

# The Interlocutor

by Dan Kennard



Upon Arrival:

Margeaux speaking: “I remember being nervous waiting for him. I was standing near the front door next to Janet, that’s Bill’s wife, of course, and I was taking a sip from my second martini, trying to calm my nerves. Janet was talking about the recent success of her husband’s glass factory, but it was difficult to pay attention. I was so distracted with waiting. Then there was a knock at the front door, and I knew it had to be him. My heart skipped a beat.”

Bill speaking: “That bastard was good looking. Stan and I were standing over by the stereo, across the living room from the door, talking sports with some other guys, when she pulled it open. I know he saw the guy because Stan stopped talking for a moment, distracted, then he took a long swig from his bottle of beer. I wouldn’t have noticed the guy myself if Stan didn’t stop talking to stare at him. I asked him if he knew who the guy was, but all Stan did was shrug his shoulders.”

Janet speaking: “Margeaux stepped aside to let him in, and the first thing he did when he walked inside was bow politely to Margeaux and then to me. I was standing near the door. His bowing surprised me for some reason, and then I overheard him ask Janet where the rum station was. She pointed towards the kitchen, and then off he went. I was a little bewildered by the man, I have to say.”

Allen speaking: “I don’t remember his arrival exactly, but I do remember him being there. Honestly, I didn’t really give a shit about the people at

the party I didn't know. Who does? Leo and I had burned one beforehand anyway, and we were already a few drinks in by the time he ended up talking to us. I remember standing across from Bill and Stan, thinking about how desperately I wanted to change the music. Stan had put on some shit from the eighties, and that was really the only thing I could think about. That, and Susanna was looking mighty good that night, too, standing next to her sister Emily."

Leo speaking: "I don't remember anything about the guy except that he was pretty funny, and he wore a slim-cut brown suit with a red bow tie, which I remember thinking seemed unusual. I was more interested in Susanna than anything, though. Why do you ask?"

First Impressions:

Rodney speaking: "Teresa and I were sitting on the couch across from Carla and Art, watching television and talking. I think we were watching some countdown show or something, when the guy comes walking over and stands directly in front of the TV. He smiled at us and said his name was Lionel and that he was an old friend of the family. Then he shook all of our hands and asked us how long we had been sitting on the couch. I thought maybe he had some kind of special need that we weren't aware of, but only at first."

Janet speaking: "I asked Margeaux who the guy was, but she just shrugged her shoulders and looked away. She and Stan are always shrugging at things. I got the feeling she wasn't being totally honest with me, which, I have to say, wouldn't be the first time. Anyway, after he came out of the kitchen, he nodded at the two of us, gesturing with his rum and coke, then made his way across the living room and stood directly in front of the television before Rodney and Teresa and two other people I didn't know. Then he started shaking hands with them and talking like they were old friends."

Susanna speaking: "As soon as I saw him walk by, I nudged Emily with my elbow, and we watched him go stand in front of the TV. Emily remarked that he might have been the most handsome man she'd ever seen. She said he had great hair. Then we overheard him ask Teresa and Rodney how long they had been sitting on the couch, which I thought was a weird question."

Emily speaking: "He was dreamy, for sure. I had my eye on the taller man across the room, Allen, I think his name was, but once this guy walked by, I forgot all about him. His dark hair was parted perfectly to the side, he was clean shaven, and, from what I could tell, fit as a fiddle, too, but it was his

unassuming smile that really drew me to him. Something about it seemed ironic or half-serious. I spent the rest of the night following him with my eyes. I think Susanna did, too.”

Art speaking: “After he introduced himself, he talked to all of us for about ten minutes, complimented the color of the couches, and then praised the general organization of the room before asking if we had thought about our New Year’s resolutions at all. I mentioned that I intended to work out more this year, especially after eating so much food the last few weeks, and then he offered to write down his own workout routine for me, if I wanted it. I didn’t know who he was, but I thought he seemed like a nice guy. He didn’t seem threatening, if that’s what you mean.”

Carla speaking: “When he started asking us about our resolutions and offered to give Art his own workout routine, I was excited. If Art could get into half the shape this guy was in, I might feel like I went back in time a few years, physically speaking. At that moment I felt like the man was an angel, or something, sent to save our marriage.”

Later on:

Allen speaking: “Standing around, the four of us—Stan, Bill, Leo, and myself—we were all talking about how shitty our YMCA soccer team was last season, when Bill suddenly remarked, staring across the room at the man as he talked to Susanna and Emily, that he was willing to bet money that the man was putting on an act of some kind and explained how he didn’t trust him. He claimed that there was something about the dude’s smile that made him suspicious, but I hadn’t really noticed.”

Leo speaking: “All I know is the guy spent a significant amount of time talking to Susanna and Emily, which pissed me off. I remember his dumb ass brown suit and his asshole tie and him talking to Susanna and Emily. That’s all I remember, except that I also wanted to talk to Susanna, but now I couldn’t because he was doing such a good job of it. They laughed a lot while he spoke to them, and even though I hate to admit it, it didn’t seem like they could look away. That was when I asked Allen if he wanted to go burn another one outside and get some fresh air. I don’t know for sure, but Allen seemed a little put off by the guy, too, and we both went outside together.”

Emily speaking: “Oh my God, the man was delightful. He introduced himself as Nathan Greenleaf and said he was an old friend of Margeaux’s from community college. I never thought to ask him why he was at the party, though. I didn’t care, really, I was just glad to be talking to him. He

said something about recently returning from an ice-fishing expedition and remarked about how perfect he thought the room temperature was. I hadn't thought about it until then, but the room was at a perfect temperature. Then he smiled at both of us and asked if we had any good jokes we wouldn't mind telling, but neither one of us could recall anything."

Stan speaking: "I'm not sure where Leo and Allen went, but when the guy came over to us, the first thing he said was, 'This rum is really starting to get to me,' before he slugged down the rest of his drink. I told him it was getting to me, too, and asked him how he was enjoying the party so far. He said he had always wanted to be in New York City during the holidays and thanked me for asking. Then he looked at Bill and I and asked what we did for a living."

Bill speaking: "I had been watching him for a little while as he made his way around the room talking to everyone, and I began to think that he wasn't a real person. Everything about him seemed rehearsed, or something. Then he had asked Stan and me what we did for a living, and when I told him I owned a very successful glass factory on Eighth Street, he surprised me by saying, 'Didn't they just rebuild that place a year or two ago?' which happened to be around the same time that I took over ownership. After that I wasn't sure what to think of him. When I asked him what he did for a living, all he said was that he was doing it. Then he excused himself and said he needed a new drink."

Inside:

Rodney speaking: "I saw the guy go outside, so I went into the kitchen to make another drink and started talking to Stan and Bill on my way back. Then I asked Stan how Lionel was related to the family, and Stan said, 'Lionel who?' which, needless to say, wasn't the answer I was expecting."

Art speaking: "I'm still trying to figure out if him offering me his workout routine was an insult or a genuine offer, and even now I don't know what he meant by it. As soon as he walked away to get another drink, Carla turns to me and says, 'Are you going to do it, Art? You going to take him up on it?' and at first I didn't even know what she was talking about. I was thinking more about the guy than anything he had actually said. After he was gone, it was like he never existed. I felt like I had just gotten off a weird ride or something."

Outside:

Leo speaking: “That freak must have seen us go outside because half-way through our joint—am I allowed to say that? Joint?—anyway, halfway through it, the guy comes outside and finds me and Allen standing just outside the front door and asks if he could have a drag. If a man wants a drag of something, it’s hard to say no, you know? I thought it said a lot about him. To me, anyway.”

Allen speaking: “Yeah, he came outside and asked for a couple of drags, and I could tell by his face that Leo was surprised. I guess he didn’t expect the man to be a pot smoker, but, then again, people surprise me all the time about that shit. A lot more people do it than are willing to talk about it. Leo handed him the half-smoked joint, and he took a few deep drags on it. Next thing I know, he’s looking up at the sky with his crooked smile and saying how much it sucks that no one can see any stars, you know, because of the lights from the city and all.”

After His Exit:

Susanna speaking: “He came up to Emily and me and told us that, unfortunately, his time that evening had run out and that he must be going. I thought it was such a great way to put it. Neither I nor Emily wanted him to go. Especially Emily. She won’t say it, but she was heartbroken that she might never see him again.”

Teresa speaking: “I thought the man was a creep, pure and simple, and I was glad when he announced to the four of us that he would be leaving. I leaned over to Art and said, just after he bowed and walked away, ‘Good riddance, that man was a creep,’ but I wasn’t convinced that Rodney really wanted to him to go.

Allen speaking: “After we burned that second one, I made myself another vodka and tonic, so I don’t really remember him leaving.”

Leo speaking: “Me neither.”

Janet speaking: “He bowed in front of Margeaux and said he must bid us adieu and thanked Margeaux for the drinks. Then he winked at her, which seemed inappropriate to me. Then they hugged briefly, and Margeaux whispered something into the man’s ear, and, even though I couldn’t hear it, they both laughed.”

Stan speaking: “Of course I saw them hugging at the front door, but I

trust my wife. Besides, we were both in on the whole thing together, anyway. I didn't think she would go for it at first, but she surprised me."

Margeaux speaking: "I thought it sounded like a great idea for fifty bucks. Stan told me that they had one of these guys at his office party last year, and everybody loved it, so I thought, why not, right?"