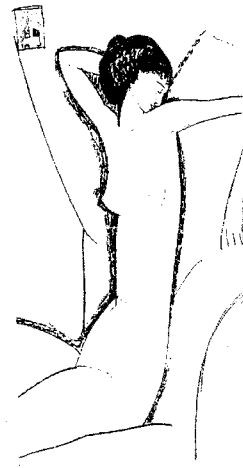


/ Who Do You Belong To?

Memoirs of a Cybersexual

Giovanna Coppola



In the winter of 2001 I had a crisis and called up my favorite astrologer, Eric Francis, in Seattle. We scheduled three sessions by telephone, in which he would decipher the planets moving in my chart, and tell me where I needed to take my life. All I had to do was tell him everything about myself and email him some poems.

"I can't believe you turned out the way you are out of all these circumstances," he told me over the phone. "You are a wild child. You have five planets in Leo. Leo Leo Leo Leo Leo. So much fire. So sexy. You must write for my website. I want you to write about self-love for the Valentine issue."

Before long I found myself sitting in front of the computer, projecting a poetic sexpot self on "Wanderlust," my monthly column for Eric's website Planetwaves. For a year I wrote about skinny dipping in Italy; imagining what the sex was like the night I was conceived; masturbation and Catholic school; my high school crush who refused to kiss me because both of us had parents who had died of cancer; imaginary friends during a lonely winter; the conflict between my body wanting a baby and my spirit wanting to be alone; and kissing my friend's sister at my favorite bar. All the stories were true, so I was writing about me, but they weren't true because I left out everything that went along with them. I left out my vulnerability, all those times when I racked my brain with 'what-have-you-done's and woke up in the middle of the night shivering, suppressing the embarrassment and the guilt.

I admit it, though. I was powerful in my stories. I was hot and sexy, a magical combination of all the best parts of myself, the bits that only last for a flitting instant in real life; I was my own impermanent sexiness frozen in time on the computer screen, and always switched on – and that's what attracted the men.

*_For a year
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If I'm the girl behind the poet behind the sexpot behind the color theorist, then you're the man behind the boy behind the construction worker... behind the TV screen.

I sat behind a screen and they sat behind a screen and we sent each other emails while wearing our pajamas and drinking tea and getting up to go to the bathroom. Who were we, where were we coming from, and were any of us different from the common voyeur watching a porno? I got emails from Eric who fantasized about having a baby with me, Steve who wanted to cheat on his wife with me, and a guy I met on an airplane who Googled my name and found my stories. He called me "naughty" and wanted to be friends with me forever. And worst off, I was my own fantasy because I wanted to be strong and desirable and a beautiful poet, someone who could project an irresistible cyber-self with no other tool than a keyboard.

"Eric Francis is a friend of mine," I told myself. A writer I greatly admired, astrologer, investigative journalist, and social commentator, he made his living doing exactly what I wanted to do. Eric Francis was a friend of the persona I had created. Or rather, Eric Francis, the persona, was a friend of the persona I had created.

All of us were living in an imaginary world and couldn't see the details of each others' ordinary lives: those insignificant moments filling up the gas tank on the way to work, moaning "hey" in the morning at the office, procrastinating over writing Christmas cards, listening to the phone ringing at 8 p.m. and knowing it's your parents. None of that mattered. All of that was forgotten as we typed fast words over a high-speed cable line to unknown presences on the other side of the computer screen.

If I'm the girl behind the poet behind the sexpot behind the color theorist behind the keyboard, then you're the man behind the boy behind the construction worker behind the pencil pusher behind the TV screen.

The images and the fantasies can only last in the imaginary world because, once they enter into real time, all of the sensibilities churn purple and dark. This is what happened when Eric came to visit. It was at night in the winter and we walked through a field as it lightly snowed. The sky was purple and I almost stepped on a dead snake lying in the grass. We stopped. I let him hold my face and I looked at him, at his graying hair, crooked nose, small chin, and tiny teeth. His longing scared me. The dead snake scared me. The purple night and the snow and the cold air and his warm hands on my face scared me.

"You are so real," he said softly, breathing in the night.

I knew he wasn't going to find the person in my stories. And he didn't, so he never talked to me again. And then Steve's wife forbade him to talk to me. And then I had to change my email address because the creep I met on the plane emailed me every day.

And all of it happened, but none of it was real. How could any of it have happened? Because I know who I am and I know what I do, how I move, what I say. I know when someone desires me. But if there are only words to my name, the image that's created in the mind ceases to

belong to me – or to the guy on the other side, or to any
of us.

*_if there are only words to my name, the
image that's created in the mind ceases to
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