



Booth

Volume 3 | Issue 8

Article 4

8-26-2011

Fuck Raymond Carver

Todd Wright

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth>

Recommended Citation

Wright, Todd (2011) "Fuck Raymond Carver," *Booth*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 8 , Article 4.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth/vol3/iss8/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Booth by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Fuck Raymond Carver

Abstract

When I got to the bakery I was in a shit mood. I stood in line behind bratty Manhattan kids, howling and crying about what they wanted their parents to buy them. The parents weren't much better. When they'd get to the front of the line they'd make sure to show they were put out for having to wait. I wanted to punch them in the face, but I had to admit I was just like them.

Keywords

anger, resentment, relationships, sex, teaching, writing



ABOUT ARCHIVES CONTESTS PRINT SUBMIT

August 26, 2011

Fuck Raymond Carver

by Todd Wright

Excerpted from a novel manuscript

One

When I got to the bakery I was in a shit mood. I stood in line behind bratty Manhattan kids, howling and crying about what they wanted their parents to buy them. The parents weren't much better. When they'd get to the front of the line they'd make sure to show they were put out for having to wait. I wanted to punch them in the face, but I had to admit I was just like them.

"Bake me a cake as fast as you can," I said when it was my turn.

"What kind of cake?" she asked.

"I don't care."

“What do you care about?”

“That’s a good question,” I said.

“No, I mean what’s the cake for? Do you want it to say something?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I want it to say ‘Fuck Raymond Carver’. Make it out of whatever. I just want it to say that in pink and white frosting on the top.”

“We can’t say ‘fuck’ on cakes,” she said.

“I’ll pay extra,” I said.

She looked like she didn’t give a shit about her job and that she might do it. She scanned for her boss behind her and then looked back to me and said, “Fifty bucks on top of the price of the cake. Cash. If you don’t like it, hit the road.” I felt like I was in high school again and buying quarter bags. I could tell that in another situation I would have gotten along with this girl. She had a look in her eyes like someone who had taken care of men all of her young life and didn’t have the energy to add any more to the list. She wore a black and white polka dot poodle skirt and a white apron. She was kind of Goth and I couldn’t tell which parts of her clothing were supposed to be ironic. Her judging, sharp eyebrows were juxtaposed with a playful barrette in her hair, a yellow bunny giving the middle finger.

“Cute bunny,” I said.

“Thanks,” she said. “You should see what the monkey is doing on the other ones I have.” Her face didn’t soften, and her nails impatiently strummed the glass counter.

“Okay,” I said. “I need that cake.”

“What’s it for?” she asked as she took the money from me.

“It’s a gift.”

Twenty minutes later I was back on the street with the cake in hand and heading to the A train. It was hard to get through the turnstile with the thing and I started to get pissed off. The train pulled up as soon as I got to

Wright: Fuck Raymond Carver

the platform though, and I was cruising uptown in no time. When I got home Rachel was there. She was in the kitchen doing something and I got a beer and squeezed by because our kitchen is small.

“What’s in the box?” she asked.

“I got PBQ something,” I said.

“PBQ? What are you up to?”

“Nothing,” I said. I turned my back to her so she couldn’t see me lying.

“You expect me to believe that?” She smiled, waiting to find out what weird shit was going on in my head. “You’ve been cursing them for months and having a fit and pulling out your hair. Now you got them something?”

“Yeah.” I drank and thumbed through the mail. Con Ed bill. An opera flyer. “After I sent them that strongly worded email I felt bad. So I got them a cake.”

“Saying that Satan would save a special place up his flaming asshole for them is a little more than strongly worded.”

I shrugged. “You want to see it?”

“Of course.”

I ran my index finger along the bottom of the box and tore through the seal. I lifted the box top to reveal the beautiful, cursive letters. It was impressive. Rachel hardly looked at it. Mostly, she looked at me as I looked at it. I put on a smug smile for her benefit. She turned back to the kitchen.

“You’re not going to let me send it, are you?”

She started chopping vegetables and then said, “Babe, do whatever you want. I happen to think it’s crazy to send a reputable literary magazine a cake that says, ‘Fuck Raymond Carver’. They’re going to know it’s from you.”

“I think I’ll send it.” I lowered the box top back over the cake and it

squawked as the air was pushed out.

“I know,” she said, and went back to chopping.

I was lucky to be married to Rachel. She was brilliant and really great looking. On top of that she put up with my shit. She put up with my neuroses, my awkward sexual advances, my drinking and my smoking, and she rarely called me on any of it. We had been married a little over two years, but I still liked to watch her whenever I had a chance. I liked to watch the body of her long brown hair swing on the small of her back as she worked in the kitchen. I liked to watch her intent face as she read a book, or studied her computer screen.

We watched TV after dinner and had a couple of bourbon and cokes. I waited as long as I could before mentioning smoking a cigarette and when I did, she agreed. We were on the top floor of a fourth floor walkup in Harlem and were the only ones in our building with roof access. We’d go up there to smoke cigarettes and drink and talk. Sometimes we’d talk about a trip we were planning. Sometimes we’d pace up there sorting out how we were going to pay the bills. Sometimes on the weekends we’d get sloshed and go through half a pack of smokes up there talking about the future, what we wanted to be, and what we didn’t want to be. I don’t think we ever fought up there. It was great.

On this night we just smoked in the silence. It was cold.

Then she said, “We should have sex tonight.”

“Nice,” I said.

We tossed our smokes onto the street below as someone went through our garbage cans and a couple of teenagers yelled at each other about some shit. Rachel went down the hatch first so I could shut it tight. We went inside.

She went to the bathroom and I knew it was time for bed. I shut the TV and everything off, locked the door and got undressed. While she took out her contacts, I laid in the bed messing with my dick. I’d had a few more drinks than I’d meant to and I was feeling rubbery. I knew that it would be a nice thing for me to be hard when she got back, so I really started

flopping it around, thinking about whatever came to me. Tits. Ass. An encouraging moan. I fell asleep before she came to bed.

Sunday morning started with a fight.

“Is it that you’re not attracted to me anymore?” she asked, waking me from my half sleep.

In a rush it came to me that I was a fucking idiot.

“Of course not,” I turned to her and grabbed at her ass. She pushed me away and turned to face the wall. The sunlight was coming into our bedroom window. It felt like ten or eleven in the morning.

“I’m serious,” she said. “We never have sex. What’s the problem?”

As usual, I had nothing to say.

“I’m not blaming you,” she added. “I’m perfectly willing to accept that we have both, somewhere along the way, fucked this up. But I’m still in my twenties. I’m not ready to be that old married couple that pecks each other on the cheek and goes to sleep. Don’t you want to have sex with me?”

She turned back to me and I nodded enthusiastically.

“Well?” she asked.

“Then let’s have sex,” I said.

No response.

I pulled my boxers down and kicked them to the foot of the bed. I went to grope her chest over her T shirt.

“Stop,” she said.

“Why?” I asked. “If we both want to be having more sex, then let’s have more sex.”

“I don’t feel like it now. Not when we’re lying here talking about it.”

Then, as if her mentioning the fact that we were lying down repulsed her, she dragged herself from the bed. She was still seated, but turned away from me.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“What are you sorry about?” she said.

“For falling asleep.” I tried to think quickly if there was something else.

“It’s okay,” she said, and stood up, heading for the bathroom. “Forget it. It’s not a big deal.”

The door shut behind her and the shower came on. I considered masturbating.



[ABOUT](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [CONTESTS](#) [PRINT](#) [SUBMIT](#)

Fuck Raymond Carver

Two

I woke up Monday morning without a hangover, but I had coffee anyway. It left me jittery and sweaty even as I walked in the cold from our apartment to the post office. I slapped almost an entire book of stamps on the cake box and dropped it in the bin outside because I couldn't wait in the god-awful line I could see inside. People at the post office were worse than people at the cake place. It was a hundred degrees in there year round, and the workers behind the counter didn't seem to notice. The rest of us would be sweating and pissed off, fantasizing about murdering somebody as we waited our entire lunch hour to send something off, and the robots would be back there moving at a snail's pace. At the 125th street station I made a point of exhaling loudly as I skirted around a couple of people hanging out outside the entrance. I made it to the platform just as the D train left the station and I said, "Fucking assholes," not speaking to or about anyone in particular. A guy sitting down near me looked up from his paper and I put my hands up, giving him a look like, *Mind your fucking business*. He replied with, *You must be mistaken. I don't even see you*. He looked back down to his paper. New Yorkers make you want to kill sometimes.

I got to my classroom early so I drew on the chalkboard. Mostly people

with eyes missing and teeth missing and arms missing. I always draw things like this and I don't know why. Other than the fact that for the week in seventh grade I was convinced I was an artist, I was also into horror movies.

Class started. I was teaching rhetoric and the rhetorical triangle that day. I'd done this lecture so many times I didn't even really have to pay attention to myself. Through most of it I thought about how shitty my weekend had been and how I'd fucked up. When I would fade back to the lecture I was giving, I'd notice people sleeping or texting. It pissed me off, but not enough to do anything. After class a guy said he wasn't sure he understood what we were studying and asked if he could email me with a draft of his paper. I said it was no problem and gave him a fake address. Then I went to the crummy office that the part time faculty shared and I checked my real email. There was this annoying Spanish professor in there and I regretted the trip as soon as I'd walked in. Even though this room was way too small for the two dozen adjuncts they had assigned it to, and even though it was a complete shit hole with no heat and always had a lingering smell of microwaved curry, this middle aged woman had set up camp there and loved it. She had brought in a little desk lamp and a fake fern. She had filled the bookcases around her with every book she could find. She had hung her various degrees on the wall and brought in an old armchair for concerned students to sit in. Her effort exhausted me.

"How are you?" she sung. She seemed nice enough, but her voice was always a little too shrill and her teeth were fucked up. Those things bothered me more than they should, probably.

"Okay," I said. "I just need to check my email and then I have to run to class."

"I thought you only taught one class this semester." She checked her watch. "Isn't it just getting out?"

"Yeah," I said. "No. It is." I trailed off as I typed my login and found a bunch of junk mail. I had been waiting for an email from PBQ, but it was becoming clear they were ignoring me. I logged off and hopped up.

"Do you have an extra dry erase marker?" the woman asked. "I seem to have misplaced mine."

I slid out the door.

On my way out of the building, her saying, *I thought you only taught one class*, echoed in my head and I imagined what she would look like falling down stairs. Not that I imagined pushing her. Even in my fantasies where terrible things are happening to people, I'm never anywhere to be seen. I stopped to light a cigarette and ran into Gary at 12th and 5th. I was relieved. He pulled his headphones off. We hugged. He was the only one I hugged in New York besides Rachel.

"You wouldn't believe the fucking weekend I had," I said.

"Say no more," he said, and took me around the shoulder. "Let's grab a beer and you can tell me all about it." He spun me and we were headed to 6th Ave. It was three in the afternoon, but it was hard to say no to Gary. So I didn't.

"Aren't you teaching a class now?" I asked.

"God no. Office hours."

At the bar, I told Gary how I'd slept through sex. I told him that this wasn't an isolated incident. Not that I had been falling asleep a lot, but that things weren't right. They hadn't been right for months.

"You're not going to want to hear this, Todd, but I know what the answer to your problem is." He brushed his tennis player hair back and smiled. Gary had been mildly aware that Rachel and I weren't having sex very often, but this was the first time he had advice.

"Why would I not want to hear it?"

"Because it's going to make you uncomfortable."

"No it's not."

He gave me a knowing look, but proceeded anyway.

"You think your wife is hot, right?"

“Yeah.”

“And you want to fuck her, right?”

“Right.”

“And she doesn’t see you for the piece of shit you are, and wants to screw you occasionally right?”

“Right.” He had a way about him that made you comfortable. He smiled at everything you said like you were the only person in the room. It was why he had dozens of female students standing outside his office every day. That and there was a rumor going around that he was twelve inches. I had never found a student waiting outside my office.

“Your problem is that you happened to marry a 21st century woman, Todd. A 21st century woman is strong and successful, like your architect wife. 21st century women work all day for less money than men, and they take all kinds of shit from men who think women don’t know how to do their jobs. They are aggressive and capable because they have to be to survive in a workforce that they had to push their way into.” He motioned for another round of beers. “And then she comes home to *you*.”

“Fuck you.”

“I’m just saying.” He laughed to himself. “She keeps the dragons from burning down the village all day. And when she comes home she wants to put her sword away. She wants to release that burden. She wants to relax and not be a hard ass anymore. She wants to get pounded by a confident 21st century man, my friend.”

“Oh, I see. This is about me being a pussy.”

“No, don’t misunderstand me. I love you, man. You’re my best friend in this city. But when Rachel comes home from work I know what you do. You sit there like a lump. You sit through dinner wondering if she’s going to ask you if you want to have sex. You go to bed at night and lay down next to her, *your bodies pressed together*, and you wait for her to give you permission to have sex with her. You’re a sad case, brother.”

I rose to go to the bathroom.

“I told you it would make you uncomfortable.”

“I just have to piss.”

“Okay. Hear me out first. I’m sorry if I’m making you mad, but hear me out.”

I waited.

“Rachel wants you to respect, love, and yes, even fear them from time to time. But I guarantee there is a significant part of her that wants you to drag her off by her hair and ravage her like the caveman you are.”

I pissed and we left.

“You hear from PBQ yet?” he asked as we went underground.

“No.”

“Sorry, man. Assholes.”

We went our separate ways as Gary took the train downtown to his hipster sky high flat and I took the uptown train to the Harlem brownstone we were renting. On the train, I thought about how badly I wanted to be Gary. The fact that he looked a little like a Ken doll made me want to punch the good looks out of him, but he was my best friend. He was also crazy successful and totally deserved it. Gary had just published his second book of essays. Most of them had appeared in *Rolling Stone* or *Spin* or *The Village Voice* before. He wrote on American rock and roll of the 1960’s and the punk of the 1970’s and he was good. I’d memorized one of his recent reviews.

Reveals, not only the flaws, but also the elusive beauty of a music we thought we’d heard before we heard it from Gary Stone. Although he is too young to have experienced this music when it was released, it doesn’t stop him from putting his fingers directly on the pulse of those whom this music saved those decades ago.

I remember going green with envy when I read it, even as my eyes welled with tears for a friend I was so happy for. I got right off the toilet and called him. I hadn't even pulled up my pants.

When I got home, Rachel wasn't there and I was disappointed. I made some macaroni and cheese and drank a beer. I checked my voicemail and she had left a message about working late. I ran downstairs to buy a few bottles of beer from the bodega at the corner. The guy at the counter smiled when I walked in, but the other guy, the guy that seemed to be arguing over the price of something, gave me a look from hell. I averted my eyes and headed to the coolers at the back. As I opened the door to grab a handful of Pabst the guy said,

"I *fucking* hate white people."

He said it so I could hear and the nice guy that worked there was reeling trying to keep things cool. In his heavy Syrian accent the shopkeeper gave the guy the price he'd asked for and tried to shoo him off. I pretended to browse the beer, keeping my back turned. The selection was the same three beers that it always was, but I created a fiction in my head where I was debating the merits of them to kill some time. *Hmmm. Steel Reserve or Pabst? I can't decide. Or what about a classic like Budweiser? You can't turn your nose up on a classic like that.* The two were getting louder and I was trying to ignore it.

"No. Fuck that. Let him hear me! I'm not gonna run off because some fucking white boy comes in here."

I'd only been living in New York for two years but I knew that I had to remove the tail from between my legs. If I stood with my head in the fridge any longer it would be clear I was afraid, and I didn't want him to know that. I turned towards the counter and walked over to the men with as much faux confidence as I could muster. I repeated the same thing to myself that I always did in situations where I thought I might get my ass kicked. *Stay calm. Be friendly. Act bored. Like you haven't realized this motherfucker wants you dead.*

The guy moved aside so I could put the tallboys on the counter, but he didn't walk away. He challenged me to look at him by standing a little too

close.

“How are ya?” I said to the shopkeeper. I didn’t know his name, but I liked him. He was always nice to Rachel and me when we came in.

“Okay, buddy.” He pulled a black plastic bag and started filling it with the beers. “You okay tonight?” He had thick black eyebrows and wore the same Jets hooded sweatshirt every day.

“Oh yeah,” I said. “Just fine.” I had to make a move. I told myself to sack the fuck up.

I moved my eyes to the guy next to me and said, “How are ya?”

He said nothing. I had a good foot on the guy, so it was silly to be paralyzed in fear. And yet there was no denying his eyes said he didn’t give a damn about the height disparity.

“How much do I owe you?” I said to the clerk.

“\$7.50.”

I handed over a ten that was already in my front pocket. The guy took forever with the change and I felt like I was going to lose my cool. My aggressor was purposefully breathing hard. I almost absent-mindedly started biting my lip, but I remembered a time that I’d made that mistake shortly after we’d moved here. A guy at 119th and Frederick Douglass had spied me nervously trying to get home late one night and cursed me. *What are you scared of? Why you bitin your lip? You want somethin to be scared of? I’ll give you somethin to be scared of.* He yelled shit for two blocks until I was out of sight. I hadn’t chewed my lip since then. Not even alone in my apartment.

“I was just fucking with you,” the guy finally said. I was still waiting for my change.

“What’s that?” I said, doing my best to do the bored thing.

“I said I was just fucking with you.”

“Oh, that’s okay. No problem.”

“I just want you to know. I was just *fucking* with you.” His face said he was being genuine, but his tone and the way he was repeating himself said otherwise. The shopkeeper fumbled with a roll of quarters and the other guy headed for the door. He turned and walked backwards, eyes still on me.

“That’s cool,” I said. “No worries.”

The door swung open and closed. He was gone. I thought it was over.

“Sorry about that,” my nameless Syrian friend said. “He’s just crazy.”

“It’s okay,” I said.

He gave me the change and I walked out to find the man leaning against the building. He was built. His arms were big. Not defined like he lifted weights, but big. He had a cigarette and was checking his pockets for a light. I tried to pass by quickly, but he sprang off the wall and walked by my side.

“You got a lighter?”

I stopped and lit his cigarette. I started walking again and he came with me.

“I was really just *fucking* with you. I was in Vietnam with a bunch of white folks. You don’t bother me.”

“Cool, man.” I said.

“It’s those goddamned Arabs you can’t trust, man. They’re *fucking* faggots. They’ll try to fuck you every chance they get. You know what I mean?”

I didn’t have a clue, but I knew I didn’t want to engage this anymore. I was almost to my building. I fingered the front door key in my pocket so I could be ready.

“I don’t know,” I said, trying to smile. “I guess I don’t know too many to

say.”

“That piece of shit in there tried to fuck me once. For real.”

“That’s crazy.”

“You’re not a faggot, are you?”

“No,” I said, raising my hand to show my wedding ring. “I’m married.”

“Good. Because I can’t stand them.”

“Okay,” I said, ‘Have a good one.’ I trotted down the steps to my front door and unlocked it quickly. He stood there surprised that we were done talking.

“Alright,” he said.

I closed the door behind me and heard the lock go into place. When I got upstairs I went out on the roof and smoked a couple cigarettes back to back and chugged a beer. Some stuff can make you feel like you’re eight years old again.

Rachel got home a couple hours later and I apologized about the sex.

“Honestly,” she said. “I haven’t thought about it all day. Forget about it, okay?”

She touched my face and it made my tipsy heart soar. The hand ran from my right eye, down my cheek, and circled around my chin.

“I had a really shitty day,” she added. “I just want to take a bath and go to bed.”

“Okay.”

“I love you, though.”

“I love you too.”

She went into the bathroom and started the tub. After a minute she cracked the door, peeked out and said, “Is there anything to eat?”

“Yeah. There’s some macaroni and cheese in the fridge.”

“Thank you,” she said.

PUBLISHED: August 26, 2011

FILED UNDER: Uncategorized

« Previous Post Next Post »

ELSEWHERE

[Butler MFA](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Facebook](#) |



© Booth Journal. Powered by [WordPress](#) and [Manifest](#)



[ABOUT](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [CONTESTS](#) [PRINT](#) [SUBMIT](#)

Fuck Raymond Carver

Three

On Tuesdays I didn't teach, so I hung out at our apartment all day. Since Rachel had to go to work at nine, I'd get up and make coffee and make it look like I was going to write.

"You can't let yourself get down about PBQ," she'd said after we received the letter. "You've got to keep writing. On days that you're not teaching, you should write."

"You're right," I'd said, and I'd meant it. But in the six months since we received that letter, I hadn't written a word. Sure I would get up with Rachel every Tuesday and Thursday. I would make coffee and turn my computer on and open the word processor. I'd throw on pajama pants and a shirt and sometimes I would actually think about what I would write if I were to write. By the time she left for work, I'd be sitting at the desk.

"Good luck," she'd say, smiling. There was no doubt in my mind that she spent her walk to the subway daydreaming of a successful writer husband.

"Thanks," I'd say smiling back. Five minutes later I'd be back in bed asleep. I used to set an alarm for 11:45am just so I could be awake and coherent

when she'd call at lunch to see how it was going.

This is how it went for months. I'd sit around our 450 square foot apartment and think of shit to do that wasn't writing. I'd do the dishes and clean the bathroom and even crazy stuff like dusting the spines of books on the shelf. When Rachel would get home around six, I would be attention starved. I'd run my mouth about everything that had happened on TV that day. On this particular Tuesday, Rachel surprised me by coming home early after lunch.

I had my dish gloves on and I was scrubbing the grime out of the hardwood floors. I was happy to see her. She came over and I stood up off the floor and we hugged without saying anything, holding each other for a minute. Like we did when we were both ready to move on after a fight.

"Want to take a nap with me?" she said, and I knew it meant sex.

I had the feeling that I should be aggressive and passionate like Gary had said, but I didn't know if I could manage. When we got in the bedroom I tried to growl at her and she laughed. It sounded like something a terrier would do if he wanted to be let outside.

"What are you doing?"

"About what?" I said, doing my best to act confused.

She stripped her jeans off. She was wearing black panties with lace and I went hard instantly. I desperately wanted to fuck her. More than anything, I wanted her to come like you see women come in good porn. I wanted her to come like professional adult film stars pretended to come. I wanted her to quietly confess on a girl's night a few weeks later that she blushes every time she thinks about the way she came that day with me. I wanted those friends to go home and fantasize about what I must have done to my wife to scramble her brain so badly.

Instead, I put my larger-than-average-but-not-nearly-so-big-that-I-belong-in-fetish-films dick in my wife for a minute and a half. I came loudly and like we'd been going for hours. When I rolled off of her, I noticed that I was the only one breathing hard. I knew I'd fucked up before either of us opened our mouths. The cold silence killed me but I kept my

Wright: Fuck Raymond Carver

goddamned mouth shut. If I closed my eyes and pretended that she'd had as good of a time as I did, I might be able to live with myself. I was able to turn off the worry switch, and I drifted off to sleep.

Page 3 of 4 « Previous 1 2 3 4 Next »

PUBLISHED: August 26, 2011

FILED UNDER: Uncategorized

« Previous Post

Next Post »

ELSEWHERE

[Butler MFA](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Facebook](#) |



**BUTLER
UNIVERSITY**

© Booth Journal. Powered by [WordPress](#) and [Manifest](#)



ABOUT ARCHIVES CONTESTS PRINT SUBMIT

Fuck Raymond Carver

Four

Wednesday I got to The New School early to talk to Gary about how sex had gone, but he wasn't in his office. Plus the bitchy redhead from my class was hovering around his door and I didn't want to make small talk with her. I poked my head into the adjunct office and found it empty. I was relieved and went inside. The lights were out and I sat down. I burned fifteen minutes by staring at a bulletin board, letting my eyes go blurry and doing my best to think nothing. I got close. I made a point of getting to my classroom just as it was time to begin so I didn't have to sit there with all of them staring at me. I went right into it.

"Open your books to page fifty six. Today we'll be discussing the rhetorical triangle."

The smartass redhead said, "We talked about that last time. He-llo-o..."

The class erupted and I felt my face go red. She said "hello" in the three syllable way that made you want to punch someone in the fucking face until they looked like hamburger meat. I kept my cool and asked the class to read the next chapter on their own. This would give me a chance to figure out what the hell I was doing.

I looked over the syllabus while they read. The redhead whispered shit to the guy sitting next to her with a smirk. I hadn't wanted to inflict physical violence on a person this badly in a long time. Not since I'd seen a guy slap his wife on the subway a few months ago. It was late, maybe three in the morning. They had been having a pretty quiet argument. Loud enough that you'd notice they were fighting, but not so loud you knew what they were saying. It was their faces that told you something big was going on. Veins popped out all over and wild hand movements caused all eight of the other passengers in the car to start watching like I was. And then he flat out smacked her. He did it like he hated her. He did it like he'd wished it killed her.

She screamed. The guy grabbed her head and pulled it to his lips. He spit words into her ear, a rehearsed barrage that he'd no doubt made her suffer before. She quieted. It wasn't really the fuckhole that had bothered me. The world was peppered with fuckholes and if you spent any time in public, you'd see one from time to time. What made me so angry was that as soon as he slapped his wife stupid, every one of those onlookers darted their eyes back to their papers or to their friends or out the windows. They all pretended to go back to their conversations, or to the Yankees scores, or to their private thoughts. They all pretended they hadn't seen a person just get hit with the full force of an adult man's hand. I wanted to get up and tell all of those assholes that they were cowards. I wanted to put them on trial for their betrayal to the woman. I wanted to see hamburger meat faces, slumped over on the seats of the train.

I didn't do any of that. What I did was the same thing everyone else did. I looked away. I had a fake conversation with myself about random bullshit. *But what would I make to go with the pork chops? I'd love to find some of those au gratin potatoes, but I don't know if the Duane Reade even carries stuff like that. I'll probably have to walk over to C Town on 7th Ave.* I was every bit as cowardly as them.

I collected myself, got over my anger for the redhead and put a lesson plan together. Class went better than I had expected and it reminded me of a couple years before when I had been a TA and really loved teaching. I got on a little roll and made a few concepts accessible by sharing personal anecdotes (*selling door to door vacuums requires loads of rhetoric and no conscience, and genital warts sometimes look like awkwardly placed zits*)

that made the class perk up from their text messaging hypnosis. I was suddenly able to remember a Wordsworth line right when I needed it, *to me alone there came a thought of grief*, and when I accidentally kept the class longer than I was supposed to, no one noticed.

“Oh,” I said, as I looked at the clock. “We’re out of time.”

They looked to their watches and cell phones with surprise. They scurried off and I’d forgotten about the redhead. It was as close to professional euphoria as I had ever felt. It was probably a very small version of what successful people feel all the time. I felt like a teacher. The feeling was buzzing inside me when I left the building. I lit a cigarette and grabbed a slice of pizza. The frigid February air made me walk briskly and I found myself in the kind of mood where the burn of hot pizza sauce on the roof of my mouth made me laugh instead of curse. I hadn’t laughed at pain in a long time and it felt good. On an ad near the entrance to the subway it showed a couple dancing in moonlight. It was selling something or other, and it reminded me that Valentine’s was coming up.

Later that night, over bourbon and cokes with Rachel, I brought up the idea of celebrating.

“We should do something big,” I said. “We should jump on a bus and go somewhere.”

She perked up on the couch and came over to me as I made us another round in the kitchen.

“You want to *plan* to go somewhere? You want to plan to *travel* somewhere for Valentine’s Day?”

“Why not?”

“I’d love to,” she said. “I’m just a little surprised you even remembered it’s coming up. You’ve kind of been somewhere else lately.”

“I know,” I said. “Sorry. I’ve been a little fucked up, but I’m going to shake it off.”

“Do you want to talk about it? I’ve been trying to give you space, but if you

want to.”

“I don’t really think I need to talk about it. I think I’m over it. You know, it was months ago.”

She gave me a skeptical look.

“Babe,” she said.

I looked away and took a sip of my drink. Handed her the one I made for her. Went for the couch.

“Babe,” she repeated. “I found the shirt.”

She went to our bedroom and I heard her reach into the hamper and extract the evidence. She came back out with the wrinkled thing. It was my favorite black t-shirt. I had spelled out *Fuck Raymond Carver* with duct tape over the chest. I could feel my face getting red.

“What’s it for?” she asked, the way your mom used to ask when she found porn under your bed. Forgiving, but disgusted. Her nose was crinkled.

“I was going to wear it to work the other day but I was chicken shit. I didn’t want people asking about it.”

“Why would you put words on a t-shirt for people to see and then not wear it because people were going to see it? It’s kind of crazy, sweet heart.”

I stood up and took the thing from her. I hung my head like a kid and hoped my sorrow would make her pity me enough to drop the whole thing.

“Seriously, what’s the *Fuck Raymond Carver* thing all about? The poor man has been dead from cancer for more than twenty years. I think he’s been sufficiently fucked without you making cakes and making shirts and whatever else you’ve been doing.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’m not over it yet. But I’m working on it. I am. And I think part of working on it is that I’ve got to get out of my own head. I think we should get on a bus and go to Philly for Valentine’s. Do Love Park. Have a Philly cheesesteak. Maybe go to a nice restaurant one night.”

She smiled. “Okay crazy husband. Let’s go to Philly for Valentine’s.”

“Great,” I said. “And I’ll plan the whole thing. I’ll get the hotel and the restaurant. I’ll do everything.”

“Okay,” she said. “But no more *Fuck Raymond Carver*? No more ruining your clothes?”

“No more,” I said.

She smiled and we sat down. I was glad I’d never told her the magazine was located in Philadelphia. If I planned it right, I’d be able to confront the editor of PBQ without Rachel ever knowing.

Todd Wright received his MFA from The New School in New York City. While he was studying there he wrote a story called “Selling Her”, based on his experiences as a door to door vacuum cleaner salesman. It was accepted by a prominent magazine, but then rejected when one of the editors was reminded of a Raymond Carver story. Fuck Raymond Carver is the result of Todd’s experience with being accused of plagiarism. Contact Todd at waxchicken@yahoo.com.

Page 4 of 4 « Previous 1 2 3 4 Next »

PUBLISHED: August 26, 2011

FILED UNDER: Uncategorized

« Previous Post

Next Post »

ELSEWHERE

[Butler MFA](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Facebook](#)



**BUTLER
UNIVERSITY**

© Booth Journal. Powered by [WordPress](#) and [Manifest](#)