

An excerpt from
Dry Cold Comfort
 by Joseph Aragon



(The restaurant. DARCY and NIQUI are at a table. NIQUI, who has a few glasses of wine in her, is looking at the screen of Darcy's cell phone.)

- NIQUI: Is this the best she could do?
- DARCY: It's not like he was about to pose for her.
- NIQUI: Well, it does look like him, although . . . Hey! You know who he looks like?
- DARCY: . . . Donald Sutherland?—
- NIQUI: . . . Donald Sutherland! The right light, the right angle—spitting image! And you said he was living in an alley just off Main?
- DARCY: Logan.
- NIQUI: What on earth is he doing there!
- DARCY: I dunno. My wife said something about “atonement”.
- NIQUI: That's funny. We're not Jewish. I'll bring this to the police's attention. Then they'll spread a dragnet or whatever around that entire area, and bring my beloved father back to me. And I owe it all to you.
- DARCY: And my wife.
- NIQUI: Ah yes, her too. If she has the proposal on my desk by next Tuesday, I'll run it by the board. If things go well, as they often do when I'm around, we'll have that eyesore levelled by next fall.
- DARCY: That's good news.
- NIQUI: Anything to continue the proud Richter tradition. *(grabs wine bottle and tops her glass off)* More wine?
- DARCY: I'm fine.
- NIQUI: *(filling his glass)* No, no, no, Darcy. That isn't how it works. You must become as inebriated as possible. Loosens the lips. In a perfect world, all job interviews would be run this way. Why should I waste my time

carefully wording questions and reading your body language when I can just get you sloshed and you'll tell me anything I want? *In vino veritas*, right?

DARCY: I suppose.

NIQUI: Something I've noticed, and maybe you've noticed it too—my diction improves with every drink. “She sells seashells by the seashore.” Isn't that wild?

DARCY: Impressive.

NIQUI: I've always had good diction. Maybe it was all those years wearing that retainer.

Are you enjoying my company, Darcy?

DARCY: Yes.

NIQUI: Are you really? It's not because I'm potentially holding your future in my hands?

DARCY: No, I'm genuinely enjoying your company.

NIQUI: 'Cause if you're not, I fully understand. When I'm on a date, guys usually tense up around this time. I have that effect, it seems.

DARCY: A date?

NIQUI: Come on, Darcy, you knew full well what this was. If this were a real job interview, would I really be this hosed? Thirty seconds after stepping into my office yesterday, you formed an opinion of me in your head that should have sent you running and screaming. But you stayed. Not only did you stay, but—like a fool!—you agreed to meet me here for a “job interview”. That can mean one of two things. You really *are* a fool . . . or you want this job really, really badly.

Pretty sharp huh? I know what people think of me. You know what they call me? Lady Caligula. Like I'm some kind of fuckwit Roman emperor swinging a dead—cat around and—smashing—china or—something. But I've got an MBA, dammit, I graduated *summa cum laude*, I'm a fucking *genius*! I run my father's company with a firm, just, knowing hand. I run it pretty *fucking* well!

DARCY: Niqui, you might wanna keep your voice down—

- NIQUI: No, you know what? I'm gonna let everyone know, excuse me: *(gets up)*
My name is Dominique Richter and I am *not* a fruitcake!
- DARCY: Niqui—
- NIQUI: I can calculate the standard deviation of our fourth quarter earnings in my
fucking HEAD!—
- DARCY: *(yanks her)* Niqui sit down!
- NIQUI: . . . I'm sorry, Darcy . . . I'M SORRY, FOLKS! . . . I'm sorry, Darcy . . .
- DARCY: It's okay.
- NIQUI: I made it worse, didn't I. Not only is she a fruitcake, she's a drunken
fruitcake. I can see tomorrow's front page already. "Lady Caligula
Disturbs Snooty Diners." I suppose *you* called me that, too.
- DARCY: Never.
- NIQUI: Liar. *(sips)* Ice wine. From northern Ontario. "The grapes are naturally
frozen on the vine at minus ten degrees centigrade before they're picked,
locking in the natural sugars and juices, thus giving the wine its
remarkable sweetness and flavour." See? Would a fuckwit know that? I
don't think so.
- (Pause.)*
- You did know, didn't you? Not about the wine, about—y'know—
(gestures between them)—this.
- DARCY: I had an inkling.
- NIQUI: Just an inkling? I hope, for the evening's sake, you had more than just an
inkling.
- DARCY: How much more should I have had?
- (Pause.)*
- NIQUI: Tell me about your wife. What's her name again? Tess? Wasn't short for
anything, right? Just Tess? Tell me about Tess, Darcy.
- DARCY: She's . . . a beautiful woman. Intelligent. Ambitious . . .
- NIQUI: Do you love her?
- DARCY: I do.

NIQUI: Mm. "I do". "*Eye Doo*" . . . Do you have a picture of her?
(DARCY *takes out his wallet and shows her a picture.*)
She's very pretty.

DARCY: I know.

NIQUI: You're a lucky man. And she's a lucky lady.

DARCY: . . . yes . . .

NIQUI: Not the most convincing "yes" I've ever heard.



End of Excerpt