

# **Revelations**

Katherine Oak Stevenson

WRT 4086 Advanced Creative Non-Fiction

Oakland University

It is a deluge. Not the normal Seattle rain that just pisses down interminably, but a straight-up monsoon that threatens to turn Pine Street into rapids. I step out from the curb and land thigh-deep in water rushing toward the drains, the muddy torrent saturating my pants and my long velvet dress. When I reach the other side of the street, I do a quick survey of myself in the club's foggy windows and see that my black clothing barely hints at being waterlogged.

We're meeting at Chop Suey, a silly little club that's all decked out like the inside of a Chinese take-out menu from 1985. When we ran into each other at a party last week, he'd asked me if I liked dancing and, when I said yes, he suggested we go see Mark Farina together. I'm really excited about the possibility of having a new show buddy, as the last one just moved to NYC.

I arrive a bit earlier than he does, so I grab a drink and head to an empty table. He shows up when I'm on my second cocktail, but I lie and tell him it's my first because I don't want him to think that I'm a drunk. He orders a double Jamieson and sits down across from me; only the house music is playing but the bass is pretty deep and so we have to shout to hear each other.

"I'M SO EXCITED THAT YOU SAID YOU'D JOIN ME!" He is animated, grinning. His dark blue eyes catch the light and seem to spark a bit.

"OF COURSE! I'M EXCITED THAT YOU INVITED ME! I NEED A NEW SHOWBUDDY." I sip from my vodka and soda and smile back at him. The house music is frenetic, they're building up to the DJ.

"OH? THAT'S COOL. IT WAS COOL TO RUN INTO YOU AT JOE'S LAST WEEK. IT HAD BEEN TOO LONG."

"YES! I WAS SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT YOU AND ADAM, THOUGH."

"I'M NOT!" He laughs loudly over the music, his eyes glinting again. "I'M REALLY HAPPY ABOUT IT, ACTUALLY. I MEAN, IT WASN'T GOING TO WORK IN THE LONG RUN."

"BUT YOU TWO WERE TOGETHER FOR SO LONG!"

"YEAH, I KNOW, BUT I WAS SO YOUNG WHEN WE STARTED DATING, I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW. . ." The music starts to wane and the lights begin to dim. "WANNA HEAD UP?"

"YEAH!"

We leave our empty drinks at the table and hit the floor. The next hour or so are snapshots of greens and blues and reds and lights, smiles and hips and elbows and hair and laughter, and spinning, spinning, spinning.

I take a break and hit up the bathroom, then the bar. He's waiting for me with another drink. "WANNA SIT DOWN?"

"SURE."

We head towards the back, all the tables are empty of people but filled with discarded cups, bottles, and cans. He moves a few from one table to another and we sit down.

"I REALLY ASKED YOU HERE BECAUSE, WELL, I LIKE YOU." He smiles.

"I LIKE YOU, TOO!" I sip my cocktail. The reverberation flowing throughout the club, I'm not sure if the wave I'm on is the result of the vodka or the sound system. Either way, it feels good.

"NO, I MEAN, I WANT TO DATE YOU."

I spit out my drink. "WAIT, WHAT? I THOUGHT YOU WERE GAY?"

He laughs. "YEAH, ME TOO. BUT I'M BI, WHICH IS WHY ADAM AND I WEREN'T GOING TO WORK. HE'S NOT OKAY WITH IT."

"AH, OKAY. HUH."

"SO?"

"SURE, WHY NOT?!" We smile at each other and he leans in.

When we kiss, I know it's not the vodka or the sound system; this wave is terrifyingly brand new and something else entirely.

-----

It's six months later and he's shown up at the house on 43rd street after the clubs closed. He's wasted, again, and mumbling about a Sikh cab driver who made a pass at him. I tell him that the same guy has hit on me, too, and we laugh about it. His mouth tastes like whiskey and I'm pretty sure he won't remember anything when we wake up tomorrow.

I'm roused by the silvery morning light beginning to sneak through the cream-colored Venetian blinds. He's snoring lightly and I sit there for a few minutes, watching him. The snoring slows down, then stops and his eyes blink open.

"What are you doing?" He's a bit irritated.

"Watching you."

"Ah." He stretches and snorts a little.

"Oh, man, I didn't tell you the wildest thing I just heard."

"Huh?" His voice is sluggish, muffled.

"Remember that Christmas party, at Mary's? That guy, Ryan?"

"The one who hurt you?" He's more alert now.

"Yeah, he was so aggro that night." I stroke the underside of my arm where, after receiving it as a White Elephant gift, Ryan had pressed the Wartenberg Pinwheel deeply into my flesh. He'd broken skin and I'd had strange looking scabs on my arm for over a week, but now they're nearly gone.

"Yeah, I seriously wanted to kick his ass that night. That really pissed me off." He turns onto his side, facing me, his irises are steelier than usual.

"Ha! Yeah, right. That would have been funny to see."

"What? You don't think I could do it? I *am* bigger than him."

"Well, taller, yes, you're taller. But he probably has 50 pounds on you."

"Haha, yeah," he nods and laughs. "So, anyway, what's up with him?"

"Oh, yeah, okay, so Mary--you know, they used to date, right?--well, she told me that he called her up a couple of days later to apologize about the party."

"That's good . . ."

"And he said that he was going through a lot right now and that he was drinking too much to deal with it."

"Huh." His eyes drift up to the ceiling and begin to slowly move as if he's tracing lazy patterns in the popcorn texture.

"Yeah, so he tells her that he has been struggling with his gender identity and that he thinks he's going to transition to a woman! Can you believe that? He's so aggressive, I just can't picture that!"

His eyes begin to dart across the ceiling even faster, his search for a pattern seeming to move from the outline of a cloud to a Jackson Pollock painting.

"I mean, can you believe it?!" I prompt him again.

"Yeah . . ." He sounds unsure.

"Really? You can? I just, I can't. I just, well, anyway. . ."

"Yeah, it's just that, well, I didn't know. . ." His voice is thick all of a sudden, like there's a deep sob struggling to get out.

"What? You didn't see it, either?"

"No, no, it's not that. I mean, I don't know, I don't really know him. So whatever. But I don't know if it's something that you can *tell* just by looking at someone."

"Well, of course not. I didn't mean that. You know, everybody's different. He just never gave off any kind of . . . I dunno . . . *feminine* vibe." My fingers absentmindedly touch my forearm again.

"Yeah, he definitely does have a different energy." His voice is more distant now.

"You okay?" I turn towards him.

"Yeah, why?"

"I guess I thought you'd find it funnier."

"Well . . . it's not just, no it's not funny to me. For me. Actually . . . I actually didn't know how to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"That I've been thinking a lot about that. That I've been feeling like this."

"About your gender?"

"Yeah."

"Oh. . ." I sit up and look down at him. His face is in shadow, a blend of sadness and fear. He won't make eye contact with me. "This is not how I pictured this conversation going, I'll tell you that right now," I laugh.

His pupils are pinpoints, but my joke breaks his faraway stare and he finally looks at me. Then he giggles, too. "I bet not!"

"So why didn't you want to tell me?"

"I was afraid you'd leave me."

"Why? You know I've dated women before."



"Yeah, but . . . this is harder, I think. This will be harder." He looks down into the pillow, searching again.

"Maybe. But maybe this is how you get where you need to go."

"I--I don't, I don't know," he stammers quietly. "I don't know what to do."

"Yeah, it's big. That's big. So."

"So?"

"So, I know that I love you. And this is kind of scary but I still want to be with you."

He stares up at me, eyes bright. "Really?"

"Yeah, I mean, I guess we'll just have to figure this out. I don't know where we'll even start, but we'll figure it out! And who knows, this might even be fun! An adventure!" I smile broadly.

"Well . . . I don't know about that."

"Yeah, I know you don't, but I do."

I lay back down and he curls into me. "Yes, yes, you do. You do."

We stay there in bed, wrapped up in blankets and buried in pillows, holding each other in silence for a while. I can feel his pulse through his wrist, lying across my stomach.

Now I'm the one searching the popcorn ceiling for meaning, lying here feeling conflicted. I'm so happy that he's shared this with me, because now so much about the past few months makes sense. I'm scared, though, and I'm not sure if I'm strong enough to do this, if I can do it, or if I want to do it. All I know is that I *have* to do it; I feel, viscerally, that if I leave him, he probably won't make it through this alive.

-----

Ingersoll was founded to help Seattle's relatively small trans community connect with each other. In addition to workshops and therapists, they also hold community social events like cakewalks and bingo. We start going there weekly for events, and she suggests that I attend one of the therapy groups for partners of people in transition.

When I arrive, I realize that I am a bit of an outlier: I'm a queer woman whose partner is transitioning from male to female, but I don't care about gender, we're in a non-monogamous relationship, and we've only been together for six months. Everyone else here are het women whose devoted husbands of at least 25 years have decided to transition, effectively upending their entire lives. They're infuriated.

"It's just selfish. I'm so mad at him. HIM! I can say that here! At home, HE gets hurt if I say it, but it is what it is, I hate HIM." Pam is a farmer's wife, and she drives from 40 miles outside of Seattle in order to attend this group. I feel like it's more for her than me, so I stay quiet.

"Yes, yes, I know," Jana coos softly. "Get it out, Pam, let it go." Jana is the facilitator and she's primarily focused on letting these women release their anger. And they are all women -- specifically, they're all heterosexual wives of formerly heterosexual men. There aren't any men in these groups, and there are no gay women, either. This experience feels distinctly like a referendum on heterosexual, masculine America.

"Give it time," Layla says to her. "It sucks now, but you'll get a divorce and then--"

"I'M NOT DIVORCING HIM!" Pam cuts her off. "No way, no way, no way. I AM 59 YEARS OLD, what the hell am I supposed to do? No, he lied. He can't do this. He has to pay, I don't know. . ." She trails off and looks down at her hands; they're clutched together so tightly they look purple.

"No, I just meant. . ." Layla looks to Jana, then to me. I shrug.

"What, you don't care?" Pam is staring accusingly at me. "Just shut up. SHUT UP! You're like, what, 25? Who cares what you think?"

I haven't said a word since we sat down; in fact, except for introducing myself at my first session three weeks ago, I haven't said anything at all.

"Pam, you can only speak about yourself," Jana reminds her, looking over at me and smiling. "Do you want to share anything today?"

"No, I'm good," I mumble as Pam's eyes bore into me.

It's the last group therapy session that I attend.

-----

"I found a doctor!" We live together now in the Ballard house, the bright primary colors that my brother, Mr. Tale, and I painted the walls reflecting in her eyes as she paces through the house. She's manic.

"He's in Thailand so we'll need to figure that out but even so he'll cost less than that dude in Arizona and we can spend more time there they have nurses that help you and we'll be in the hospital for ten days and then we can be there for like six weeks or something and I think this is the right move." She stops short when she sees that I'm looking at a book. I'm halfway through my training as a massage therapist and I'm studying for an A&P exam.

"Did you hear anything I just said?!" She's visibly aggravated. "I told you that I found him, the doctor. You know, for this." She points southward.

"Yes, yes, I heard! No, that's great!" It's been a bit of a slog these past months.

"We need to get tickets. We need to get a loan. Haha! Can you imagine? Getting a loan for my surgery?!" She's laughing hysterically at the thought.

"We can just say it's a personal loan to pay a debt or something," I offer.

“Yeah, yeah. We’ll figure something out.”

And we do get a loan. At the bank, we learn that I, a woman with a credit score of 810, no debt, and a part-time job qualifies for less of a loan than she does, a white American male on paper -- who is also unemployed and has a credit score of 560. “Well, at least we can use that privilege for something good, one last time,” she smirks as we walk out the door.

-----

The blackout drapes are working overtime and I cannot really see anything at all. She’s allergic to the morphine so she has an intense headache; accordingly, the nurses keep the drapes closed and the only light I see for the next week are the tiny slivers from the door opening and the blue hue of my computer screen.

Before we left for Thailand, a friend ripped us DVDs of anything we asked for, and then several of his favorites. I can’t practice my Thai because she can’t tolerate noise, so I’m just plugged up on my bed -- and I use the term “bed” loosely because it’s really just a one-inch thick exercise mat with a sheet stretched over the top -- watching old TV.

By day five, I’m stir crazy, so I decide to go for a walk. When I leave the hospital, the humidity smacks me in the face, and I feel wonderful. We’re not in a tourist town, really, and it reeks of the rotting fruit and diesel that seems to perforate the air of

equatorial cities the world over. I come upon the Thai version of a shopping mall and step in.

It's towering and doesn't seem particularly sturdy; five or six floors are connected together by labyrinthine stairwells. I begin my search for a magnet, strolling slowly from one store to the next. I am unsuccessful because this isn't actually a tourist town, and no one comes here to remember it.

I return to the hospital just as she wakes up. "Where were you?" She is accusing and sounds hurt.

"I needed to take a walk."

"You're here to take care of *me*. Don't leave me again."

I want to tell her that I know this, that taking care of her has been what my life has turned into, that five years later, I am acutely aware of my role in this story, but I don't. I know she's in pain and on opiates and isn't thinking clearly. "I'm sorry. I am. I won't leave again."

And I don't.

-----

Summer in Seattle is one of those things that will romance someone into moving here. They're sucked in by the aqua skies and crisp white lines of Mount Rainier peeking out over the city, the fresh sea breezes and the endless, endless green --

and then they're hooked. They don't know that it takes seven months of dismal, crappy rain to create that lushness, but they'll learn soon enough.

When we return from Thailand, it's July and she's about half recovered. She spends a lot of time doing self-care while I start the humongous task of transforming a house into a spa. I'm working with an esthetician and we've decided that we've watched enough home improvement shows to do all the work ourselves. I don't tell her that my home improvement education is basically limited to old episodes of *This Old House* that I watched on PBS as a kid and a smattering of *Trading Spaces* that I watched while stoned at my friends' house a decade ago.

With my part-time gig as an office manager and working on building out the spa in order to open up my massage practice, I'm gone for ten to twelve hours a day. So she starts going out again.

At first, it's occasional: She'll text me and tell me she's staying over somewhere. But then it becomes a few nights a week. It's after she's gone for five nights in a row that I ask her what's going on.

"Well, I met someone."

This, in and of itself, isn't news. Since we're non-monogamous, she's had boyfriends this whole time.

"Cool! Who is he?"

“His name is Ralph, he’s really cool, I think you’ll like him.”

“Let’s have him over then.”

“Okay.”

He comes over for dinner the following week. He’s a divorced single dad, an architect, and, second to her old boyfriend Jeff who I adored, he is the best guy she’s dated.

As the weeks pass, she and Ralph are spending more time together, but I’m busy and I don’t really notice it. Honestly, it’s a bit of a relief that she isn’t at home, impatiently waiting for me.

After years of emotional turmoil and focusing on her needs, it feels good to be starting a new chapter of my own. Things couldn’t be going better! I’m weeks away from opening my own business, my girlfriend is finding her own footing, things feel like they’re finally stabilizing.

It’s late September when she tells me. She makes me a giant batch of crab cakes, ostensibly to soften the blow, and then breaks the news.

“I’m in love with him. And I think I’m actually, you know, when it’s all said and done, I think actually, I’ve been a straight woman this whole time.”

I’m staring down at my plate, swirling wine in my glass. All of this, everything we’ve been through, and now this? It’s a maelstrom in my head and I’m on fire and then



I'm about to freeze and snapshots of Pam and Layla and the other angry women who felt betrayed burst like wet fireworks behind my eyes and then, amidst it all, a calm washes over me.

"Are you okay?" She's searching my face; I know she cares that she's hurt me, but I also know that she can't help it.

"Yeah," I say softly.

"What . . . what are you thinking?" She's looking for absolution.

"I don't know. I mean, well, yeah. I just realized that I thought we were doing something completely different than we're actually doing."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the fact that you are telling me this, that you want to break up because I'm not the gender you want, it's just. . ." I smile weakly.

"Ah." She looks off behind me, through the tiny kitchen windows, connecting to the lights in the distance. I know she'd rather be anywhere else but here.

"It was an adventure, though," I choke through the tears. I'm laughing a little bit and riding waves of grief and relief. "And we did have a lot of fun."

She laughs. "Aha! So you actually did know!"

"Nah, I had absolutely no idea. I was just hoping for the best."