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The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Nightmare

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A large room in an apartment on a high floor in a new building somewhere in Eastern Europe: it is after midnight, the night sky is clear. Moonlight illuminates gentle waves that slide back and forth on the beach that is across the road from the apartment building. There are no streetlights on the deserted road. The windows of the tall building are dark, except for a faint glow behind one broad window, high up.

The room, lit only by a laptop's screen, is sleekly furnished, with tan leather and steel chairs at one end and a matching sofa that faces toward the water. In front of the sofa, there is a low glass and metal table with only an empty blue ceramic bowl on the surface. In the dim light, it is not evident what are behind the glass protecting the large framed objects that hang on the walls.

At the end of the room opposite the chairs, a young woman sits on a high-backed leather chair in front of a laptop set on an otherwise bare small, elegant table of polished blond wood. The young woman faces the room. In the daytime, when she turns slightly to her left, she can see in the far distance the horizon where the water meets the sky and where large ships move slowly from right to left. Always in that direction. At least once a day, she will roll her chair close to the floor-to-ceiling window and with a pair of high-powered binoculars watch the ships, looking for a flash of sunlight that might indicate that someone might be watching her building or even her apartment. After a few moments, she will laugh softly and shake her head.

She leaves the apartment only in the evening, after dark, in a new Mercedes SUV that she parks in the garage under the apartment building. She will drive on unlit roads with the windows open, letting the breeze hit her face. It does not ruffle her hair, which is under a well-fitted dark wig. She wears dark glasses, which have special lenses; even though it is night and wherever she goes, she can see perfectly well. The point is, no one can know who she is. The Mercedes dealer didn't know; she has created papers that can pass any inspection.

Some nights, she will stop at a restaurant that is isolated or at the outer edge of a town or small city. She might have a meal before she finds an empty place at the bar. She will talk with the bartender, which she has learned is a signal that she is open to talking with other drinkers. She has learned to recognize people like herself — usually men, but occasionally women — who don't want anyone to know who they are and where they might be. They don't ask her questions about herself, so, she knows, she won't be encouraged to ask questions about them. She can quickly tell whether someone she's just met has

spent a working life behind a desk, undoubtedly in front of a computer screen, or at a teller's or cashier's window. Those, she has determined, are the least threatening among the people she encounters on what she realizes are hunting expeditions. When she decides that the risk of a physical attack is minimal, there will be an invitation for a quick bout of frantic sex in the back of her SUV. On the way home, the itch no longer needing to be scratched, she will stop for groceries at one of the few small stores that stays open unusually late in this part of the world.

Other nights, when there is no moon, she will don the wig and dark glasses and go for a jog on the beach. The beach will be dark, and drivers on the unlit road that runs along the length of the beach will not notice her. With each breath she takes on those carefree jogs she will think about how satisfying the important aspects of her life feel to her, despite her need to be cautious about revealing her identity and her whereabouts.

Tonight, she is staying at home. At two o'clock her laptop will receive an encrypted face-to-face call from two academics in the United States. She does not know their real names. On these calls, even with the encryption, they use the names Ben and Jerry. They wear masks and employ a device that alters their voices. They have told the young woman emphatically whenever she has asked for some clue to their identities that they do not trust the encryption app that she uses. Their unwillingness to let her know anything about them troubles her. But they have provided so many details of their activities on behalf of her project that she cannot conjure up any good reason not to trust them.

Ben and Jerry call the young woman Natalie, because, as the one who calls himself Ben has put it, if Hollywood were making a movie about her, studios execs would find someone who resembles **Natalie Wood** to play her — someone of Eastern Europe parentage who looks like a Hollywood princess, Jerry added. A week ago they told her that they will indeed be discussing a movie about her — a docudrama, they call it — that they will be pitching (a sexy word to her) to public television stations in the U.S. The working title, for now, is *Robin Hood of Scholarly Publishing* — until they can think of something better.

For the past week, the young woman has fretted over questions that they may have to find answers for. After all, not everyone has been in favor of, let alone sympathetic to her project. She worries about suspicions that she and others who have worked on the project have phished for passwords to university library systems that enabled downloading of journal papers residing behind walls meant to restrict such access to only university affiliated students and faculty members. Are all the passwords, purloined or not, safe? Will her defying the American judge's order to shut down the site with the downloaded papers eventually make legal trouble for the students and faculty members who have donated their passwords? What will people think of her when they learn of her apartment, her Mercedes, her clothes, the money she has for dinners and drinks? What names will they call her when the press announces how she plans to dispose of the project? These last two questions trouble the young woman the most. Wondering who Ben and Jerry might be is a minor issue by comparison.

At this moment the young woman is calm. She has always relied on United Nations Charter language about the rights of all mankind to have access to the wealth of the world's knowledge. It cannot be sequestered behind pay walls and be available only to those fortunate to be living in rich countries. That is the mantra that answers any demanding question anyone can dream up, and no matter how adamant the questioner.

The young woman swivels her desk chair so that she is looking at the blackness of the huge window. She closes her eyes. Ben and Jerry will be on her laptop screen in just a minute or two. Suddenly the room is filled with bright light. A pair of powerful hands takes hold of her shoulders and spins her around. She sees several men, large men, dressed in black, watch caps pulled down to the tops of masks covering their faces.

A large, rough hand takes hold of the young woman's chin. She cries out: "What do you want?"

The hand turns the young woman's face to the laptop screen. Ben and Jerry are there. They remove their masks. They have painted clown faces. When they speak, their voices sound like she imagined their real voices might sound.

"What do we want, little Natalie? The passwords, of course. What would you think? All them lovely passwords," they sing out in unison, their lips curved in half-moon leers.

The young woman screams. 

From A University Press from page 75

Endnotes

1. For some background on peer review, **Trevor Lipscombe** wrote a marvelous essay on the sectarian origins of peer review and how that has trickled down to the present day ("Burn this Article" — see <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/613577>). And I describe elsewhere (see <https://ugapress.wordpress.com/2016/06/16/peering-into-the-dark-underbelly-of-peer-review-or-practice-makes-best/>) our committee's own peer review and drafting process that produced the handbook.
2. I've had some experience with online publishing of digital scholarship, but that remains more experimental to-date and our *Best Practice Handbook* focused on more established book conventions.
3. Based on reported numbers from **AAUP Annual Directory of Presses**, 2000 through 2015. See also **Crossick, Geoffrey**. "Monographs and Open Access: A report to HEFCE." Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), January 2015, p. 21, which reports title output of monographs among the four biggest academic presses as doubling between 2004 and 2013.
4. The number of new presses is small, in North America at least. I know of at least two new Presses in the past couple of years, with at least two more in the start-up phase (some have not announced publicly).
5. **AAUP**. *Best Practices for Peer Review*. 2016, p. 6.
6. For example, **Claire Potter** at the New School is in the midst of an experiment with **UNC Press**, writing her next book in a shared environment (see <http://digitalulab.org/2016/06/05/why-blog-a-book/>) that allows ongoing comments as she writes and rewrites about the future of digital scholarship.