

Stranger Than Fiction (2 Women)

16.

She looks across the street again. The young blonde boy is only a few yards away from the puddle.

Kay closes her eyes and lifts her arms up. The wind courses against her face, her clothes, her skin.

The boy's bicycle strikes the puddle, splashing rain water onto the pants of the middle-aged black woman.

Kay dangles a single foot over the ledge...

And with the strike of the final, singular violin note, she jumps...

WOMAN'S VOICE

Excuse me... Excuse me...

We...

CUT TO:

INT. GARMENT LOFT -- AFTERNOON

Kay stands on the end of a factory table in a large, poorly converted downtown loft. She wears the same clothes as she did on the building and her foot dangles over the edge.

PENNY (O.S.)

Excuse me.

Kay turns.

A formidable, stern-looking woman in a sensible outfit stands in the doorway of the loft with a laptop case held by her side.

Kay looks on, not moving. We can see the table is surrounded by dozens of wadded up tissues, several errant cigarettes and what look to be a bunch of letters strewn about as if recently looked through. The city shines through the numerous, filthy windows that stretch across the downtown garment loft which has been renovated into a large office.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Are you Ms. Eiffel?

KAY

(in a hoarse voice)

Yes.

PENNY

Excellent. What are you doing?

KAY

Standing on a table.

PENNY

Why?

KAY

Research.

(CONTINUED)

PENNY
Am I interrupting?

KAY
Sort of.

Penny puts her laptop case on an available table.

PENNY
My name's Penny Escher. I'm the
assistant. The one the publishers
hired.

KAY
The watchdog.

PENNY
The assistant.

KAY
So you're her to answer phones, file
files, type memos...

PENNY
Yes.

KAY
And watch over me so I don't get
distracted.

PENNY
I'm here to make your life easier
while you write.

KAY
So I don't get distracted.

PENNY
To help you...

KAY
Because they think I'm distracted.

PENNY
Yes.

KAY
Because they think I have writer's
block.

Penny looks for a way to change the subject.

PENNY
(sees pages on floor)
Are those pages?

KAY
They're letters. To me.

PENNY
Are you writing back?

(CONTINUED)

Penny looks at her with a looming eye.

KAY

No.

Penny comes over to pick up the letters. She notices the cigarettes.

PENNY

Ah. And I imagine you smoked all these cigarettes?

KAY

No. They came pre-smoked.

PENNY

(without even a smile)

Right. They mentioned you were funny. Well... please... don't let me distract you.

Kay steps to the other edge of the table, finds a cigarette in a tissue and lights it.

KAY

What do you think about leaping off a building?

PENNY

I don't think about leaping off a building.

KAY

Yes you do.

PENNY

No. I try to think of nice things.

KAY

Everyone thinks about leaping off a building. Everyone.

PENNY

Well, I certainly don't think about thinking about leaping off a building.

KAY

They say-- I read this in this fantastically depressing book-- that when you jump from a building, it's rarely the impact that actually kills you.

PENNY

Well, I'm sure it doesn't help.

KAY

There's a... There's a photograph in it, a photograph, from the L.A. Times around forty years ago. Called "The Leaper".

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KAY (CONT'D)

It's old but... it's beautiful.
From above the corpse of a woman who
had just leapt to her death. There's,
there's blood around her head...
like a halo. And her leg is...
buckled underneath her. And her arm
has snapped like a twig.

(pause)

But her face is so serene. So at
peace.

(pause)

And I think it's because when she
died... she could feel the wind
against her face.

Kay puts out her cigarette.

KAY (CONT'D)

(with vulnerability)

I don't know how to kill Harold Crick.

PENNY

(reassuringly)

I know. I've heard.

KAY

I can't just... It has to be perfect:
exact, specific, poetic but not...

PENNY

I know.

KAY

I... I just...

(sighs)

As much as I'd like to, I can't just
throw Harold off a building.

PENNY

Ms. Eiffel. Kay. I have been an
assistant for 18 years. I have helped
more than 20 authors complete more
than 35 books. I have never missed
a deadline. I have never lost a
writer to a block for longer than
three weeks. I will be available to
you every minute of every day of
every week until the final punctuation
is embedded on the final page. I do
not like loud music. I do not abide
narcotics. I prefer to be called
Penny, not Ms. Escher. And I will
gladly and quietly help you kill
Harold Crick so we may both go on
with our respective lives.

(pause)

And if you'll allow me, I think it
would benefit you greatly if you'd
cut back on the smoking.