

The Messenger

Volume 1989
Issue 1989 *The Messenger*, 1989

Article 4

1989

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Recommended Citation

Vance, Ben (1989) "The Problem with the Whole Thing," *The Messenger*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1989, Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol1989/iss1989/4>

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The Problem with the Whole Thing⁺

Angie told me that her brother wasn't going to marry the call girl after all. She told me over drinks at that place -- you know, the place on 3rd? You know.

"He decided Mom wouldn't like it," she said, stirring her drink, examining her fingernails for chips.

"Right," I said. Their mother's like totally loaded. If Mark makes his mom happy for two of three more years, he could stand to inherit one or two big ones. One or two mil, you know.

So then we were riding back to Angie's place in her car, and she said, "But I think he really loves her." Just like that, out of the blue.

"Really?" I said. I mean, it was kinda weird, her saying something like that just out of the blue like that, weird.

"Yeah," she said, turning left past the parked Audi. "That's what he told me anyway."

I shifted in my seat a little. "So he's living in Vail?"

Angie was scanning the block for a parking space. "Yeah. That's where he met her. He didn't know she --"

"Didn't know she was a call girl --"

"Right. I mean, obviously, he didn't know, he just thought she was like this rich girl who liked to ski and probably had a trust fund or whatever --"

"Yeah."

"--and just hung out at Vail, right? But he said he loved her."

She slid the car into an impossibly small space. "When did you see him?" I asked, opening the door.

She got out of the car. "I met him in L.A. about a month ago. Remember, when I went out there?"

"Yeah."

"And that's when he told me about her. We stayed at Dad's house and we're like hanging out by the pool, and -- hold on a sec." She started fishing in her purse for her keys, dug them out, and started up the stairs. "And so he just springs the whole story on me."

I laughed a little. "Just boom -- I'm in love with a hooker?"

"Well, no, obviously not like that, I mean, I already met the girl, before." She slipped off her coat and crossed the room. "Want

a drink?"

I sat down on the couch, picked up a copy of Interview off the coffee table, flipped through it. "Sure, whatever you've got." I could hear her making the drinks, ice clinking on glass.

"So I knew something was up," she said, sitting down next to me, drinks in each hand. I took one and took a sip. "It was just strange. So anyway, he's like 'Angie, this is Fawn,' and I'm like thinking 'Sure, that's your real name.' It was obvious."

"What, that she was a hooker?"

"Yeah, but don't say that around Mark, because he gets like totally pissed. He does not like to talk about it."

"Does Kendall know about it?" Kendall's their little sister. She's like maybe fourteen, fifteen.

Angie sat back. "Oh sure. Kendall's totally hip. She thinks it's great. I mean, she's wilder than me, by far. I caught her and Mark doing lines once."

"Wow," I said.

"I know," she said. "Ever since Dad put her in boarding school in Switzerland she's been totally wild." She drained her drink. "Enough about that fucked-up half of the family, though," she said, flipping her hair back. "Want to go to bed?"

So I met Mark and Fawn when I was with Angie again at this little place right off the park. She was beautiful, but just kind of -- I don't know, kind of trashy, y'know? Just kind of too good-looking, if you know what I mean.

We sat down with them and had cappuccino. And it was like two, in the afternoon, on like a Monday, and they're having drinks. Christ, I'm thinking, I like to drink, but Monday afternoon?

"Mark!" I said, and shook his hand. Mark and Angie's dad and my dad used to play golf together, and I used to go over to their house all the time when I was a kid, so I knew him.

"Hey, Carter," he said. "This is Fawn." I shook her hand too, and I'm thinking, Jesus, she's practically falling out of her dress.

"Mark tells me you two go back a long way," she said.

"Too long," I said. Everybody laughed.

"So how's Mom?" Mark asked Angie.

She took a small sip of cappuccino. "She's fine. I talked to her last week. You know about..." She nodded almost imperceptibly

towards Fawn, and I'm thinking, great, I think I've gotta go.

Mark put his arm around Fawn. "You know we're getting married." Fawn smiled broadly. Angie's eyes just widened.

"Hey, how's the food here?" I said. I guess Mark changed his mind, I'm thinking.

"Mark, I thought that --" Angie started.

"Fawn and I love each other very much. This is what we want."

And I'm thinking, sure, I love scuba diving, but for two mil I'd give that up.

Man, Angie was pissed. I think she's like the peacemaker in the family, trying to keep everyone cool, and she knew that this would be some heavy shit with mom. Not to mention the bills he was shutting himself off from.

"Mark, you know about Mom." She smiled sweetly at Fawn. "Will you excuse us?" Fawn just shrugged her shoulders and got up.

"Don't start that with me, Angie," Mark warned. He sat back and shot her this totally withering look. Man, he was pissed, you know?

"Fine," Angie spat. "Fuck you. Just fuck away the two million." She got up and looked at me. "Carter?" I did not like this at all. I'm like friends with Mark and Angie both, right? So what do I do? Go with the chick? Fuck that.

"I'm just going to finish my cappuccino," I said.

"Fine," she said, and left. So I'm just sitting there with Mark. Not too uncomfortable, you know? And he looks like he's about to flatten me, just for being there. Hey man, I want to say, I just slept with her, it's not like I'm on her side or anything. I don't give a shit. So he cleared his throat.

"What a bitch," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "What a bitch."

So anyway I'm at this party at Reed's house, and it was totally wild. I mean I was fucked up, everybody was, and then Trey tells me that they're doing rails in the back room, and I'm thinking, what the hell.

So I went back there, back in Reed's bedroom, and shut the door. The music's like really loud, and there's a shitload of people,

"Cool," he said. He took out his wallet and gave her two hundreds and a joint. She looked at me again and left. He stubbed out his cigarette and looked at me. "C'mon, man," he said, "let's get a drink."

So anyway, about two months later, I ran into Tommy at this place downtown. He was hammered, and started buying me drinks and shit.

"Did you hear about Mark?" he said. I sat up.

"No," I said. "What about Mark?"

"He did it man. Killed himself."

"What?" I yelled. "What? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"He ate a bottle of sleeping pills, man. Hey, I thought you saw Angie a lot. I thought you guys were doing it."

"Once. What the fuck? When?"

"I don't know. Like a month ago." I could not fucking believe this shit.

"Why?"

"Cause, he was like in love with a pro, and he got himself shut out of his mother's will, and then found out she was still turning tricks, even after she said she'd quit."

"Jesus Christ," I said. I mean, I played football with him, right? That fucking shithead.

"I mean, over a girl, right?" Tommy said. "I can see getting cranked about the scoots, but killing yourself over a fucking girl? Give me a break."

"Really," I said. I was like in shock or something. "Tommy, look, I gotta go."

"You just got here, man. I just ordered shots for us. Look at the tail in this place! C'mon, man, you can't go." But I left anyway.

I call Angie the next day. She was living in the condo in Vail and I wanted to say something, I don't know what, something, like I'm sorry, or how are you, or some shit. I mean, she must be floored, I'm thinking, right? Her own brother. So I call her up.

"Angie," I said. "I just heard."

"What?"

"About Mark. Jesus, Angie, I am so sorry. I really am. You

and the other door in the bedroom, to the bathroom is open. So Trey and Tommy and this chick named Coco, who Trey's going out with now, she's from France or something, are all in there, passing this mirror around. So I sat down.

Well, they were like passing it around, and actually I kind of decided that I didn't want any, so I just sat back and enjoyed the atmosphere. And then I noticed -- I mean you couldn't help but notice -- that I could hear people fucking in the next room, the adjoining bedroom. So I hit Tommy in the arm.

"Tommy, man" I said, "Who the fuck is in there?"

Tommy snuffles a little and says, "Reed, man."

"What are they, fucking in there? Jesus."

"Yeah," he kind of laughed. "Reed's taping it."

"Taping it? Like video?" I said.

"Yeah. Isn't it wild?"

"Yeah," I said, and leaned back on the bed. "Wild." And Trey keeps trying to get me to do a line, but I just waved it on.

Sometimes you're just not in the mood, right?

"Tommy," I said.

"Yeah."

"Who's the chick?"

He looked at Coco, and I'm like, no, no. "The chick in there, I mean," I said, pointing to the door.

"Oh," he said, and did another line. "Some hooker."

"Oh," I said.

So after a while, they all just leave, and I just stay in there, smoking a cigarette, and I just want to check this shit out. I mean this was wild. And after a little longer Reed came in.

"Hey, Carter," he said. "Got another butt?" So I gave him a smoke, and he sat down, looked at me, and got this big smile.

"What?" I say. "What?"

He blew some smoke out. "I did it."

"I heard."

"Yeah, man, on tape." His eyes were so fucking red. Jesus, I'm thinking, you are stoned to the gills.

"Reed, I've gotta run," comes this girl's voice, and I look up and it's her, man, it's Fawn. I almost fucking screamed. She looked at me and I looked at her and she was like, please don't fucking say a word.

must be crushed."

"I'm all right." Long pause. "Hey, Carter, why don't you come out here? I'd really like to see you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I really would."

"I don't know, Angie. I mean, I guess you'd like to be alone or something, wouldn't you?"

"No, no, I'm fine now, I'm over it. Come on out."

"You're over it?"

"Yeah, completely. You know what else?" she kind of giggled.

"What?"

"I get the money now."

"Wow."

"Yeah. Cool, huh?" I'm kind of dazed at this point, right?

I got a letter from her not too long ago, and I open like this perfume-scented letter, and out falls this picture. And I can't believe this, but it was a picture of her, lying in bed, just wearing this little negligee deal. So I'm thinking, who took the picture, right?

So in the letter it said "Come and see me. I miss you. I bet we could have some fun. I'll pay for your plane ticket. Love and kisses, Angie."

Man, I just threw that shit away. Just threw it the fuck away.

Ben Vance

+Winner of the Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Creative Writing