

Candace seated herself in the shade. Or more accurately, she discombobulated herself and everything she was carrying onto a concrete ledge. Seated herself sounds so graceful, and Candace Snark was not. Her overstuffed tote bag slipped off her overstuffed shoulder, knocking the bag of pastries she'd just purchased from a Hungarian Bakery across the street out of her hand and onto the bench. Candace, slightly out of breath and red faced, was more concerned with the iced-coffee that lurched slightly from the weight of the bag and sloshed over her dowdy Mary Janes. With the coffee a righted and the tote bag hanging harmlessly at her side, Candace dropped her overstuffed bottom onto the seat. She sat for a few moments observing the Peace Fountain's fantastic creatures while catching her breath, before wresting the now flat pastry bag from underneath her and pulling a bit of the starchy mess within out for a nibble.

Here may be where you expect to hear what a lousy day Candace Snark was having. In reality it wasn't particularly bad. The hot weather had made the walk down Amsterdam Avenue slower than usual, and the chocolate pastries she liked best were already sold out, but Candace was accustomed to these minor troubles. She wiped a drip of lemon or bavarian creme, she wasn't sure which, from her hefty bosom and pulled a handful of papers from her tote.

Dear Miss Snark, Let me begin by saying that I love your blog...

At this point Candace stopped reading and removed a form rejection letter from a different compartment in her tote. It probably wasn't this inexperienced writer's fault that they'd mistaken the hugely popular and totally fictional blogging agent Miss Snark with her, the mostly unknown and painfully real literary agent, Ms. Snark. Candace had a nagging suspicion that the use of the name Miss Snark had not been accidental, despite many well intentioned assurances by various publishing insiders. The irony between the web Miss Snark-a suave, sophisticated, and freakishly self-important New York publishing mover and shaker and the real Ms. Snark-a frumpy, grumpy, lifeless bookworm, had not been lost on Candace, who was boring but not stupid. Since she was powerless to do anything about her blogging doppelganger, hopeful writers bore the brunt of her aggravation.

Candace used several form rejections. One was kind and encouraging, or at least as kind and encouraging as an impersonal rejection can be. One was totally generic, and one sympathetically suggested that the recipient consider developing actual writing skills before continuing down the path to authorship. She considered all three extremely professional and was constantly amazed by the number of aspiring writers whose fragile egos were injured by her correspondence. On this occasion, she chose the generic option, it was the only one she'd brought with her, and slipped it into the writer's SASE.

Candace picked up her next submission and began reading then looked up in frustration.

When would writers learn. Although the story was quite intriguing, something about a little girl called Alice who follows a talking rabbit down a hole to a bizarre alternate world, any writer who'd done their research should know that neither Miss or Ms. Snark ever represent children's books, even interesting ones.

Candace stopped working and stared across the street. Behind a tall, iron barred fence, overgrown bushes and weeds swayed gently in the wake of passing cars. She often came to the park next to the Cathedral, it's proximity to the Hungarian bakery more of a draw than the majestic sanctuary or it's peaceful grounds, but the bit of wild garden across the street had captured her imagination. It was not feral, not unkempt, not overgrown because someone simply had not gotten around to weeding and pruning. It was wild by design. A tiny bit of windswept moor or hardy meadow tucked into an insignificant corner of Manhattan.

There was not, nor had there ever been, anything wild about Candace Snark. She wore sensible shoes, rented a sensible apartment, and when the occasional opportunity presented itself, dated sensible men. She had no pets (who needed the extra hassle), no car (why pay for parking), no great adventures (where do people get the time or money for such things), and no great romances (really romantic guys preferred thin girls). In fact, Candace's larger than normal girth was as close as she'd ever come to wild. And let's face it, even in Manhattan, where waifish figures are required of all non-ethnic women, being able to eat an entire pound of Jacques Torres chocolates in one sitting was hardly taking a walk on the wild side.

She listened as several tourists read a nearby inscription aloud: *Peace Fountain celebrates the triumph of Good over Evil*. Candace had never bothered to read the plaque before and now she knew why. What drivel. How exactly did a giant crab represent divine good? Or Giraffes for that matter.

Turning her attention to a completed manuscript she'd been considering for several months, Candace flipped through the pages. She had no real intention of offering representation and had been intending to email the author for several days now. It was rather well written, in a modern script-like style, with strong characters and a clear plot. She'd enjoyed it more than most manuscripts. Unfortunately, it was not what people in the industry called tight. That is, it meandered along rather than rushing headlong through the action. It meandered so effectively that the work was nearly double the allowable size for a first time fiction writer. Candace stopped at the front page one last time. She disliked books that began with quotes and had to this point ignored the one used here, but for some reason, in the shadow of St John's, it jumped out at her: **Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heaven.**

Suddenly everything became very clear. She would become Ms. Snark. She would be wild

and campy and oh so svelte. And she would start right now. Pulling her laptop out, she typed a few choice words under the printed message of her standard online rejection, then stuffing the thin computer back into her bag, Candace gathered her things and hastily departed.

Now for the sake of tightness, we must resist the temptation to wonder too much about the how of Ms. Snark's transformation. Suffice it to say that with an expensive membership at a health club, a private trainer, a diet comprised entirely of cardboard and other uncooked organic matter, and a wee bit of plastic surgery Candace attained, for the first time in her life, a trim athletic figure. She moved into a horribly inconvenient but enviably cool apartment with Angus, her equally inconvenient, metrosexual Airedale. She regularly threw dinner parties attended by the movers and shakers of the publishing industry. She shopped, mingled, and adventured-that is of course, when she wasn't indifferently dashing the hopes of thousands of expectant authors who now sought her out in droves. Life showed every indication of nearing perfection, but it never quite got there.

It's difficult to determine which came first-the drip or the drop. We might have known, had events been marginally different. Possibly, if the team of twenty-something researchers, hadn't shifted attention, even momentarily, from glacial observations to some previously unknown woman singing about her bumps, and while they smirked and tittered at the euphemism, uncomfortably aware that ladylumps could in fact influence the behavior of solid, rational scientists like themselves, the all but forgotten glacier dripped. Or perhaps dropped. Just once. And the researchers missed it. Missed the crucial evidence that would have made a genuine case that Global Warming was really happening, that is wasn't merely an inconvenient truth, but a fucking code red emergency.

By the time researchers finally managed to digitally record the sound of a drip dropping into the slushy ice, ocean levels has risen enough to convince any rational person that the earth's glaciers had been melting for quite some time. One might, if they had extremely limited understanding of human nature, have expected a massive worldwide effort to reverse this artic melt-down via any feasible means-prayer, sacrificing useless or annoying celebrities to snow demons, constructing giant air conditioners in a long fence spanning the US/Mexican border, installing giant cosmic mirrors in the atmosphere over earth or even the ridiculous measure of reducing CO2 emissions.

Instead, most people went on about their lives, business as usual. What else could they do. After all, Al Gore simply isn't as compelling as Bono; and living in a world without crude oil is far more daunting than texting your contribution to stop world hunger. Anyway, if this global warming dealy was really as big as the media sometimes made it out to be, surely the government

would be taking more of an interest-sort of like they did just before Hurricane Katrina.

Unlike New Orleans, Manhattan is an island. This makes it an ideal target for terrorist attacks and natural disasters involving rising water levels. However, as anyone who's familiar with A New Yorker's View of the World can see, everything from 10th Avenue east is at a much higher altitude than the entire rest of America (with the exception of a few scattered mountains). Clearly all of New Jersey would be one giant aquatic parking lot before the heart of the Big Apple suffered anything more than some increased river depth. Or so they thought.

Several years after Candace Snark left the Peace Fountain on Amsterdam Avenue, and instead of going directly home for an evening of greasy Lo Mein, plum wine, a pint of icecream and half a bag of Oreos, detoured several blocks to a fitness center and enrolled in her first spinning class, before smirking staff members suggested that she ease into fitness a bit more gently with water aerobics, Ms. Snark stood at the counter of the club cafe waiting for a wheat grass smoothie. A newspaper article warning of imminent disaster caught her attention. She scanned it quickly then dismissed it.

Newspapers warn of imminent disaster daily. Imminent disasters increase circulation almost as well as actual disasters that happen to other people and the lurid details of celebrity lives. Candy, as she now called herself, was not unduly concerned. A cashier pushed a tall smoothie in a disposable cup toward her then positioned a small CLOSED sign on the counter.

"Closing early," she inquired.

"The storm," he replied in a snarky tone. "In case you hadn't heard, we're in a state of emergency, everyone who can is supposed to move inland."

Ms. Snark snorted contemptuously. Evacuation might be necessary for Long Island and some of the outer boroughs, but she lived on the 14th floor of a sweet little place in Midtown. Besides she'd planned on purchasing a fabulous pair of Chanel pumps with her newly increased Saks credit line that afternoon.

Ms. Snark was by no means the only New Yorker to shop in the face of danger. While bumper to bumper traffic inched its way off the island, Grand Central Station looked like something out of a refugee film and the US Coast Guard shuttled boatload after boatload of huddled masses to distant ports further north, thousands of people went about their daily lives as best they could given the inconvenience of mass exodus.

The Chanel pumps were even more fabulous on her feet than they'd been in the store-black suede, t-straps, deadly spiked toe. So fabulous, in fact, that she purchased a pair of black skinny pants and a cashmere boyfriend cardigan to go with them. High winds and torrential rains engulfed the city by the time she returned to her apartment late that afternoon to find Angus tak-

ing up an unusually large percentage of the square footage due to his overfull bladder. Obviously, her pet service had been among the weak willed fleers.

Earlier in life, Candy Snark's skill set had included a select variety of abilities that had nothing to do with the publishing industry or personal image. At one point, before moving to New York, she had known how to cook her own food, clean the toilet with a funny angled brush, put groceries into a shopping cart, bag them and carry them home. Back then she could change a tire, mow the lawn and shovel snow. But in truth, not having to do any of these tedious chores was one of things that made living in New York so much fun.

In her home town of Nowhere, take out dinners were reserved for especially rushed evenings, cleaning women were for fabulously rich people, any apartment lacking a full size range wasn't worth the money, and no self respecting woman would pay a company to deliver groceries. Nowhere didn't even have a pet service.

She glanced at Angus. Even in his uncomfortable state he was the picture of doggie cool. Perfectly groomed, fashionably accessorized and stretched out in a position that managed somehow to accentuate his powerful chest, showoff his puppy eyes, and hint at his well-endowed, albeit totally dysfunctional genitals. Candy was certain he practiced posing whenever he was alone. Catching her glance, Angus, somewhat lazily, lengthened his body then rolled upright, careful not to seem too eager at the prospect of making a trip out, before heading to the bedroom closet for his black Huge Boss scarf. Just as well she thought, slipping her new pumps onto her feet and striding over to her laptop.

Several days earlier she'd received an unusual email. Candy was not entirely convinced that you could be entirely stable and develop a crush on someone you'd never seen, met or even knew anything about. But this uncertainty had not impeded the sickening thrill she got every time she checked her messages. Which, when she was near a computer, had increased to every few minutes, sometimes every few seconds; as if the frequency of her checking might somehow be transmitted across the world wide web like a romantic SOS.

The situation had cropped up innocuously enough, just another query letter in the throng. But this query was not from an author in search of an agent, rather the gentleman in question was seeking an author. The first note had been distinctly polite, and error free, leading Candy to assume that the writer was not American, but beyond this and its unusual content, the letter made little overall impression on her. She'd responded immediately explaining that she could not, in good conscious, give out contact information for writers to a complete stranger, but that if he wanted to tell her more about the project, she would consider mentioning it to a few writers and they could contact him personally. And then she forgot all about it.

A reply awaited her the following morning.

thank you for the prompt response. I imagine you are very busy and appreciate your willingness to offer assistance on this matter. I am a professor of Archeology and Antiquities and have recently stumbled onto a previously lost collection of stories from the middle East. many of these stories have survived (in varying versions) in other collections. However, several were totally unknown and one of these has taken hold of me. i believe it could be very successful, if retold in a more accessible way, but I regret that I don not have the skills for such an endeavor . Please feel free to forward this information, along with my email, to any talented authors who might be interested in the project.

yours,
James

Her first reaction was almost imperceptible. Only vaguely aware that her heart was racing, as if something exciting had occurred and her brain had failed to notice it, Candy stared at the screen. Then tingling electricity danced from her neck to her hips, her stomach flip-flopped and her hands strayed to her hair, twisting distractedly at a loose lock. She was utterly confused. Certainly these were the tell-tale signs that some desirable male had just eyed-her up, found her very much to his liking, and was communicating his interest with a combination of pheromones, body language and facial expressions. But there was no man. No body language. No Pheromones. Nothing except yours-5 symbols grouped together to form a not uncommon closing.

Ridiculous, she chided herself, knowing from experience that a rosy blush was rising on her cheeks and giggling demurely, despite the fact that only Angus was there to hear her. But deep inside she was positive, knew without the slightest doubt, that in this case yours, was not just a closing. Those 5 symbols represented an untold number of ardent statements -I am yours. I want yours. Who is yours. My place or yours.

"Do you think it's possible to fall for some one over the internet," Candy asked a friend later.

"Oh please," Noah replied as he checked an invisible blemish above his eye with the back of a spoon. "I hope this reflection is distorted, otherwise I'm starting to look like an extra from Night of the Living Dead." He waited for Candy to assure him that his appearance was perfect, as always, and when she didn't he dropped the utensil, eyeing her with interest. "Well, duh. Don't we read the Craigslist personals for light entertainment, or am I thinking of some other body Nazi. " Noah resented the number of hours that Candy forced them to spend working out.

"I know you can find people to fuck over the internet. That's not what I meant. " She screwed up her face in way that indicated she was actually perplexed. "Is it possible," she finally continued, "for two people who have never met, who know nothing whatsoever about each other, to suddenly and for no apparent reason connect. Almost like magic?"

"Emotionally or physically?"

"Either. Both."

"You know the answer to the physically part. You've seen some of the men I go home with."

Candy nodded, and remembering the circumstances leading to Noah's most recent long term partner she added, "Emotionally too."

"So what are you asking me for?" he sulked.

"What I want to know is, do you think the same kind of magic can happen over the internet."

An eager smile spread across Noah's face. "What have we been getting up to?"

Candy sighed, rubbing her hand across her brow. "I have a massive crush on this guy. And I can't explain why. It just happened. One minute I was Snarkily stomping on self-righteous lawyers who were kind enough to send me this years best-selling legal thriller, and the next I was staring love struck at my laptop screen."

"Staring love struck or panting hornily?"

"Hornily is not a word. And I sort of went back and forth."

"Did you, really?" Noah snickered.

"Yes, actually. Pathetic as it might seem."

"Well, out with it." He loved to hear the dirty details of his friends' sex lives almost as much as he loved talking about his own.

"I read the word yours and went all gooey. And yes I'm intentionally using the word gooey."

By the time Candy had explained the entire affair, Noah's perpetually unflappable expression was developing a decidedly shocked pallor.

"That is the most romantic story I've every heard," he confessed once she finished. "You've fallen for a word."

"You're helpful."

"Well, what do you want me to say? Email the guy and casually mention that you're not psycho but you'd nonetheless like him to come to New York and either take you out for a candlelit dinner where you discover that you're soul mates, or fuck you till neither one of you can remember your own names, or both depending on the sentiment he was intending to convey with that irritatingly ambiguous yours?"

"I want you to tell me that I'm not delusional and in desperate need of therapy and prescription drugs."

"You're really serious."

"As serious as anyone can be about an unknown person named James and a yours."

Noah patted her hand sympathetically. "We're energy. That's it. Complicated, needy bundles of energy. And all that information speeding along the information superhighway is energy

too. So yeah, I guess I believe it's possible that somehow, I don't know how, but somehow, you could feel some kind of attraction to someone you've never seen or met, just by way of that energy exchange."

Candy grinned appreciatively.

"But you might want to consider therapy, just to be on the safe side."

Noah's theory was all the reassurance Candy needed. After several phone calls she typed a short but friendly message to James, informing him that she might, in fact, have found a writer and that she hoped he would keep in touch, since the project would eventually need an agent and she was already interested. After rereading it several times, Candy determined that it was acceptably professional, so as not to render her a total fool; but chatty and open ended enough to encourage a reply--which was exactly what she wanted. After typing and retyping various closings she settled on *Best--best friend, best sex, best time ever.*