

Kyla Cherry

John Bandler

A fan's seemingly chance meeting with Kyla Cherry, cable news's sexiest anchor, turns out to have been decreed, and is key to the inevitable Revolution against the Archive.



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by

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Kyla Cherry. According to Wikipedia, cable news's sexiest anchor.

Wikipedia was right.

Red and black—her favorite colors. Black hair, red mouth. Brown eyes, close enough to black. Also according to Wikipedia, 35, married, one child. Why was this so important?

Because, yesterday, Kyla's tailored, petite form graced an economy class aisle seat in his row. Unfortunately, she sat neither next to him nor on his side of the plane. She sat on the other side of the aisle.

He'd never seen her in the flesh, yet it was the blonde girl in the window seat *next* to Kyla who stole his attention, some teenager in an orange dress. A distraction. Senseless. He should pull away, take in the famous Kyla, but Kyla was covered from her neck to her knees. Perhaps that was it, and the orange girl was annoyingly, annoyingly, . . . Strapless? No, under her white, see-through shawl, he could make out spaghetti straps.

Hair pulled back, full lips

Kyla had great lips too. So, back to her?

Not so fast. The girl in orange had just raised her dress above her knees—Kyla would have to wait her turn. Besides, Kyla was out of his league, economy class or not.

That was yesterday.

Right now, a few stars still sparkled in the crisp, predawn sky, while loudspeakers rattled muzak and wakening birds squabbled in trees lit up as for Christmas. Under the transparent

canopy by the pool, waiters in green and cooks in white were setting tables or bustling around the buffet. This sprawling oasis was paradise, indeed—if your lungs held up to the air pollution and if you could ignore the poverty beyond the walls.

Kyla sat with her back to him, alone. He'd arrived early for breakfast, but—

“Coffee, sir?” a waiter said.

Making sure he had Kyla in view, he found a chair and sat down. Shouldn't the waiter have pulled out the chair for him? Perhaps the guy had a nose for off-season, conference-rate patrons. “Please,” he said to the waiter.

Would she remember him?

Back on yesterday's plane, she'd thrown him at least one glance. He was sure. The girl in orange had looked his way too. Damn. Both women must have caught him staring. He'd swung his attention to his window, then plunged back into his laptop and resumed watch from the corner of his eye.

The girl in orange had kicked off her shoes. Knees up, she pressed her toes into the seatback in front of her, seemingly unaware of how much of herself was on display. As it climbed, the plane pitched, lurched, and rolled, and a patch of sunlight swept over her leg. The patch shifted, swelling, now closing to a sliver, now shutting like an eye.

Eyes. Creases. Drawing from life. Creases in the female flesh should be soft-edged, mysterious, inviting. The plane was hot—muggy, like the terminal building they'd just left behind. The girl's skin would be moist. The plane shook, her thigh quivered, and her hand slipped between her legs.

He licked his lips. She crossed her legs.

When they reached cruising altitude, the glow on her leg steadied. Too bad. That sexy jitter had suited her. She'd closed her eyes. Oh, God. Her legs were blushing. Well, if not that, then her skin must be developing a serious rash

Whatever, when they landed, much too soon, the women walked off ahead of him. He hadn't seen either of them again.

Until now.

Without turning her head, Kyla motioned him to sit at her table. How the devil—? He grabbed his plate and coffee mug, and rushed over. Whoa, don't look too eager.

Her perfume was gentle on the nose. "I saw you on the plane yesterday," he said.

Kyla flinched, put down her orange juice, and dabbed at her eye with a napkin.

"Dust," he said. "Grit." Helpful bugger, wasn't he?

She folded and smoothed her napkin back onto the table—doubtless some harmless woman thing—and looked into her bowl of fruit.

*

How many world wars has man suffered, sir?

It depends, certainly, on when you start counting, how you define "world war," and how you define "man." Philosophers—an old-fashioned term for ardent thinkers—disagreed on the definition, on the number, on everything. Wars seemed better defined according to whether certain statistical and accounting thresholds had been surpassed. Body counts. Setbacks to Gross Domestic Product. Etcetera.

What's Gross Domestic Product, sir?

Later. Imagine, nuclear weapons used to be considered a threat. Bah! Zurich Convention X3C took smart care of those annoyances. Failsafe automata—tamperproof failsafe

automata—controlled all reactions—chemical, nuclear, the lot. Only one weapon of mass destruction survived. You! Are you paying attention? Yes, you!

*

Octogenarians in shorts and flowered shirts, and conference delegates in off-the-rack gray converged on the buffet. None glanced at Kyla, accessorized and dressed to the nines as if about to host the Academy Awards—which she had. “These people seem remarkably good at not recognizing a celebrity,” he said.

“I don’t want them to,” she said.

All over again, he fell in love with her voice. But, oh dear, she seemed a bit off-beam. Worse, she thought him stupid. “But”—he threw out his arms—“you’re here.”

“Of course, I’m here. So are you.”

He looked at his watch. “I mean, if I go to my room and turn on the TV—”

“You’ll find me missing—that is, if your TV works.”

“Missing.”

“Right. AWOL. You’ll find another bitch filling in till they track me down.”

Another tack might work better. “You haven’t asked me my name.”

“You haven’t asked me mine.”

“I know you,” he said.

She glanced around briefly then smiled.

Okay. A gear shift— “Where’s your friend?” he said.

“That girl you were ogling yesterday?”

“Yeah.”

“Right now, Miss Blonde Voluptuous in gaudy orange is some hundred miles away.”

*

Let us recall a seminal excerpt from the Co-Nirvana Accord, namely, from Amendment 7a, Section xiii, Paragraph 3—the universal interface between man, media, and the Archive will become seamless, permanent, ubiquitous, and irrevocable. A bit of redundant legalese there, but in those days “man” still had a discernible meaning.

*

His waiter had brought him his omelet and hash browns and refilled their coffee cups but he couldn't see himself touching any food right now. His stomach had undergone its usual metamorphosis when he badly wanted sex with a stranger—it had shrunk. No matter. By the time sunlight filtered through yonder high treetops—ten minutes max—she'd have given him the shove.

His two-bit garcon obviously thought so too and, thereby, had forfeited his entire gratuity.

*

The Corporation cultivated clients who demanded technology for attenuation of leakage and evasion of intruders, and were willing to pay for the privilege of cheating the Archive. But the Corporation also cultivated clients who sought high-sensitivity detectors to probe and exploit the very same leakage for every conceivable advantage, from product marketing to finding soul-mates to rigging elections to feeding the Archive.

*

He was rapidly running out of alternatives. “I thought—”

“Look, no hard feelings.”

“About?”

“That you’re stuck with me.”

For the day? For the week? An hour with Ms. Kyla Cherry should be one heavenly deal. Any moment, though, one of his dowdy conference buddies would grab a chair, sit down, and hog the conversation. Yet, if he was “stuck” with Kyla, perhaps they could continue to get to know each other elsewhere. His room? Untidy. Better hers. Better still, they could check out of this hotel altogether. Escape.

She shook her head, it seemed to him, sadly. “You’re married.”

“So are you.”

She poked around in her fruit bowl. “Sorry,” she said. “I’m training myself not to get too enmeshed in situations of jealousy and lust. As you see”—she hesitated—“I’m not too good at it yet.”

Hang jealousy. Take lust. Did she mean *his* fragile and easily-triggered lust, or hers? This woman seemed serious about something, to be sure, but—

“Yours!” she said.

Wow. She’d forgotten, perhaps, that she was Wikipedia’s most ravishing TV anchor—subject of *Why You Can’t Take Your Eyes Off Her*, one of the most watched documentaries ever.

“You read my mind,” he said.

“The network didn’t choose me for my legs.”

Indeed, her unauthorized bios had been silent on her legs.

“But you won’t be disappointed,” she said.

If he ever got to check out her limbs, he could amend Wikipedia's sketch accordingly.

"So," he said, "what does it feel like, reading minds?"

She finished her yoghurt and put down her spoon. "Imagine music blasting through the walls, your windows, and multiple connecting doors to your room when you're trying to fall asleep after twenty-four hours in Economy. Now imagine something infinitely worse."

*

The Corporation worked both sides of the street, manufacturing detectors commensurate with its expertise in both shielding and leakage attenuation. Those who couldn't pay—the unlucky souls who used to be called "the masses"—would have their brains farmed, and any and all of their intellectual "property," useful secrets and mental baggage alike, automatically and painfully harvested.

*

"Right now," she said, "I'm trying to focus on your essence through the mind-chatter of the rabble that surrounds us. Okay? Now imagine living other people's obsessions. That's stage two, but I'm getting better at dodging the agony. Stage three. Chaos. A few days ago my head started burning. So I arranged to meet you here."

"What if someone videos us and sends the clip to your studio boss?"

She flashed him a don't-touch-that-dial smile and said, "Only you and I know I'm here."

*

Did Kyla Cherry ever adapt, sir?

*

He looked around. “Okay, what’s our waiter thinking?”

She didn’t turn. “You don’t yet realize it—why should you?—but your subconscious is part of the infernal background chatter. I need you to stop fighting me. Reign in your sarcasm. Relax.”

If she was monitoring him, why bother having any voice conversation at all? “Did you notice the rash on her legs?” he said.

Bingo. She seemed as close to hurt as her trained persona surely allowed. “Here’s my answer, Casanova, in four parts. Listen well. One—I engineered her blemishes.”

“How?”

“You want to know how, and not why? Anyway, her imperfections simply turned you on even more.” She signaled and reached for his hand. “Two—this primitive oral conversation of ours drowns our animal imperatives . . . Fortunately. Don’t look at me like that.” She squeezed his hand. “*My* subconscious also clamors for my attention, a kind of telepathic blowback. And, three—yes, we *will* have sex.”

Don’t say it, don’t say it, don’t think it. “Who else knows about this, your mind-read-write condition?”

“By the way, I’m happy you’re getting the hang of it.”

One two three four. One two three four. Four.

“Indeed,” she said. “Four—you will wish you were dead.”

Dead-dead-dead-dead. Oh God.

“But you won’t betray me,” she said.

“When?”

She let go of his hand. “Not long after we make love.”

Ambiguous, ambiguous, but better not probe. Better not— He straightened himself in his chair.

“Because, my dear, I may never let you touch me again.”

*

All texts, all artistic achievements, all knowledge should be gathered, archived, and available free on demand. This mantra, it was thought, would stick it to the rich, sideline the pirates, and console the destitute. This might have made sense in the dinosaur age of media hardware, of gimmicks and gadgets. However, once entrepreneurs sensed that what had started off as interbrain seepage might indeed evolve into a “seamless, permanent, ubiquitous, and irrevocable” state, their struggle for totalitarian control inevitably ensued.

*

In her suite, curtains drawn, dark, he sat up in her bed and waited for her to finish whatever she was doing in her bathroom.

He still hadn’t managed to study her legs. But they’d sure felt good.

*

As decreed by the Archive—you can look up the chapter, section, and paragraph numbers later—the unauthorized promotion, manufacture, and exploitation of “thought-delete” buttons became punishable by death.

Now, any questions?

*

While you were in the bathroom, I considered phoning in a claim of ransom.

I know, dear, but you would only have escalated my fraud while getting yourself into one hell of a mess.

What's your range?

Depends on the field strength and the volume of adjacent cross-thinkers, my energy level, and whether I'm transmitting, receiving, or actively blocking.

Why keep up the pretense?

If I confessed to my skill—which kind of came and went and took hold of me like a common cold—my utility and yours would have been wasted. We would never have met That's not what you meant.

No.

Turn it down now. Turn it off. Kiss me.

*

What's Wikipedia, sir?

Only now you ask? Wikipedia is one of the many endearing and almost instantly obsolescent forerunners of the Archive. A speck in our history. Imagine, if you will, that primitive man once shared his inner thoughts and thought processes willingly. Ultimately, this foolishness enslaved him.

How many babies did they produce?

Thankfully, more than the critical number. Her virus was programmed to infect her with the desire to have as many babies as possible and only with him—and in our haste and fear of the Corporation's imminent counter-virus, the minimum number of offspring needed to seed permanent distrust of the Archive and hence spawn the Revolution eluded us. Then.

Fortunately, our prototype virus managed to prevail long enough for Kyla Cherry to store a sufficient number of her eggs. By the by, none of you has asked me about the girl in orange.

Wasn't she a distraction, sir?

Actually, she attached herself to our soon-divorced hero and agreed to host some of Kyla's fertilized eggs.

May I . . . ?

Indeed—don't be shy—you are wondering whether Kyla died through a mutation. The answer is no. A glitch triggered a viral feedback loop and a malfunctioning breaker failed to trip. The surge vaporized Kyla's cortex.

I don't understand why she told him he would wish he were dead.

The physical act of love used to have the unfortunate side-effect of imprinting an incurable obsession. She was simply preparing him to be without her.

What if the virus had failed, sir?

Ah. Good lad. Your first question. Well, the Elders of the Revolution ordered an endless suite of alternatives. First, a resistant species of man had to be developed. Second, the neutralization and reconstitution of the Archive had to be rendered inevitable. Third, the Corporation had to be crushed.

Excuse me, sir, I have questions too. Mostly about your terminology.

Yet another newcomer. Welcome, young sir. Fire away.

What does "without her" mean, sir?

END