



T H E
PHOTOGRAPHER'S
D I L E M M A
k a i t e r e n l e s s

FIRST MEETINGS

Ariadne Campbell scoffed.

“It’s... really quite dreadful. He’s talented, clearly, but it’s just so... grotesque.”

The woman’s companion, a bulky man with golden hair, dressed in a blazer that was far less expensive than it looked, folded his arms took a step away from the painting. He scanned the composition for a few moments and then returned his gaze to Campbell.

“I have to disagree with you. I think it’s lovely. No, that isn’t the right word. *Striking*.”

“You’re far too accommodating, Calvin; you never like to say a negative word. No spine beneath all those muscles.”

“It’s not that I am afraid to critique, it’s just in this I find nothing to critique at all. It’s magnificent, really.”

“It’s shock-drivel. I mean, rape... really?”

“Are you sure all that faulty ire isn’t just a result of Lynder Partridge getting top-slot and you getting... well, nothing.”

Some art reviewers from the local papers walked by, sizing up the massive canvas and it’s disconcerting contents. They stroked their stubbly chins and scratched out some notes and chattered amongst themselves about the latest cinematic releases and celebrity scandals.

“You seen the latest Captain Omega film?” A pudgy, balding man with a windbreaker inquired to a young, starry eyed Asian woman who stood beside him. She shook her silky mane, “No. Haven’t seen them, superhero movies are rather... I don’t know I just don’t find them interesting. They’re all... it’s like the same film over and over again. There is no dramatic tension because you know the good guy will always win. You know one thing I was thinking about was how morality is handled in these films, superhero films, action films generally,” the fat man nodded blankly, he wasn’t really listening, didn’t really care, his eyes scanned the room, seeking out the all-stars from the world of the arts; there was always a scoop, if one was keen enough to but find it. The woman droned on, “So like, they’re always just like good and noble and whatever, which is fine and all except that, ya know, they’re like actually *vigilantes*. I mean, think about it, that’s what superheroes are, really. If someone dressed up in a mask and a cape and went around beating up criminals we’d all think they were crazy.”

The fat man turned to his companion with a knowing glint in his eye, “Lady, we pay good money to watch the mistresses of inner-city thugs throw tampons at each other; I think we’re all crazy.”

The woman gasped and turned to her friends to relay the horror she had just witnessed as the fat man cracked a grin and moved up stand between Campbell and Calvin, examining the elaborate drawing in between darting glances to the aloof duo.

“You’re the famous Ms. Campbell, aren’t you? The photographer, right?”

Campbell was surprised and flattered to be recognized; she tried in vain not to let it show through.

“Yes. Do we know each other?”

“Nope. But I know you know. I’m Ashton Derby,” he flashed a well-filled notepad in front of her

face, “Been following your work. Pretty stuff, very pretty stuff, you’ve got a keen eye.”

“Apparently you do as well,” she smiled smugly, luxuriating in her burgeoning fame, “Are you an artist yourself?”

“No, not me. Ha, can barely draw a stick figure. I just like writing about it. I fancy that’s what the shrinks would call ‘cathartic release.’ Or voyeurism... or something like that.”

“What do you make of Partridge’s work; his drawings?”

“They’re... different. They’re kinda... I dunno... disturbing.”

Campbell turned to Calvin with triumph shinning in her eyes, “See, I told you he wasn’t all that.”

“Oh no, it isn’t that I think they’re bad, I mean, it’s like a car crash, it’s horrible but I can’t look away; that’s kind of a testament to the artist, don’t you think? Whole reason I came to this gala event was to snag an interview with the elusive Lynder Partridge, guy never answers my emails, phone calls, nothing. He’s a hermit. Ya know, I tried looking him up... weirdest thing, there are no photographs of the guy anywhere, online, in papers. Must be camera shy.”

Campbell’s heart shrunk. She was so sick and tired of hearing that name. So sick and tired of everyone praising such a rank amateur. This should have been her event. HER gala. If only... if only...

Now it was Calvin who looked victorious, he arched a brow in his friend’s direction as if to say, “Still so haughty?” Campbell crossed her arms about her breasts and bite her lip and then scoffed at the fat man.

“I can’t believe it. I can’t believe our collective tastes have reached such lows. Decades ago this city used to be the art capital of the world and now... THIS? This is what passes as art? This ghastly aberration?! Lynder Partridge is nothing more than an over-hyped elitist.”

Darby was taken aback and for a moment he stood in stunned silence; he’d not expected such a sudden deluge of passion. Calvin only sighed, it was not the first time he’d witnessed such an outburst. Before either of the men could respond, a new voice fluttered over the air, low and scratchy and strangely sonorous.

“I’ve been called many things, Ms. Campbell, but never ‘over-hyped’.”

All heads turned to behold a man of middling height and pale flesh standing before them. The intruder wore an off-white suit, expertly tailored, a red tie and a jet black overcoat, tipped at the collar with expensive furs and leather loafers that clattered musically upon the gala’s marbled floor as the cane that followed with them. His features were sharp and angular and his opaque blue eyes reflected the light in prismatic sparks that were diluted from the thick and serpentine whorls of smoke that roiled up from a daintily clutched cigarette – half smoked – which he held in his left and leather gloved hand.

Darby’s face lit up as he saw the man, his long-sought quarry as Campbell’s own fell in dismay. She’d not actually expected to meet the man when she’d accepted invitation as Partridge was notoriously aloof. Some who knew him reported that he was partial to month-long vanishing acts; where he went during those sudden sojourns was anyone’s guess.

“M-Mr. Partridge! Hello, I’m-”

“Ashton Darby. Newspaper man. Culture reporter for *The New Daily Standard*. I read your column,”

the fat man waited in vain for the artist to comment on the quality of his writing; when he did not, the light faded from his eyes and he twirled the notepad with agitation, “And you are Ariadne Campbell, and this must be your friend,” Lynder turned to Calvin with the faintest trace of a smile and extended one of his thin, leather-gloved hands.

“Calvin Mercer, pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Partridge.”

“Likewise.”

“Do forgive my friend here, she sometimes gets a little carried away, I’m sure she didn’t mean-”

“I meant absolutely everything I said,” Ariadne snapped hotly, her gaze narrowing and her mouth going taunt. It occurred to her suddenly that this chance encounter opened up a whole world of new possibilities for her career. Perhaps, she thought, Darby would even write her up in one of his columns! If there were to be a public spat, surely *someone* would pick it up. One of the tabloids. One of the screamsheets. Tantalized, she steeled her resolve.

“Your art is dreadful.”

Darby nearly gasped while Calvin simply shook his head in resigned vexation; why, he thought, could she never behave herself? There always had to be a show...

Lynder’s face registered nothing. His facade as placid and impenetrable as a Venetian mask.

“You’re a photographer, are you not, Ms. Campbell?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“What I should fancy is truly cause for dread is the photographers’ dilemma; the photographer is a documentarian through and through. He does not *create*, he *captures creation*.”

“All art is documentation.”

“This is true. Art is documentation of *one’s own creation*, not of another’s. The photographer who does not arrange his or her own scenes, why,” Lynder finally turned towards her, it was the first time he had looked directly at Campbell since he’d entered the scene; his head level, piercing blue eyes unblinking, “She wouldn’t really even be an artist at all, but merely a voyeur, a vessel for the real actors to communicate. A medium.”

Campbell froze having noticed the gender switch – *he* to *she* – she’d heard the words but they did not instantly register in her mind. When they had sunk in she groped for a retort but there was nothing other than the rattling of the crowd like a great and baying pack of hounds echoing all throughout the hall surrounding and her own rapid clattering thoughts which slithered up from the viscous recesses of her frantic mind. She had never considered such a position before; she knew he was wrong, of course, indeed, had to be, but she could not articulate *why* and in due course began to question her own conviction. *I’m not... I’m not just some documentarian. I’m an artist. Just like you. Only better. Far better. You think you can talk down to me because you’re on the rise? Because you’ve got a little bit of local fame? Because you got the gala slot and not me?! I’ll show you, you arrogant bastard. I’ll show you!*

Campbell made a showing of carelessness, sighing and turning from Lynder as if he bored her, though, in truth, it was to escape his gaze. Most people looked off at regular intervals when they were

talking with someone but Lynder's eyes never wavered, he was focused wholly upon her, expectant, she assumed, of a reply. She didn't like it. Didn't like him or his weird eyes or his fancy coat or his preened dress clothes beneath it. Didn't like the gala and the insect clattering of the crowd.

She wanted to get out. *Needed* to get out.

"This conversation bores me, I'm leaving," she thought that might do it, thought that would stir some hint of passion from him, rouse some semblance of anger. But there was nothing. His cold, blue eyes and his sharp pale face remained wholly immobile, unfazed.

Momentarily, Lynder inclined his head respectfully, sincerely, "Good'day, Ms. Campbell."

It took considerable willpower for Campbell to keep herself from running from the gala. *The bastard had won*, she thought to herself, and what was more infuriating was that she was fairly certain the battle was entirely constrained within the confines of her own mind. Even so, she vowed she'd never again allow him the upper hand.

Never.

R E S E N T M E N T

She scanned Darby's column as soon as it was released. There was no mention of "Ariadne Campbell." Ariadne cursed herself; *I should have made a better impression on Darby and a worse impression on HIM. I should have... I should have...*

"Something on your mind, Ms. Campbell? You look worried."

She turned to her model where he stood in the albescent loft, naked and holding a fig. Putting down the paper upon her worktable she looked up at the man and shook her head.

"It's nothing. Hold the fig a little higher."

"Like this?"

"Yes, good. Good."

Only it wasn't good. It was a stiff and cliché sub-par Renaissance-era facsimileism. It was deplorable. She looked at the digital camera reel, picture after picture of the lithe, muscular young man in various poses of heroic splendor as hackneyed and messageless as the splicing on-to of Roman columns upon a Brutalist facade. She had attempted Homeric Joe McNally and ended up as just another amateur floundering at the fathomless edges of the new. She sighed and leaned back, setting the camera down with a dull clack upon the worktable and sipped some lukewarm bourbon from a small, squat wineglass. She hadn't been able to find any of the damned shot glasses, she wondered idly if Calvin had thieved one for his upcoming flat-party. He'd better not have...

"Ms. Campbell, I could really use a stretch, like I said before, I don't mind posing a little over-time, and we're," he looked towards his mobile phone's clock, "Ten minutes over. It's just that I've been doing this pose for almost twenty minutes straight, neck is killin' me."

"Yeah. Sure. Fine."

She was only half listening. Frustration's savage increase consumed the whole of her mind. She couldn't find her shot glasses. She couldn't get a gala slot. She couldn't get featured in any of the big name art columns even if she was being recognized by their writers. She still couldn't think of a rebuttal to Lynder's rebuke and as a consequence had decided to forego her typical photographic methodology of streetcrawling for real-life scenes in favor of an elaborate and meticulously crafted designer-fantasy shot. What bothered her most was that the draftsman had not spoken out of anger, but out of concern and curiosity. His low and sonorous voice echoed still.

Art is documentation of one's own creation, not of anothers. The photographer who does not arrange his or her own scenes, why, she wouldn't really even be an artist at all, but merely a voyeur, a vessel for the real actor's to communicate. A medium.

A medium... is that all I really am? A vessel? She wondered with horror, her hands closing tensely upon her sunless knees, her lips and brows trembling with emotion. The week had begun so promisingly and now everything felt wrong. Fate was taking the piss.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't pay you to psychoanalyze."

The model threw up his hands in entreaty, his mouth going taunt, eye mired in confusion and a mild but growing sense of irritation.

“Yeesh. Sorry. Don’t know why you’re in such a foul mood today. I was just worried about you-”

“I don’t pay you to worry. I pay you to do good poses for my work. A task at which you have miserably failed. Look at this. It’s cartoonish,” she held up the camera reel screen for him to observe, “See. Look at this.”

“Those were poses *you* asked me to do.”

“Well, you didn’t do them very well, did you?” The question was rhetorical. She knew they were bad and she knew he knew they were bad. She just wanted him to suffer for it. He wasn’t an artist but he’d been around enough artists to know what was aesthetically pleasing and what was schlock. *It was his fault*, she thought, anger rising with her body from the couch. *HIS, not mine!*

“I don’t know what else you want from me.”

“I want you to leave. You’re fired.”

His eyes went wide, “What? Why?”

“Just get out.”

“An explanation for my CV would be appreciated.”

“I said get out.”

He turned to leave, hurriedly dressing and snatching his phone up from off the counter of the exposed kitchen island. He paused at the door and turned to look at his former boss with equal measures of disappointment and disdain.

“You ever wonder if you can’t get into the big galas because you aren’t talented or if its just because you’re an unbearable bitch? Food for thought. Have fun with the rest of your life.”

She was expecting an infuriated slam but he closed the door gently behind him. As his feet clattered down the old tenement hallway Ariadne moved to where he’d stood before the counter, as if to envelope his afterimage. Some indeterminable amount of time clocked away into nothing before she inhaled deeply and poured herself another shot of brew, sipping the golden drops in quick, nervous gulps, cursing her former employee in her mind. *You never really cared about my work. You probably only cared about me because of money. Maybe you wanted to fuck me. Well, now I’ve fucked you. Bastard.*

Outside the cars tore at the concrete and a flock of birds she’d never seen before squealed by, as if in protest of gravity’s suzerainty. The city screamed and she screamed with it.

*

“That fucking bastard.”

Ariadne Campbell mouthed the words under mint and marijuana tainted breath as she beheld the large five foot by five foot drawing which hung upon the pure white wall of the gallery pulling all present eyes towards it with its grim and imposing majesty, even as it repelled with its stark audacity. The picture was of a middle aged man, muscular and nude, holding the sun in one hand and the moon in the other, standing astride a continental rendering of the globe, a crown upon his head and upon his face, a peculiar mask that bore some similarity to those of the Venetians. Despite the ornate, facial covering, she recognized the man, the model. The peculiar almond eyes and distinctive hardness of his jawline was unmistakable.

Derrick J. Graham. D.J. for short.

As she stood with clenched fists, her face twisting into a wreakful grimace, the click and flash of a camera followed swiftly by a sonorous, demure voice.

“I thought you might come. Its been a while, Ms. Campbell.”

She spun instantly to behold Lynder Partridge standing before her, camera raised to his face. He smiled and slowly lowered the machine and then gestured to the illustration which hung upon the wall, back-lit by pure, white light.

“What do you think?”

“I think you stole my model.”

“Stole?”

“He used to work for me.”

“Precisely, he used to. Or did you forget that you’d fired him after a temper tantrum? Forgive me if it should displease you, but you really shouldn’t have blamed the man for your work, he was just a prop, *you* were the director. He cannot be held accountable for the failings of your work, anymore than I could blame my graphite for botching one of my drawings.”

“I didn’t come here to be lectured.”

“Then why did you come?”

She shook her head and gazed off towards a crowd in the distance. Lynder swiftly followed her gaze and lit upon a tall, muscular blond man with a ridiculous multi-colored plaid shirt, rolled up to his elbows.

“Ah,” Lynder nodded to himself, “You’re here for him. Calvin, right?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I understand what that gaze means. I can see why you like him. He’s very handsome.”

Ariadne screwed up her face in a mixture of amusement, confusion and disgust.

“What are you, gay?”

“Must I be to have a proper appreciation of masculine beauty? You like him, don’t you?”

“More than you.”

The ghost of smile traced a faint line across Lynder’s smooth, pale face which sharpened the

contours of his cheekbones under the sterile white gala lights, whereupon his luminous blue eyes flickered with a strange intensity. He nodded slightly, but not to the woman.

“Do you know why you don’t like me?”

“Because you think you’re so much better than me.”

“I am better than you, Ms. Ariadne, that is precisely why you don’t like me.”

“Fuck you.”

Lynder continued on, heedless of her rising temper, his face expressionless save for his eyes which projected an intense and dreamlike yearning.

“The inability to acknowledge one’s betters, in the arts, as in anything, is the surest sign of an overflow of passion and it is precisely your undirected passion which blinds you, which keeps you from admitting the obvious – that my work is superior to your own, that your own is merely ancillary to yourself, that you are but a medium, a vessel, unable to craft a vision to mold the world – which keeps you from accepting any criticism whatsoever. Mind well that the inability to accept criticism is an implicit expression of the belief in one’s utter perfection. One can scarcely expect to make strides when one believes that technique has reached its apex.”

She hated him, hated him more than anyone she had ever met, yet still she stayed and listened, intently. Despite her inner protestations, his words filled her with fascination. Momentarily, the trim, dapper man checked his form-fitting silver wristwatch and raised his brows slightly.

“I must take my leave; I promised Mr. Derby an interview for his paper concerning my most recent series. Do take care.”

With that he left out of the gala as the crowd swirled around him like a tidal wave of flesh, the ceaseless increase of their murmuring swiftly drowning out his elegant footsteps and obscuring him from sight entire. She’d been so absorbed by his words and presence that she’d wholly forgotten that the man had taken a photograph of her. The woman’s mind raced, she feared what of her that portrait would reveal. She cursed him under her breath and turned to leave but paused when she spotted Calvin once more, he was speaking with Graham some distance away on the far side of the gallery, beside two large statues that seemed to have been welded together from heavy scrap, each of a titanic knight, one with a shield, the other, a sword. Momentarily, a woman, young and curvy, with skimpy, form-fitting clothing, sided up to Calvin and whispered something in his ear, he pulled a face and the next instance she kissed him with a mischievous twinkle in her eye and he took her by the chin and kissed her back passionately. Then the trio laughed, oh, how they laughed. Ariadne felt they were laughing at her, sneering, conspiring.

This gala, just like the last should have been mine! Just as Calvin should be mine, not that disgusting slag’s. I know her, I’ve seen her around, nothing but a drugged-up whore. Filthy eurotrash. Not even from this country. What does she have that I do not? Is it her money? All those greenbacks from e-begging and lascivious strip-shows? Is it because she has a spot in the gallery and I do not? Is it because she knows and probably fucks the old pricks who run the artmag scene? How did my sweet Calvin ever get so mixed up with people like her? Its not fair. Its not right. Its not how it should be... none of it.

Ariadne’s heart pounded like a misfiring engine, eyes going large with dreadful rage, like an owl in

the moonlight, her fists balled, knuckles white. She hated to admit it, but Lynder was right about one thing: she wasn't putting herself into her works. She was acting merely as a medium, afraid to ply her hand, afraid to reach unto the world and mold it to her design.

No longer.

The wicked droning of the club-speaker's drowned out all conversation, interaction was relegated to drunken glances and sensual movements. A communication of primal rhythm. Ariadne Campbell sat in the corner, staring sullenly at her half-empty glass. She could see them out of the corner of her eye. Dancing, kissing, rubbing, whispering about fucking. Her lip quivered. Head dizzy with drink. Knuckles white. The sound of the place was starting to become overwhelming, the sonic shredding roiling throughout the ambit of her mind like an ocean in a shell. She'd no idea why she'd accepted Calvin's invitation. She hated the beehive cacophony of the club.

I should have turned him down. I can't dance. Don't have a date. Probably look like a fucking loser. Sitting in the corner alone, sipping tequila. I don't even know why I bought it. I can't stand tequila... at least they didn't drop a worm in it...

Some moments later a voice greeted her. Unfamiliar and husky.

"What are you doing sulking in the corner, beautiful?"

Her words came slow and messy, the alcohol haze masking the texts from the library shelves of her memory palace, "I'm not sulking. Who are you?"

"Rivers. Jamie Randall Rivers. You don't remember me?"

"Oh, wait, we met at Calvin's party, last Friday, right?"

"Right. What's your poison?"

"Tequila."

He raised his brows. That's a whole lot of tequila for a little girl like you."

"I'm not that little."

"Are to me."

"Is that a challenge? Bet I could drink you under the table."

She had no idea where this sudden bravado was coming from and knew that she couldn't out-drink the man, if only because she felt extremely drunk already; yet even still, the words continued to gush from her mouth as if of their own accord.

"Well? Wadda ya say?"

He smiled like a wolf. "Sure."

An hour and a half later, Ariadne and Randall were rolling with laughter, exchanging stories of their youth, business mishaps, their dreams, failed and achieved, all whilst knocking back shots like fish filtering water. Shortly thereafter, Calvin and his girlfriend finally left the dancefloor and made their way across the club to stand before the cackling duo, "Randall, I didn't see you pop in, I'm glad you could make it."

"Your parties are always great, man. Thanks for the invite, was only late because my kid was sick, poor girl couldn't sleep."

Ariadne sat bolt upright. Kid? He hadn't mentioned a kid. Is he married? Does he have a wife? Why would he come over and call me beautiful if he did? I thought he...

“Why aren’t you two dancing?” Calvin’s girl inquired with a raise of a over-shaved brow. Ariadne couldn’t remember her name. Was something strange. Foreign. Eastern European. Stoya or Stoylarov or Story or something like that. Calvin always had been possessed of a inexplicable appreciation for the exotic.

Randall raised his empty shot glass and shook the ice cubes therein which clattered like hollow bones, smiling. Calvin nodded and pointed to Ariadne, “How about you, you up for a dance... if you don’t mind, Svety?”

Svetlana, that was her name. Sounds like a low-shelf sugar brand.

Svetlana rolled her eyes, “I hate it when you call me that, sounds too much like ‘sweaty.’”

Ariadne and Randall burst into laughter as an embarrassed look ghosted across Calvin’s squarish, handsome face. “Sorry.” He mouthed sheepishly. She smiled and fixed him with her gaze.

“Actually, yes.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, I do mind. Now come on, this is one of my favorite songs.”

Without another word Svetlana dragged her hapless lover back into the crowded dancefloor as a saccharin pop piece thundered from the loudspeakers, “I just wanna taste you baby, I just wanna little piece of the pie, I just wanna feel you honey, I just never wanna see you cry-“

“I think I know this song, not really my cup of tea but-”

“You didn’t tell me you had a kid.”

He paused, confused, brows furrowed like a tractor-rent field.

“You didn’t ask. Is that a problem?”

“No. Its just... are you married?”

His right brow arched a little higher. Momentarily, he raised his left hand and wriggled his unadorned and evenly tanned fingers.

“Fraid not. You planning on proposing?”

“No. Just curious.”

“Did you think I was hitting on you?”

Ariadne’s heart sunk. She didn’t know how to reply, every avenue, verbal and not, seemed equally likely to lead to social embarrassment.

“Uh, that isn’t what I said.”

“Because I wasn’t. I mean, not that I wouldn’t, I just-”

“Its fine.” She wanted desperately to say “forget it” but feared for sounding too forceful.

He cleared his throat and starred intently at his glass. Lynder’s words rang through Ariadne’s head as she observed the man, who looked so genuinely uncomfortable in that moment, “Art is documentation of one’s own creation, not of anothers.” This is MY creation, this moment of unease and emotional

ambiguity, this voided mental space externalized.

She removed her Leica M4-P from her bag and, swiftly as possible, snapped a shot of Randall staring at his glass. He looked up in inebriated confusion and she snapped again.

“What are you doing?”

“I hope you don’t mind. I just felt compelled.”

“Uh, well, I’m going to go and... get another drink.”

“Ok.”

He never returned. After around ten minutes had elapsed she induced that he had like as not left or maybe had moved into one of the other chambers of Calvin’s strange, multi-stratified compound, a gift from his oft doting and well-heeled family. Perhaps looking for another girl. Perhaps not. It didn’t matter. He didn’t matter, not to her, not in that moment, all that mattered were her photos. Her art. She rose with such suddenness that she knocked over her glass, spilling the congealing contents of her cup across the table and made for the exit, she wanted to her, fearful that someone would catch her leaving and raise the litany of typical queries which the unimaginative always did in such situations. “Why are you taking off so soon?” “How come you’re leaving already?” and so forth. She had no time or patience or energy for such conversations. Her goal compelled her to swift action and that crystallization of purpose steeled her being and drove her through the foggy haze of alcohol and wavering, sultry bodies and noise and street-bound biomass into the winding labyrinth of the cities slums which had come to be known as The Tombs. As she rounded the corner of the first alley which let out from Calvin’s northern block she bumped into a tall man with a white jacket.

“Fuck, I’m sorry.”

The man looked down upon her without sound or further movement, or at least assumed he did, for his face was masked in shadow, swallowed whole by the pall cast by a dark blue ballcap.

The man continued to regard her a moment without moving and then spoke, his voice low and flat and strange.

“These streets are unsafe, especially at such an hour. It is inadvisable to walk them alone.”

“You seem to be doing just fine by your lonesome.”

“I am never alone.”

She was too stunned by this sudden theatrical turn to properly respond. What did he mean? There was no one else around. Was he on drugs? He didn’t seem like a tweaker. It was only when the man had half vanished from sight that Ariadne regained the powers of speech. She noticed, as she watched him go, a curious ensign upon the back of his jacket. A red chrysanthemum. When the man had gone she continued on her way back to her apartment which lay at the south eastern corner of the Tombs. She raised her Leica and took his picture.

She passed by a old black man sitting upon the stoop of a decaying tenement who was dressed in a broad brimmed hat and ragged flannel. He looked up hungrily, speaking softly but excitedly.

“Hey honey, you looking for a little... something-something.”

She wasn’t sure whether he meant drugs or sex or some combination thereof; the one thing she was

certain of was that he was implying at least one of the three.

“Nope.”

“You sure bout that?”

“Pretty sure.”

“Cool, cool, cool. Suit yaself.” He lit up a cigarette and looked off into the vacant dark, puffing and rubbing his chin as the wind picked up and tore through the massive concrete structures with the dessicated rattling of a hundred thousand cicadas. Once he’d looked off she snapped a photo. He looked up, frowning.

“What the fuck you doing?”

“Just taking pictures.”

“Take them somewhere else.”

“Sheesh, don’t get your panties in a knot,” she sneered taking another picture of the man. A dark look came then over his face and he rose up from the stoop, his posture threatening.

“The fuck you say, bitch? Get the fuck out of here.”

She snapped mid-rise and at full height, as his mouth hung open, spittle flying, anger radiating from his eyes and vaporizing up with the steely blue of the moon.

“Alright, calm down.” She implored the man, turning, her heart racing a little faster than usual.

“Be calm when you ain’t taking no more pictures, I don’t do that tabloid shit.”

She pocked the camera and waved at the man whose wrathful glare continued to follow her down the length of the street until she vanished into the void.

Once home she grabbed up her mail, threw it on the kitchen island and shut herself up in the darkroom, developing her photos.

BEYOND VITIATION

“These are pretty good,” the old man stated flatly, as he examined the photographs, his brows slightly raised, his glasses perched upon the end of his nose, “I don’t tend to see a lot of slice-of-life work anymore from serious photographers. Documentation is out, digital manipulation is in. Fantasy portraits are the flavor of the month. Demon-ladies and badly photoshopped levitation scenes, etcetera. I’m sure you know what I’m talking about. Tedious. Very tedious. But this, this has some grit to it, unearths the petty squalor of the inner city, the emulsification of crushed dreams and the vain striving to move beyond that vitiation.”

“That was what I was going for. Tell me, is ‘pretty good’ good enough for your gallery, Mr. Thompson?”

“Well, you just get right down to business don’t you. Brass tacks then. Yes.”

Ariadne heard his words, registered them, but even still she could not believe in their veracity. For years she had been struggling to break into the gallery scene, into the upper crust of the art world. Now, at long last the delicious nectar of victory dangled temptingly, just above her tongue. To taste it...

“What?”

“Yes. I would love to put these up for display. However, before I do, I’d like to know why you’ve taken them. What’s your motivation, Ms. Campbell?”

“Um...” Her tongue caught in her throat. It was not a question she was accustomed to being asked, “To be... more than just a vessel. To show through my pictures of the city, how much one person can change it, even if only so slightly. We forget how much impact we have on those around us, especially when we chance into them but once and never met them again.”

The old man paused, strike buy the peculiarity of her answer.

“Most people just list off what they want to get with the attention that is brought by their art. Listen, Ms. Campbell, as I’d said before, I would very much like to put these up; I’m hosting a show in a week, Saturday; you can leave these here and my people will set them up along with the other displays.”

“That’s fine, I’ve got copies.”

“Good good, but I assure you, we take the utmost care in the maintenance of our pieces.” The old man paused and looked out the window whereupon a enormously fat woman was slurping from a fast-food cup, “It is rare enough we take care of our bodies and thus our minds, to say nothing of their products. For this reason I like to look at art like a body, an extension of it, a fusion of the body with the world. Thoughts are bodies. Thoughts and dreams.”

“Art is the crystallization of a dream.”

The old man smiled even as he tilted his head in perplexity.

“You sound just like Lynder Partridge.”

FIN

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