



RICH MAN POOR MAN

Excerpt from 'To Your Own Self Be True'

Ray Melnik

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(Rael confronts the man who raped his mother over a decade earlier.)

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Rael slipped in quietly and carefully shut the door behind him. There was a large comfortable guest chair in front of the desk, so he sat gently. The office was huge, decorated to a T and with only the best furniture and carpet. The man he believed to be Adler Beaumont was continuing on the channel. With Beaumont using a headset, Rael only heard one side. He imagined Beaumont felt like the king of Madison Avenue looking over his subjects on the street below. He listened to him.

“I want that bastard to give me the time slot that I asked for. Don’t tell me he won’t play ball. You tell that asshole that, if I don’t get the time slot I asked for, I’m going to pull the account. Tell him he can have another twenty, but I want that slot.”

He didn’t say goodbye, but Rael knew the conversation had ended, when he held the headset in his hands and stared out the window for another minute. Beaumont finally turned around and saw him.

“Who are you? What are you doing in my office?”

“Are you Adler Beaumont?”

“Yes, I am. What do you want? How did you get in here?” he asked, believing Rael was too lowly to be speaking with him.

“My name is Rael Anton. You may remember my mother, Una. She was the one who cleaned your office about twelve years ago.”

He immediately recognized the name, learning it at that time when he worried that she might cause him trouble for what he'd done. He didn't say a word, pushed a button on his channel and pressed two digits.

“Denise, cancel my next appointment and take my calls for now.”

Rael looked deeply, expecting to see the littlest bit of shame from being reminded of what he did to his mother. Instead he saw only a look of defiance.

“So what is it you want from me,” he barked, not really asking.

“You know what you did. I want you to listen to what I have to say.”

“As I remember it, your mother came on to me.”

“That's a lie. You know that's a lie.”

“Well, prove it,” he said. “That was a decade ago and if you think you can intimidate me, good luck, kid.”

“Actually, I told you it was closer to twelve years ago,” Rael told him as he reached into his jacket pocket and slapped the photos of Sheri on his desk.

“What’s this?”

“My mother got pregnant when you raped her. This beautiful little girl came from the vile act you committed. We may not be able to prove it was rape so long after the fact, but I’m sure your career and home life will suffer once it’s proven that Sheri is from your sperm donation.”

Defiance turned to anxiety as he thought about the damage it would do if this were made public now. He sat silently, obviously worried.

“So what is it you want from me?” he finally asked, no longer with a cocky demeanor.

“I told you. First I want you to listen to what I have to say,”

He sank deep into his chair and said nothing.

“You were likely born into money, always gotten anything you wanted and obviously feel you can take anything you want. You and your kind have your beautiful homes and things. You go through life as if it were a game of who can have more. You maximize your wealth through greed and purposely cheat everyone around you. All the while you amass more and more money on the backs of the working class and ignore how hard it is with falling wage values and rising living costs.

“My mother worries about how to put food on the table, while you contemplate where you’ll spend your lavish vacations. You and

your type own the politicians and you're proud of it. You lobby to keep the wages of fine people like my mother at the poverty level, never letting them get ahead while you speak about how great the economy is. And the economy is great, for you. But try living our life. Many of the people who work for you are struggling, while you spend more on flowers for your lobby than they make for their yearly salary.

“You speak about how you're entitled to every bit of what you earn because you work hard. Well, so does my neighbor who works two jobs just to make enough to take care of his family, maybe put meat on the table once or twice a week. You pride yourself on how much you can squeeze from those without a voice and how it maximizes your personal profits. You spend substantial resources coercing those in power to create more and more loopholes for you to shield your money and gain more tax breaks. Who do you think makes up for the loss in revenue to the government? How much more do you think you can squeeze people before they break?”

Rael could have continued, but he needed to hear Beaumont say something. He leaned over the desk and stared into his face.

“Well?” Rael asked.

Given what was at stake for Beaumont, Rael could see that he couldn't help himself when he shrugged his head and rolled his eyes.

“Well, I don’t know what to tell you, kid,” he said. “I may do all of those things, but I sure don’t look at it the way that you do. Nothing I do is illegal.”

Rael raised his voice. “Of course not, you idiot, the system is aligned so that you don’t need to. But you’re still raping the vulnerable because you can, just like you raped my mother.”

“Listen, kid. We can settle this without trouble. Think of what your mother would go through. This would be messy for all of us.”

“For no one more than you, Beaumont, but I won’t expose you. I’d rather not have Sheri know that a rapist scumbag fathered her. You would deserve everything it would bring, but you need to do two things.”

“I’m listening. What?” he asked, finally in familiar territory.

“You know my mother is beautiful outside, but what you don’t know is that she’s as beautiful on the inside. She is smart, hardworking and deserves better. I found out that your company provides the majority of the funding for a science facility called SciLab, in upstate New York. I know you can pull some strings to arrange for a job offer. Make it a good paying housekeeping supervisor position there. I will get her to accept it. Her work for your company has always been exemplary, so no one would question the offer.”

“That’s not a problem. You got it. What else? Money, right?” he asked. That’s still no problem. I just want this to go away.”

“Yes,” Rael began to say, but was interrupted.

“I knew you would want a piece. Thinking of the things you’ll be able to buy, huh? See, we’re more alike than you think,” Beaumont blurted out.

“We’re nothing alike. We could take you to the cleaners on Sheri’s behalf, but I have little interest in putting her through the anguish. You’re obviously extremely wealthy. Put seven hundred thousand dollars in a high yield trust fund payable only to Sheri when she reaches the age of eighteen. I’m sure that’s nothing for you. Name me as custodian and send the paperwork with the account information to me.”

“Sure kid. Done.”

Rael transferred the information he would need for delivering the trust information. He scooped up his photos of Sheri and, when he turned to leave, he heard Beaumont.

“Hey kid, you really don’t know me. I can be a nice guy at times.”

Rael turned red and looked back.

“Really, Beaumont? During the whole time I was here, you not once asked me about Sheri. You never even picked up the photographs. I think I know you all too well.”

When he walked out, Beaumont had already opened his channel to get back to business. He considered their visit no more painful than a mosquito bite.