

Carmel Pops
in
Unicorn Gone Fishing
a.k.a.
Take Out Food is the Best
by
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A work of fiction.
And don't you forget it.

###

Should we start with her? I think we should. I don't think Carmel would mind. I think he realizes that's where the story starts, her story starts, with her... not in some ghetto shanty, decades gone back; but rather, in some upscale suburban near-mansion, going on, well, most likely, close to the very same, decades gone back.

But in either case, if we went that far, we really would be going too far... back, farther than Angie could remember, in any event, considering Angie had a hard time remembering what her real name was and that Angie was just an alias, most likely the one that Carmel gives her, further along in this very same tale. But then, that there,

rather than jumping too far back, is obviously jumping a little bit, too far ahead.

#

Do we care about Angie? Do we care about the wrinkles in her skin, in her face, the sag of her flesh... sagging in all the right places, sagging in all the wrong places. She wasn't bad looking. She wasn't good looking. Her looks weren't really that important... not at the start... probably not at the finish; what was important were the designer purses strung over her shoulders. She carried three of them: a curious number. That's really what captured Carmel's interest.

Carmel likes to make movies. I like to write books. But this is Carmel's story. And so, we should see Angie as he did, in that first moment, through the lens of an auteur, setting the shot, her in an almost business skirt, but not quite; we'll cut off the heels in this photographic cinematic image, show off the legs, but just a little bit, a bit of flesh, with just a wee little bit of that middle part, nice, not special, nothing to write home about... or write a long story about... or take any time to craft an artistic shot about, not really.

Angie: not even worth the film they shot her on, is that what her tombstone would read... will read... if she is lucky enough... her body ever found... to get a tombstone? But I jump, I skip, I look over those ribs, her ribs, such meat on them bones, showing it off, low cut blouse, yes, showing it off. She was showing it off. It all. There wasn't much to show off.

Carmel had been walking down the avenue... or boardwalk. I wonder which he would choose. Avenue sounds more... hoodlum-like-ish to me; but perhaps a walk, is more of the hood. It doesn't matter. I like to wax poetic. I try to wax poetic. And Carmel is always looking for the shot. And those three purses were the shot. You see. It was a mystery, a personal conundrum. Why three purses? Where they really designer? They were looking to be designer, trying to look designer. So, was she rich? Some Euro Slut fresh off the boat, just off the train, in town, day about town, didn't want to go back to the hotel? Or was there no hotel in her future? All that she owned in those bags, those purses, such a crafty bag lady... and what was so important, to carry around, day after day... in all of her worldly possessions.

Or... and this is what I like to think, the crux of the matter... that in point of fact, Carmel was drifting back, in his mind, to better days, the days of his youth, a score of years gone by, to the purse snatching days of his youth. And back there, in his mind, which one of those purses would he have grabbed, which one held the loot, her passport, her watch, and her money?

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Carmel is named after the candy, the pops, *Carmel Pops*. He likes to eat that candy-coated popcorn... and nuts... and, of course, he lives for the prize at the bottom. With Carmel, there is always a prize, at the end, as the credits roll by... eye on the prize, and all that, never once looking away, checking out the girl, Ms Bag Lady, dipping

a meaty finger into the box, pulling out a piece of caramel coated popcorn, plopping it into his mouth, turning up the box, shaking out a piece or two, maybe more, playing around with the stuff in his mouth, sucking on it, getting the grit stuck in his gums, as he always seems to do, and flashing a toothy smile at the lady... I, of course, use the term loosely, lady... but still, Carmel most certainly smiled at the lady, as she walked on by, and Carmel, flashing that bit of gold, in the teeth, rings on his fingers, gold watch, and chains, on the neck, nice suit, very nice suit, bespoke, clean, new, sparkling in detail, down to his shiny new shoes, perfectly new, not a scuff, not a mark, and those eyes, never once taking his eyes off the prize.

She was moved... I like to think. In truth, it is so hard to drop into other people's mind's, to know what they are thinking, but as she walked by, close by, she watched Carmel watching her, looking at her, not so much smiling, though he smiled, but mainly just noticing... and deciding... so she decided to stop as he had... just a few feet farther ahead... by the fountain... and the cans... of garbage. Ah, yes, Carmel does know how to paint a scene, juxtaposing like with like... and trash with the trash.

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Angie, the girl, wasn't good looking. Have we established that? She wasn't bad looking, either. I hope we can establish that. She was simply a lady out for a walk... Oh, OK, a rather long walk, might as well spell it out, been a few days, now, since she'd last seen a shower, but this was not clear in the moment, not yet, her hair not

quite combed, it was windy, down by the docks, the tourist boats, the fishing boats, the warehouse yards, now, those can be a good place to sleep, if you should ever find yourself, down on your luck, so in the end, so hard to tell, and you know how these European Tourists can be, the lot of them smell, like they haven't bathed in weeks.

I mean, it would have been easier to tell these things if she'd just dumped out her purses, junk, the lot, but so hard to tell before rooting around, doing the dump... and that was the thing, that drew Carmel in. And then, there was her hair, a rainbow of color. I'm sure, all the rage. Why have one color? Why not two? Or three? Or more? Such colors... but hardly done right... still, enough to spark an interest.

Lucky girl, a fine gentleman like Carmel, his interested piqued, just might bite.

###

Angie was combing her hair when Carmel walked up. Or that is to say, she had seen Carmel, had stopped, and was combing her hair for him, putting on a display, showing off her assets, best asset. Yes, I think that sounds just about right. And from there, it only being proper... or that is to say, who would call Carmel anything but a gentleman... and live to tell the tale? So, of course, Carmel greeted the girl, said, 'Hello,' with that big toothy smile, all sugar and sweet, syrup in his mouth, and a playful gleam in his eye. I'm sure they made small talk... for a moment, hardly more.

Have you ever seen hunger? OK. How about fear? Have you ever seen fear? Or, I know, have you ever seen God? No? Going to far? So, have you ever seen your fate reflected in the eyes of another and just known? Angie saw Carmel, beheld Carmel, looked into his eyes, fell into his eyes, soft skin... the color of night, with a big nose, and that short black curly hair, hardly in need of the 'sheen, but one would feel naked without it. And she just looked into those eyes and those big, fat, welcoming lips, lips that never stayed still, even now, right this moment, playing with a juicy nugget, bit of caramel corn... and you, yes, even you, my dear friend, would be able to see that hunger, the hunger in her eyes, from having not eaten in days... feasted in weeks. And of course, if you could see something as simple as that, well, to a hunter, on the prowl, there is no doubt as to what Carmel saw in her eyes. Oh, yes, Carmel, the vicious psychopath, I do believe he'd eviscerate me on the spot if I ever referred to him as less, hunter by day, killer by night, prowling the city, stalking the streets, this world, his element. And as the rest of creation walked silently by, the two of them might as well been alone, made for each other: a dog to the bone.

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Does it mean much, after the break, if I just start in on it? Can you see the scene, cut back from commercial break... or descend once more from the city, skyline. Cars to the side, people walking by, nobody notices, nobody cares, just Carmel... and a lady. Oh, yes, she is with him now, best to say, 'Ma'am,' as he tilts the rest of the box of

sugary delight into his mouth, crumbs falling, sticky candy, toothy grin, such a waste, and her eyes, looking into her eyes, ‘Oh, did you want some?’ with no food in days, what do you think?

But would you have time to think?

Or would you hold out your hand as Carmel emptied the box... dust, just few crumbs, ah, there’s a peanut, which Carmel grabs, plucking into his mouth, playful grin, cruel smile, leaving you with the prize. You remember, back as a child, that sticky sweet stuff, gagging it down, just so you’d get the prize?

And that prize, today, a plastic bracelet that falls... just so happens to fall, right into her hands.

Man, those prizes suck.

Still, do even I... do I have what it takes to look into Carmel’s eyes and resist. Does any man? Does any woman? As Carmel attaches the band, connects the bracelet, closes the loop, seals her doom, marking the girl, claiming his prize, the flesh of the girl.

Still, there is honor. What is honor? Honor among killers and thieves? But still, there is honor. And one must pay for their prize.

‘What are you hungry for?’

Such an innocent question, little girl, what are you hungry for?

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She had hot dogs in the park. Well, she had hers and then she had his... while Carmel opened another box of that sugar delight. He never shares the stuff, you know. Never.

You can ask. He'll say, 'No.' Or you can just take it... and die... or worse. They say Stan took a box... to tide him over, over lunch break, running that errand, getting a hammer and nails, and he took a box. I mean, come on, Carmel, the man, lives on the stuff. He's got cases of the stuff, pantry full of the stuff, and Stan took one measly box... and how many years did it take poor Stan to die? Keeping in mind that as I write, he sits, still, those nails put to good use, through his hands, into a deck chair, and still slowly, he dies.

But I digress.

But then again, what's a story without a little digression, a little indiscretion... or a side trip to a barber... call it a beauty salon. I've told you of the girl, Angie, that name, probably the first name that came to his mind, filling it in, telling her, because of course, she'd just lie, anyway. I mean, how could a person not even remember their own name, unless, they'd lied, so many times, twisting on the words, and Carmel just giving up, on the game, cutting to the chase, 'I'm gonna call you Angie.'

'OK.'

What else can you say, looking up, into those buttery-soft, sugar-brown eyes?

And when old Carmel takes you by the hand, under his wing, little chickadee, arm wrapped around, walk at his side, going through your purses, that's plural, like he owns them, and understands what they're about, throwing out this, throwing out that, in the end, tossing them all, wholesale, aside.

She was going to get mad.

Well, not going to. You could see the rage build, building up, right there. Who was this man! What gave him the right! That was her stuff! Her shit!

‘Worthless shit,’ not even worth the exclamation mark, just the truth, cold hard, facts: and facts be facts. The purses were getting in the way, annoying, really, and among the lot, not a passport to be found, no money, no hotel room key, no credit card, fucking, hell, not even a photo ID, nothing, nada, crap, junk, worthless fucking crap, not worth its weight: a fucking key ring, minus the keys, an empty eyeglass case, with no glasses in sight, a crystal shot glass, chipped, but still, you never know when you’re going to need that, a broken watch, a leaking pen...

That’s where Carmel lost his patience. He has to eat with those hands, you know. Blue fucking ink on his fingers, throwing the purse in the trash, in anger, in disgust, wiping his hands on her blouse...

‘Hey!’

Just let the word hang there, *hey*...

Let it grow smaller... and smaller... and smaller. Eyes boring in, you know the man is contemplating just killing you right there, right there in the street, not in heat, not in anger, but because his fingers are blue. The one obviously leads to the other. Can you feel it? Have you watched his movies? She hadn’t. Clearly, she hadn’t. So, how could she know? But she could feel it. That anger... no, not anger... that contemplation... that looking at the gum on the sole of your shoe, just scrape it off, the girl, nothing more than gum on the sole of his shoe.

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Maybe she didn't feel the violence. But, hell, I wasn't even there, and I felt the violence, heard it in Carmel's voice, when he told me, 'This bitch...' he went on, but I think, 'This bitch', pretty much tells it all, his tale, the account.

Oh, he had plans for her. He always had. But now, he had plans for her.

But, hey... say it with me.

But, hey...

No hotel room. No cash. No credit cards. No... nothing close to what Carmel was hoping for, looking for, but come on, seriously, Carmel has cash, Carmel has credit, and let's be real, this is his town, this is his world, this is his mother fucking oyster. Like he needs a fucking hotel room... not at this hour, at any rate. I mean, come on, at this time of day, one goes shopping, buys their woman, his woman, his property, this woman some new threads, classy stuff, fit for a night on the prowl, picking up men, filling their needs, satisfying, the making of, dreams and desires.

I'm sure it was expensive.

I'm sure it was nice... tasteful... in a show off your cleavage, show off your legs, split here, reveal there, a little glitter, a little gold... I bet she'd already forgotten, hadn't quite realized, that in those eyes, those sugar-brown eyes, she was already dead.

But, hey...

Yeah, hey...

Can't you just see her death scene? How many times do you figure Carmel is going to say, 'Hey,' in that scene, all calm like, just working it in, 'Hey, Angie, remember

that time?’ Or maybe he’d just use hay. How would you kill... what, a worthless whore, how would kill a worthless whore like that with a bale of hay? That’s the real question? So, maybe a hay baler? But no, that’s way too predictable. For an auteur, to satisfy his artistic temperament, the scene needs... a little more, it needs to be a little more interesting than that. So, maybe cover her in hay and let the birds, feed in the field, straw man, straw woman, birds, pecking her to death... eh, as you can see, the creative death scene, not really my thing. I’d need to brainstorm... or call in an expert in the field. I mean, come on, a guy like Carmel, he would know, probably already does know... or better yet, three fucking purses, filled with garbage and junk, what’s the best way to kill a girl with three purses... garbage... and junk.

And yes, as they went shopping, I do indeed believe that was what Carmel was thinking, every last moment, all of the time.

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And from there, well, it’s getting late, time for me to wrap this up, move on, get along.

Seriously, is the scene in the dressing room, where Carmel clips another one of those stupid plastic prizes to the girl’s hair important? Does it move the story along? Probably not. Like she’s ever going to pay off her debts, count them, two, going on three.

But whatever, it was a butterfly... one of those stupid, inane, butterfly hair clips, idiotic little thing. Did it make

the look? Ruin the look? Here, Angie, look... tell me if this goes with your hair.

#

Angie...

Carmel took the girl home, to his home, current home, no worry the name on the door, mailbox to match, some condo in the sky, doorman, knew him by name, visiting Angie, he was.

Angie... who do you think was waiting there, for them, for Carmel, her man, in that condo, in the bed, in the closet, on the floor... cameras set to catch the scene, the crew still cleaning up, from the night before.

‘Can’t you see I’m working, here!’

‘Sorry, boss,’

Cameras on the wall, button hole lapel, hidden... everywhere, nursery monitors, home security, on the go, and the big guns, hand held, ‘Don’t mind him.’

‘So, we’re going to make a movie?’ What a smart little girl. What a smart little question.

‘Yep, and you’re the star of the show.’

What a lie! Carmel is always the star of the show. I mean, come on, his movies don’t start with the byline *Angie Presents...* seriously, she’ll be lucky if she gets a mention... as a walk on, stunt double.

And meanwhile, the crew, dashing about, trying not to get in the way... or finding themselves standing still in a corner, unneeded... or worse yet, drawing the focus, becoming part of the story, folks, mentioned by name, don’t often last long... in a *Carmel Pops Story*.

‘The bedroom all ready?’

Let it sink in.... about that bedroom. What are your fears? The children might see you? What you had to do to make a few bucks, back in the day, during your lazy college years. Or maybe it’s your parents you fear? What would they say? About more than a little... more like a gaping wide, for all the world to see, at that scale, it’s hard to call it... mere indirection? Ah, but we’re not going deep enough, hard enough, twisted enough. What... if you were to make the late news? Coroner’s report...

For beyond those doors, leading poor Angie, right to those doors, the bedroom doors... might as well, take a hop, take a skip, take a detour to the bar, fully stocked, grab a drink, I mean, hey, just, hey, she looks like a drinker, looks like she could use a drink, shaking, the trembles, refilling, second glass, oh, she’s real thirsty, hadn’t had a drink of the stuff, in what, going on two days, such a long time, third glass, fourth... no, Carmel calls it quits, third’s the charm, stilling her hand, holding her hand, putting the bottle down, as he finishes his last box, the last box of the show... of those *Carmel Pops*, custom label, marketer’s dream, pour out the prize... it could have been a tattoo, cheap shit, they give away those tattoo’s so often, but Carmel spikes the boxes, custom made, custom supply, why insert crap, when you can put in what you need... to make the movie, set the scene.

And for this scene, what Carmel figured he needed, what he figure would set the right tone, reaching, pouring out, so tiny in his hands, large hands, strong hands, controlling hands, psychotic hands, killings hands, and into these hands, premonition of death, foreshadowing of things

to come... fell one of those little itty-bitty cocktail swords... that they skewer olives with... in some of those fancier drinks... in some of those fancier restaurants.

Of course, Angie is not really the olive type. They mostly just get in the way... and detract from the juice, the punch... the crux of the tale. Carmel pinning that toy to her shirt, not really explaining why, so close to her heart... nor why he's suddenly holding a knife, in his hand, where did he get it, the knife, it's such a big knife, a butcher's knife, the type you see in the news, African tribe, settling the score, paying past debts, and she knows... or not yet, she hasn't really focused on the blade, hasn't really been shown the blade, besides, what can she do, the doors are open now, body on the bed, blood on the floor, bits and pieces... the prior occupant... a pair of arms, tastefully on display, like flowers in a vase, crystal clear... a bit of blood in the water keeps them fresh, longer, household tips, secrets, tips of the trade... and seriously, you do not want to look in that closet, to see how many more; but right now, the lights are on... and the camera is running... but in this type of movie, nobody ever bothers to call action... and somewhere in her heart, beating deep down inside, Angie knows she's had her last drink, now's as good as ever...

#

But in the end, this is the end, and where I shall leave you. Carmel Pops, swinging the door wide... Angie's eyes going wide, finally seeing that blade in his hand, the look in their eyes, the crew, the hunger in their eyes, nothing quite

covers the smell... of blood... quite like a good old fashioned barbeque....

Hey!

But, hey!

Just rumors, I'm sure, designed to delight, titillate the crowd, pack them into theaters, sell a few books, and make them wonder, just how far would an aspiring film maker, he go, and just how far would an aspiring actress, she go... and just how far would an aspiring writer, he go... as she looks to his eyes, trying to make some sort of sense of it all.

But as for this director, this actress, this writer, at times, they, he, mostly he, it's a *Carmel Pops Presentation*, this ain't no joint, no creation by committee, just simple instructions of the form, do it now or die.

'Write it up. We're going to expand the media form.'

And as to the girl, the scene, what's up, what's next, time for that artistic closing shot, if you ask me, of Carmel's face, growing large, filling the screen, smiling, happy, toothy grin, gold tooth, licking his chops, a bit of caramel corn stuck to the side, sucking on gums, taking his time, digging it out, the closing scene, the closing score, as he explains ever so sweetly, 'This could go any old way, little girl. And in the end, I'm going to let you decide.'

Fin

After all, somebody has to go out and get that Chinese take-out, on those days, when you want to eat in...