouldn’t he be one of your heroes? Isn’t he what your people aspire to?”

“Seth Scott’s a pussy. So he made one good porno.”

“Five, actually.”

“So what. If he was a real man, he’d drink thirty-year scotch. Like the broad. We got plenty of that.”

“It amuses you to talk like a misogynist troglodyte, doesn’t it?”

“O please, O Educated One. Have mercy on my inferior vocabulary. You’ll never find out what really amuses me. Not while you’re so busy trying to intimidate me.” He flashed that smile again.

Janine looked at her table, worried that one of them would look up and see her standing there, not getting their drinks. It was one thing for Ben to call her professionalism into question, but not Audrey Drake—she wouldn’t look like an incompetent, like a fool, like one of those vain silly girls whose reliance on frippery and frivolity was the bane of feminism’s existence, not in front of Audrey Drake.

“My table asked for Champagne.”

“Which we don’t have.”

She untied her apron strings. “Take them some nuts,” she barked. “I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

“No, you won’t.”

He watched her resolutely walk to the back and disappear. He imagined she broke into a sprint on the other side of the swinging door—the closest liquor store was two blocks away and it was open for ten more minutes. (Unlike the other relevant businesses in the neighborhood, the liquor store was denied permission to stay open all night. Although both moral and practical reasons were cited, everyone understood it was because the most influential member of the chamber of commerce owned the bar and the café whose major source of revenue would be curtailed if the same product could be purchased nearby for a third of what he charged.)

Ben filled a nut bowl and, with it, traversed the length of the bar to emerge from behind it. As he passed Oscar and Melanie on the way, she indicated another round. Always amused to witness the pairing off of couples, he was baffled by this particular union. In his decade of bartending, he hadn’t seen many opposites like these two attract—a tuxedo and a pair of Birkenstocks. Most surprising to Ben was that he had pegged her as a more free-spirited type, one not so inclined to be taken in by the kind of jackass who’d wear a tux to a midnight showing of a porno. He had thought the same thing of Janine before witnessing her present obsequy. He had suspected she wasn’t as self-composed and imperturbable as she wanted him to think she was—what twenty-two-year-old ever is?—but he didn’t think she’d lose it over someone who barked at a waitress.

Maybe he was just a simple troglodyte (and oh yes, he knew the word), but in his world, porn was porn, Champagne was an aperitif, hook-ups between jackasses and hippies were just a bad idea, and twenty-two-year-old waitresses did not order thirty-five-year-old bartenders to fetch nuts. The simple rules of the universe had been perverted. Maybe it was the full moon. Maybe it was the presence of porn stars across the street. Something was just not right.

to be continued

CYNTHIA CRAVENS

EDUCATION

- Ph.D. English Studies with a creative dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013
- M.F.A. Creative Writing, Emerson College, 2004
Screenwriting Certificate, 2002
- B.F.A. Writing, Publishing & Literature, Emerson College, 1992

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

- 2012-2013 Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- 2011-2012 Adjunct Instructor, Indiana University Northwest
- 2005-2012 Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2003-2004 Instructor, Emerson College

HONORS & AWARDS

- 2012 Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2011 Charles F. Goodnow Prize for Fiction, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2010 Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award, University of Illinois at Chicago
- 2009 Runner-up, The Short Story Challenge, NYC Midnight

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- “In Her Father’s Study: Finding the Centerfold.” Northeast Modern Language Association, Rochester, New York, March 2012.
- “Saving the Family or Saving the Nation: Jack Bauer and the Virtues of Family.” Film & History National Conference, Milwaukee, WI, November 2010.
- “The Old Man” and “The Woman on the Ferry.” Fiction reading, Speaker Series Colloquium, University of Illinois at Chicago, October, 2010.
- “Toward a Neoliberal Aesthetic: Jonathan Franzen, George Gissing, and the Politics of Authorship.” Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association National Conference, St. Louis MO, March 2010.
- “Silver Platter.” Program for Writers, University of Illinois at Chicago, October 2008.

ACADEMIC SERVICE

2011-2012	Committee member, Curriculum Review, IUN.
2008-2011	Editorial Staff of <i>Packingtown Review</i> , UIC.
2008	Prose Editor of <i>Packingtown Review</i> , UIC.
2007, 2010	Committee Head, Reading Series for the Program for Writers, UIC.
2007	Second Year PhD Colloquium, organizational/search committee, UIC.
2006, 2010	Mentor, First Year Writing Program, UIC.
2006	Tutor, Writing Center, UIC.
2005	Manuscript Reader for <i>Other Voices</i> literary journal, UIC.
2003-2004	Fiction Editor, <i>Graduate Writing Supplement</i> , Emerson College.
2003-2004	Mentor, Writing, Publishing and Literature, Emerson College.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2004	Assistant, Zachary Shuster Harmsworth, LLC, Literary Agency, Boston, MA.
2002-2004	Script Reader for Scout Productions ("Queer Eye for the Straight Guy"), Boston, MA.
2001-2004	Film Reviewer for the Boston Underground Film Festival, Boston, MA.
2002-2004	Assistant to the Director of Local Sightings Production Company, Boston, MA.
2002-2003	Assistant, Grub Street Writers, Boston, MA.
1995-1996	Art Reviewer for <i>ArtsMedia</i> magazine, Boston, MA.
1992-1996	Freelance Writer.
1992-1993	Editorial Assistant for <i>She</i> , Boston, MA.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Modern Language Association
 Northeast Modern Language Association
 Association of Writers and Writing Programs
 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association
 National Women's Studies Association
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