

INT. COFFEESHOP -- DAY

Stu frowns slightly as he watches Mark devour his fish. He cuts a piece of the salmon off and starts to CHOP it into little pieces until it resembles salmon-dyed mashed potatoes. He carefully eyes the piece that he has masterfully reduced to its molecular components, scrupulously checking it from all sides that it doesn't contain any fishbones, only after which he dares to put it into his mouth.

Stu sighs.

STU

It would have been easier if you had ordered the salmon steak to be taken through a blender before serving. That's how they make chicken nuggets at McDonald's, you know. They throw the entire chicken into the blender, beak and bones and all to make their patties ...

Mark ignores the remark.

MARK

I want to meet her.

STU

The hell you do. And the hell you will.

MARK

Come on, you have to work anyway. What's so bad about me giving her some company until you come back?

STU

I was hoping I wouldn't have to give you a straight answer for that.

MARK

Listen, it's not like you can stash her away forever. I mean, come on, how long have we been friends now? Ten years? Eleven?

STU

Nine. So?

MARK

So? One would think that you could trust me. Or that you would trust me.

STU

I do. I'd just rather spare the girl the pleasure of embarrassing myself by showing her who I count among my friends.

MARK

I'll behave.

His features brighten.

MARK *(CONT'D)*

Ah, hold on - she isn't one of those highly neurotic types, is she?

STU

Depends. If judging by the shoddy standards of the magazines you read, yes, she just might be.

MARK

There is nothing wrong with men's fitness magazines.

STU

Absolutely nothing. Except that there is nothing fit about you. And that the articles are all about the same tiresome three S subjects: sex, sixpacks, and ... uh, scantily clad women.

MARK

Oh, boo! That was shit.

STU

What, the 3 S articles?

MARK

That was a double boo. The single boo was about your sad attempt at changing the subject. So, is she one of those walking sex bombs? We both know how much trouble they are.

STU

Yes, I know how much you like the neurotic types - comes with the territory. Birds of a feather ... well, your Vivian really was a hot dish. But then I wasn't the one who wanted to marry her. I also wasn't the one who built a shrine with her photographs after she took off with that movie director YOU introduced to her.

MARK

Indeed ... but I did introduce her to you. I do remember seeing surprise and envy in your eyes when you met her.

Stu sighs.

STU

Anything else?

MARK

Well, yes, disbelief.

Stu snorts.

MARK (CONT'D)

I was waiting to see despair as well, but I suppose one cannot have everything in life...

STU

My Lord. It must feel real nice living inside your head with Peter Pan and the Easter Bunny.

Mark raises his eyebrows, ignoring Stu's remark again.

STU (CONT'D)

Truth to be told, I always did think your Vivian was, well, strange.

That gets Mark's attention.

MARK

In what way?

STU

Nothing blatant, but something about her just didn't seem quite right.

MARK

Bull. You never said anything.

Stu grins.

STU

Of course not. You probably would have beat that hideous guitar of yours on my head. You wouldn't have listened and it was none of my business. Besides, it was just an impression.

MARK

What do you mean?

STU

She just didn't seem the marrying kind.

MARK

What kind did she seem to you, counselor, who has suddenly become the world's expert on women?

STU

The kind you keep on your side and destroy your life over, Mr. Groupie. I figured you wouldn't be smart enough to see that, and I was right, wasn't I?

Stu lets his words sink in.

MARK

You do know that the greater the neurosis, the greater the sex appeal. It's been proven.

STU

Yeah, whatever, Mr. Men's Health.

MARK

I'm serious. They are the kind of person who can barely contain their passion - akin to putting a lid on boiling water. Eventually, the pressure becomes too much, and something has to give. Is yours that kind of person?

Stu looks thoughtfully at Mark.

STU

She used to be like that.

MARK

But she is not like that anymore?

STU

Listen, why are you so curious about her anyway? It's not like you'll ever meet her. Not until she divorces and we get married, anyway. Then -MAYBE!- I'll allow you to catch a glimpse. From the last row.

Mark becomes serious.

MARK

Counselor ... you are aware that if she is married, the chances for a happy end are dismal? You are just a concubine, a dirty mistress.

Stu nips from his glass.

STU

Why go for pessimism when you can have fatalism?

MARK

Why go for fatalism when you can have futility?

STU

Better to have a life with glorious drama and failures than one of boring monotony.

MARK

Dramatic, as always. Rousseau?

STU

Almost. Roosevelt. Talking about the greatness of being someone who acts and fails grandly instead of being a timid wimp.

MARK

How very appropriate. That's why dirty mistresses enter happily married life so often. Oh wait, no, they don't.

STU

What's so wrong if the dirty mistress gets the happy end, once for a change?

MARK

Yeah, whatever, Shakespear.

Stu watches Mark take the small plastic bottle filled with soy sauce, dropping his head back and repeatedly sucking out its remnants blissfully. By the second time, the bottle is empty, but he still continues to get the very last drop out as it slips out of his fingers and drops onto his white shirt, leaving a dark stain.

Stu shakes his head mockingly at his comically surprised expression as if an invisible hand had slapped the bottle out of his fingers onto his precious pants.

STU

You're such a jackass.