

WHEN ANGELS FAIL TO FLY

A STEVE CASSIDY MYSTERY



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ONE

"So who's the lucky guy tonight, Steve?"

"Must you say that so loud, Nancy?" I protested as I placed my gym bag on a nearby bar stool.

"Afraid someone will get the wrong idea about you?" Nancy replied with a smile.

"The short answer? Yes."

"You private dicks can sure be touchy sometimes." Nancy, the attractive forty-something bartender with short dirty blonde hair and haunting brown eyes, slowly began checking out the dinner crowd. "Just between us, do I know him?" she asked in a low conspiratorial tone.

"That depends," I said. "Are you acquainted with many fifty-six-year-old overweight plumbers from Plymouth, who like to lay a little extra pipe when they're out of town attending a plumbing convention?"

"Did you say plumbing convention? They have those?"

"It's big business. I was there this afternoon sizing up tonight's target."

"I bet those guys are a laugh a minute," Nancy said, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Oh yeah, you'd be surprised how many *tools* there are at those things."

Nancy and I locked eyes and both laughed.

"So who's the lucky girl?" Nancy inquired a few moments later. "Does she know what you've planned for her? For a chunky plumber past his prime, I hope you're giving her danger pay."

"You'll like Samantha," I said. "She recently dumped her fiancé after finding out he'd been cheating on her. She wants to see every no-good boyfriend, husband and lover go down in flames."

Nancy rolled her eyes. "I've been there and all I can say is Heaven help Peter Plumber."



“Exactly.”

I checked my watch: 5:29 p.m. Sam and “Peter” were scheduled to arrive here for an intimate dinner in thirty minutes. For marital cases I often use Randy’s Saloon and Grill, an outdated restaurant located in the east end of the City of Darrien—my new home. This cozy get-together would hopefully be followed by a visit to Room 215 at the nearby Tecumseh Motel, all of which would be captured on video by yours truly. I glanced at the predetermined rear booth where my cute couple would be seated and noted the RESERVED sign. A few feet away, there was a similar sign atop a smaller table for two, where I would enjoy a steak dinner paid for by the client, Mrs. Plumber. On the vacant chair across from me, I would position my gym bag so the pinhole camera within it could record both video and audio of the soon-to-be lovers.

“Don’t these guys get suspicious when your girl takes off her blouse to reveal wires running from her bra, down her stomach and into her waistband?” Nancy asked, breaking my concentration. Before I could answer she added, “Who knows—maybe for a twisted, cheating husband that could be a turn-on.”

“Maybe,” I concurred, “but that would never happen.”

“Why?”

“Because within two minutes of Samantha entering the motel room, I’ll page her. She’ll then say there’s an emergency and ask the guy to leave.”

“Are his pants already down around his ankles?”

“On occasion.”

“How embarrassing.”

“Not as embarrassing as when he’s sitting across from his wife, giving a deposition at her divorce lawyer’s office,” I smirked.

Nancy gave me a dirty look. “How can you take delight in destroying a marriage like that?”

“I get no delight. I get paid for a job well done,” I countered. “I don’t instruct these fools to break their wedding vows—they just do it. I am paid by the hour, regardless if they go to the motel or not. If the wife’s right, I confirm her suspicions. If she’s wrong, I alleviate her

anxiety about her soul mate when he's out of town."

Nancy bent forward across the bar, reached both hands out above my head and then turned her arms slightly. "There," she said, "your halo was a bit crooked."

"Thanks," I laughed. "I keep forgetting to check it when I go out."

After I downed a shot of whiskey with Nancy, I went to the bathroom to make a final check of my new digital video camera. Once in a stall, I opened the pullout screen, which revealed a beautiful shot of my feet resting on the tiled floor, with today's time and date in the lower right-hand corner. Next, I turned on my wireless audio recorder and fit a discreet earpiece in my left ear. I pressed the TEST button on the recorder, which emitted a low-pitch squeal. When Samantha and her date showed up, I'd be able to hear everything they said. With my equipment in good working order, I zipped the gym bag closed and proceeded into the dining room.

No sign of Samantha and Peter. I looked up at the clock above the jukebox: 6:02 p.m.

I grabbed another drink and decided to take a seat at my table. Within a few minutes, I heard Sam's heavenly laugh in my earpiece.

They had arrived.

Showtime.

You could tell from Peter's demeanor that this was not the first time he had taken a woman out for dinner without his wife present. In this dimly lit atmosphere, he actually appeared to be a successful businessman. He was six feet tall, clean-shaven, with a full head of black hair. Earlier in the day, I had categorized him as being stout but on second look, I realized that wasn't the case; he simply had a "middle-aged gut," as my dad would say. Gone were the rumpled suit, unkempt hair and glasses I had seen him sporting at the convention centre. Tonight his hair was slicked back, his contacts were in place and he was wearing a low-end Brooks Brothers suit. To top off the transformation a high school ring was now on his left hand, where his wedding ring once proudly sat.

As I watched this makeover success brush by me, I wondered



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which of these “changes” his wife had discovered first, setting this file in motion.

As per usual, Samantha played to perfection the part of a sexy businesswoman visiting a strange city, looking for a discreet romantic encounter. Her dark blue sundress seductively hugged her curvaceous frame, giving the illusion she had just stepped out of a swimming pool. As she got closer to the booth, I forced myself to concentrate on the menu, to avoid any unintentional eye contact. I then made a quick scan of the room and saw that every other male in her vicinity was also feeling Sam’s considerable presence.

“Trust me, guys, she’s the last woman you want to be caught out on a date with,” I said under my breath, intoxicated by her perfume as she shimmied her way into the booth.

During the next hour and a half, Samantha and Peter did all the predictable first date things: made small talk, joked around, laughed too quickly at each other’s amusing observations on life, flirted, lied, flirted some more and lied, lied, lied.

Our plumber friend however, was participating with one major disadvantage: I hadn’t provided him with a full dossier of his date’s actual vital statistics. Listening to him brag about his university education, football career (cut short due to a blown out knee during THE BIG GAME), the timeshare condo in Mexico and most interesting, his wife’s tragic death (on their honeymoon no less), I was amazed how Samantha could keep a straight face. Throughout the meal, she countered each exaggerated untruth with one of her own, speaking as casually as a telemarketer trying to sell you life insurance over the phone.

During this time, I partook of a Caesar salad, a large New York strip steak, loaded baked potato and steamed vegetables, while appearing to read a new Howard Hughes biography. The conversation behind me soon turned to the topic of what to do after they left the restaurant. As their dinner banter consisted almost entirely of sexually charged innuendos, I figured old Plumber Pete would be primed to jump Samantha’s bones the moment they reached the parking lot. Of course, she had other plans.

Marital cases are much like police sting operations; for them to be a complete success you must avoid an “entrapment” rap from the target at all costs. Yes, you supply all the temptation (girl/drugs) and enticements (sex/big bucks), but at the end of the day, you can’t force someone to do something against their will.

In a court of law, the prosecution has to prove several things in regards to the defendant’s actions:

1. That he knew why he had attended that specific sting room.
2. Why he had brought a briefcase full of money.
3. Why he had given the nice drug dealer his hard-earned cash.
4. Why he had then left the room carrying a knapsack of cocaine.

A P.I. on the other hand only has to get his subject up to a woman’s hotel room for a “conviction.” As a former cop, I always like a clean conclusion to each cheating spouse case I take on. That’s why you’ll never hear Samantha suggest they go to her room. To me, that is entrapment. If however, Peter Pipe Layer brings it up first, he has only himself to blame.

For better or worse, that’s the way I operate.

“Are you done, sir?”

I looked up from my book to see Nancy standing over me with a huge grin on her face.

“I am. The meal was excellent, as always,” I said handing her my plate.

She looked at the booth behind me. “Did you leave enough room for dessert or would you like the bill?”

“Dessert, huh? I think I can stick around a few more minutes. I hear the cherry pie is quite good.”

“I made it fresh this morning.”

“You don’t say.”

As Nancy walked away, I heard our friendly neighbourhood plumber make his fatal final play for the fiery red haired babe sitting across from him. During my dessert order, I registered only bits and pieces of Sam and Peter’s discussion. There was something about him not wanting to go to his hotel, as he was afraid his accountant friends—also in town for a business convention—would hit on her



incessantly.

"Maybe . . ." he started tentatively, yet to my trained ear confidently, "we can head to your room. Where are you staying again?"

"The Tecumseh Motel," Samantha replied, "but there's really nothing to do there. I don't think they even have pay-for-view movies," she said, a bit embarrassed. "My employer is pretty cheap."

Wait until you see your pay slip, I thought, amused by Sam's declaration.

Peter Plumber then laughed nervously as he asked, "Did he at least spring for a room with a king-sized bed?"

GOTCHA!

Five minutes later, Nancy was surprised when I declined the piece of pie she was holding and requested the bill.

"You're still paying for the pie, right?" she asked playfully.

"My gift to you," I said, giving her my credit card.

She looked at the plate in her hand. "This isn't my tip, is it?"

"Not by a long shot."

Before heading to my van, I gave Nancy her usual \$100 "hospitality tip" and scribbled, "See you soon," on the top of the receipt. Outside, I hailed a nearby taxi and paid the driver \$40 to wait for Samantha and Peter.

"No problem, pal," the cabbie said coolly.

When they stepped out into the early evening sun, I snapped some good identification shots. An argument then briefly ensued when Samantha insisted they take a cab (as the last thing we wanted was for her to get into a strange man's car). Peter was adamant he was fine to drive but soon realized his protests were futile when my cab driver pulled up to whisk them away.

I followed at a discreet distance, still recording the plumber's verbal (and I'm guessing hands-on) flirtations with Samantha, who continued to play it cool. A short time later, I zipped past them and made my way to the motel.

The Tecumseh Motel is an older-style building with all the unit doors facing the parking lot. I set up in an adjacent convenience store lot, jumped in the backseat and awaited the taxi's arrival. The beauty

of this location was it gave the target ample opportunities to change his mind; to save his soul and dignity; and to possibly rescue his faltering marriage.

The short cab ride from the restaurant fell into the *This is dangerous but fun* category. However, once buddy was actually at the motel the reality of the situation set in: "Oh my God, I'm going to have sex with this woman! Should I really be doing this?" Some guys actually sprinted up the exterior staircase, trying to get down to business as soon as humanly possible. Don't get me wrong, occasionally there are would-be-cheaters who suddenly have a look of terror wash over their features. Maybe an image of his wife or kids pops into his mind—who knows. Despite the consequences, one by one almost all physically will themselves forward, across the parking lot, up the two flights of stairs and finally to Samantha's room, or as she calls it, The Loser's Love Den.

I taped more close-ups of Peter's face and saw only joy; no trepidation at all. A player, pure and simple. He was alone, out of town, horny and about to make it with a beautiful young woman who wouldn't charge him a dime (this time).

How lucky could one plumber get?

Once inside the room, Peter immediately tried to kiss Samantha. I could hear the microphone being jostled as their chests collided with one another.

"Hey, slow down," Sam said.

"I'm sorry," Peter stammered. "It's been awhile. I guess I'm out of practice. I didn't mean to . . ."

"It's all right," Sam cut him off. "I'm kind of new at this too."

Good girl, I thought. Keep him cool. We're almost there.

"Why don't I freshen up? The cigarette smoke was pretty thick in the restaurant and I hate the smell."

"So do I," Peter replied.

There was a long period of silence in the room that made me uncomfortable, but then our Plumber Playboy said something that would be the final nail in his marital coffin.

"Would you be opposed to getting cleaned up . . . together?" Long



pause. "You know . . . have a shower, or bath, if you prefer?"

"Let me think about that," Samantha replied, as she entered the bathroom and closed the door. "Let's rock and roll," she said in a low whisper to me.

This was my cue. I picked up my cell phone and auto-dialed Samantha's pager number. A minute later, I could hear Sam's distinctive pager tone go off in my earpiece. I heard the bathroom door open and Sam give out a short cry as she read the message.

"My father's had a heart attack."

"You're kidding?" I heard Peter say.

Wrong reaction, friend.

There was authentic fury in Samantha's response. "Do you think I would kid around about something like that? What does this message say?"

I visualized poor Peter's expression as he read my message: *Urgent. Dad's had a heart attack. Call me. Eileen.*

"Eileen is my sister," Samantha snapped, venom dripping from each syllable.

"Geez, I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean to imply . . ."

"I have to pack," Sam cut him off again. "I'm the one who should be sorry. You've been so nice and we were getting along so well."

"No, these things happen." He was good at hiding his obvious disappointment but what choice did he have?

Samantha continued to sob into my ear as the exterior room door opened and I saw (and videotaped) Peter look out.

"I'll grab the taxi we came here in. It's still out front." He turned to Samantha and enveloped her in a big bear embrace. "Everything will turn out okay. Trust me." He looked at Samantha's tear stained face and kissed her on her right cheek.

Samantha stepped away and smiled weakly. "Maybe we'll meet again."

As Peter put on his coat, his attention returned to the bed. "I attend these conventions twice a year. With any luck we'll be able to make some beautiful music together next time." There was another awkward pause before he added, "I'll get out of your way so you can

pack. It was very nice meeting you.”

“Again, thanks for dinner, it was lovely.”

Peter walked down to the parking lot and then looked up to Sam’s room, where she remained standing in the doorway. They waved to each other as he entered the backseat of the taxi, which was driven off the lot. Five seconds after Samantha closed the door my phone rang. I couldn’t even get, “Hello,” out before she started screaming at me.

“Did you see what he did? That perv kissed my cheek so he could taste my tears! What kind of sicko does that?”

“If your father had cut out those fatty foods, maybe you’d have found out.”

“I don’t think so,” she hissed. “Are you coming up?”

“Be there in a sec. I’m going to follow the taxi, to make sure our mutual acquaintance gets to his hotel in one piece.”

Unfortunately, due to slow traffic flow on the main drag, I lost sight of the taxi a short time later. As it was heading in the right direction, I made the executive decision to pull the plug and return to the motel.

I opened the door with my key and was immediately struck by how gorgeous Samantha was. The fact she was stretched provocatively across the bed in only bra and panties was also mighty appealing to my old eyes.

“Now what would your significant other say about you and me hanging out together under these circumstances?”

Before a response could be uttered, I found myself joining Samantha on the bed, where she gave me a long sensuous kiss.

“How’d I do tonight? Were you jealous?”

“You were wonderful,” I replied as Samantha began to unbutton my shirt. “As for being jealous—I don’t get jealous. I was a bit envious though when plumber boy wanted to take a shower with you.”

“Do you want to take that shower with me now?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

As the room was already paid for in full, we decided to use all the provided amenities for a few more hours. The in-joke was I would then bill the client for the time it took to *debrief* the other investigator



on the evening's events. Some female clients actually praised me for such a thorough job and said *the other woman's* comments had been very enlightening.

If only they knew just how enlightening those sessions were for Samantha and me.

Around ten-thirty, I offered to make a quick dessert run, as we were both hungry after our very physical interview session. I drove the van off the lot, hoping to find the ice cream stand up the road still open. I thought a banana split would hit the spot right about now. Bananas, whipped cream, three scoops of ice cream, two spoons and one Samantha.

What I hadn't counted on was having the tables turned on me and being the one now under surveillance. Like most of my targets, I was completely oblivious to being watched. I hadn't noticed that our jilted plumber friend had returned in his dark green Saturn rental car and saw me exit the room, kissing Sam in the doorway on my way out.

Apparently, he had been waiting to make his move for some time, internally seething over our little deception. A taxi driver would come forward to say he had driven the former Plymouth resident—who appeared agitated at the time—to the Holiday Plaza Hotel around 7:45 p.m. "He was, you know—frustrated," the driver was quoted in the newspaper the following morning.

What this scumbag cabbie failed to mention was he'd told Peter the Plumber about our \$40 financial arrangement outside the restaurant. Mr. Plumber, always good with numbers while on the job, had no difficulty putting two and two together.

When I returned fifteen minutes later with the banana split resting on the passenger seat, the only thing left for the police officers to do was fill out the proper paper work. They had already responded to a 911 call about an enraged couple screaming at each other in a cheap motel room. They had already shot and killed a man covered in blood and brandishing what looked like a gun (but turned out to be a hammer). And they had already determined the naked woman on the bed inside Room 215 had been bludgeoned to death with the aforementioned household tool.

As I looked up to our room and then at the plumber's dead body on the pavement below, I could only think of the question Samantha had posed to me earlier:

Now what would your significant other say about you and me hanging out together under these circumstances?

Of all the questions I would have to answer, that would be the toughest. I could handle the cops, the lawyers and even Samantha's family, but I had no clue how my lovely Linda would react. Her move from our small hometown to the big city was meant to be a fresh start for us, yet I had royally and tragically, screwed things up once again.

As the media would play up for weeks, the irony of this whole debacle was that my mistress, Samantha, had been killed due to a suspicious wife. I wondered how Linda would feel that a homemaker from Plymouth had suspected her husband of cheating yet she hadn't suspected me.

Or had she?

I figured I'd never find out. If I were in her position, I knew I would hit the road and never look back.

In life there are certain lines you should never cross: As a kid, you're programmed to colour inside the lines. In wartime, there's always a line drawn in the sand. And in committed relationships, the line you never step over is to cheat on your partner.

Devoid of any meaningful emotions, I got out of the van and started toward the officer in charge, inadvertently stepping under yet another taboo line: the yellow police tape that surrounds a crime scene. In that instant, I knew that morally I was no better than Peter Plumber.

Pathetic.

"What's your business here, sir?" the officer asked as I approached.

"My name is Steve Cassidy. I'm the P.I. and resident dirt bag responsible for this mess."