



## I Met Someone

By Bruce Wagner

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*I Met Someone* is the story of Academy Award–winning actress Dusty Wilding, her wife Allegra, a long-lost daughter, and the unspeakable secret hidden beneath the glamour of their lavish, carefully calibrated celebrity life. After Allegra suffers a miscarriage, Dusty embarks on a search for the daughter she lost at age sixteen, and uncovers the answer to a question that has haunted her for decades. With masterful suspense, Bruce Wagner moves among the perspectives of his characters, revealing their individual trauma and the uncanny connections to one another's past lives. *I Met Someone* plummets the reader down a rabbit hole of the human psyche, with Wagner's remarkable insights into our collective obsession with great wealth and fame, and surprises with unimaginable plot turns and unexpected fate. Alternately tender, shocking, and poetic, this is Wagner's most captivating and affecting novel yet.

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## I Met Someone By Bruce Wagner Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #856669 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-01
- Released on: 2016-03-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"*I Met Someone* sneaks inside the palace walls to tell the story of a middle-aged actress of Meryl Streep-level renown....a shock revelation [transforms] the book into an updated Greek tragedy....The Greeks wrote their tragedies about kings and queens, and this curious novel positions the mega-famous as our modern day royalty."

—*Wall Street Journal*

"The deepening trajectory of Wagner's work is truly breathtaking; reading *I Met Someone* is like experiencing an as-yet-undiscovered prayer charting our desperate, funny, wrenching, and wholly necessary struggle to find meaning within the world and connection with each other. I was altered by it."

—Steven Soderbergh

"Funny and tragic in equal measure, Bruce Wagner tells a beautifully American story about the desperate hunt for fame and love."

—Sherman Alexie

### About the Author

Bruce Wagner is the author of *The Empty Chair*, *Dead Stars*, *Memorial*, *The Chrysanthemum Palace* (a PEN/Faulkner fiction award finalist), *Still Holding*, *I'll Let You Go*, *I'm Losing You*, and *Force Majeure*. He wrote the acclaimed miniseries *Wild Palms* (based on his graphic novel) and *Maps to the Stars*, directed by David Cronenberg. Wagner lives in Los Angeles.

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\*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof\*\*\*

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They sat in cushioned chairs at a burnished roundtable. The lighting was reverential, spiritual, evoking the mahogany jewel box temple of an Emirates airport lounge. Chet Stoddard wore his trademark silver-hinged Persols, discreetly absurd seersucker suit, and dumbass bowtie.

His head subtly lowered as he spoke in hushed, trademark reverence, a P. T. Barnum reciting showbiz psalms.

"It's 1995. You're a household word. Beloved by the filmgoing public, deeply respected by your peers. You have an Academy Award on the mantel and in the years that follow will acquire two more: one for Best Actress—your second—and a third for Best Supporting. But in 1995, Dusty Wilding makes a decision—a choice—that will cause a seismic shift, a challenge to the paradigm, virtually altering the landscape of popular and political culture. She comes out as a gay woman. Why?"

She paused. Mystery-smiled. Slowly, softly blinked. Looked downward, while forming a humble response. Everything about her was warm and direct, elegant, uncompromising.

"I just think it was a way of taking control of my life. You know, Chet, my role model was always Elizabeth Taylor. Still is! She was so brave. And when she knew something was right, Liz didn't give a hoot what the

world thought. I think—I think I wanted to have that kind of courage. And I knew in my heart what I was doing was right.”

She never gave interviews while making a movie, but Chet was an old friend who’d always given her the same respect accorded to more typical guests, movers and shakers on the world stage of politics, science, human rights. Writers and mavericks, Nobelists even. He was in L.A. for a month doing Hollywood-centric shows, and she was happy to do him the favor, even in the middle of a shoot.

“You’re one of the rare actresses who does it all”—he went on, a trademark steamroller of quantifying slavishness—“from screwball comedy to tent-pole blockbusters like *Bloodthrone* to edgy, independent film. Tell us a little about what you’re working on now.”

It was cold in the studio. Her arms were studded by gooseflesh, like the pointillist clouds of a mackerel sky.

“Well, it’s called *Sylvia & Marilyn*—”

“About the poet Sylvia Plath.”

Chet got his serious, I’ve-done-my-homework groove on.

“Yes. It’s an amazing, alternate history that takes place in 1985.”

“Directed by Bennett Miller.”

“The amazing Bennett Miller.”

“Capote, *Moneyball*. *Foxcatcher*. Had you worked with him before?”

“No! But whenever I ran into him, I was shameless. You know—I’d just kind of corner him and say, ‘We better work together . . . or else.’”

The host’s dead whore smile hung by the fire while the eyes de-camped to consult his notes. “The film takes place in 1985 but Plath died in ’63, by suicide.”

“Yes. And the film explores—Dan Futterman wrote the script and it’s brilliant—what might have happened if she had lived.”

“Her husband was Ted Hughes—”

“Also an amazing poet,” said the actress.

She was so watchable: the cascades of red hair, the vintage YSL suit, the legendary porcelain skin.

“His book *Crow* was a college favorite of mine,” said Chet, flaunting his trademark brains. “Did you do much research?”

“A fair amount. And she—she’s so amazing. I was really interested in—fascinated by the time before she became ‘Sylvia Plath.’ The years in New York when she worked for *Mademoiselle*.”

“When she was trying to make her name. Now, Hughes was a notorious womanizer. Many say that Sylvia killed herself over one of his affairs.”

“With Assia Wevill,” said Dusty, with a nod. “Assia killed herself too! And she killed the child they had together—”

“Wow.”

“—a little girl that he never acknowledged as being his own.” “What was it about Hughes?”

“He was very handsome. And a poet. A great poet . . .”

“The women were not happy campers. Was he an *homme fatale*?”

“Well, I don’t sit in judgment, Chet,” laughed Dusty. “But in our movie—spoiler alert!—Sylvia leaves him.”

“For Marilyn Monroe,” he said, with winking comeuppance. “And Ted Hughes takes his own life! Marilyn is her true love.”

“In the film.”

“In the film. Oh my God, Bennett is going to kill me! I’m going to blame it on you, Chet! You always get me talking, you’re a very bad man.” He took the compliment with a trademark grin of smarm and humblebrag. “But you know, actually they were born around the same time. I think Marilyn was a bit older than Sylvia.”

“Did the two ever meet?”

“That I don’t know. I’m sure Bennett does.”

“So something could have happened.”

“I think it’s kind of amazing to think so. That’s the brilliance of Dan’s script—its plausibility. You start to think, Did this really happen? It’s brilliant and thought-provoking, but great fun.”

“Can you tell us about the work you do for Hyacinth House?” (Coyly prefaced by the wince of a smile, to punctuate the segue.)

“I’ve been working with the foundation for almost twenty-five years.” She was glad to suddenly be talking about something real. “They’re an amazing organization that’s literally changed thousands of people’s lives. And mine as well. I think of them as family.”

The married couple slept in separate rooms. Not just to sustain eroticism but because it felt civilized and right—though when Allegra began to show, she had a craving to share a bed with her wife. One of the things that turned her on, Dusty too, was pregnancy porn. They streamed it on the BeoVision, watching two women making love and suckling each other’s milk, sometimes both in the third trimester. When Allegra wanted to branch out and watch a man join the fun, Dusty would huff and leave the room in faux disgust while Allegra giggled like a scamp. After the miscarriage, they didn’t watch those videos anymore.

Five a.m. . . .

She heard the gate open as Marta let the driver in. She spooned her lover, reaching around to caress the gravid belly with her fingers. Allegra acknowledged the touch with a small, narcotic exhalation, and the actress disengaged, bending to softly kiss the baby bump good-bye.

She showered, threw on her favorite decade-old Lululemons, and went to the kitchen. The dutiful majordomo had a mini-croissant and cappuccino waiting (in the vintage Tonight Show cup Allegra bought for her wife online) and was sweetly chastised by her employer for such unsolicited devotions. What would she do without Marta? She left the fattening croissant.

She paused before the mirror in the entrance hall, taking her first real look of the day: a fifty-three-year-old makeup-free movie morningstar, beatific and unadorned, half-astonished she'd survived, fragile and unbreakable, childlike, ancient, with lustrous, hard-core, wide-open heart—redoubtable warrior-queen and doubting heroine, personal favorite in a suite of silver gelatin images from an illuminated manuscript bound in vellum and for glory, consecrated to the coffee tables of an Annie Leibovitz Elysium. She was her mother's daughter, burdened by the miseries of that provenance, and the mother of all daughters too, exuberantly dunked in public ownership, holy terror, and joyful noise.

An abashed assassin sent by Botticelli . . .

“Morning, Jeffrey!”

He held open the door of the SUV.

“Good morning, Dusty. How was your weekend?”

“Awesome. Mellow. You do anything?”

“Took the family for a hike in Eaton Canyon.”

“Where's that?”

“Altadena?” he said. The interrogatory lilt signified a respectful smudging/diminution of the possession of knowledge that might lie outside his illustrious passenger's realm—third-generation Teamster politesse.

“That's awesome! Love Altadena. Smoggy, though.”

“A little bit, but it really wasn't too bad. Pasadena can actually be worse. We usually do Griffith Park but I like to switch it up.”

“Love Griffith Park.”

A P. A. adorned in mountaineer-lite—her airbrushed, kewpie-doll features gave her the look of an American anime—stood obediently by the trailer as Dusty alit from the Lexus.

“Hi, Samantha!”

“Hi, Dusty! How was your weekend?” “So good. And you? Get in any trouble?”

“We had a production meeting yesterday,” said the tomboy soldier, playfully wrinkling her grindstone nose.

“Well that's no fun.”

“Then we went out drinking—” she added, tossing off the hard-working, high-spirited crew’s go-to corollary with rote aplomb.

The P.A.’s walkie crackled. Came a voice from the battlefield:

“We need Dusty in thirty, for blocking.”

“In her trailer now,” replied the grunt to her headset.

While Dusty got situated, a replacement P.A. rapped on the door and entered, bearing aluminum foil-covered plates.

“One egg-white omelet with Worcestershire on the side,” he said. “And onion rings from In-N-Out.”

Dusty peeked from the bathroom, rhapsodic. “Rory, you are amaz- ing. Can you just put it on the table?”

“Absolutely.”

The replica of The Tonight Show set circa 1985 was dead-on . By coincidence that was the year of her first appearance.

The party line had it that Carson was a cold, misanthropic prick, but she never saw that side. He’d been faultlessly kind and hugely supportive of her career. He retired a few years before Dusty came out, but when she did, he sent flowers and a beautiful letter ruefully signed “the man that got away.” (They were both Gershwin fans and did a duet of the song in the last week of his show.) She always had the feeling he was “interested” but for whatever reason held back; he was a wolf and a player for real, but when they were together he was never anything less than the urbane, dapper, acerbic gent in Johnny Carson Apparel. She probably would have balled him if he’d pressed the point—she wasn’t too proud to say she had a Daddy thing (like Sylvia!). Probably she just wasn’t his type. He seemed to go for those brittle, hair-shellacked, Stepford-wife types.

The lookalike host was already behind his desk, his jovial side- kick on the couch beside him, warming up his Ed-laugh like a singer doing arpeggios. They were straight-up clones—insane and hilarious! She fucking loved this script.

“People, we are getting very close!” announced the First A.D.

The hubbub fell to a murmur. There was always reverence in the decibel drop that presaged a shot, and rank fear too.

Bennett, the director, sat in front of the monitor, in headphones. The agitated D.P., scowling in a private world of permanent aesthetic dissatisfaction, looked over his shoulder to check the director’s screen before skittering away. The script supervisor sat beside Bennett in front of his own monitor, watching YouTube on his iPad.

“All right,” said the First loudly. “Last looks!”

Patrice, Dusty’s hairdresser (they’d been together twenty-three years), did his nominal thing while a wardrobe person picked microscopic lint off her pantsuit. The makeup gal powdered the nonexistent shine on

her forehead.

Ready for picture.

Bennett called “Action.”

The Johnny pursed and twitched his lips. “Our next guest is a Pulitzer Prize winner and one of America’s most beloved poets . . . ” She flushed with off-camera butterflies, just like before real talk- show appearances. The Johnny sounded so crazy-real. Total déjà vu. “Author of *The Bell Jar* and many others, her new book is a delightful children’s story written with Shel Silverstein—*Gobbledegoo!* debuted this week at number one on the New York Times bestseller list. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the very gifted, very lovely . . . Sylvia Plath.”

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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