

THE VIDEOGRAPHER



mar de Napoli was surprised at how quickly his wife Marina adapted to being videotaped. She was a natural, he told her. And, relaxed and unself-conscious, she truly was. He was even more surprised by how she seemed to come more alive whenever the camera was pointed at her. He didn't believe it at first, and it took a few experiments to finally convince him. This is what he did: He watched her eyes closely when they were going about their daily routines in the ordinary way; then he brought the camera along one afternoon when they were out and about as usual running errands in the city. He felt very awkward and had to force himself to point the camera at Marina as she was shopping for a new pair of jeans, while she was browsing in a book store, and as they sat and sipped their customary cappuccinos at their favorite café. When he viewed the tapes at the first available opportunity, when Marina was at work, he saw a liveliness in her eyes and manner that went well beyond the novelty of the act itself. Unmistakably, there was a

bright light in her eyes, Omar thought. To further confirm this he invited one of his closest friends over to look at the tapes. Vince Pelakis had known them both since junior high school and would be a reliable and trustworthy witness who could both confirm and share in the phenomenon of what Omar described as Marina's transformation.

"Without a doubt, there's something new in her eyes," Vince declared in his usual down-to-earth and straightforward manner. "Without a doubt, she's a new and more fascinating woman in front of the camera. But next time have her wear a red sweater. She looks really good in red. It sets off her dark eyes and black hair."

Although grateful for his testimony, Omar was more than a little disturbed by Vince's excitement and by his remark about Marina being even more fascinating on tape than in person. He had dimly suspected that Marina possessed some sort of attraction for Vince, and this little experiment had brought Omar's buried misgivings into consciousness as it clearly revealed his good friend's true feelings for his wife.

Later that day, when Omar was alone again, he thought about what Marina's enhanced magnetism on tape could possibly bring about if he continued to film her. Would it elevate them in their social circle? Could it bring them greater status or turn them into local celebrities? Should he pursue it further as a grander and more elaborate experiment? What effect would it most likely have on their relationship? Perhaps he was only inviting trouble and should simply leave the thing alone. Why play with fire? You could end up stretched out on a rock with vultures gnawing on your liver. So Omar, being inherently

timid, decided he'd put an end to this folly right away. And to make sure he wouldn't be tempted again he wrapped the camera in an old T-shirt and stored it on the back shelf of a closet with the intention of selling it an e-Bay as soon as possible.

But then, a few days later while they were finishing their linguine and pesto dinner, Marina asked very casually, "What happened to the video camera?"

"You mean the one I won in that silly contest?"

Marina raised an eyebrow. "Don't be dense. Of course, how many video cameras do you have?"

Blushing, Omar checked his impulse to say he had sold it on e-Bay, which had been his intention. Marina got very upset whenever she found out that he had lied to her, even if it was only something small and insignificant . . . and she always found out. So he said instead, "I was thinking of selling it."

"No, don't do that. Not yet anyway. Let's play with it some more. It's fun. Besides, I want you to bring it to my sister's wedding next month."

So the thread of the thing was picked up, and Omar retrieved the camera from its secret place, trusting Marina to guide him, like Ariadne, through this new emotional labyrinth in their five-year marriage.

At Marina's sister's wedding, Omar discovered the nearly princely power the camera conferred upon him. He had been generally ignored by his wife's family, but now they took a sudden interest in him. He was no longer just the melancholy and reserved Omar, the cautious intellectual who never seemed happy or at ease with other people, he was the guy with the camera, the one who wielded the device that would record ever

action, every expression, and every comment. He had the power to show them at their best or at their worst. So they all smiled at him, and cracked jokes about his new role, and made funny faces. Omar was thrilled with his new status as family videographer, and it was this experience that planted the seed of his new addiction.

As it was, Omar had an obsessive streak. It had been focused on bicycles and monopoly as a boy, chess and cars as a teenager, and then pool and Russian literature as a college student. In his early twenties, right after he had graduated, in fact, he had developed a passion for video games and computer technology which led him naturally and, one might say inexorably, to a career as an information engineer for a pharmaceutical company. Once he had settled into that practical path his life with Marina blossomed into a full-blown romance and then a relatively stable marriage. Marina had been a punk musician and artist's model when Omar had met her at a party in his senior year at college, but it seems that beneath the angry feminist façade beat the heart of an old-fashioned girl who reverted to all the conventional dreams of her Catholic upbringing. And yet, Marina still possessed the wild vines of her rebellious phase — they were dormant, not dead. She had flashes (or flashbacks we could say) of desire for her days of untamed freedom, her nights of sensual excesses. Those impulses had been disciplined but not entirely abolished. She was still inclined to break out in bouts of fiery defiance and outrageous exhibitionism, like her tendency to become overly dramatic whenever her wishes were unfairly denied or the trajectory towards her immediate goal was obstructed by

someone's stupidity. And at those times her cheeks reddened and her nostrils turned white. Omar's face still burned with a mixture of embarrassment and excitement when he recalled the department store incident. He watched, in a state bordering on shock, as his normally dignified wife screamed at the sales clerk and used the f-word and other equally ugly expletives because he would not bend the policy rules to grant her a discount on the coat she wanted. And, like most people who were challenged by her outbursts, the clerk gave in. Of course this only encouraged her.

In any event, it was the video camera which had now become the object of her desire, and nothing must be allowed to stand in her way.

And nothing would, at least as far as her husband was concerned. Omar's addiction and Marina's desire worked in conjunction like a kind of spell spun by the ancient alchemists. So they were perfectly, one might say diabolically, matched for the task at hand — the introvert and the exhibitionist — for this new diversion which was about to have a major transformative effect on their relationship.

It all began, as related, in the most casual manner, with Omar taking the video camera long on their ordinary outings, but then it was the video taping itself that was the direct purpose of their weekend excursions. They visited their favorite spots in parks, at the beach, at the college campus, places where they had habitually gone to de-stress or commune with nature, to relax, to talk or read, but where now they were invigorated by the act of video taping Marina at play. It was always Marina, of course, who was the subject of the whimsical little dramas they

concocted, never Omar, who would have stiffened like a cadaver in front of the lens and who was truly at his best behind the camera.

There was an Italian-style villa by the sea where they loved to go. It had been privately built and owned by a wealthy family for many years prior to being willed to the state and turned into a public park. The grounds were enormous and it was always possible to find a private secluded spot somewhere inside or behind one of the many outbuildings.

Marina had a talent for improvisation and she would devise brief scenarios and act them out. These skits ran about five minutes on average. Sometimes Omar would give her prompts and encourage her with exclamations such as “That’s wonderful!” or “Beautiful!” or “Gorgeous!” or “Perfect!” which were the things he thought professionals said to their models and which helped him feel more like a suave cosmopolitan international cinematographer instead of a weekend amateur. If Marina was performing in front of the camera, then Omar was playing his part with élan on the other side. It was the camera more than anything else inherent to the situation that exerted an equal measure of metamorphic power over both of them.

However, after a month or so had passed, they grew bored with these droll little romps which consisted mostly of Marina mugging into the camera, or climbing into a tree and beating her chest like Tarzan, or leaping about like a frog, or flapping her bent arms and clucking, or running in circles and figure eights, or pretending to conduct a witches Sabbath.

One warm October Sunday afternoon they strolled listlessly about the grounds, bored and frustrated at having exhausted

their dramatic repertoire and, no matter how hard they strained their tired imaginations, unable to come up with any new ideas. The well had run dry.

A moment later, as he gazed out at the ocean, Omar snapped his fingers. “How about something piratey. Pirates are always fun.”

“Arrggh!” cried Marina. “Avast, me hearties! Yo ho ho and a bottle of Jack Daniels,” she exclaimed without much enthusiasm. “Okay, that’s it. I’m done being a pirate.”

“Why don’t you do something from *The Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. . . ?”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Do you want to play Jack Sparrow?”

“You mean like this?” Marina got up on her tiptoes and minced and wobbled about as if she were drunk. Then she keeled over and lay laughing on the ground.

“That’s fantastic!” Omar cried out to encourage her. “Do some more. Do something else.”

Marina gave him a sly look and pulled her shirt up over her breasts.

“That’s great!” Omar said. “Do something else.”

Marina segued into a Marilyn Monroe-like glamour queen camping it up by puckering her lips and batting her eyes. Omar zoomed in for a close up of her face and then pulled back and pointed the camera at her chest. Marina pulled her bra cups down with her forefingers and kept going till the tips of her nipples were exposed.

“I love it!” Omar exclaimed. “Show me more . . .”

In a flash Marina had slipped off her bra and was waving it over her head like the flag of a pirate ship.

“Ahoy there!” said Omar. “I’m about to board you.” And putting down his camera Omar embraced Marina in a highly excited state. He kissed her passionately and ran his hand up under her shirt and fondled one of her firm breasts.

“No, not here,” Marina objected, pushing his hand away and sitting up.

“There’s no one around,” Omar protested breathlessly.

“Are you crazy? Somebody might come by at any minute. Let’s finish this at home.”

And that was how the camera became an integral part of their lovemaking from then on, adding some much needed spice to what had become a plain dish and a rather predictable routine.

Their friend Vince had developed a keen interest in their video escapades and had been coming over every Monday evening to view the results of the weekend shoot. They had adopted the jargon of Hollywood movie making, using terms such as “on location,” “out takes,” “rushes,” and “clips.” They even toyed with the idea of making a short feature film and entering it into a local film festival. Omar had the aptitude to learn how to do the necessary editing on his computer and Vince offered to help purchase the required software and equipment, even going so far as to suggest he would raise the needed capital to produce the movie and shoot it using 16 mm film. But he was on his fourth glass of merlot at that point, so Omar just laughed and said “Sure, why not!” getting a little thrill out of the prospect but not really taking it seriously. Omar

knew, however, that Vince very much wanted to “get in on the action” somehow. Vince’s interest in Omar and Marina’s hobby had grown, and if he couldn’t join in as Marina’s acting partner, which he had suggested, then he threatened to get a camera of his own and start taping her whenever he came over for a visit or they went out together on a double date. Omar suggested he find a willing partner of his own, but Vince just shook his head and looked determined. This made Omar very uneasy and he could see that the situation was about to get out of hand. He then decided it might be a good idea to invite some other people over for the Monday night viewing session, just so that Vince wouldn’t feel it was his exclusive right and that he was intimately a part of their hobby and to break up their *ménage à trois*, as it were.

The following Monday there were two additional people, Marina’s sister and her husband. The Monday after that two more came, Marina’s other sister and her boyfriend. Then Vince brought a woman he had just started dating. After that, Omar invited another one of his friends until by the end of November their hobby videos were attracting an average audience of twelve people. Of course this larger gathering of viewers served only to stimulate their creative juices and spur Omar on to making more interesting and elaborate productions. He began writing scripts and asked Marina to rehearse and memorize her lines. The first one was fun, because of the sheer novelty of the thing, but after that it got to be a chore. Making a five-minute movie took up their entire weekend and even began to encroach on some of their week nights when Omar wrote the scripts or did some minor editing with a rudimentary program he had

downloaded from the internet. What had started out as a lark was turning into a vulture that scavenged for every spare scrap of their free time.

Finally, with the dawning of the new year, it reached a crisis. Marina flatly refused to go on this way. She lashed out at Omar for allowing all this “movie stuff” to get out of control. “You’re obsessed with this video thing. You just want to show off. It’s gone straight to your ego, like shots of tequila. I can see what it’s done to you, made you a power and control freak. Don’t you realize that? It’s no fun any more, Omar, and I’m not going to do it again unless it’s fun.”

So the taping stopped for a while and for the first time in many months they had a free weekend. They went for a drive, went to a museum, saw a play at the college, had dinner at a new Thai restaurant . . . they were busy but couldn’t help feeling that something was missing.

The following Monday they showed “reruns” and several people among the 20 or so in attendance openly expressed their disappointment. Then Vince surprised everyone by revealing that he had bought a video camera of his own, “A Christmas present to myself.” He had “started taping little vignettes of people being stupid,” as he put it. He laughed out loud as he described one guy who kept banging his head as he was trying to get a cat out from under his car with a wiffle bat. “I just drive around and look for things. You’d be amazed at how often people do dumb things when they think no one is looking.”

“Let’s see them!” rose a chorus of voices. “Did you bring them with you?”

“No, but you can see them at home on your computer.” There was a moment of puzzled silence as Vince smiled smugly. “You can watch them on You Tube. I’ve uploaded five of the best. Here’s what you do . . .” And Vince explained the details of finding his video clips on the YouTube.com web site. “They’ve been viewed a total of over 6000 times,” he declared proudly. Omar knew he was exaggerating, but possibly not by very much. Vince liked to round off to whole numbers, especially large ones, it always gave him great pleasure to use big figures and Omar could see how much he enjoyed this little demonstration of his savvy. Vince looked around at his listeners, who were staring at him with admiration, and there was a gleam of gloating in his eyes when his glance rested for a moment on Omar. At that instant the worm of envy entered Omar’s heart. Now he too would have to upload his videos of Marina onto the internet. “I’ll have an audience so big it will leave his dumb-ass videos in the dust,” he thought. And the desire to outdo his friend became his secret obsession.

The fastest way to overtake Vince’s videos, Omar believed, was to be more daring, more provocative, and this, of course, would require Marina’s collaboration. But she was not in the most cooperative frame of mind. Omar brooded over this for days until he came up with a plausible solution. He knew his strategy could work, and, with the right kind of coaxing, he thought he could get her to agree. The key was to make it fun.

They continued to include the video cam as a part of their sexual foreplay. Omar would tape Marina as she undressed, or “stripped” as he liked to call it. Then, overcome by extreme arousal, he would lay the camera aside and they would jump into

bed and make passionate love. Afterwards, Omar would pick up the camera again and film Marina as she pranced about in the nude, as she examined her breasts, as she got into the shower, as she got out of the shower and dried herself off. They purchased a copy of the Kama Sutra illustrated with photos of attractive models online from Amazon, not wanting to embarrass themselves at the local bookstore where they were known as serious readers, and attempted a few positions with the camera taping them, but the results were very unsatisfactory. They realized it would only work if they had someone taping them. “Shall we ask Vince?” Marina suggested with an arch grin. “It would take a lot to convince him,” Omar replied with irony. And they both laughed. But Omar was more than a little disturbed thinking that Marina might actually be willing to go ahead with that kinky idea.

One cold Sunday afternoon in early February, instead of going out to one of their customary locations, they stayed home and Marina decided to take a bath, something she hadn’t done in months. Marina’s baths tended to be fairly elaborate productions, with candles, incense, music, a glass or two of wine, a book, bubbles, special soaps and a loofa in the shape of a glove. Omar was always recruited to scrub her back with the loofa. When Marina told him casually that she was going to take a bath he got very excited.

“Please, Marina darling, please let me tape this from beginning to end.” He was almost panting with inspiration, certain that this would be a very interesting and important production. Images from the French Impressionists, Degas, Renoir, Bonnard, Toulouse Lautrec, and others of his favorite

artists, flashed through his mind. "I'll make it a work of art," he exclaimed.

Not wanting to crush his artistic spirit, Marina took note of the passion in his voice, of the happy and eager boyish sparkle in his eyes, and she agreed. Although Omar was at his most charming in this state, Marina's primary motivation in almost everything she did was to please those she cared about. Omar's enthusiasm was winning and she took fire from his spark. But another element was now mixed into the chemistry of this new endeavor. Marina began to want to please other men, men like Vince whom she knew would enjoy and appreciate her nakedness, in a safe and secure way, and the medium of the video tape would enable her to do this without risking her marriage. Displaying herself and arousing the desire of other men to possess her in this manner would not come with the baggage of guilt and the nasty complications of an affair. She had not only her husband's approval, but his active and willing participation.

With trembling hands, Omar set up his camera on its tripod, made adjustments, brought in extra lighting to supplement the candles and create the right mood. Then he tested the sound, using large pillows to absorb the echo and thus improve the overall acoustics. It took him over an hour to set up and Marina grew impatient until, unable to wait any longer, she came "onto the set" in her bathrobe with her book and glass of wine in hand.

"Aren't you ready yet?" she demanded testily. "I can't wait any longer. I'm freezing my buns out there. Did you turn the heat down?"

“Okay, okay, Sweetie. Just about ready.”

“Well, ready or not I’m getting into the tub.”

“Okay. Go ahead. Try to relax and just do what you always do . . .”

“Yes, yes, I know all that,” Marina retorted as she set down her things and removed her robe. “Just don’t pull an Otto Preminger on me. I refused to be bullied by anyone, especially not my husband.”

Omar knew the wine was making her a little more aggressive than usual, and he just ignored her harsh comments and went on adjusting his equipment.

The next sound to issue from Marina’s throat was a deep sigh of animal pleasure as she sank down into the hot and bubbly water gushing from the faucet and already filling the tub half way. She closed her eyes and took a sip of wine. When she opened them again she appeared transformed. “I’m ready for my close up now, Mr. De Mille,” she said.

“Beautiful! Fantastic!” Omar exclaimed, peering with one eye into the viewfinder of his camera. “Lights! Camera! Rolling film . . . !” he went on with a chuckle of self irony. But he was nevertheless deadly serious about making this weekend project a work of art.

While Marina pampered herself, he went on filming, adjusted the lighting, asked her nicely to repeat certain actions so he could get a better angle or a close up. In short, he acted like the consummate professional, determined to “get it right,” and Marina, caught up in his inspiration and her desire to please, allowed him to take her completely into his gentle hands.

Forty-five minutes later, Omar announced that he had what he wanted, and Marina declared that was good enough for her. She was tired and hungry. Standing up in the tub, she rinsed off the remaining soap bubbles with water from the shower. Omar said their little film collaboration “was a wrap.”

“And so am I,” Marina quipped as she wrapped herself in a large purple bath towel.

When Marina saw the “rushes” of the film later that night after dinner, she was astonished by the quality of the results. “I expected something special, but never anything this good. How did you manage it?”

Omar winked and smiled a little ironically. “Talent, Babe, talent. I picked up a few tricks from that video workshop at the college, and I, uh, bought some new equipment.”

“Well, that’s nice, but I hope you didn’t go overboard . . . or over budget.”

Omar chose to remain silent for a moment and ignore the insinuation. “I’ll need to work tonight to get this ready for tomorrow’s screening.”

“What are you going to call it?”

“‘Marina’s Bath’ of course.”

Omar edited the film until five o’clock the next morning, only stopping when he was satisfied that it was the best he could make it. What he had was a smooth and tightly edited little gem that ran twelve minutes and twenty seconds and had everything that professionally produced films had, only on a much smaller scale: effective lighting, clear sound, and interesting photography. By 5:30 AM Omar had successfully uploaded his film onto YouTube. Then he went to bed and snuggled up close

to his “star.” An hour later, his “star” got up for work. Omar smiled happily and went back to sleep.

He got up at noon and went straight to the computer. He clicked on YouTube and checked the hits. “Marina’s Bath” had already been viewed 9,327 times. The blood rushed to Omar’s face and the hair on the back of his neck prickled. With trembling fingers he typed the password for his email account. There were 167 “fan letters,” messages of congratulations from people all over the globe.

In a state of tremendous excitement, Omar made himself some coffee and ate a bagel without tasting either. A half hour later he checked the stats again on YouTube. The hits for “Marina’s Bath” had increased to 12,426 in just thirty minutes. “It’s a sensation,” he said aloud.

And indeed “Marina’s Bath” proved to be a true internet phenomenon. By 4:30 that afternoon, the number of hits had grown to over half a million. To calm himself and steady his nerves, Omar had a glass of merlot. When Marina came home an hour later, he was in full celebratory mode and without pausing to consider what Marina’s reaction might be he blurted out that their film was an internet sensation.

Marina blinked, open-mouthed, and stared at him with a look of complete stupefaction on her face. “You mean you put it up on YouTube!” she cried out in a fury. “What the FUCK! How could you do that without asking me first?”

“I didn’t think you’d mind,” Omar replied feebly. “It’s sort of my thing, you know, something I created . . .” He noticed that her cheeks were turning red and her nostrils were pinched white.

“MIND? I’m fucking HORRIFIED!” Marina screamed. “And it’s just as much mine as it is yours!” She slammed her purse down on the kitchen table, tore off her hat and gloves and threw them onto the counter. “Holy crap! My private bath on the friggin’ internet. My bare breasts exposed to the world!” She stopped dead in horror. “Don’t tell me you showed my genitals! I’ll kill you if you did!”

“No, no, I didn’t do that. Calm down, will you please? Stop shouting at me for goodness’ sake. Stop acting like I committed a felony.”

“Oh no? Then why do I feel like I’ve just been raped?”

Eventually Marina quieted down. She had a glass of wine and some dinner, and by the time their guests arrived for the Monday night screening the storm had passed. Marina had been uneasy about this event, not at all sure how she felt about having her friends see her half naked sitting up in the tub, but after a few more glasses of wine and some soothing and encouraging words from Omar she just shrugged and said, “Fuck it! It’s just a naked body. They’ve all seen that before.”

The screening was a huge success. Everyone was excited by the film and thrilled about the stir it was causing on YouTube. Vince was not in attendance due to a bad cold but it turned out that he had already seen it at home on his computer and had sent Omar one of the hundreds of congratulatory emails that were still coming in.

Over the next week, Marina grew more and more accustomed to having her naked body exposed to the world via the internet. She did not completely admit it to herself because it went against everything she had been raised to believe, against

all the religious and moral teaching that had conditioned her values in childhood, but in fact she was immensely pleased by all the attention. The idea that this behavior might go well beyond “naughtiness” and could be classified as “wicked” by her parents and their church-going friends only thrilled her the more. She dismissed the notion that this was merely a delayed adolescent rebellion. Her rebellious streak ran deeper than anyone, even she herself, had suspected, and now that this thing had begun the momentum carried her farther along than she had ever dreamed possible into this new way of acting out her fantasies. This was a full-blown declaration of independence from all the old sexual repression and the negative thinking about her self worth. This proved to herself, if not to others, that she was at last a free and fully liberated woman.

Omar too had become much more sure of himself. Having the world look at his wife’s naked body did not disturb him in the least. Quite the contrary, it excited him and stimulated him with the force of a drug to strive for more challenging and creative work.

“What I thought we’d do next,” he said to Marina after dinner on Thursday, “is go to a spa. As a matter of fact, I’ve already set it up. I told them they’ll get free publicity out of the deal so they agreed not to charge us a penny. You can get the full treatment, an entire day for free, worth at least 500 bucks, and I’ll just film you doing your thing. Is that okay?”

“Are you going to put it on YouTube again?”

“Yeah, probably. Do you have a problem with that?”

“No, not really. When do we do it?”

“I thought this Saturday would be good. Gotta strike while the iron is hot, as they say.”

“Fine,” said Marina with a small shrug. “We’ve got no other plans. Why not?”

Omar smiled. He was very pleased that Marina’s attitude was so progressive. With a partner like her, there was almost no limit to what they might accomplish.