

"THE CARPENTER"

Written by Rosemary Regello

Rosemary Regello  
7855 Firestone Way  
Antelope, CA 95843  
(916) 722-6779  
regello@thecityedition.com

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*Before beginning our present-day odyssey, let us first step back in history for a little clarification:*

FADE IN:

EXT. REFLECTION ON A RIVER SURFACE (1813) - DAY

Over the serene sound of the ambling current and a warbling blue jay, we discern the shapes of SHAKER SETTLERS sawing logs. That familiar harbinger of progress, the SCREECH-SCREECH of saw teeth, cuts into nature's harmonious melody.

EXT. SHORE OF CONCORD RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

The Shaker men are destroying their backs with blunt, inadequate pit saws. The lurching back and forth, back and forth is almost too much to watch. We thank God for OSHA. As for turnaround time on the new home, don't even ask.

Fortunately, on a slight hill overlooking these masochistic endeavors, lies a single, solitary --

LOG CABIN.

On the porch, SISTER TABITHA BABBITT sits spinning wool. She sees the men in the distance, observes their grueling labor, then looks down at her spinning wheel. And an idea occurs to her.

EXT. SAME PORCH (A FEW WEEKS LATER) - DAY

Sister Babbitt directs a BLACKSMITH as he mounts her new prototype circular saw blade onto the spinning wheel. The men gather around as she demonstrates the concept.

EXT. SHORE OF CONCORD RIVER (A FEW YEARS LATER) - DAY

The first lumber mill in the world makes its debut. Powered by the river current, the planks roll effortlessly through the blade and get stacked like hot cakes. Standing off to one side, Sister Babbitt glistens at her contribution to history.

EXT. EIGHTH FLOOR, OFFICE TOWERS UNDER CONTRUCTION,  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA (PRESENT DAY) - DAY

The whirl of a micron carbide blade rotating at 360 rpm on a large panel saw dazzles the human eye as it rips a 3/4 inch miter off a veneered panel. A pair of guiding human hands crosses into our frame. They're not the big, gruff, calloused, hairy mitts of your typical tradesman, however.

They belong to one WYLIE FERGUSON, 28, female, with an attractive but sturdy curvature. Now to you or me, a saw blade spinning at 360 rpm might translate into ten bloody stubs at the knuckles. To Wylie, it's a walk in the park. She lifts the panel off the saw and positions it between the mitered edges of two other panels already installed on a load-bearing column. It's a perfect fit.

ELSEWHERE ON THE FLOOR,

TRADESMEN are busy installing plumbing and electrical conduit, sheet metal ducts, sprinklers and drywall. Outside the windows, a crane lifts a steel girder onto a twin office tower under construction. Boy, we've come a long way since those old pit saw days.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SAME - DAY

Dirt-splattered pick-ups and SUV's are scattered across the newly poured blacktop. Nestled among this rustic cornucopia is a very nice domestic sedan bearing U.S. Government plates. It's from that direction that a cell phone RINGS.

INT. SEDAN - DAY

A body stirs to life in the back seat. A woman's hand reaches out from beneath a stolen airline blanket, searching for the phone. Then the gorgeous head of KATHERINE BRENNER, 38, emerges from slumber. She bears a marked resemblance to Sister Tabitha Babbitt. After checking her caller I.D., she answers her cell in a rather hoarse monotone.

KATHERINE  
You're in trouble...

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Yes, I found the place. (gazes out at towers) It would be hard to miss. So, Ricky, the superintendent isn't coming in till nine. Your schedule said arrive by seven or else.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN MARK DOLAN, CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BLDG., WASH. D.C. - DAY

Beneath the great seal of California, a prickly office receptionist, RICKY, cradles the phone while he sorts mail.

RICKY

I see there was some miscommunication. This is what happens when we turn off our cell phone.

Still in the car, Katherine flips the rear-view mirror into position and adjusts her look.

KATHERINE

I had dinner with my parents last night.

RICKY

Sounds like a raucous evening. John left a message at your hotel.

KATHERINE

There wasn't any message from John.

RICKY

I must say, Ms. Brenner, you'd never cut it at a temporary agency. Anyway, the state Division of Apprenticeship Standards heard you were in town. And apparently they have this longstanding agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor, which provides for written notification in the event of an inspection -

KATHERINE

Ricky, can we cut to the chase?

RICKY

Someone named Ronald's waiting for you on the steps.

Katherine spots a balding bureaucrat, RONALD, pacing at the entrance like a caged orangutan. He's toting two hard hats.

KATHERINE

Swell. Remind me what I'm doing here, again.

RICKY

Evidently missing an appointment at the taxpayers' expense. You're supposed to be finishing the survey for that affirmative action bill.

KATHERINE

(alighting from the car)

It's not an affirmative action bill.

RICKY

Excuse me, "The Equal Access to the Nontraditional Jobplace" bill. Yeah, right.

EXT. SEDAN - DAY

Katherine opens the driver's door, snares a leather-encased notepad, locks the car and proceeds toward the tower.

KATHERINE

Don't you think it's strange how that person from the ETA bailed out on us?

RICKY

John said something about her taking stress leave.

KATHERINE

I wonder what brought that on.

The sound of PILE DRIVING commences. Katherine looks over at puffs of smoke where a second tower is going up.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Never mind. Are you still picking me up at the airport?

RICKY

Actually, the Congressman asked for that esteemed privilege.

KATHERINE

You know, this equal opportunity stuff can get extreme, even for me. The idea of defending a woman's right to be - (looks up at an ironworker) a roofer.

RICKY

Yeah, it's ridiculous. Like a man applying for a secretarial position. The gall.

Ronald's waving the hard hats to get her attention.

KATHERINE

Look, I gotta go.

RICKY

(after she hangs up)  
Like I was keeping you.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO TOWER ONE - DAY

On her way up the steps, Katherine fishes through her purse for a pill bottle. To the side, a GARDENER waters some new landscaping.

RONALD

Have trouble finding the place?

KATHERINE

No. Do you think I could get a glass of water before we start?  
(flashes the pills) Allergies.

Ronald considers the request doubtfully. Then he lights on an idea: the gardener's running hose.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

It can wait.

INT. EIGHTH FLOOR, SAME - DAY

When the elevator door opens, Katherine bolts out like a thoroughbred from the gate. With her sleek dress, dark shades and appearance of conviction, she's an immediate sensation with the blue-collar grunts. By contrast, Ronald shuffles behind her like a disabled grinch.

KATHERINE

So, Ronald, you're with the free state of California. Tell me - what's wrong with this picture?

Ronald sees nothing wrong, just a lot of white, working class men hard at work. Well, some of them are hard at work. Twenty-four other pairs of eyeballs are locked on the legs of the visitor. Katherine takes notes.

RONALD

A head count proves nothing. You do recall the two electricians on the fourth floor, the laborer... and now this carpenter.

He means Wylie Ferguson. She's installing another panel on a column. Holding one end of it as she slips in support blocks underneath is a gaunt, retirement-age carpenter, HENRY. Wylie tightens two bar clamps to secure the glued panel, then turns to face the inquisition.

KATHERINE

You made that look so simple.

WYLIE

Yeah, well, you get a lot of practice around here.

Wylie indicates other columns she's finished.

KATHERINE

Amazing.

WYLIE

Is this about my back dues?

KATHERINE

God, no. I'm investigating gender discrimination. Here, let me give you my business card. (*commences search of purse*) Do I look like I'm from your union?

WYLIE

You look like you're from Disney World.

KATHERINE

Washington. Same thing. So, is everything going OK out here?

Katherine fumbles her nail polish, lipstick, clippers and prescription bottle out onto the ground.

WYLIE

Lady, I got to get back to work.

Katherine stops, removes her sunglasses and stares at Wylie, mystified.

KATHERINE

Alright. (*proffers card*) Call me if you need anything.

WYLIE

Do I look like I need something?

KATHERINE

Maybe a semester of charm school.

Leaving Wylie to her column, Katherine and Ronald resume their inspection of the site. The older carpenter takes the business card and reads it.

HENRY

Aide to Congressman Mark Andrew Dolan. Sounds pretty important.

WYLIE

I'd like to boot her snooty, slack ass down the elevator shaft.

INT. CORRIDOR APPROACHING ELEVATORS, SAME FLOOR - DAY

Katherine and Ronald maneuver around CARPETLAYERS working on the concrete floor.

KATHERINE

The Subcommittee is not going to be happy when I testify.

RONALD

A foregone conclusion.

Katherine hits a groove in the cement and steps right out of one of her high heels. As she backtracks to reclaim it:

KATHERINE

Ronald, why are we the only ones wearing hard hats?

RONALD

Regulations.

Katherine removes the hat, fluffs her hair. This generates WHISTLES and CATCALLS from all around. They continue walking.

KATHERINE

So let's talk regulations. Let me see. I don't have my calculator, but four women out of a workforce of say, two hundred...

RONALD

Ms. Brenner, blue-collar jobs rarely attract a large pool of females.

KATHERINE

Ronald, for twenty-six-fifty an hour, nuns would be abandoning the convent. I had no idea the situation was this bad.

Overhearing this, a PAINTER intentionally bumps Kasey, streaking her dress with paint.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Damn.

RONALD

The bottom line is that the state cannot order any contractor to hire nuns, nor may it compel a labor organization to recruit them.

KATHERINE

Then tell me then, what exactly does the state Division of Apprenticeship Standards do?

RONALD

You mean, besides responding to the false alarms of uppity federal interns?

She assesses the paint damage, checks her watch, and pushes the elevator button.

KATHERINE

You called us, remember? And I'm not an intern. Ronald, look around. This isn't some trashcan burning on the sidewalk. We're talking serious obstruction of federal anti-discrimination law here...

EXT. A PASSENGER AIRLINER - DAY

Lifting off from San Francisco International airport.

KATHERINE (V.O.)

In particular, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964...

INT. COACH CABIN, EASTBOUND AIRLINER - DAY

Katherine swallows two pills with a glass of wine.

KASEY (V.O.)

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972...

EXT. CAPITOL HILL, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

A summertime sizzling post card shot.

KATHERINE (V.O.)

The Job Training and Partnership  
Act...

INT. HOUSE HEARING ROOM, WASHINGTON D.C.

The SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONS is meeting. Its chair is a distinguished, good-looking Democrat, CONGRESSMAN MARK ANDREW DOLAN, 47. A lot of not so good-looking, brick-faced LABOR LEADERS fill the chamber. At the witness table, Katherine reads from her report.

KATHERINE

Let's see, the Nontraditional  
Employment for Women Act of 1991.  
That requires recipients of  
federal funds to set specific  
goals for the training and placing  
of women into nontraditional  
assignments.

She stops to drink some water and stifle a yawn - jet lag. Also yawning are members of the all-male PRESS CORPS covering the session. Most are diverting themselves with video games on their laptops. Another doodles a cartoon: Katherine as a scrawny soapbox agitator at the height of her oratory; Big Labor dead asleep behind her.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

In 1992, we passed the Women in  
Apprenticeship and Non-traditional  
Occupations Act, which authorized  
over a million dollars to help  
both employers and unions  
integrate women into the trades.  
But let's go back to 1978 for a  
second. President Carter issued an  
executive order that established a  
goal of 25 percent for integrating  
women into the trades workforce.  
Hardly a giant leap towards  
parity. By the mid-1980s, the auto  
manufacturing industry actually  
reached a respectable 20 percent.

Mark Dolan's chief of staff, JOHN DECKER, 32, enters the chamber, notices the doodle on the way to his chair behind Mark. It gives him immense joy to see Katherine lampooned.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Meanwhile, in the construction trades, the figure has catapulted from a pathetic 2.4% in 1970... to a staggering 2.5% today. (glancing back at audience) The penalties for violating the law, some of you may not be aware of, range from 3 to 5 years in a federal penitentiary and fines of up to \$15,000 per offense.

A crew-cut union representative, ROY CRAWFORD, leans towards the man beside him, EDDIE KENT, 60. Eddie has thick brows, a creased, teddy bear face, and is dressed like a Ponderosa rancher.

ROY

Is she serious about this stuff?

EDDIE

Nah, what she needs is a little executive order up in my hotel room later.

An elderly Republican on the committee, CONGRESSMAN YATES, pipes in with his mint julep drawl.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Young lady, let me stop you for just a second. I read somewhere that in order to accomplish true gender parity in America, 77 percent of the labor force would have to change jobs.

KATHERINE

Yes, would you mind if I took yours?

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Well, first you'd have to move to Alabama. Now, could you explain to me the relevance of Title Nine in this matter?

KATHERINE

Sure. Most trade unions and employers participate in joint apprenticeship programs. The apprentices get classroom training, typically at a local community college.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

I see. So you're suggesting that because there aren't many women in these programs, that a crime is taking place.

KATHERINE

Exactly.

Some of the reporters look up from their laptops.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

But what do the trade unions have to do with it? Don't the companies do all the hiring?

KATHERINE

No. Let me explain. Say, you want to work for a company that's unionized. First, you have to go down to the union hall and sign up on a list. The company calls the union, says they need a worker, and the union calls the next guy - or gal - whose name is on the list.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

So then the companies don't control who gets hired.

KATHERINE

Usually not, and especially in the case of apprenticeships.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

(indicates Chairman Dolan)

So this bill your boss is promoting will now regulate the hiring procedure?

KATHERINE

It extends the authority of the Employment Training Administration to intervene in cases where a pattern of discrimination is indicated.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Where a "pattern of discrimination" is indicated.

The mood of the labor leaders is becoming increasingly agitated. Their visceral reaction to being accused of wrongdoing is clearly palpable. John Decker confides something into the chairman's ear.

KATHERINE

If the joint apprenticeship committee doesn't correct the problem within a reasonable time period, then the E.T.A. will cut off its funding.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Sounds to me like the end of apprenticeship in America.

KATHERINE

Well, some would call it a radical step. I myself call it law enforcement. I mean, let's face it, given the track record of--

CHAIR MARK DOLAN

Congressman, this is a chance to open up the trades to sectors of our population that are associated with the welfare rolls. Young minority men, single mothers -

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Ex-convicts, the homeless, refugees from Guatemala. Who else must we accommodate? No siree, this bill is nothing more than an attempt to reinstitute quotas. I'm having none of it, and I suspect neither will the Supreme Court.

Feeling vindicated, the labor leaders burst into APPLAUSE and a long, spirited, standing ovation. Katherine closes the report, lobs her pen down on top of it. A discouraging turn of events, but not unexpected. What's worse, she's discovered a paint stain on her panty hose. As she waits for the clamor to subside, she notices something else.

A LONE TRADESWOMAN

Squeezed between two fat union officials, she wears a denim jacket, a John Deere Hat and the white knuckles of someone just sentenced to death. Suddenly all that dull reporting has a face, and it's not Wylie Ferguson.

The clock on the wall reads a quarter to twelve.

CHAIR MARK DOLAN

Ms. Brenner, I think that about covers it. Can we go ahead and insert the report into the record now?

Katherine flips madly through the pages.

KATHERINE

Just one moment. I think perhaps a few hard numbers would underscore the problem.

CHAIR DOLAN

Okey-dokey.

KATHERINE

Consider, shall we, the case of the Plumbers, Local 9 in Philadelphia. Its current president for life is one James Dean Callahan.

In the audience, CALLAHAN, an old geezer with liver spots, snaps to attention at the mention of his name.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

In his 22-year tenure, not a single woman has completed an apprenticeship in Local 9.

The press corps lights up. Mine Sweep powers off and Microsoft Word powers on, as many nimble fingers lay into keyboards.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Then there's William Mahoney, president of the Ironworkers Local in Tallahassee. Not one. Jeremy Quinn, Sprinkler Fitters, Local 2 in Charlotte; Martin O'Shaughnessy, Cabinet Makers Local 109 in Atlanta. Grady Mulligan, Plumbers Local 16 in Sparks, and Eddie Kent, Carpenters Local 50 of San Francisco.

Eddie smiles proudly at being acknowledged for his despicable feat. As Katherine works herself into a lather, the irate GRUMBLING from the audience reaches fever pitch. Mark Dolan has his gavel in the air but can't bring himself to lower it. His aide John Decker contemplates murder.

Turning to face her detractors:

KATHERINE (CONT.)

No gentlemen, none of you can escape the inexorable zero.

The woman in the John Deere cap leaps to her feet.

TRADESWOMAN

Yeah! It's about time you creeps got busted. You don't train us at all, you buffalos.

The buffalos are on their feet. Mark pounds the gavel. FEDERAL PEACE OFFICERS storm the room and sweep the agitator away in a most uncomfortable fashion. Katherine cringes at the sight of this rough handling. But Eddie smiles, takes all the commotion in stride.

EDDIE

She's right about us, you know.

ROY

Yeah, Eddie, the President's gonna send in troops.

As the dust settles over the chamber:

CHAIR DOLAN

This seems like a good time to break for lunch. If there's no objection.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

Why, Mark, she's just getting warmed up.

CHAIR DOLAN

May I remind the ranking member of our full agenda today.

The other Democrats are already clearing out of the chambers, which settles the matter. Yates kicks back in his chair and savors the Pandora's Box he's just opened.

CONGRESSMAN YATES

I can't wait to see Act Two.

CHAIR DOLAN

This meeting is adjourned until one p.m., at which time the accused will have their chance to reply to these serious statistics.

Unappeased, the labor leaders file out like an oppressed race. Katherine's ambushed on all sides by the reporters. As they swarm with her, she manages to turn briefly and meet the chairman's questioning, if not livid gaze.

INT. BEDROOM, KATHERINE'S DUPONT CIRCLE CONDOMINIUM - NIGHT

Softly lit by an upward pointing lamp. Panning around the room, we find sedate furnishings in zen-like moderation, along with a family heirloom mahogany bureau from the 19th century. There's a large, framed UNICEF poster on the wall, a thriving fern and a nice view of Dupont Circle through the window.

Katherine lies in bed staring at her lover, who has just climaxed without her. It's the honorable Mark Dolan.

KATHERINE

I thought you were angry with me.

MARK

I was.

KATHERINE

If it wasn't for that damned woman's stress leave, none of this would have happened. I mean, you'd think they would have pulled someone out of the bullpen, instead of calling us out of the blue. It's strange.

MARK

Don't worry about it.

He climbs out of bed and heads for the bathroom.

KATHERINE

Not that I minded. Well, maybe I minded a little.

BATHROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The room's steamy after a shower as Mark opens the medicine cabinet to put away his razor. A pill container on the shelf piques his curiosity, so he reads the label.

KITCHEN BAR

Katherine's feasting on a huge green salad and surfing on her laptop when he rejoins her, re-dressed in his suit. There's an open bottle of wine on the counter.

KATHERINE

Try some. It's organic.

He buttons loops his tie instead and glances at the front page of the *Washington Post*.

KATHERINE (CONT.)

Farm bill passed the senate. Two hundred billion in subsidies.

MARK

For the people who work the land.

KATHERINE

Hard to picture investment bankers toting rakes out to the corn fields.

While Mark returns to the bedroom to get the rest of his things, Katherine brings up the sub-committee website.

CLOSE ON LAPTOP SCREEN

We glimpse her testimony at the hearing in snatches of digital bytes. The video freezes every few seconds.

MARK (O.S.)

Did you find my blue swim trunks?

KATHERINE

They're not back from the laundry.

When the video stream reaches the point of her tirade, Katherine slams the laptop shut, annoyed with herself. Mark steps back in and she trails him through the living room to the front door.

MARK

You get your mortgage payment in?

KATHERINE

I had to borrow money again.

MARK

If it's any consolation, you're due for a raise next month.

KATHERINE

You could give me John's job.

MARK

He doesn't like you, either.

Katherine slips ahead of him and blocks the door.

KATHERINE

So what did you mean before when you said not to worry about it? I mean, the bill. We're going ahead with it, aren't we?

MARK

Hank and I are thinking of tabling it for awhile. That's confidential, by the way.

KATHERINE

You're not serious.

MARK

After your Bobby Kennedy routine,  
the allies are pulling back their  
tanks.

KATHERINE

So what if the unions get their  
come-uppance. What's the big  
deal?

MARK

Five hundred million in PAC money  
in the next election cycle.  
That's the big deal.

KATHERINE

What are they going to do, give it  
to the Green Party?

He concedes the point, kisses her goodbye.

MARK

Long day.

KATHERINE

Yeah, it was rough, wasn't it?  
What's going on, Mark?

MARK

I need those trunks. And don't  
forget that report on the  
immigration thing. I have  
Government Ops on Wednesday.

KATHERINE

Alright. See you later.  
(After the door closes:)  
Long night.