

**Den of Iniquity**

by  
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**DEN OF INIQUITY**

SCENE: A grimy office, with a library table, a computer desk and printer, a typewriter or two. Books and papers strewn about.

AT RISE: THALIA, an attractive young woman, writes intently with a pen on a few scraps of paper.

A loud KNOCKING at the door. Tap. Tap tap tap. Tap. It repeats.

Thalia goes to the door and peers through the peephole.

THALIA

Who is it?

GERALD (OFF STAGE)

Virginia Woolf.

(Thalia puts away her paper and pen. She opens the door, yanks a man inside (Gerald), slams the door shut, and locks multiple locks. GERALD is a mousey looking guy in a sweater, nervous and scared to death.)

THALIA

Can't have you lingering on the doorstep. People get suspicious.

GERALD

Right.

THALIA

You must be Gerald.

(Gerald isn't quite how to introduce himself. He sticks his hand out, awkwardly, and she smiles and shakes it gently.)

GERALD

Yes, I'm Gerald--

THALIA

I don't need to know your last name, Gerald. Better that I don't.

GERALD

Sure.

THALIA

Peter said you might stop by.

GERALD

Right. He told me that you... that if I... I've really...

THALIA

You've never done anything like this before.

GERALD

No. I mean, I've thought about it, but...

THALIA

Lots of people do. People live their whole lives in their heads, but you... Here you are, baby.

GERALD

Yeah. Here I am.

THALIA

First time's a charm. Nothing like the first time.

GERALD

Okay.

THALIA

You're sweet. But that first time, it doesn't come for free you know.

GERALD

Oh, right.

(Gerald digs in his pockets, pulls out a wad of cash and hands it to her. She counts it.)

GERALD

Is that enough? Peter said...

THALIA

That'll be fine. Don't worry about anything, all right, Gerald. Everything's going to be fine.

GERALD

Okay. Yeah. Wow. It's just, I have a...

THALIA

Wife. Sure. Lots of them do. That's half the reason why you're here. Kids, too?

GERALD

Three.

THALIA

There's the other half. It's all okay. When you're done, you'll feel like a new man. In the end, they'll be grateful.

GERALD

Gee, you think so?

THALIA

I know so. Do you know how you want to do it?

GERALD

Yes. I mean, I think so. Are there... Are there options?

THALIA

I think I can accommodate most of the basic desires. Do you like to do it by hand or machine?

GERALD

I don't know if I ever... I hadn't really thought about using a machine.

THALIA

We've got two typewriters--a Selectric--good speed, easy to use. And there's also an old manual Underwood. For sentimental types. We've got a computer with a word processor, too. Even a laser printer. You've never seen writing come out so crisp. Bold, black letters on starched white sheets.

GERALD

Oh, wow.

THALIA

But if you're a hand man, I can still satisfy you. Folks like all kinds of tools, and I aim to please. One guy, he won't do anything but pencil. Not just any pencil, but a Mongol Number Two.

GERALD

Aren't those--

THALIA

Hard to come by? Sure. But where there's a will, there's a way.

GERALD

I was thinking about... Well, a pen.

(She goes to the desk, unlocks a drawer, and produces a wooden box. She unlocks it and opens it for him.)

GERALD

Oh, yeah. Hmm.

THALIA

Go ahead. They won't bite you. Take one.

(He cautiously reaches into the box and lifts out a fountain pen. He unscrews the cap and smells it. He shakes a drop of ink onto the back of his hand and tastes it.)

THALIA

India's finest. One hundred percent pure. Many a heart's been won and lost with that ink. More than a few empires, too.

GERALD

Can I... I really need to... I want to...

THALIA

Put that cap on, sonny. I know you're eager, but don't go spurting that stuff out prematurely.

GERALD

Of course, I'm just...

(She lifts a rug to reveal a secret stash of paper. She takes out a handful of different types.)

THALIA

Some like legal pads, makes 'em feel in touch with the common man. We've got lined, unlined. Cotton bond. Hand pressed. Parchment. Vellum.

GERALD

Do you think I could try the...

THALIA

Start out slow. Don't get over your head.

GERALD

You're right. I'll take a yellow pad, lined.

THALIA  
All right.

(She leads him to the desk. He sits, pen in hand. She places the pad in front of him, gently, and puts a steadying hand on his shoulder.)

THALIA  
There's more where that comes from, honey. You just open up and...

GERALD  
And?

THALIA  
Do what comes natural.

(She playfully rumples his hair, kisses him on the cheek.)

THALIA  
You call me if you need anything.

(Thalia exits.)

(Gerald looks at the blank sheets of paper, a little nervous. Intimidated. Looks for the right angle. Runs a hand over the pad. Looks around. No one to see him. Ruffles the pages at his ear and sighs with delight. Puts the pad down, eager, but not wanting to go too fast. He picks up the pen again, feels its weight in his hand. Runs his fingers over the smooth surface and unscrews the pen cap. Admires his small but powerful tool for a moment. Settles himself down in his chair, assumes the position. Long pause. Finally brings pen in hand down to the top of the page. Takes a deep breath. Writes a single letter. Blinks hard. That was good. Real good. Smiles. Writes another. Needs less of a breath this time. Finishes a word. Nods with satisfaction, starting to really focus now. And suddenly he's writing, his hand and pen pouring the words onto the page. The universe could explode and he wouldn't notice--there is nothing for Gerald but the words flowing from his soul onto the page.)

(There is a loud BANGING at the door. Gerald does not look up or stop. He tears off a page and begins another. More loud banging.)

MAGGIE (off stage)  
Gerald! Open up! I know you're in there.

(Gerald stops, frozen, pen leaking a splotch onto the page.)

MAGGIE (off stage)  
Gerald! Gerald!

(Gerald looks around for an escape route, but sees nothing promising. He has the deer-frozen-in-the-headlights look. Hopes that Thalia will appear for his rescue. Nothing.)

MAGGIE (off stage)  
Gerald, so help me God, if you don't open this door, I will get in the car, put it in drive, and crash right through.

(Gerald caps the pen, slides the pages he's written under the desk blotter, walks to the door, and opens it. He backs up to allow MAGGIE inside.)

MAGGIE  
What are you... Who is she?

(Maggie looks all around. She exits in the direction that Thalia left, then reenters, still searching.)

MAGGIE  
Where is she?

GERALD  
Who?

MAGGIE  
Don't play games with me, Gerald. We've been married too long for that. I don't deserve to have you cheat on me, but if you are, and I've found you, at the very least I deserve the truth.

GERALD  
There's no other woman, Maggie. No one else. I love you. You know I do.

MAGGIE

Then what are you... You said you were going to get the oil changed in the car, and I saw the car heading in the wrong... I just... What is this place?

GERALD

It's nothing. Nothing, just an office. I was meeting someone from work, and he left and then I was waiting, and I...

MAGGIE

All the way in this part of town? It gives me the creeps just being.... and look at this place. If I didn't know better... (looks around a little more, slowly realizing) Oh, my God. I've heard about places like this. You... You've been...

GERALD

It's nothing. Completely innocent. Just relax for a minute. It's not what you think.

MAGGIE

Show me your hands.

(He hides them behind his back.)

MAGGIE

Show them to me!

(He produces his ink-stained hands.)

MAGGIE

Ink!

(Distraught, she sinks into the chair at the desk.)

MAGGIE

You've been writing.

GERALD

It was nothing. Harmless scribbles, that's all.

MAGGIE

Scribbles.

GERALD

A few paragraphs, that's all. I didn't even like it.

MAGGIE

Look at you. You're all flushed. Your hands are trembling. A few paragraphs my foot.



GERALD

Maybe a page. I'm completely in control. I can stop any time I want to.

MAGGIE

Listen to yourself. Don't you think that's what they all say? Nothing to worry about, honey, it's just a letter. Just a poem. Just a short story. Just a ten-minute play, a screenplay, a full-length tragedy. Just a novel.

GERALD

I was experimenting, just to see what it felt like.

MAGGIE

And what am I supposed to tell Timmy and Becky and Martha when it's bedtime and their father is nowhere to be seen. Where's Daddy, Mommy? How come we never see him anymore? How come we only wear hand-me-downs and eat army surplus cheese? Where's Daddy? Don't worry children, he's just off at some coffee house. Truck stop. Or maybe an empty office, or maybe he's sitting at a picnic table in some squalid park getting his fix. Writing an essay. Opining the start of his memoir. What will I tell them, Gerald?

GERALD

It won't be like that.

MAGGIE

Next thing you know, you'll want to set up a little office in our house, in some dark little corner of our bedroom. Working behind locked doors. But they'll know. They see. What's Daddy doing in there, Mommy? Is that what you want them exposed to?

GERALD

I wouldn't. They would never--

MAGGIE

They're children, but they're not stupid. What if Timmy decides he wants to be just like Daddy and starts writing little scripts for his stuffed animals. Little show tunes for chorus lines of army men.

GERALD

I would never do anything to hurt them, you know that. Never. But, you have to try to understand--

MAGGIE

I've seen what it can do. My own father was a closet writer of... literary criticism.

GERALD

I didn't know.