

SANDRA

It's not their job to have your back. It's mine.

FRANK

You want me to be a progressive race warrior, but I'm not biting. I was hoping to make a different kind of history here.

SANDRA

There's even more of a history than you know.

FRANK

Meaning?

SANDRA

People your age think "Black Lives Matter" invented activism over police brutality.

FRANK

It did more in a year -- less -- than anyone else did in a generation. More.

SANDRA

Okay, but that doesn't mean the problem wasn't known before.

FRANK

But your generation had bigger fish to fry, eh? See? Cynical.

SANDRA

If you go after Carbonella, you have to want him. I mean really want him. I've been after him for a very long time.

FRANK

Seriously.

SANDRA

The first time I heard of Carbonella, some hysterical mother grabbed me at a community board meeting. I was, like, a week out after convincing my editor to let me cover something other than ... whatever shit he thought my delicate tits could handle. As soon as she saw me asking questions and realized I was a reporter, she latched on with a sob story about her teenage son disappearing into a precinct on a Friday and surfacing

in court the following Monday booked for murder. I had just convinced my editor to treat me like another reporter, and now I've got this sob sister disaster. But I follow up. Some 'roided-up sergeant -- probably on desk duty for kicking someone's teeth in -- gives me the knee-jerk "he's not here," even though I don't even have the name right. The mom told me his name was 'Carbonara.' Before I'm back in my office, the precinct captain has called ahead and killed my story. It wasn't even a story yet! I had asked about a guy and got his name wrong. My editor tells me I'm not writing about cops just doing their jobs. The paper believes in Compstat, believes in the crime turnaround. The publishers give generously to the Police Athletic League, you understand.

FRANK

When was this?

SANDRA

Ninety-three, ninety-four. I wanted a beat, I wanted a job, so I promptly forgot about the crying woman --

FRANK

Sandra!

SANDRA

Hearst, Black, and Murdoch. I forgot about her and got on with my life. People disappear, unmourned, in this city every day. If someone sheds a tear for you on your way out, that's a kindness. Years passed, and I don't know why I even remembered Carbonella, but he showed up in a trend piece about active cops "consulting" for true crime shows on TV. It wasn't even my piece, but my friend was over in Arts and she was pissed it got spiked. Writing about questionable ethics was as hard-hitting as it got for her, and she was proud of it. But there was this guy there; his name was "Carbonara" or something. Same guy. Dodging another bullet. He bugs me, Frank. And if you go after him, I don't want him slipping out of it. He's the kind of slimy asshole other assholes cover for, just because they're assholes. He's the kind of guy who doesn't have to worry about consequences.

FRANK

You're talking about Howard.

SANDRA

Let me worry about Howard.

FRANK

He wants me gone --

SANDRA

You misread his indifference. When he does remember you work here, he knows your stories are adding to the brand. Speaking of -- you made me forget why I came in here with your bar story pitch -- I wanted to poke you on the notes for the homeless vet story. You want this police story? Multi-task: start teasing out this detective's timeline; re-draft the assembly lede; and clean up your notes on the high-profile prize-bait. Howard and the old guard will all die soon enough. They're older than me, after all. Just don't give them any reason to doubt your professionalism and confirm their prejudice. Make sure you're fully documented -- I's and T's. (Sarcastic:) I know your filing non-system. We're covered on that front, right? (Pause.) Franklin.

FRANK

You bet.

END

ACT I

SCENE 4

(FRANK pivots back to LESLIE; another night, volume rises, but the bar is more sedate.)

FRANK

So where's this witness?

LESLIE

Dead.

FRANK

When?

LESLIE

Years ago.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Present day. In darkness, FRANK's face is illuminated by a tablet. Gradually, he is lit in an isolated pool of light.)

FRANK

I was just trying to find the quote -- I think it's on my Wikipedia page -- but the wifi here ... Anyway, at some point I was called a fabulist. I really wish "fabulist" had better connotations. As titles go it really sounds wonderful. Can't you feel the warmth and joy in the word? Can't you imagine what a fabulist brings? When we receive something fabulous, it's happily, with gratitude -- and the irony is that the fabulist is initially received with warmth, until his nature is revealed. Even its root -- fables -- are understood to use basic truths to underpin their fictions. The fable, while impossible, is essentially true. But there are some professions in which fabulist can prove deadly: such as memoirist, which I wasn't before this all began, and journalist, which I was. I don't think print is dead, and I don't think the role of the journalist is any less crucial to democracy than it's ever been. I think writing is an invitation to connect, to converse, and the shared private moment between writer and reader is precious to me, it's always been. The things I did, they constituted a betrayal to institutions, to people I counted as friends. I never thought I was betraying my readers. I hoped to serve them. Connecting with readers -- or, today, listeners -- is the sole pursuit. I'm still getting to do that, so I don't miss anything. The people. I guess I do miss the people.

(Lights shift.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(One year ago. Bar. Music. Loud conversations. LESLIE and FRANK are in mid-conversation.)

LESLIE

He has an alibi. The state's witness was unreliable. His court-appointed attorney fell asleep during the D.A.'s opening statement, for crying out loud --

FRANK

Look, it sounds like this guy got a raw deal, and that sucks. But I don't see what I --

LESLIE

It could be a great story --

FRANK

It could be a compelling story, I don't know about great. There are lots of guys locked up for life who say they didn't get a fair trial; that alone won't get my editor to go along with it.

LESLIE

What is your job for if not to address injustice?

FRANK

My paper is for slowing our hemorrhaging subscriber and ad revenues.

LESLIE

You're such an asshole. What are you for?

FRANK

Bedding you.

LESLIE

Asshole.

FRANK

You're the activist. The world is binary to you. I'm -- I'm a raconteur; I revel in its shades of grey.

LESLIE

I just want to tear my clothes off when you condescend

to me, really, I do. This is a story. It's a good one.

FRANK

It's one of many, and I'm telling you, I bring that alone into the office and it's going to lose. (Beat.) Come on...

LESLIE

Fuck you, come on. What?

FRANK

Have you allowed for the possibility that your guy is guilty? I know it's the fashion now to think cops become criminals the minute they turn off their body cameras.

LESLIE

What if my guy isn't the only case?

FRANK

Meaning?

LESLIE

As part of the state's case, Samantha Jones gave an eyewitness account of the murder. Jones was a recovering heroin addict.

FRANK

So her testimony was unreliable because she's a heroin addict?

LESLIE

Who said it's unreliable? It was so reliable the state used her as a witness for half a dozen murder cases over the course of three years.

FRANK

Okay. That is interesting.

Finish

anymore, but hey, I'm retired, what the hell else am I gonna do? Listen, you answer that call. Must be important. I'm going to ~~call~~, but you call if you need, buddy. Anytime

ACT I

SCENE 11
Text

(FRANK and LESLIE in FRANK's apartment. Drinks in hand. Music. Late. Intimate.)

START

LESLIE

Oh my god, all I let you talk about since the bar is the article, the article, the article. We haven't caught up at all.

FRANK

We don't need to.

LESLIE

We do. So. You did it. You're a reporter. At the Times, no less. That's journalism's Mecca, isn't it?

FRANK

More like the fanciest lifeboat. And you? Did you go to law school?

LESLIE

I did. And I passed the bar. And I actually get to practice law.

FRANK

As the hard-nosed prosecutor with a heart of gold?

LESLIE

"Law & Order" marathons are not the preparation we thought they'd be.

FRANK

Not much was what we thought. (Beat.) I thought we were set. What happened?

LESLIE

(peering at the bottle)

You go maudlin fast. You know what happened --

FRANK

-- Now, there is still some dispute about that --

LESLIE

-- You bonked my roommate --

FRANK

I did not "bonk" anyone! I will concede that when you walked in, hands were in inappropriate locations --

LESLIE

Hands, tongues --

FRANK

Mistakes were made. (Beat.)

LESLIE

Did you have a high school girlfriend when you got to college?

FRANK

Yes.

LESLIE

And you thought that was set for life. Why would your first college girlfriend be any different?

FRANK

Fair enough.

LESLIE

You were undoubtedly sharp, though. Even back then. You were on a path.

FRANK

So, obviously, were you.

LESLIE

Well, I don't know. (Drinks.) It was law or dance.

FRANK

Lies.

LESLIE

Truth. One of those two paths, I was going to follow.

FRANK

They're not even closely related.

LESLIE

First of all, that's not true, but second, even if it was, that's the point. They're not alternatives if they're actually the same thing.

FRANK

But how can two such different ambitions live in one head? One pretty, well-composed...

(FRANK takes LESLIE's head in his hands. She does not resist the touch.)

LESLIE

I'm glad that you have such an internally consistent brain. Must be so peaceful in there. (LESLIE takes FRANK's head in her hands.) Carbonella. You still with me on this project?

FRANK

I do have a working draft I was going to hand over.

LESLIE

Can I see?

FRANK

No. But my editor is looking at it. It could print soon. Could be big.

LESLIE

It will be big.

FRANK

Why did you bring this to me? To the paper? Why not just call a press conference and dictate the story?

LESLIE

A press release wouldn't have been a story. "Civil rights lawyers allege police misconduct." So what? We do that every day.

FRANK

Even now?

LESLIE

Even now. Some people do belong in prison, after all, and lots of folks still trust to police to make the initial call. If the Times uncovers a massive

conspiracy, though -- and our clients are granted appeals as a knock-on effect -- everyone still wins.

FRANK

So it's not about the story --

LESLIE

If the story gives my clients a second chance after being screwed by the system, then yes, it's about the story. It's about whatever works.

FRANK

But --

(LESLIE kisses FRANK.)

LESLIE

Bed. Now. Tell me when I can read a draft.

FRANK

That's up to my editor. (LESLIE kisses up FRANK's neck.) I mean, I could get some idea from her when it might drop...

LESLIE

That's more like it.

(LESLIE resumes kissing FRANK, who struggles to focus.)

FRANK

What happens after the article gets published? If it gets published.

LESLIE

What do you mean, "if"?

FRANK

It probably will. I'm running a hot hand right now, but that's my point.

LESLIE

What is?

FRANK

What's happening right now?

END