

## Chapter Four

### *“I Know There Are Stories Out There About Me”: Dark Muse*

*“I want to tell you about the most important lesson I ever learned. No matter how hard we try to struggle against our true natures, against what we really are, the most basic desires always triumph in the end. If I had allowed myself to accept that back then, well, none of this would have happened and no one would have gotten hurt. But when does life ever turn out the way it’s supposed to? Welcome to the real world.”*

–“Kevin,” *Kings of Hollywood*, 2001<sup>1</sup>

*“You’ve never seen his other side. Maybe no one else has. Hell, maybe even the very idea that there could actually be a decent human being in there somewhere is just another fantasy of mine. But I can’t help the way I feel... What if he wakes up and there’s no one—no one here? He’s been alone for so long.”*

–“Brandon,” *Kings of Hollywood*, 2001<sup>2</sup>

“No dear, I’m working.” The actor, looking slightly dishevelled from a long morning of rehearsals, glanced up from his pile of papers and briefly met my gaze. On 6 June 2004, I had travelled to London from my home in Devon to attend the inaugural 24 Hour Plays gala at the Old Vic, in which a group of actors, technicians and writers came together to create, rehearse and then perform a series of plays in just 24 hours. Spacey’s stellar status had encouraged a number of well-known actors and actresses to participate, including Brian Cox, Bill Paterson, Jim Broadbent and Rosamund Pike.<sup>3</sup>

Arriving at Waterloo Station in the early afternoon, I met up with two old pals from school and we were looking for a good place to have a few drinks before I returned to my hotel to get ready for the evening gala. My friend Gemma, noticing that the door that led down to the Pit Bar was open, descended the stairs to investigate, before emerging white-faced a few moments later to exclaim “*Kevin Spacey* just told me they weren’t open yet!”

“Go down and speak to him,” Gemma urged. And why not? What fan wouldn’t jump at the chance to snatch a few private moments with their idol? To me, however, our “relationship” was slightly more complex even then. A year earlier, I had written a novel, *King of Hollywood*, a pseudo-biography about the life of Danny Spain (née Gibson), an enigmatic—and closeted—Hollywood actor.

In creating the character, I had used many details from Kevin Spacey’s childhood—at least, his childhood as he had portrayed it to the media—as well as other bits of information and rumours about him that were circulating the Internet at the time. Not wishing to conceal this from Spacey, I had sent regular letters to the Old Vic detailing how the project was going and had also given him half the proceeds from the book’s royalty sales via a series of cheques made payable to the Old Vic Theatre Trust charity.<sup>4</sup>

The gala also took place only six weeks after brother Randy’s bombshell interview with *The Mail on Sunday* revealing their father’s abusive character and Nazi connections. After reading the article, I had called Randy on the phone and subsequently had several long conversations with him about his estranged sibling. It is hard not to warm to the elder Fowler brother, who despite his flamboyant appearance<sup>5</sup> is well-spoken, considerate, and has an endearing childlike quality<sup>6</sup> that an autistic person like myself (I have Asperger’s Syndrome) can relate to. While Kevin always seems to have a frosty aura surrounding him, Randy—whose house, like mine, is filled with toys, fish and felines—is friendly and approachable.

On the way down to the Pit Bar, I had so many questions I wanted to ask Kevin. Did he know about *King of Hollywood*? Had he read it? What did he think of it? Was he flattered to be chosen as my Muse, or offended? How did he feel about me befriending his brother? Did he still care about Randy? Did he know how much Randy still cared about him?

So now was my chance. He was sitting at a trestle table by the bottom of the stairs, a Starbucks coffee cup and the play scripts in front of him, and a security man on either side. Otherwise, the bar was deserted. “Hi Kevin, can I talk to you?” I remember saying. “No dear, I’m working,” he said in that detached, ironic voice I had heard so many times on screen. One of the security men got up and moved towards me. “I was talking to your brother Randy, he’d really like you to call him,” I added, wondering if this would have any impact. “That’s nice, but I’m working,” he replied, turning away as his security man nudged me back up the stairs.

So that was my first meeting with Kevin Spacey, the man who had inspired my first novel. There would be many more such encounters over the next few years, as I stood in the autograph queue outside the theatre after one of his powerhouse performances waiting to exchange a few words with my Muse, sometimes bringing an affectionate letter or a birthday card with me from Randy. But that brief exchange in the summer of 2004 is the one I remember most clearly. And he never called me “dear” again.

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Kevin Spacey first entered my orbit in 1988, when he played the wildly unstable crime boss Mel Proffitt in the TV series *Wiseguy*. This role, however, did not open many doors in Hollywood for the actor, and I don’t remember seeing him on screen again until 1995, when I went with a group of university friends to a showing of *Seven* at a cinema in Liverpool. After this, Spacey popped up several times in some of my favourite movies—such as *L.A. Confidential*, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and *The Negotiator*, with the presence of his name in the cast list usually guaranteeing a good production. It took a late night TV screening of *Outbreak* in 2000, though, for me to really become interested in Spacey and to want to learn more about the man behind the carefully-crafted celluloid image.

And the more I discovered about Kevin, the more I came to feel that this highly-intelligent, enigmatic man—who would happily perform impromptu impressions or a tap dance for an enthralled audience, yet clammed up immediately when asked about his “personal” life—would be a good starting-point for a character in a screenplay or novel. Two things stood out particularly. First, the idea that being closeted would create a degree of self-loathing in an actor that would make for some brilliantly intense performances to the detriment of his emotional well-being, and second, that having to be so “discreet” in your choice of sexual partners would inevitably lead to some dangerous encounters. I later dubbed my writing “fan faction” (“fan-fac”)—fan fiction (“fan-fic”),<sup>7</sup> with a bit of truth mixed in.

My first Spacey-inspired work was a screenplay entitled *Kings of Hollywood* that I produced as part of an evening class in creative writing at Exeter University in late 2001. This tells the tale of Brandon, a young man of 22, who travels from his home in Iowa to Los Angeles in the hope of becoming an actor and soon becomes involved with “Kevin” (I wasn’t subtle!), a “short, handsome, intense man of 40.”<sup>8</sup>

Initially amused by Brandon’s naiveté (invited to his lavish home for an “audition,” Brandon asks the older actor for an autograph), Kevin soon makes it clear that a line-reading is the last thing on his mind:

BRANDON

So, would you like me to read for you?

*Kevin turns around to face him again.*

KEVIN (*lazily*)

What?

*Brandon holds up the script.*

BRANDON  
From the script?

KEVIN  
Why would I want you to do that?

BRANDON  
Well, how else are you going to tell whether I'm right for the part?

*Kevin smiles, Cheshire Cat like, a characteristic gesture that will soon become familiar to Brandon.*

KEVIN  
Ah, yes, the part. Well, that all depends on what happens in the next few minutes, doesn't it? I wanted to make sure that you understood that, because it's very important at this stage that we understand each other.

BRANDON  
Uh, OK.

KEVIN  
Good. You wanna get down on the floor?

BRANDON  
Sorry, what?

*Kevin starts to undo his pants.*

KEVIN  
You heard what I said. Get down on the floor and suck me off.<sup>9</sup>

A Hollywood cliché to be sure, the “vertical casting couch” nevertheless may have been a resource familiar to Spacey, as musician Mike Skinner noted after turning down an invitation to “come and see me backstage” from a bathrobe-clad Kevin at the Old Vic:

“Imagine you're in a Winnebago and you're an aspiring actor. You are looking to do your Shakespeare thing on the big screen and Kevin Spacey is your director, or the lead actor. Your agent's got you this sweet gig in a fucking blockbuster and you're on Hampstead Heath and you're in your thing.

They've got the ARRI's [film lights] set up, they've got the HMI's there and they're like 'We're ready for you now Dave' and Kevin Spacey goes 'now suck my cock.' I think if I was an aspiring actor and I had to shag someone, I think that would probably scar me.”<sup>10</sup>

Military advisor Mark Ebenhoch, who worked on Spacey's 1995 movie *Outbreak*, revealed in November 2017 that Kevin was constantly surrounded by a group of young male “assistants” whom some on set referred to as his “harem.” Ebenhoch—who is gay, but was himself closeted at the time—stated that one day after the crew's lunch break, an assistant approached him and asked him to come back to Spacey's trailer. “They asked [me] flat out to engage in a sexual act. It was enough to stun me. It blew me away,” he said. Ebenhoch—then

aged 35—did not remember the exact words the assistant used, but recalled the offer was “more than just ‘He’d like to meet you or get to know you.’”<sup>11</sup>

This “Kevin” shares Spacey’s penchant for self-denial, telling Brandon that “just ’cause I fucked you [doesn’t] make me gay...Did I bring you flowers, or send you sappy emails, or take you home to meet my mother? Of course not. I’m not one of *them*.”<sup>12</sup> When I showed my tutor the screenplay—without mentioning who had inspired it—she noted that “Kevin” reminded her of Spacey’s *L.A. Confidential* character: the showy but tormented (and possibly closeted) Hollywood detective Jack Vincennes.

Spacey’s own struggle to conceal his sexual identity was reflected in his first overtly-gay screen role, 1997’s *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, of which he said of his real-life character:

“The popular conception of Jim Williams in Savannah was that he was a sinewy, sinister, closeted, tortured homosexual into rough trade. In my research, I found a very different [person]. He was a southern gentleman. He was very at ease with his sexuality. He was *not* hidden, and I do not play him that way.”<sup>13</sup>

Clearly Spacey felt more secure playing an “out” gay man than one still imprisoned in the closet: the latter option too uncomfortably close to reality, perhaps. As *Vanity Fair*’s Richard Lawson tweeted in response to the Rapp scandal (expressing some sympathy for the fallen actor whilst still acknowledging the severity of his actions): “The psychology of the closet is dark and cruel and self-punishing. That Spacey has dwelt in that for years is sad. But 14 is 14.” David Thomson conveyed a similar sentiment in his 2019 book on the origins of celluloid desire, *Sleeping With Strangers*:

“If you now disapprove of Kevin Spacey (born in 1959) remember that he was a kid in love with acting who felt he had to bury his sexual identity to get work. He needed to chase that inner self out of sight. So some gays his age went into hiding. For a time he was heroic, then he became powerful—a grave plight in America. Some had it much harder.”<sup>14</sup>

The mental pressures of such a life have clearly taken their toll on the fictional Kevin too. He warns Brandon that “I never *ever* let personal feelings get in the way of my work. Now, there’s sex, and then there’s what people in the world outside this one foolishly like to call “love,” and they’re two very different things...It’s not pretty, but it’s the only way I know. Comes with the territory. Survival of the most emotionally detached.”<sup>15</sup>

As their liaison progresses, Brandon asks Kevin if he ever gets tired of “trying to be something that you’re not” and receives this emotive response:

KEVIN

You know what the secret to acting is, kid? Well there ain’t one. You just gotta pretend to be someone else for ninety minutes. That’s it. Simple. But you wanna be a *great* actor, you gotta—well, you gotta actually become someone else sometimes. I gave up pretending a long time ago. Whatever you see now is what I am. A survivor.

Look, I’ll make it real simple. Once you got your name up there on the big screen, no one can tear it down again, OK? Even if the flick bombs, there’s always ancillary. No way you can lose. But you have to really want it, you have to make sacrifices if you want to succeed, and let me tell you now that “love,” or pretty much any significant kind of relationship, is gonna have to be the first thing to go.

Can you even imagine what it is like to be at war with yourself from the moment you first open your eyes in the morning, to have to fight every sensation and instinct in your body just so's you can come home to an empty house, to go to sleep every night alone next to a pillow soaked by your tears, knowing you'll have to do it all again the next day and every day after that for the rest of your life? Could you live like this, Brandon? Could you? Because if you want to make it big in this town, then that's the way it has to be. You can't cut a deal on this one. Ever.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, Kevin Spacey is known for subsuming his “true” personality within the roles he plays. *L.A. Confidential* author James Ellroy once observed of Spacey that “There is something amorphous about the guy...there's a mask that's up when you meet him personally, and I imagine that this helps him when he immerses himself in a character.”<sup>17</sup> Interviewing Kevin in 2003, Mariella Frostrup noted: “He's often quoted as saying that when he discovered acting, he finally learnt how to be himself. I suspect the reverse is true, that in acting he found a way of never having to be himself.”<sup>18</sup>

In 2004, Randy described his brother as “an empty vessel” who had “wrapped himself in an emotional bubble”<sup>19</sup> to avoid the beatings their brutal father often administered to his children. In 2017, he added: “[Kevin] was a natural on stage. He loved the attention. He loved playing at being someone else. Once he started acting he realised the power he had, it transformed him. He created the character of Kevin Spacey but it masked a monster.”<sup>20</sup>

*Kings of Hollywood's* Kevin's eventual coming-out, like Spacey's, is motivated more by circumstance than by choice. After Brandon is tricked by a trashy tabloid reporter into revealing the details of his life with the older actor (the exposé is titled “QUEEN OF HOLLYWOOD?”), Kevin is ordered by his agent, Marshall, to give the youth up. “You don't have any—well, *personal* feelings for this kid, do you?” he anxiously inquires of his client. Closet door firmly bolted, Kevin reassures him that “You know me—I could never give that much of myself to another person. All pleasure is strictly business, right?”<sup>21</sup>

When Brandon tries to make amends—and uses the dreaded “L” word—Kevin throws him out of his house, calling him “a ridiculous little extra.”<sup>22</sup> The younger actor subsequently finds his own career taking off, while Kevin attempts to find solace with a “MAW” (“Model, Actress, Whatever”) he meets in a bar. When she reveals that she was sent by the viperous Marshall to try to seduce him, and asks “Is it really so hard to be heterosexual?” Kevin is compelled to admit the depth of his hitherto-unacknowledged feelings for Brandon. “You know what the funny thing is? I mean, it's only acting, I've done it a thousand times before, up there on the screen,” he says. “But it just doesn't seem real any more. I've finally had enough of playing the straight man.”<sup>23</sup>

The planned reunion with his young lover, however, doesn't quite go to plan. Kevin's ex Michael, who he abandoned fifteen years earlier when he moved to Hollywood, unexpectedly turns up at his home, armed and seeking revenge. Looking around Kevin's palatial domicile, he observes: “This is a *nice* place. Real nice. I'll bet it's seen some pretty sweet pieces of candy passin' through. Kinda—cold though. Nothin' that a wife and a coupla rugrats wouldn't fix—but I guess you couldn't pretend *that* much.”<sup>24</sup>

Pursuing a reconciliation of his own, Brandon arrives shortly afterwards to find that the maniacal Michael has shot Kevin then turned the gun on himself. “Nothing is ever real in this town,” sobs the injured actor, recalling his carefree pre-fame days. “In a little while, I'm—I'm—gonna wake up and I'll be back home—I'll be twenty five again—God, I was happy then.”<sup>25</sup> While Michael dies, Kevin survives, paralysed from the waist down by Michael's bullet. In the closing pages of the screenplay, a sombre Kevin, Brandon—now his “official” boyfriend—by his side, delivers an *American Beauty*-style homily at Michael's graveside:

KEVIN (V.O.)

So there you have it. That's my story. You wanna hear the worst part? I still can't say for sure whether I would have made this decision if it hadn't been forced upon me. I guess some things never change. But at least I know now that if you have to spend your whole life in darkness to get what you think you want, then it's better to give it all up and come into the light. Maybe then you'll find what you're really searching for, because in reality, there are no perfect takes.

If none of this makes any sense to you, then you can probably count yourself among the lucky ones. As for the rest of us, well, I guess we'll just have to go on waiting—and hoping—for whatever it is that finally gives us the power to be free.<sup>26</sup>

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By 2002, when I was looking for inspiration for my novel *King of Hollywood*, I was ready to explore another facet of Kevin Spacey's character: his fractious relationship with his father. As he told Amy Raphael of *Esquire UK* in an interview in March of that year:

“By the time I was 14, I had changed school about 10 times. I was always the new kid on the block. It was great training for me as an actor, but it was terrifying, it was lonely, it was scary. To always have to make new friends...because my dad was unemployed, we lost the lease on places and we had to move. So there was this upheaval all the time...There were times I was *so* angry with my father for moving us around. I couldn't have done better in his shoes, I suppose...But I remember being very angry nonetheless, and  *fucking* pissed off that we were going to move the next day and I was never going to see my new best friend again.”<sup>27</sup>

At the time, the only information I had about Spacey's father was Kevin's portrait of him as a distant, strict, but basically decent man who seemed unable to hold down a job or support his family. Danny Spain's father, John Gibson, is a struggling ad man rather than a technical writer, who (like Geoff Fowler, who relocated his family from New Jersey to California in 1961) moves his clan to the Los Angeles area in search of work when Danny is a pre-schooler, thereafter “drifting from suburb to suburb in search of the security that never came.”<sup>28</sup>

Like Spacey, Danny is the youngest of three children, with an elder brother and sister.<sup>29</sup> Both were born in 1959, Spacey on 26 July and Danny on 20 December. Kevin's (apparently falsified) accounts of his childhood mishap with matches and subsequent abortive spell in military school found their way into *King of Hollywood* too: though in this version, our protagonist is sent away by his father “to straighten him out” after he catches him in a compromising position with their next-door neighbour, a man of 54 to Danny's sixteen. Danny attends the fictional Westgate Military Academy, while Spacey attended the real-life Northridge.

Danny is expelled from Westgate after getting into a knife fight with another student, which leaves him with a distinctive scar down the right side of his face. This is another characteristic I took from Spacey: the inch-long groove on his right cheek is one of his most noticeable features. Danny Lanzetta, in his article for *HuffPost*, remembered being “fascinated” by the apparent scar, “but too afraid to ask about it.”<sup>30</sup> While Kevin once playfully claimed to have received the mark “in a duel,” when I checked this with Randy, he confirmed that it was actually a skin wrinkle, a genetic quirk from the Fowler side of the family: father Geoff had them also.

After his expulsion, Danny is thrown out of the family home by his father and briefly stays with an uncle in Burbank, winning his first acting role by chance after unwittingly following his dog Bobby into an audition room and impressing the casting director with his confidence and charisma (dogs prove the “best friends” of many of my characters, as they have been for Kevin

throughout his adult life).<sup>31</sup> Kevin Spacey's first screen part was "Subway Thief" in the 1986 TV movie *Heartburn*; Danny's is "First young pickpocket in subway" on a TV cop show titled *LAPD Blues*.

Kevin's tale of near-Dickensian poverty in his early days in New York, working as his building's caretaker for a rent rebate and collecting aluminium cans to exchange for cash to buy food for himself and his dog, Slaughter,<sup>32</sup> is mirrored by Danny's even more extreme experiences with his pooch in the tenements of West Hollywood: "[Danny] slept on the floor, curling up to Bobby to keep warm. When the food was all gone he shared the animal's Kal Kans."<sup>33</sup>

Like Spacey, Danny has a mentor named "Jack" (in Spacey's case, this was Jack Lemmon, who became friendly with the actor when he played his son on Broadway in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which led to his now-infamous encounter with the young Anthony Rapp). Spacey has often referred to Lemmon as being a father figure to him, particularly after Geoff Fowler passed away in 1992.<sup>34</sup> *King of Hollywood's* Jack, a Mafioso-turned-actor who inevitably gets cast as Mob types, fills the same role in Danny's life. Like Lemmon and Spacey, the two also play father and son in a famous American play, here Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, in which it is noted of Danny that "he literally fused with the character, resentful son of an ambitious, failing father."<sup>35</sup>

Spacey related in 2001 that his last conversations with his father, when Geoff lay in the intensive care unit with a tracheotomy tube that restricted his speech, were cathartic: "There were a lot of things that I said [over] the course of that couple of weeks that I don't think I could've ever said in any other circumstance. But by the end, we'd said a lot of things to each other. I think by the end there was an understanding and a reconciliation that we'd never experienced before."<sup>36</sup> Danny has the opposite experience with the dying John, who, on his deathbed, begs his son's forgiveness for shooting his elderly pet dog dead many decades earlier: Danny refuses, shouts an obscenity at his father, and storms out of the room.

*King of Hollywood* is dedicated to "Topanga Boy"—Kevin's unknown companion<sup>37</sup> in the Oakland Memorial Park encounter of March 2000—and "Thomas—the Quietest American."<sup>38</sup> This was an allusion to Graham Greene's 1955 novel *The Quiet American*, whose protagonist, a journalist, is named Thomas Fowler. Spacey's father Thomas Geoffrey Fowler, as a wannabe author who never saw his words in print, was thus "the Quietest American."

I chose to dedicate the book to him (using his first given name, as he had always been referred to by Spacey as "Thomas" rather than "Geoff")<sup>39</sup> as an "apology" of sorts for making Danny's father such a swine: as I later learned, this was hardly necessary, since the real-life crimes of Geoff Fowler far exceed the callous actions of John Gibson. When Danny's live-in partner (another Michael, this one a lawyer and *Oprah* fan), suggests that he may be repressing memories of being abused by his father, Danny responds sadly: "It was the abuse of indifference...I can't even remember him hugging me, ever...if someone touches you, even if it hurts, doesn't it show that there's something there, some love, somewhere?"<sup>40</sup>

A friend of Danny summarises John as "more sad than cruel, with the resigned frustration of a man who had found the winning lottery ticket one day after it expired. A man who would cover his furniture in plastic and forbid his children to touch it, rendering it respectable but purposeless. Much like himself."<sup>41</sup> The reference to furniture covered in plastic was another Spacey allusion. In 2002, he noted of the décor of one of his childhood homes:

"There was a time when my parents actually had plastic on the fucking *furniture*...I would have huge arguments with my dad, asking him why. He'd say it was to keep the sofa clean, but I'd always want to know why he couldn't clean it after someone had sat on it. I was like, 'How can we ask anyone over and ask them to sit on *plastic*?'"<sup>42</sup>

Their frequent relocation as children has left both Kevin and Danny with a compulsion to rearrange their living spaces—as Kevin related in 1999 with reference to his apartment, "I can't

stop moving furniture, and I do it alone at 3 in the morning...I have a whole process,”<sup>43</sup> while Danny’s analyst tells him that his “creative rearrangement” of a hotel suite is due to “reverse OCD...ees caused by ze desperate urge to symbolically recreate ze chaos und disorder of your childhood.” “Nah,” Danny responds. “I was just bored.”<sup>44</sup>

Danny has a much better relationship with his mother than his father, recalling of his early childhood intrusions into his parents’ bedroom that “the infuriated John had spent many a cold night uncomfortably squashed up on the couch, while the tiny conqueror luxuriated in the comfort of his mother’s embrace.”<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Spacey has spoken many times of his close bond with Kathleen, such as this startlingly candid disclosure to *Maxim* magazine in 2001:

“If you run across the perfume that your mother used, that’s a comforting smell. I remember putting my head in my mother’s lap when I was young and she used to scratch my head—and I can literally go right back if I smell that particular perfume. It’s very comforting, because there was something incredibly secure about my mother scratching my head, making me feel connected to her.”<sup>46</sup>

Danny’s big celluloid break comes in the movie *Skrewed*, which, like *The Usual Suspects*, is lauded by critics as “a gritty, stylish, intricately plotted thriller in the Tarantino vein.” His character, Keenan, is described as “a twitchy psychopath with an outer vulnerability but a resilient mind, the kind of role that would have been given to Dustin Hoffman fifteen years earlier”<sup>47</sup>: this précis would fit Spacey’s *Suspects* role as the similarly-named “Keyser” fairly well too. As Danny’s fame grows with the success of *Skrewed*, he finds the media beginning to take an interest in his personal life:

““You’re not a star ’til people care who you sleep with,” runs the old adage, and it was never truer than in the Net-hungry Hollywood of the 1990’s. And, if you were a leading man with a taste in blond Adonises many years your junior, sooner or later the tabloid vampires would descend to pick you dry.”<sup>48</sup>

Initially, Danny responds with “no comment” when asked why, at 36, he is still nominally single. “I don’t feel obliged to let the world in,” he adds. “People can think whatever they like...it really doesn’t bother me what conclusions they draw.”<sup>49</sup> The 38-year-old Kevin Spacey reacted similarly to *Esquire*’s baiting in 1997, when Tom Junod told him that even his own mother had heard “the gay rumours” about the actor:

“I can’t imagine feeling the need to jump up and say, ‘I’m not one of them.’ If anyone wants to think that, they’re absolutely free to think that. I have no interest in confirming or denying that at *all*. It’s just of no interest to me. So *what?*”<sup>50</sup>

However, coveting a Best Actor Academy Award, and aware—as Spacey surely was—that no openly gay man had ever won one, Danny ruthlessly dumps the stunned Michael and accepts his publicist Sheila’s suggestion to pair him up with a “beard.” In a nod to Spacey’s attempts to portray himself as a playboy in *Playboy* and his subsequent high-profile public appearances with a string of glamorous “dates” (which were no doubt arranged by his own publicist Staci Wolfe), “the previously-reclusive Danny suddenly started showing up at parties and award shows all over town with a six-foot blonde Swedish model Crazy-Glued to his arm.”<sup>51</sup> He duly wins the Oscar, and, like Kevin, who thanked Kathleen in his 1996 acceptance speech for taking him to acting classes, dedicates it to his mother, “for always believing in me.”<sup>52</sup>

Danny also uses his Oscar oration as a way to vent his fury at his deceased father, calling him an “ignorant fucking spineless fucking twisted fucking parasitic bastard!”<sup>53</sup> Spacey expressed similar anger towards Geoff in 2003, remembering that after one displacement too many as a

child, “for several days, I hated my father so much. I hated him for making us move. I hated him for making me go through this fucking ritual of having to start all over again and be the new kid and find a way in and get beaten up.”<sup>54</sup>

Shortly after his Oscar win, Danny has an altercation with a gay journalist, Thomas Finster, who, like *The Village Voice*'s Michael Musto with Spacey (he referred to Kevin's *American Beauty* Oscar offensive as his “I'm just wild about vagina' campaign”)<sup>55</sup> fills his column in Los Angeles paper *Los Homos* with snarky references to Danny's “male encounters.” Finster attacks Danny for his perceived cowardice in hiding in the closet, telling him that “I happen to think that your creeping around is an insult to all the gay people of this city who are brave enough to be open about who they are.”

Danny's desire to protect his “straight” image reveals his own internalised homophobia. He rejects Finster's offer to come out in a *Los Homos* exclusive, sneering to the journalist: “Only fags read your paper. You think I give a shit what fags think of me?”<sup>56</sup> Kevin Spacey has been savvy enough not to express such anti-gay sentiments in public. However, when he appeared in an off-off-Broadway play in 1982 and a male member of the cast made a drunken pass at co-star Greg Martin, the young Spacey apparently told Martin: “That's cool. One word of advice, though. If I were you, I'd watch my back in the dressing room.”<sup>57</sup> To paraphrase Shakespeare, the gentleman doth protest too much, methinks.

In the updated edition of his book on queer culture in film, *Open Secret*, David Ehrenstein referenced a *New York Daily News* article from 1999 which noted that Kevin Spacey—despite the presence of a female “date”—had been spotted at a VH-1 awards event “getting to know those cute guys in N'Sync, who livened up the theater's back row with a popcorn fight.”<sup>58</sup> After his fracas with Finster, a tipsy Danny has a similar encounter with boy band B-Real at an after-show music award party:

“[His date] held onto Danny's attentions for as long as she could, but with all those buffed boy bands around she really didn't stand much of a chance... [Danny] looked around the auditorium for signs of entertainment. He was certainly spoiled for choice. His eyes alighted on five young lads near the back of the room, who were shouting and throwing popcorn at one another. He watched in wonderment that manufactured youth could be so carefree, and wished for a moment that he had a teenage niece so he would have some idea of who the hell they were.”<sup>59</sup>

In Danny's case, this meeting ends in humiliation when he makes a pass at one of the youths, who calls him a “sick old freak who gets his kicks by taking advantage of people. Trying to seduce boys half your age! You should be locked up!”<sup>60</sup> In a more direct allusion to Kevin, another member of the band mistakenly refers to the actor as “Danny Spacey.”<sup>61</sup>

Resolving to stay away from twinks with entertainment industry connections in the future, Danny finds his carnal desires satisfied by a young prostitute, Max, who is introduced to him by his lecherously camp neighbour, Nathan Fowler. Nathan, in a play on words using Kevin's “real” surname, likes to tell potential conquests: “You know what a fowler does? Hunts pretty birdies. So what does that make me? A *chickenhawk*, darling.”<sup>62</sup>

Having spent most of his career treating “his lovers as hustlers,”<sup>63</sup> Danny makes the—as it turns out, fatal—mistake of treating a hustler like a lover. Digging deep into Danny's neuroses, Max (in a nod to *Kings of Hollywood*'s Kevin) makes the following appraisal of what he has learnt about the almost-40-year-old bachelor after a night of watching his tormented sleep:

“That you have nightmares. Nightmares that don't end when you wake up. That you're fighting your own little private war with yourself, all day, every day, that you think you've convinced the rest of the world you're cool but you can't quite convince the one person who really matters. That your real fear is that your life is essentially meaningless because

you've never allow anyone to share in it fully, and that you'll wake up one morning to discover you've turned into your father, who never valued anything above success."<sup>64</sup>

Like Danny, who is horrified by the prospect that he could be "John Gibson in queer packaging,"<sup>65</sup> Kevin Spacey has also stated that the desire to avoid his father's professional fate has had a strong impact on his career. As he told *The Guardian's* William Leith in 2002, "What drove me was a determination to not have the frustration in life that my father experienced, and also to make him quite proud, to make him relax, and to make him realise that it was okay, that everything was going to be fine."<sup>66</sup> In 2015, discussing the parallels between his *House of Cards* character Frank Underwood's fractured bond with his father and his own relationship with Geoff, he said: "I think there's no doubt that my father's difficulty in having a fully successful life in the business that he was in absolutely motivated me to try to do better."<sup>67</sup>

At what becomes their final meeting, Danny dramatically declares his love for Max, who asks him to choose between his Oscar and their relationship. When the actor hesitates, Max hits Danny with the trophy: he bangs his head on the side of the mantelpiece as he falls, causing a mortal injury. The "anti-Hollywood" ending to the saga of Danny Spain had an eerie echo a year after the book was published, when Kevin Spacey received an (albeit less serious) head wound during his mysterious early morning walk in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, from what many assumed to be a punch from an unwilling sexual target.

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<sup>1</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.141.

<sup>3</sup> Also in attendance were a number of rising young actors, including future stars Benedict Cumberbatch and Eddie Redmayne.

<sup>4</sup> I eventually stopped sending the cheques when they stopped being cashed, over a year later.

<sup>5</sup> Randy, a former musician often incorrectly described by the Press as "a Rod Stewart impersonator" (facially, he more closely resembles Ronnie Wood) ran a limo company named "Rod's Limos" in Boise, Idaho until 2015, and still dresses the part: gelled hair, bespoke suits in bright colours, and a ring on every finger.

<sup>6</sup> This can perhaps be attributed to the abuse Randy suffered as a youth. As Jack Ewing notes in his unpublished biography of the elder Fowler brother, as a result of his father's actions he went from pre-adolescence to adulthood overnight, missing out on the usual transition period. See Ewing, Jack, *Spacey's Brother*, p. 440.

<sup>7</sup> Fan fiction, a term used to denote unauthorised works of fiction about characters from an original work produced by someone other than their actual creator, has been extended to cover writings about (predominantly homosexual) couplings between real people, who are usually heterosexual in real life (this is also known as "real person slash.")

<sup>8</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, pp.17-18.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Reilly, Nick. 28 November 2017. "Mike Skinner reveals how a bathrobe-clad Kevin Spacey invited him backstage at the Old Vic," *NME*. Skinner (who performs in the band The Streets) identifies as asexual, like myself.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Vary, Adam B., Cheung, Susan, and Levy, Dana. 3 November 2017. "A Pattern Of Abuse: How Kevin Spacey Used The Closet To Silence His Victims," *BuzzFeed News*.

<sup>12</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.90.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Junod, Tom. October 1997. "Kevin Spacey Has a Secret," *Esquire Magazine*. Jim Williams (1931-90), a Savannah antiques dealer, was accused of murdering a young male employee who was also his lover: he was eventually acquitted of the crime after four separate trials but died of apparent heart failure shortly afterwards.

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- <sup>14</sup> Thomson, David. *Sleeping With Strangers*, p.307.
- <sup>15</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.69.
- <sup>16</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, pp.71-73.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in unknown. 3 September 1997. “‘Confidential’ commentary,” *Spliced*.
- <sup>18</sup> Frostrup, Mariella. 2 March 2003. “Anybody worth their salt feels like a fake most of the time,” *The Observer*.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Churcher, Sharon. 25 April 2004. “Kevin Spacey’s father was a sexual monster,” *The Mail on Sunday*.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Graham, Caroline. 5 November 2017. “Price of betrayal...and deviancy,” *The Mail on Sunday*.
- <sup>21</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.85.
- <sup>22</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.92.
- <sup>23</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.122.
- <sup>24</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.128.
- <sup>25</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, p.139.
- <sup>26</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *Kings of Hollywood*, pp.152-153. Although Kevin’s final voiceover has some similarities to Spacey’s Lester Burnham’s in *American Beauty* (“You have no idea what I’m talking about, I’m sure. But don’t worry...you will someday”), this monologue was actually written before I had seen the film.
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in Raphael, Amy. March 2002. “Kevin Spacey, Comic Genius,” *Esquire UK*.
- <sup>28</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.13.
- <sup>29</sup> However, Danny’s siblings John Junior and Karen are in no way based on Spacey’s own brother and sister, who I knew very little about when I wrote *King of Hollywood*. John Junior (who dubs his youngest sibling “Space Cadet”), later has a son called “Kevin”—named by the young Danny—who as a teenager unsuccessfully attempts to seduce his famous uncle.
- <sup>30</sup> Lanzetta, Danny. 3 November 2017. “What Kevin Spacey Did To Me When I Was 13, And What He Didn’t Do,” *HuffPost*.
- <sup>31</sup> As a child, however, Spacey did not have any pets: it seems unlikely that Geoff Fowler (who preferred cats) would have allowed the boy to get a dog.
- <sup>32</sup> For Kevin’s account, see Fleming, Michael. October 1999. “Playboy Interview: Kevin Spacey,” *Playboy Magazine*; White, Lesley. 19 December 1999. “Spacey’s Odyssey,” *The Sunday Times Magazine*.
- <sup>33</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.55.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for example, Fischer, Paul. 20 October 2001. “The Alien World Of Kevin Spacey,” *Film Monthly*; Raphael, Amy. March 2002. “Kevin Spacey, Comic Genius,” *Esquire UK*; Armstrong, Stephen. 30 March 2008. “Why Kevin Spacey has never been happier,” *The Sunday Times*.
- <sup>35</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.86. Spacey himself had appeared in a performance of *All My Sons* when he was in high school in Los Angeles. He later said of the experience that “It was the first time that I realized I had an effect on people. It was puzzling, confusing, slightly frightening, and it was liberating...all those imaginary games that you played with your friends in the neighborhood—I didn’t have to put those games away. I just kept playing them onstage.” Quoted in Rader, Dotson. 24 October 1999. “A Glimpse of How Beautiful Life Can Be,” *Parade*.
- <sup>36</sup> Quoted in Welch, Mike. Fall/Winter 2001/02. “Hide and Seek with Kevin Spacey,” *Maxim*.
- <sup>37</sup> The identity of the young man remains unknown to this day. When the *Star* managed to track him down shortly after the encounter with Spacey in the park, he admitted that he knew the actor, but denied he was Kevin’s lover and refused to answer any questions about their relationship. See Trotter, J K. 1 December 2014. “Remember when Kevin Spacey Groped a Male Model in Public For 2 Hours?” *Gawker*.
- <sup>38</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.v.

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- <sup>39</sup> Thomas Geoffrey was known as “Tom” or “Tommy” during childhood, but started using his middle name from late adolescence. See Ewing, Jack. *Spacey’s Brother*, p.29.
- <sup>40</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.124.
- <sup>41</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.141.
- <sup>42</sup> Quoted in Raphael, Amy. March 2002. “Kevin Spacey, Comic Genius,” *Esquire UK*.
- <sup>43</sup> Quoted in de Rakoff, Sophie. March 1999. “The Nice Man Cometh,” *Paper Magazine*.
- <sup>44</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.123.
- <sup>45</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.34.
- <sup>46</sup> Quoted in Welch, Mike. Fall/Winter 2001/02. “Hide and Seek with Kevin Spacey,” *Maxim*. One major difference between Spacey and the fictional characters that he inspired is that while they often feel forced to choose between their male partners and their careers, I don’t believe this has been the case for Kevin: he does not appear to have ever had a long-term relationship with any other person besides Kathleen. Spacey’s extreme narcissism is doubtless due in no small part to the way he was raised by his mother to be the centre of the universe—her darling boy could do no wrong in her eyes. This gave him a sense of entitlement that has had a major impact on his attitudes to others and is reflected in his clumsy seduction techniques—indiscriminately grabbing the testicles of men he finds attractive like an unruly toddler let loose in a sweet shop. Several somewhat creepy photographs exist of the pair together, arms intertwined, looking more like lovers than mother and son: the sickly smile on Kevin’s face as he hangs onto both Mom and Oscar in one snap brings to mind his incestuous character Mel Proffitt in *Wiseguy*, who often looked similarly mortified when embraced by his sister Susan.
- <sup>47</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.120.
- <sup>48</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.132. While Danny likes blonds, Spacey himself appears to have a preference for dark-haired young men.
- <sup>49</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.149.
- <sup>50</sup> Quoted in Junod, Tom. October 1997. “Kevin Spacey Has a Secret,” *Esquire Magazine*.
- <sup>51</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.137.
- <sup>52</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.139.
- <sup>53</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.140.
- <sup>54</sup> Quoted in Frostrup, Mariella. 2 March 2003. “Anybody worth their salt feels like a fake most of the time,” *The Observer*.
- <sup>55</sup> Musto, Michael. 21 March 2000. “La Dolce Musto,” *The Village Voice*.
- <sup>56</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.150.
- <sup>57</sup> Quoted in Martin, Greg. *Dirty Rotten Scoundrel*, p.78.
- <sup>58</sup> Quoted in Ehrenstein, David. *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928-2000*, p.362. Justin Timberlake, the band’s lead singer, later appeared with Spacey in the dire direct-to-video drama *Edison* in 2005.
- <sup>59</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.151.
- <sup>60</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.157.
- <sup>61</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.152.
- <sup>62</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.158. “Nathan” was named after actor Nathan Lane, best known for his role as Robin Williams’s lover in the 1996 comedy film *The Birdcage*.
- <sup>63</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.175.
- <sup>64</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.179.
- <sup>65</sup> Tamblyn, Robin. *King of Hollywood*, p.180.
- <sup>66</sup> Quoted in Leith, William. 16 February 2002. “Look, Dad, top of the world,” *The Guardian*.
- <sup>67</sup> Quoted in unknown. 27 February 2015. “Kevin Spacey on House of Cards, his father—and why he couldn’t possibly comment on modern politics,” *The Radio Times*. Like Nazi Party member Geoff, the fictional Calvin Underwood has ties to white supremacist groups and once attended a Ku Klux Klan meeting.