

# **The Mediator**

A psychological thriller by Erica Pensini

## **Disclaimer:**

This story is a work of fiction and all names, characters, and places are nothing but fantasy.

## **Thrillers by the same author:**

The Missing Link

Forget Me Not

Lethal Discoveries

## Chapter 1

In the broadness of my minimalistic living room the shadows of the dimming day wrap around my silhouette, black against the whiteness of the couch.

“Ms. Dawson...”, starts the journalist

“John, why don’t you call me Iris”, I say

The journalist is silent for a moment, before he replies, *Sure Iris*. His reply is accompanied by a brief laughter and a barely detectable tinge of embarrassment.

“Good”, I smile

John’s eyes elude mine for a moment, trading unspoken questions in the empty space. I sit immobile, waiting for his words.

“You’ve written ten books worth millions of copies each”, he starts, “but the beginning of your first book is what always stroke me the most”

“Why?”, I ask

John knows, but he cannot tell me.

I see John brought the book with him, and I ask him to read the passage to me.

“Perhaps you could”, he says after a pause, handing me the book

I recite from memory instead, my eyes locked onto his.

*I am not an object of desire because of who I am, but because there is something I know how to do better than anyone else. I show people their deepest desires, the ones they cannot get themselves to acknowledge.*

*Hold my hand as we head to hell, I know that’s where you want to be. It will seem so natural to go down that path when you and I walk side by side.*

*My innocence is infinite.*

After I finish we sit silent for a moment.

“Why?”, I ask again

Instead of offering an answer John clears his throat and pulls out his notebook.

I smile and pour us drinks.

“Perhaps you want to hear the full story behind these words”, I say, as I patiently begin to weave the path to John’s answer.

## **Chapter 2**

I had spent the day in a conference room, and I was ready to have some time on my own. I excused myself from the social activities planned for the evening and started heading to my hotel alone.

The fall chilled New York City. It could start pouring any moment, and passers-by hastily pushed their way forward, barely aware of each other’s presence. It was not a good day for walking, and I could have taken a cab. The streets were jammed though, and I relished the shuffles of wind ruffling my hair, they felt liberating after the atrophy in which the previous hours had plunged me.

But when I reached 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. hell suddenly broke loose, the slashes of rain fell hard, drenching me within minutes. I tried to hail a cab, but I couldn’t get anybody to stop for me. I silently cursed the drivers, and looked around for somewhere to shelter myself till the rain would subside.

There was a hotel at the corner. I stood at the entrance, monitoring the sky for some sign of respite from the downpour.

A man stepped out of a limousine, accompanied by a guy holding an umbrella over his head. I observed the scene, fascinated by the perfection of the man’s attire and disgusted by the way he strived to overstate his power. I smiled a sarcastic smile at the hidden weakness this overstatement implied.

The man noticed, and he was not the type to let go.

“Not a good day for walking, is it?”, he told me, stopping in front of me

I took my time to reply, a detached smile clinging on my lips.

“There are worse things in life than getting wet”, I said at last, my tone plain

The man’s light blue eyes scrutinized me, before locking onto my dark gaze. I could sense strength in the lightness of those cold eyes, and my smile warmed, yielding. For a moment I felt tenderness at the man’s Achilles heel.

“And there are better things than standing in front of a hotel, soaked to the bones. Be my guest for a drink”, he asserted

It didn’t seem strange to accept, so I did. And this is how it all started.

### Chapter 3

My memories are so clear it could all be happening now.

Voices from the hotel restaurant are in the background. There's only one other customer at the bar. The guy is hunched over a newspaper as he drinks, wrapped in a black trench coat. He looks in my direction every now and then, but I soon forget about his presence.

"Two gin tonics", says the man, defining my choice

I approve with the flicker of a smile.

The man smiles back, the curved mouth hardened by his full control of the moment.

I observe the barista as he blends our drinks and I say "Iris Dawson", without diverting my eyes or losing track of the barista's moves.

"Iris Dawson is your name?", the man asks, a frown of sudden surprise dissolving the hard edges in his smile

My gaze shifts towards him at the same time the barista places our drinks on the counter.

"Yes", I reply

The man sips his drink and says "Rob Neilson", while looking straight ahead

After a moment he turns towards me, staring me down with a resolute lack of expression. Then he suddenly smiles and shakes his head.

"You are strange", he tells me

"What would you be doing now if you weren't with me?", I ask

"What would I be doing?", Rob echoes back

I nod

"I'd be ordering dinner in my room and watching some show before organizing the documents for tomorrow", he tells me

I nod again

"Why did you ask?", Rob wants to know

"To understand why you are with me", I say

Rob scrutinizes me, trying to grasp my intentions

“What do you mean?”, he insists, his arched brows marking the sarcastic façade he chooses to show me

“Why are we having drinks instead of dinner when we’re both hungry?”, I reply without thinking

The authenticity of the question shifts my perception of the moment.

I swing left and right on the stool while sipping the gin tonic, eyes smiling as my mouth clings onto the glass.

Rob cocks his head, he doesn’t understand my attitude but he’s amused.

“Where do you want to go for dinner?”, he asks

“We can order dinner from your room and watch some show, before you organize the documents for tomorrow”, I tell him, resting my chin on the palm of my hand, a hopeful smile sprawled on my face

Rob laughs, and his laughter is hearty, liberating.

“God”, he replies, shaking his head

I keep looking at Rob with rounded eyes, my expression unchanged

“Ok Iris, let’s go”, he capitulates, and I swing myself off the stool, smiling playfully, my brows peaking as an exclamation mark at the end of a happy sentence

#### **Chapter 4**

The hour is undefined. The curtains are closed, the light in the bathroom seeps through the half open door, illuminating the bed where Rob and I are lying naked. A pile of empty dishes is lying on the floor.

Rob turns towards me, and studies me for a moment, wanting to ask a question but hesitating to formulate it. I smile, pulling the blankets up to my chin as I turn to face him.

“Why did you do this?”, he asks at last

“Really, I don’t know”, I say without lying

“Do you often get yourself in similar situations?”, he wants to know

“No, I don’t. This is the first time”

He struggles to believe me.

“Really?”, he insists

“You’re the one who asked me for a drink”, I reply

“Yes, I asked you for a drink but now we are in my hotel room, naked, and we had sex”, he argues

“Yes”, I shrug

He looks at me, as if trying to read the plan underlying my actions, and I keep smiling

“How long are you here for?”, he asks

“In New York? The conference I’m here for ends tomorrow, and I’ll be flying out tomorrow night”, I say

Rob nods.

Leaving as planned is the only thing that makes sense, and yet I realize I’d want to stay here for an extra day.

“How long are you here for?”, I ask, returning his question

“I have a meeting tomorrow morning, and I’ll be flying out tomorrow night”, he says

“Good timing”, I smile

We’re silent for a moment

“What’s your meeting about?”, I’m curious to know

“It’s about esthanol, a new chemical we’d like to have in our product line”, he tells me

“I see”, I say

“But it’s not that easy”, he continues

“Why?”

“Because someone else is already producing it, and they have the know-how”, he explains

“So you are trying to negotiate the purchase of the know-how?”

Rob shakes his head

“No, they’ll never give it away”

“So?”, I insist

“So there’s really no easy way to achieve this”

I’m silent for a moment

“Is there a hard way to achieve this?”, I want to know, and Rob laughs

“Bribe the inventor of the chemical to tell us all about it and screw over our competitors”, he says, laughing again

“Is this hard?”, I ask

Rob scrutinizes me, pondering if I am joking or if I am truly as clueless as my statement makes me sound

“Well, bribing a guy is much easier than re-building his knowledge from scratch. As long as your target guy is a well-defined person it shouldn’t be that hard”

Rob looks at me, intrigued. His is a purely theoretical curiosity, he doesn’t believe that my logic can be applied to the real world but he feels compelled to hear about it.

“Someone knows about this chemical, yes? So who’s the man?”, I start

Rob doesn’t answer

“Ok, let’s assume you know the man’s name”, I say

“Let’s assume I do. So you want me to walk up to the guy and tell him, I’ll pay you millions if you spill your secrets?”, Rob replies ironically

He’s losing interest

“Not really. Maybe you can’t buy the guy with money”

“So what do you propose to do?”, Rob asks again, his thoughts shifting beyond my reach

I take the remote and turn on the TV.

“Let’s look for inspiration”, I say

I mean it as a joke, but now Rob is wondering if he just slept with a deranged woman. He gets up and starts donning his pants.

I zap for few seconds before landing on the show I want.

Lying in bed naked, I look at the images rolling on the screen and I look at Rob, waiting.

His shirt still undone, Rob stops short, his attention suddenly alert. Rob’s hands cling to the button he was about to close, immobile.

Unnoticed, I smile as I witness the unfolding of Rob’s hidden self.

## Chapter 5

The darkness has deepened around us, but I can still discern the signs that John has been impressing in his notebook as I spoke.

“So the Neil Robson in your first novel is the alias of Rob Neilson ...”, John says, eyes lowered, as if talking to himself

Our conversation pauses. All is apparently still but I sense John’s body twitch ever so slightly.

There’s a metal box beside the sofa. In it I find a story I cut off from the short fiction section published on the New Yorker years ago. The date is October 20, 1999.

“You’re a journalist, so of course you remember Rob Neilson”, I say

I observe John as he waits for my words.

“But have you ever read this?”, I continue after a moment, handing him the story

John struggles to make out the words, black against the blackness of the room, and even after deciphering them he’s at a loss.

I leave the couch to slide the paper off his hands and refill our glasses. Then I lay back and let the alcohol blow its evanescent flame through me, slowly melting in my body.

Eyes closed, I sense John’s eye on me.

“You’ve read my book, and yet you never saw this episode the way you are seeing it now. The question never occurred to you before”, I say, eyes closed

John keeps silent.

“But now you want to know if Leslie Carson is a fictional character inspired by the night I spent with Rob Neilson, or if she’s more than that. You want to know more about Leslie Carson”, I continue

“Yes, I want to know”, he tells me

“John, if you want something just ask”, I say

John doesn’t reply, and I allow time to flow by, eyes closed, laying back on the couch.

I sense John shift his body forward, and pull back. I smile, and opening my eyes I see that John has taken his glass from the table.

The amber liquid oscillates in John’s glass, ever so slightly, unveiling the invisible shiver in his hand.



I shift my body forward to pick up my glass, and pull back.

“Can you tell me more about Leslie Carson?”, John asks

“I sure can”, I smile, satisfied with the question

My memories resurface with untainted clarity in the impinging nightfall.

## **Chapter 6**

The conference has come to an end and I am lining up to board on my plane.

Rob Neilson reverberates within me, and yet our night together could have happened centuries before. It feels like one of those old memories that are tattooed inside you and emerge at random moments with almost physical intensity.

I turn around absent mindedly, when I catch a glimpse of a name tag hanging on the woman beside me. The woman is labelled “Carlie Lester”. Carlie Lester notices me looking, and realizes she had forgotten to remove her badge. She slides it off her neck with a sigh, a contained outburst of frustration after a day that has weighed on her.

I give Carlie a smile and she returns it, radiating a different self for a flashing instant. Carlie is intriguing when she frowns, and beautiful when she smiles.

Carlie and I have not been assigned neighbouring seats. Beside me is instead a heavy woman, who anxiously twists her head in all directions in the vain attempt to spot somebody. She grips the armrests, holding on to them as she swings her bulky torso towards the aisle, and she collapses back with a sigh, just to start all over again few seconds later. I am starting to get unnerved when a hostess comes to interrupt the woman’s routine by telling her the passenger next to her husband is willing to trade seats.

Carlie appears after a moment and when she sees me a smile of relief crossed her face.

“I couldn’t stand my neighbour”, she says

“I couldn’t stand your neighbour’s wife”, I reply, and we laugh

“Iris”, I introduce myself, and Carlie says, “I’m Carlie”

“I know”, I say, and Carlie looks lost for a moment

“You were sick of wherever you had been, you needed to get out of there so fast that you forgot about the badge hanging on your neck”, I smile

“Oh yeah...”, Carlie remembers, letting herself lie back, eyes closed

And without opening her eyes, she begins.

“I was always thrilled to be a scientist, a *real* scientist. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes”, I say

“You do? I was coming up with discoveries and solutions, I had good reasons to drive to work in the morning. But now things have changed”, Carlie says and pauses

“Why?”

“They’ve given me new tasks, and now I’m something in between a salesman and a manager”

“Well, find a new job then”

“I could”, she says

Carlie pauses again, a long pause floating on the background noise of the aircraft’s engines before takeoff. They roar and roar, and I wonder why we’re still stuck to the ground.

Overcoming their sound, Carlie speaks again.

“They pay me well, so it’s hard to let go, but there’s no thrill anymore. What’s worst is that every day that passes plunges me in a deeper state of torpor. I used to blow it all up when things didn’t work for me, I used to go for a fresh start without too many worries. But now...I don’t know”

“So you want the fun and the money, but it seems like you can’t get both at the same time. Is this it?”

“It is and it isn’t”

“They’ve gotten you bored to death and now you don’t know what you want anymore”, I say

Carlie opens her eyes when we finally get off the ground. The motors push the aircraft upwards, compressing us against our seats.

“I love this”, says Carlie

“I do too. I feel free only during transitions”, I tell her

“At this moment I believe anything is possible”, Carlie says

We are silent for a while.

“Anything is possible”, I say, my words reverberating Carlie’s

The trajectory of the aircraft plateaus, Carlie and I face each other.

On the background, beyond Carlie, there's a man. The guy is hunched over a newspaper as he drinks, wrapped in a black trench coat. I sense we had met before, but I can't place him. The man glances in my direction, before going back to his paper.

Seeing the man I think, Rob Neilson, but it is only a fraction of a second later that I realize why. He was at the bar the night before. Intriguing coincidence?, I wonder.

"What I want is the thrill", Carlie tells me, oblivious of my momentary distraction

"What if you could have the thrill *and* the money?", I ask smiling

## **Chapter 7**

"What if I could have the thrill and the money?", Carlie echoes me

My plain face offers no suggestions.

"I'd be happy, I suppose", she concludes, giving me a shrug and an ephemeral giggle

"You'd be happy whatever it takes to have both?", I want to know

"Yes", Carlie admits, after the briefest hesitation, and I smile

"So what can thrill you?", I want to know

"Being a scientific spy", is the answer, given without a time gap

The screenplay playing in Rob Neilson's hotel room unwinds within me, taking new turns.

"A scientific spy?", I ask, wanting more details

"Imagine sneaking in corporate labs and blowing up all their secrets. Of course human beings create the knowledge corporations treasure as secrets, but human beings are nobodies to the corporations. The profit they make is valuable, but they – as human beings – are worth nothing"

I listen to the tirade without speaking.

"So you want to steal corporate secrets and then what?"

"You know wiki-leaks? Yeah, I want to make it all public", says Carlie, a bitter bend twisting her mouth

Hunched over an empty glass and a newspaper, the man wrapped in his black trench coat adsorbs flecks of our conversation with discreet glances.

“This would give you the thrill, but what about the money?”, I say

Carlie’s thoughts swirl for a moment.

“I’d sell the secrets and then make them public. I’ll get the thrill, the money and the fun for playing the best prank ever on everyone”, she says angrily

But then Carlie’s horizon closes, her revengeful dreams deflate.

“I must be crazy to discuss this nonsense with someone I just met”, she says

Lying back on my seat, cheeks touching the headrest, I see Carlie beside Rob Neilson as I look at an imaginary TV screen.

“Most certainly Carlie, and I have a crazy idea for you”, I smile

## **Chapter 8**

John is tensed towards the crazy idea I carry within me. The darkness should conceal him, and yet his tension vibrates in the air with almost physical intensity.

I know he’s waiting, and let us savour the peculiar taste of expectation. When the moment comes, I speak again.

“I intended the crazy idea as nothing more than a fantasy. Planting its seed out there meant that the realization of the idea could not be absolutely discounted, but it was nonetheless unlikely”, I continue

“So the Leslie Carson in the short fiction you published on the New Yorker is Carlie”, John says and I nod

“Tell me more about the idea”, he says, no longer able to brace his curiosity

In the obscure silence of the room my voice traces the promise of a trail.

“I signed the piece, but as I wrote I made believe that Carlie was the author. Truth be told, she and Rob were. I’ve been nothing but the medium through which Carlie and Neil manifested themselves. You’ve read the plot. Carlie, alias Leslie, is a law abiding woman. Most and foremost though, she is a brilliant scientist looking for new turns in life, and in a crazy discussion with a stranger she figures she wants to be a scientific hacker. Somewhere out there there’s someone looking for her, let’s say someone like Rob Neilson. Rob Neilson is a law abiding man. Most and foremost though, he is a businessman aiming at profit and in a surreal night spent in a hotel room with a perfect stranger he sees some cynical frames on a TV screen, and those frames click with him. He is mesmerized by the actress playing a sexy MIT girl, paid by someone to manipulate a rational man, win his trust and have him reveal all his secrets about a

drug not yet released and on which he has worked for years. Carlie Lester wants to meet Rob Neilson. She writes about herself in the short fiction section and includes her contact information in the story. And then I, a perfect stranger, cut off the story from the New York Times, place it in an envelope and send it to Rob Neilson's company. The name of the company is easy enough to find, the likelihood of my letter being actually handed to Rob, let alone read, is close to zero. Sitting at her desk, swamped by admin tasks she hates, Carlie Lester smiles at the possibilities implied by the infinitesimal gap between zero and close to zero"

My narration subsides, and I let the realm of possibilities shimmer beyond my words.

"Did Carlie Lester and Rob Neilson really meet?", John wants to know

For a moment I wish John could feed my imagination as I'm feeding his.

"What is your gut feeling?", I ask

"I don't know. Perhaps they did", John says undecidedly

"I didn't know either for the longest time the same way I knew nothing about the inventor of the chemical of the century, that esthanol substance Rob had told me about. Was the inventor a rational but naïve man? Would Carlie be able to win his trust and secrets if given the chance?", I tell him

John still needs my words, but I have faith in his potential.

"How do you picture the inventor of esthanol?", I ask

"As a man at least in part naïve", John replies, emerging from his hidden cocoon

"Why?", I want to know

"Because only dreamers can invent what is not yet a reality", John beautifully says

There's a lamp on the side table, and I light it. Its dim reflections are soft around John's features and mine.

The change is unexpected. John's fingers contract in his shoes for the briefest instant. Then I lock my eyes onto John's, and his fingers relax as I smile.

"Let me show you something", I tell him

I take the metal box beside the sofa on my lap and find a story I cut out the short fiction section published on the New Yorker on December 10, 1999.

“Here, John. Meet Steven Meyers, alias Meyer Stevenson. He’s your dreamer”, I say, handing him the story

## Chapter 9

Bondage Breaker – December 10, 1999, The New Yorker

The rush hour wave had almost subsided, and yet the subway train felt packed when I stepped in. I negotiated my way through the crowd, trying to dig out a square of empty space. There were free seats here and there, but I couldn’t get myself to pick one. I had set my mind on standing when a woman looked up from her book and brushed her eyes on me for a split moment.

I sat in front of her.

For a while she ignored my presence, the subway, anything beyond the black and white world of words elating from her book. But when the train came to a halt at the next station, brakes squeaking loudly, she noticed me again.

“I should get myself a novel like yours”, I said

What did I expect? Only deranged people interact on subway trains. And yet something in her ways had created a shift in the set of rules. I sensed she would not pull back.

She wanted to know what brought me to New York, and I wondered what made my lack of belonging to the city so blatantly clear.

I told her I was taking a break, she smiled at my generic answer and said, “Seems like you are seeking some answers around here”

She knew so much already, so why not tell her everything?

“I’ve created lethanol”, I said

She couldn’t know about lethanol, but I thought I’d lost my mind to talk about this. When she nodded as if I were telling her I was a math teacher in junior high I relaxed.

Of course the name hadn’t rang a bell. Or had it?

“The economic value of this molecule is huge, there has been a time when I was proud of my creation. But not anymore”, I continued, unable to stop

How so, she asked, and I explained what I figured lethanol could do to ecosystems and people. Anxiousness was starting to foam within me when she shrugged and told me, mistakes happen.

“But I can’t let myself be responsible for a massive disaster”, I fought back, my tone pitching, as if winning this argument could change the facts

Then don’t, was her calm reply.

“I communicated the risks. My company knows, but profit rules. They want lethanol. I thought about ingesting the bloody stuff to reach the public. If I die *somebody* will have to ask questions”, I replied, the high pitch escalating in my tone

Few people turned my way before for the briefest instant, their irritated indifference echoing my feeling of impotence.

Is dying the only solution?, she wanted to know, the calmness in her tone unaltered. This woman had faith, or maybe what I saw was my own faith, reflected in her empathetic eyes.

I shook my head no. No, dying is not the only solution. Not for now, at least.

A man with a black trench coat hunched on his newspaper glanced my way. The glance was brief, but he was not irritated and he was not indifferent.

The woman looked at him strangely, and was silent for a moment.

I looked at him too. He was now engrossed in the black symbols populating his newspaper, and all of a sudden it dawned on me. How simple.

“Of course”, I said

“Of course”, the woman repeated, “I know about lethanol and that man over there might have overheard our conversation about it too, who knows. There are people who might want to listen, all you have to do is reach out and find them”

I grinned. She smiled, and asked my name.

I am Meyer Stevenson, and now you know about my story too. From now on I’ll keep telling it to whoever cares to hear it. You can broadcast it or forget it.

What you do with it is up to you, but bear this in mind.

- They can only have you if you let them, and I won’t.

*Iris Dawson*

## Chapter 10

John is looking at me with a peculiar expression painted on his face and an undefined question finding its way through him.

“Is this really how the Steven Meyers case started?”, he asks at last

“Yes”, I say

John ponders my answer, plays with combinations and possibilities.

“What do you think happened next?”, I ask him

“Carlie Lester finds the story. She remembers you, but she’s not sure at all that you’re making this up. She probably thinks that following the trail you gave her is nothing but a game. She can’t really believe it will go anywhere, and yet she needs out of her present life and she catches the hook”, John says

I smile.

Needing more than his own imagination, John waits for my words. But I too want his story.

“What do you think happened next?”, I ask again

John seems lost for a moment, and yet I know it is worth waiting.

“Carlie doesn’t have an exact plan, but she knows that if she can hook up Steven she’ll be a step closer to putting her hands on esthanol”, he says after a pause

I nod

“When she compares your short stories she notices how you change names...how lethanol is esthanol, how her own name – Carlie Lester – has been translated into Leslie Carson. She envisions that Meyer Stevenson is probably the alias for Steven Meyers”, John hypothesizes

“You sure know how to follow your trails, Mr. Journalist”, I smile

“And so Carlie finds Steven”, John continues

“She does”, I say

“And perhaps she even lands a job in his company”, John speculates

“How does she land this job?”, I want to know

“You’re such a tease”, John replies, laughing for the first time



I pretend to frown, before my smile melts into John's laughter.

"You want to know? I feel we can find some answers here", John says, opening my book on a page marked by a small fold on the top right corner

I cock my head sideways, now frowning in genuine surprise.

"Let me read you a chapter you might have forgotten about", John smiles

I sit back, the expectation flowing within me in rivulets of warmth, as I wait for my own words to reshape themselves through John.

## **Chapter 11**

"Carlie, how did you meet Steven?", John asks, reading from the book, and Carlie gives her account, speaking sentences as gaunt as her features.

I looked him up on a social network, she remembers, and he accepted my invite to connect. I wasn't sure about how to strike a conversation after contact was established, but Steven reached out after about a week we had connected. He told me he read some of my publications and enjoyed them. I replied on a similar professional and neutral tone, and few similar messages were bounced back and forth without much more happening. He never mentioned esthanol, and neither did I, but I kept an eye on job postings in his company, Rick Hanson's Corporation, hoping to find a research opening that could lead me to it. And soon enough I did. I applied, and told Steven about it. After sending him the message I realized for the first time that what I had been doing could be more than a hypothetical reality. Iris Dawson had sent Rob Neilson a letter with a short fiction story I posted on the New Yorker as a cover letter, an improbable attempt to sell myself as a spy able to find out about esthanol. Of course *that* letter had received no reply, but my logic was that if I showed up with actual material in my hands things could change. When I contacted Steven about the job he diverted the conversation, and told me about a seminar in the city where I lived. He was planning on attending, and said he'd be glad if I joined. The seminar was about ethics in science, I assume it was Steven's way to warn me about what I was getting into. Perhaps it was just a way to meet me, to know if I was worth helping. Perhaps it was both. Whatever Steven's reasons, I took a day off work and went to the seminar. I should have guessed at the trouble ahead that first day we met, but I chose to neglect all signs and move on with my plan. Had I dropped it, I could have taken a stance about being an ethical researcher and enjoyed my time with Steven from that first afternoon together. The irony is that if I hadn't felt for Steven, if I had been truly cold, he would have probably been indifferent to me too. We would have not started meeting every

other week, at first using science events as a pretext, then admitting we simply wanted to see each other. We would have not started to date one month after that first seminar, Steven would have not helped me get that position in his company and he would have not trust me with his secrets on esthanol. Too many ifs, but here are the facts. Three months after starting my new job I began to learn about esthanol, and I contacted Rob Neilson again. It took more than one trick to get to speak with him on the phone, but when I finally did I gave out enough detail to make him want for more. We met and he hired me, paying me some money for the information I had given that first time and promising I'd receive the rest when I'd be able to provide him with the full recipe to produce the chemical. And sure enough I did, just few months after our first encounter, but not because of my original plan. I had fallen for Steven, hard and fast. I knew everything about esthanol and the money Rob Neilson would give me were enough for me to dump my apartment keys and take off to some exotic island for many years to come. And yet none of this mattered anymore. The Rick Hanson Corporation had started to commercialize esthanol despite all of Steven's warnings, and Steven felt responsible for what was happening. They had destroyed Steven and I was ready to do anything to destroy them. That's why I gave away all the know-how to the competition. Why couldn't I just admit I was not playing games with Steven when I was still in time? I had started falling in love before making the deal with Rob Neilson, but I couldn't face the truth. I never realized that what I was doing would change my life in ways I could have never expected. You don't know how I live now, do you? I will show you when the night comes if you want. The life I've chosen for myself is so beautifully symbolic, if only you consider how I've wasted the one real love I've encountered.

## **Chapter 12**

"How does Carlie live now?", John asks, closing the book

"You're such a tease", I reply, echoing his words

The hint of an evanescent smile appears on John's lips.

"Is the story real? What happened to Carlie isn't in any official record", he says

John's eyes pierce me, their intensity effacing his smile.

"Wait a moment longer, John. You'll have the whole story, I promise", I say, pressing his hand before returning to my position

My touch is unexpected. John opens his mouth as if to compose a sentence, but he doesn't.

I observe him for a moment and notice, for the first time, that he is handsome.

The realization is unanticipated. It prolongs my silence, but I speak a split second before John does.

“Let me tell you when I met Carlie again, after her life had become intertwined with Steven’s in ways she couldn’t have known”, I start

“Tell me”, John says

“I was travelling to attend a conference, and the conference happened to be in the city where Steven, and now Carlie, worked. It was my last night there. I had been landscaping a number of streets to find a restaurant, when my eye caught a place that seemed unpretentiously classy. The waitress showed me to a table in a corner and I was just about to open the menu when I noticed, hunched over a newspaper and a drink, a man dressed in a black trench coat. I had seen this man too many times to believe this was a coincidence”, I start

John asks the obvious question.

“You thought he was stalking you?”

“No. I simply knew something was going to happen”, I reply

John’s next question comes in the form of a frown.

“Something was there, undeniably, but there was no need to rush its discovery”, is my answer

John sighs and I smile, continuing.

“I opened the menu, and my attention was rapidly absorbed by the options. When I made my choice I closed the menu and raised my eyes. The eyes of the man in black crossed mine. He raised two fingers in a gest of farewell so brief I could have imagined the fleeting moment. And when the moment passed I saw them. Steven and Carlie were sitting two tables away from mine, the food turning cold on their heated conversation”

“Did they see you?”, John asks

“Not immediately. When I did I opened a book, alternating between the pages and the real object of my attention. Steven was sitting back, shaking his head no every now and then. Carlie was begging him not to do something. She was trying to keep her composure with little success”

John drinks my words, his body slightly protruding towards me, the storyteller.

“Could you hear what she was saying?”, he wants to know

“Not everything, only what peaked in panicked notes. Please don’t, too risky, can’t go, why?, flashed in repeated echoes of escalating anxiousness”, I say

“And how did the conversation end?”, John asks

“It didn’t, at least not in that restaurant. Carlie paid the bill and grabbed her forehead in a gest of despair, before leaving the table”

“And?”, John prods me

“And it was then that Carlie saw me. She had to walk past my table to reach the exit. When she was passing next to me I looked up, and Carlie looked back at me. Was this part of the plan?, I could almost hear her ask me. But she didn’t, and walked away instead”

I pause, and this time John waits for me to continue.

“That night I wrote a story. It was about Steven wanting to leave the company and Carlie begging him not to, and the next day I sent it to the New Yorker for publication. I couldn’t stop what I had started, but I was unaware of what it entailed. My story was meant to be make-believe, till one week later something happened”

### **Chapter 13**

Before continuing the story I get up to get a drink in the kitchen. I’m standing in front of the fridge pondering options when John steps behind me, seamlessly, and takes my wrist.

“What happened?”, he asks

My lips part as I am caught by surprise, before I recompose myself.

“Do you want a drink?”, I say

“I want your story”, John replies, with a new intensity that frightens and thrills me

I free my wrist and disobey, pouring two drinks. I hand John one and take his wrist.

“Let me tell you”, I say, guiding him back to the living room

When we reach the couch I let go off John’s wrist. He raises both hands and presses on my shoulders. The pressure is soft, and yet enough to sit me.

“Tell me now”, he decides, and I start, the glass beside me, untouched

“After the conference I went to New York for the week-end. I stepped in a subway train along the subway line where I had first met Steven. It was late, the train was almost empty and I saw him immediately. He saw me too, and got up from his seat without hesitation, heading in my direction. He said he had been waiting for me, told me he knew I’d go back to NY and ride that subway when he caught sight of me in the restaurant. I didn’t think he had noticed me, and told him so. The thought of him riding the subway hoping to find me there seemed absurd, and yet which reasons did I have to spend the week-end in New York? I realized I was there, riding that subway train, hoping to find him. He pointed at the guy with whom he had been sitting, said he wanted me to meet him. Karl Lennon. As introductions were made I caught a glance of a man, dressed in black, hunched over a newspaper. I wondered if I was in a predefined plot over which I had no control or if I was sailing along the revelation of my own dreams. It didn’t matter though, at that moment the reality in which I was drenched intrigued me immensely. Your guess was right, Steven told me, as I was still trying to take in what was happening. What guess, I wanted to know, and Steven told me he was going to leave the company. He said he needed to put his affairs in order before dimbing a glacier with his spiritual guru, and Karl nodded without smiling. Carlie had betrayed him, he said, but he forgave her because society had made her the way she was, it wasn’t her fault. I wanted to know what he meant, and he said Carlie had been speaking about esthanol to Rob Neilson – their competitor. He was sure about it, because Carlie had told him. If she had admitted her mistake was she not honest?, I argued, and Steven said that was not the point. The point was that Rob Neilson knew about ethanol. Now even if he managed to convince Rick Hanson, the owner of his company, to stop the production of the ethanol Rob Neilson would keep exploiting his invention. I asked Steven how dimbing a glacier was related to what was happening. And at this moment Karl Lennon spoke, for the first time, and said that Steven had to be one with nature to join the movement. I still didn’t understand, but before I could speak Steven looked at me and thanked me for inspiring him. Then he got up, and while he was a distance from me, close to the door, he told me this: “I will broadcast documents about all the things that have happened. I will not spare any detail. Then I will climb that glacier, and I will fly. It will be my last flight, but at least I will taste freedom”. I couldn’t speak. Then the door opened, and Steven walked away without ever tuming my way again. When the door closed the man in black had disappeared too, and I was completely alone in the empty train”

## **Chapter 14**

Once I stop talking the room fills with a sizzling silence.

“Everyone thought Steven Mayer’s death was an accident”, John says after a while

“Now I’ve told you how he really died”, I say

“You have not yet told me everything”, John objects

“What else do you want to know?”, I ask

“I want to know about Leslie Carson. What did she do after Steven committed suicide?”, he says

I look at John, tilting my head with a smile.

“But...”, I say with an ironically reprimanding pout, pointing at my book

John shakes his head no.

“The answer is in there”, I insist

“I was ordering a coffee to kill some time before my flight home when I met her again”, John starts, reciting from my book

I look at him, surprised he knows my lines by heart.

I want him to continue, but he stops, looking at me with an expression I cannot decipher.

“Can you go on, please?”, I find myself almost begging

“Why do you want me to tell your story?”, John wants to know

I don’t have an answer so I look at John, silent.

John bugs his eyes and smiles, handing me the book.

“Will you read to me, Iris?”, he says

I nod, and here is how the story goes.

## **Chapter 15**

I was ordering a coffee to kill some time before my flight home when I met her again. Carlie was sitting at a table, her hands cupped around a tea cup that had gone cold. It took her a moment to notice my presence, and when she did she attempted a gaunt smile. Grief puffed her eyelids, her eyes were almost expressionless.

When I motioned towards her she didn’t give any sign of accepting or refusing my presence, and asked if I could have a seat at her table Carlie stared at me blankly for a while. Then she nodded yes.

We sat in front of each other without speaking and the arms of the dock spun in silent circles in the buzz of the crowd, until Carlie spoke in a hollow voice.

“You said I could have the money and the thrill, but you never told me about what else would be in the bundle. Steven died, you know?”, she said

I nodded yes

“It’s my fault”, she continued

I sat motionless

“I told Steven about my deal with Rob Neilson, and that’s why he died. I want to die too now”

I shook my head no. Not again, not another one.

“It’s not only your fault, Carlie”, I said

“Whose fault is it then, tell me”, Carlie retorted, anger refueling her strength

“Rob Neilson’s and Rick Hansen’s”, I reply, my voice calm

As my statement plunges in, thoughts dart through Carlie’s mind. I sense their darkness.

“Yes, Rick Hanson. Steven tried to convince him to drop the production of the bloody product, but he wouldn’t listen. All Rick Hansen cares about is money, and sure enough now that I’ve sold his trade secret his business is dead”, Carlie says, her tone gaining assurance

I nod, hoping she’ll stop here but knowing she won’t.

“I hate Rob Neilson”, she says, and I cannot help but gasp

“What is it, are you worried for him?”, she laughs

For an instant I am. Then I step out of the scene, recomposing myself.

“Why don’t you tell me what you have in mind?”, I smile

Carlie looks at me strangely.

“I will make sure that Rick Hansen knows what I’ve done. I have nothing to lose at this point, but Rick Hanson does. Unless Rob Neilson goes out of business Rick Hanson won’t be safe, and he will hate to be unsafe”, Carlie says, the words marked by the slowness in her voice

“What do you expect Rick Hanson to do?”, I ask

“Why don’t you tell me, lady. You’re the storyteller”, Carlie replies with a smirk

## Chapter 16

“Tell me, lady”, John echoes

“That night, in the solitary coldness of an urban night, I wrote about how Rick Hanson would destroy the man I had met in a hotel room, in a long gone night of the surreal. And for the first time since the beginning of the story, I cried”, I tell him

“Why did you cry?”, John wants to know

“I always remain loyal to my men, in my own strange way”, I reply

“You considered Neil Robson your man?”, John wants to know, intrigued

“He had been my man for the night that changed his life. That should be worth something, Mr. Journalist”, I say, retreating, wondering if I overrated John’s cleverness

“That’s certainly worth something. Fulfilment of your ego and a bet with yourself could have been the value of that night”, John says, his eyes gripping me

“It was that too”, I admit, uncoiling, “but not only that”

“Was the fate of Neil Robson the only reason for crying?”, John prods me

“No, I cried for myself”, I realize

I pause, formulating my thoughts, and John waits.

“I cried because I was the author of a story I wanted to efface”, I said at last

“Then why cry rather than change its finale?”, John wants to know

“I couldn’t. The story was in me, but I couldn’t modify it. I could simply see it”, I say

John’s bugs his eyes slightly.

“You are saying you were nothing but an external observer”, John summarizes

“No, I was more than an external observer. I was the mediator”, I explain

“The mediator?”, John repeats, frowning



“I sensed unacknowledged impulses and captured hidden desires. I detected them in others because they were in me, or had been in me, even if only in my dreams. I looked at them with candid eyes, no matter their nature, and exposed them without shame. I was innocent and honest”, I say

“Innocent and honest”, John smiles

“I was. All I wrote and imagined was there. It was absolute and irrational. It could not be effaced, so I admitted it, and in doing so I showed others all they had repressed”, I insist

John sighs, rubbing the back of his head.

“So tell me, Iris, how did you unleash Rick Hanson’s impulses the night you began to destroy Neil Robson?”, he asks me

## **Chapter 17**

I had to go back to the place where it all started. It was spring now, but when I reached New York the sky carried the promise of rain. Remembering my first and only encounter with Rob Neilson, I took the mood of the sky as an omen. I could have taken a cab all the way to my hotel, the same hotel where I had met Rob Neilson, but I asked the driver to stop when I was still fairly far from it.

“Are you sure, miss?”, he asked me

I said I was, and that I needed to walk.

When I reached 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. it started to pour and by the time I reached the hotel I was drenched. I stood at the entrance for a moment, wondering if I’d catch a glimpse of a limousine and if Rob Neilson, seeing me soaked to the bones, would smile and ask me for a second drink.

Few moments later a limousine stopped in front of the hotel.

Veins throbbing, I observed a guy holding an umbrella open the passenger’s door. A man stepped out, his attire perfect, his power overstated. I smiled sarcastically, remembering how I had smiled that same sarcastic smile way when I first saw Rob Neilson.

The man noticed, and he could not let go.

“Seems like the weather isn’t at its best, is it?”, he said, stopping in front of me

I let him wait for my reply

“There are worse things in life than getting wet”, I finally said, as I had to Rob

The man's dark eyes gripped mine, his defiant thin smile mirroring mine.

I felt no tenderness for this man, but when he invited me for a drink I did the sole thing I could do at that moment.

"I wouldn't mind a drink", I said

## **Chapter 18**

"You slept with Rick Hanson", John states

"All I said so far is that I accepted to go for a drink", I reply

"You said much more than that", John argues

I cock my head slightly, and a smile half questioning half surprised appears on my lips

"You've been drawing a parallel", John says and pauses

I wait for him to continue.

"You talked Rick Hanson into having dinner in his room, had sex and watched a show, just like you did with Rob Neilson. All this I know", he tells me

I round my eyes, John shakes his head and laughs.

"Don't give me that look, Iris. All this I know, now tell me about that show you and Rick watched", John commands

"There was a man on a roof, aiming at a target walking in the street", I start

"Was Rick Hanson paying attention?", John asks

"No, not really. His mind had been elsewhere for most of the evening", I recall

"But you, the mediator, made sure he noticed", John prods me

I ponder for a moment, wondering if that is really what I had done.

"I asked him if he ever wanted someone dead", I say after a moment

"This doesn't seem the question one hears every day", John comments ironically

"It isn't. Rick looked at me when I asked, saying, 'what?' in a half-minded way. And yet I had captured his attention. I repeated the question, and he wanted to know why I was asking. I shrugged, said the scenes on the screen had made me wonder"

“And what did Rick Hanson tell you?”, John wants to know

“You’re odd, that’s what he said. Then there was a muffled explosion, a lifeless man in suit on the pavement some 20 storeys below. Rick stared at the screen, frowned deeply for a while, looked at me again. Yeah, he said, there’s someone I want dead”.

## **Chapter 19**

“How did you feel after the revelation?”, John wants to know

“I was tormented. I read the papers every day, without finding what I feared and expected. Then one summer day, as I was paying for the usual morning paper, I saw the man in a black trench coat on the opposite side of the street, holding a newspaper under his arm. We looked at each other through the flow of the crowd and the cars, for the briefest instant, and I knew something would happen”, I said

“Did you ever wonder who the man was?”, John asks

I observe him for a moment before answering, trying to ascertain the real meaning of his question.

“That day I didn’t want the man to leave. I needed to know”, I reply

“Did you speak to him?”, John asks

“By the time I managed to cross the street he was gone”, I say

“Did you ever speak to him?”, John insists

Instead of answering the question I chose to continue along my own line of thought.

“After seeing the man I knew something was about to happen. At the end of the day I went to my flat and sought peace, but it was unattainable. At 2.30 a.m. I stepped out of my place”, I remember

“What were you looking for?”, John prods me

“I didn’t know what I was looking for, but I knew I’d find something”, I say

John observes me for a moment. Then, unexpectedly, he leans towards me and grips my wrists, both of them.

“At this specific moment the pace of your story is unbearably slow”, he says

I bear John’s grip for a stretched instant, then break loose and smile.

“Darling. Do you want to know what I found?”, I ask, my voice soft

“Yes”, John tells me

“Nick Lavigne”, I say

John bugs his eyes.

“Right, this is not in the official records. And mind you, Mr. Journalist, you’re not the one who’s going to change this”, I state

“Who is Nick Lavigne?”, John wants to know

“The night I found him he was a man in love crying against a light pole. He was gripping the pole and howling, literally howling, in a way I never heard before”, I start

“Who is Nick Lavigne?”, John repeats

“The killer”, I say

## **Chapter 20**

John’s light blue eyes turn intensely dark.

“Nick Lavigne is Rob Neilson’s killer?”, he asks

“The night I met him, Nick Lavigne was Rob Neilson’s killer. After we parted he became more than that”, I say

“Come on, mystery woman, explain”, John commands, and I slowly begin undoing the veils.

“Rick Hanson hired Nick Lavigne to do the job for him. Nick Lavigne was a good professional, he did the job. But then something went wrong. As I said, when I met Rick Hanson he was a man in love crying against a light pole”, I start

“In love with whom?”, John urges

“With Rob Neilson, of course”, I reveal at last

The surprise hushes John’s words, and I savour the pause.

“Nick Lavigne was a good professional. He observed Rob Neilson, studied his habits, learned everything about him. I suppose knowing all about someone is what it takes to truly hurt a person. To kill that person”, I continue after a moment

John remains silent.

“And I suppose that’s also what it takes to truly love somebody”, I conclude

Silence.

“How did you learn that Nick Lavigne fell in love with Rob Neilson?”, John asks, recovering at last

“I took Nick Lavigne in my arms and held his shattered body, wiping the tears from his eyes”, I smile

## **Chapter 21**

John observes me, pondering my meaning.

“You’re talking by figures of speech”, he says after a pause

“No, I am truthfully describing the facts. When I saw Nick Lavigne gripping onto the light poles as if that was his last hope in life, screaming out his tears in the deserted street, I took his hands off the pole and said, ‘hey, its alright’, and then I hugged him”, I remember

“You really did that?”, John wants to know

“Yes I did”

“And you weren’t scared that the man was a psycho?”, John asks, astonished

“I was sure he was a psycho as much as I was sure that he wouldn’t hurt me”, I reply calmly

“How did Nick Lavigne react?”, John wants to know

“He pushed me back so violently that I almost fell to the ground. He yelled, LEAVE!, told me I knew nothing about him, and that he was worth nothing. Then he started sobbing so hard he could barely stand, and came towards me, teetering. He collapsed on me, holding onto my body as he had done with the pole. *Help me, please help me*, he begged, his voice hoarse and broken by the tears. Time stretched as I let him pour his pain on me, my body shaking against the convulsions of his”, I remember

John drinks in my words. He has gotten closer, as if his thirst for my words could be quenched by physical proximity.

I take a sip from my glass, and continue my account a split second before John asks.

“When I felt Nick could manage to walk I took him by the hand and walked him to my flat. He let me guide him, without asking where we were heading. He was a broken man with no will. When we reached the rental place where I was staying I removed his shoes and guided him to the couch, brought him a glass of water”, I say

And here I stopped.

“Don’t stop now”, John urges me

“I won’t”, I reply calmly

“What happened?”, John insists

*“What happened?”, I asked Nick after letting him settle for a moment. I am a professional killer and I’ve killed the man I loved, he said. Tell me about him, I said, and he did. He told me the whole story, the names and all, without omitting any detail”*

John looks at me intensely, as to penetrate the deepest meaning of my words.

“This cannot be true”, he says at last, bugging his eyes

“Nick told me the whole story without pausing, his eyes dry now, the pain turned into numbness. When he finished the story he collapsed his head backwards, eyes closed. *You don’t believe me, do you?*, he asked me, eyes still unopened. I said I did”

John wavers between faith and disbelief.

“Then he opened his eyes and pulled out a gun”, I say

John’s body oscillates slightly, before leaning an inch closer to me

*“Thank you for being my confessor in this last hour, he said, placing the gun in his mouth. I was sitting very close to him. It is strange how I felt no fear, just a sense of waste as I pictured the remnants of this man scattered on my walls, on my couch, on me. I asked Nick if he was sure this is the last thing he wanted to do. He took the gun out of his mouth, slowly, and looked at me”*

“He looked at you, waiting for your words”, John smiles

“No, for his own intentions mirrored on me. I was the one waiting for his words”, I reply

John smile fades on his lips

“What did he tell you?”, he wants to know

“Rick Hanson will die”

## **Chapter 22**

John’s body is tense, he is hardly breathing.

“So died esthanol. Amen”, I conlude

I expect John to say something, but he doesn’t.

“Are you satisfied, Mr. Journalist?”, I ask smiling

He shakes his head no, and I bug my eyes, teasingly.

“What else?”, I want to know

“Carlie Lester”, he replies

“What about her?”, I say

“You tell me”, John decides

My smile fades, and I bow my head.

“What is it, Iris?”, John asks, his tone changed

“Nothing. I will tell you what happened to Carlie Lester, but you won’t understand. You don’t understand me and you won’t understand her”, I state

“I know”, John admits, and when he says so I feel lonelier than I have ever felt sitting alone in this living room

“The summer was veering into fall, and the night was drenched in melancholy. My fridge was empty and I was starved. It was about midnight when I had stepped out of my place to buy some food in a 24 hrs shop few blocks away from my flat. I was walking back home when something captured my attention”, I recall

I am recounting the story for myself now, and when John speaks the sound of his voice resounds oddly in my living room. It seems alien to the place.

“What captured your attention?”, he asks

I shift my body on the couch and frown.

“Sorry”, John apologizes

“There was a homeless in a corner and he was looking up, his eyes intensely drawn to something. I followed his gaze, and saw her. She was wearing a black dress, fishnet stockings, red pumps. She approached the man and bent over him, her breasts ready to pour out of her tight dress at any moment. *I’m back darling*, she whispered. Then she moved his blanket slightly and slid under it, working her way

on him till he started to moan. I observed the scene, mesmerized. When Carlie completed the task she got up, wrapped the blanket on the man's body with care and left without a word", I recollect

John is about to speak, but then he stops

"Carlie was walking away when our eyes met. She smiled from a distance, pondering options. I stood still, waiting for her decision. Then she walked towards me, and took my hand. '*I think you deserve to see what you initiated*', she told me", I recount, addressing John again

He senses the change in me.

"How did you feel?", he asks, and I am so relieved he did

I sense the change in him, and the walls of solitude begin to melt in my renewed warmth

"I suppose I should say guilty, but it was not so. I was intrigued", I say

"And you followed her", John says

"I did. *I've lost everything in life, Iris*, Carlie told me, holding onto my hand. I nodded and she continued. *I don't deserve to live anymore. I want to destroy all of me, I want to melt into others, be what they need me to be. I don't want to exist for myself anymore.* These were her words", I tell John

"Did Carlie try to commit suicide?", he wants to know

I shake my head, smiling.

"No John, did you not listen to what I just said? She didn't, not with a gun or by jumping a bridge. She died every time she made love to a man in the street, and she did so over and over again, roaming the street at nights to efface her identity. And to punish herself endlessly, I suppose", I explain

John is speechless

"Carlie had sex with all the homeless she found in the street?", he asks at last

"Yes. Carlie donated joy to the rejected, free of charge", I smile

John looks at me for a moment, and there's curiosity and care in his eyes. Perhaps love.

"What about you, Iris?", he wants to know

## **Chapter 23**

"Fall was veering into winter, and melancholy into sadness. I was sitting in my apartment, analyzing my life, when the phone rang", I tell John



"Who called you?", he asks

"The man introduced himself as Ed Black. He said he read my short stories on the New Yorker. He said my style was good, and the links between the stories riveting. I sat holding the phone, barely breathing. *Are you still there?*, he asked, and told me I should go see him. I asked when, and he said, *now*", I say

"And you went to meet him, just like that?", John laughs

"Of course I did. It could have been a prank, but why not?", I shrug

John shakes his head

"God Iris", he says

"You must have faith in the possibilities of life", I smile

"So it wasn't a prank after all", John replies

"Make a guess, John. Who was Ed Black?", I ask

"An editor?", John says

"I want you to tell me more about him", I prod him, legs crossed, my foot drawing slow circles as I wait

John guesses, but hesitates to speak out his guess.

"Tell me John", I insist

"You tell me, Iris. I want to know what you and Ed Black, the man with the black trench coat, a paper and a drink in his hand, told each other when you rushed to see him with great urgency", John states

I nod my head yes, smiling.

## **Chapter 24**

"How could this happen?", I say

"You made it happen by believing it was possible", Ed Black replies

"Who are you?", I want to know

"Your editor. I'll publish your stories into a book", Ed Black tells me

"My stories were a fantasy, and we're not talking about fantasy, we're talking about facts", I insist

"Is there a difference?", the editor asks, his tone plain

“Who are you?”, I repeat

“I’m your fantasy”, he replies

“Stop toying with me. I want to know what’s real”, I insist

“Reality is the one you choose to write”, Ed Black smiles

Maastricht, April 2016