

Ophelia

1.

In a huge, ramshackle, Victorian house overlooking Lake Thonotosassa (thun ohta sassa) is one of Florida's oldest radio stations, WSAS. In the 1930's, it was an AM station, then in the 1960's it went over to FM. Also, in the 1960's, there was a small electrical fire in one wing of the house that resulted in that part of the building being closed, locked, and forgotten about, without electricity. Some of the rooms in that wing have been used for storage, and some look just as they did decades ago with Victorian furniture, four poster beds, chandeliers, and dust-covered keepsakes from days past.

The radio station only takes up a small part of the top floor of this three-story building. The descendants of the family who have owned the house since it was built haven't been here in years and leave management of the estate, and the radio station, to a trusted relative, Eddie.

A couple of minutes after 10 AM, the morning show host, Roy, goes in Eddie's office and sits down.

"How's it going, Eddie?"

Eddie is in his fifties, and lives 20 miles away in South Tampa.

"Good, how you doing?"

"Great. You going fishing?"

Roy kids Eddie about only coming to the station when he wants to go fishing.

Eddie laughs, “I might be able to squeeze in a little lake therapy, but I’m really here to introduce you to your new co-host.”

Roy says, “Good, I hope she’s more, uh... pleasant to be around than Hazel was. I didn’t hate it when Hazel said she was leaving.”

Eddie laughs, “Me either. This new girl, Ophelia, has a kinda sketchy resume, but her voice is crazy cool, deep, raspy, nice. And, she’s not really a girl, I didn’t ask but, she must be in her late thirties, and a little overweight. I hope there’s some good chemistry between the two of you.” He looks at this watch, “And she’s off to a good start, she was supposed to be here ten minutes ago.”

Just then Ophelia walks in. She’s wearing jeans, sandals, a dark green tee shirt, sunglasses, and a baseball cap. Roy also thinks that she’s probably in her late thirties, she’s not tall, and to him she’s not overweight, she’s voluptuous.

Eddie remains seated, and says, “Roy, this is Ophelia.”

Roy stands and waits for her to put her hand out, she smiles at him, slides her Oakley’s off with one hand, and reaches out to him with the other. He is slightly taken aback; she projects a mature, serious, beauty, with big, blue eyes, and long, black hair. He takes her hand, and smiles back. She

smells like a sample he smelled in a dentist's office magazine last week.
Was it *J'adore*?

Eddie leans back, his chair creaks, then, "Welcome aboard, Ophelia, you're now part of the WSAS family. We're usually about the lowest-rated radio station in the Bay Area, we're not incorporated, and the owners take no interest in what goes on down here. Because of our more relaxed position in the ratings game, we don't have many rules, so let me just say... we take no political stance, unlike the local, highly-rated, non-commercial radio station that is full-on Liberal; we don't go there. We don't want any politics, no yelling, no profanity, no religion. We don't have any rules about how many songs per hour have to be played or what kind of music is played. You can make your own playlist, but please always back announce. We still play vinyl and CDs, but we've never gotten rid of any music so we have a huge library of recordings. And of course, no dead air, please."

He looks at Roy, "Roy's been doing the morning show for about six months, and..."

Roy, "Actually, a little over a year."

Eddie, "Right, that's what I meant, a little over a year, and it's been dismal, course it's not his fault. Radio is still going strong, but it's Sirius XM, Pandora, and big corporate stations with digital databases, and... not this kind of radio. But we have fun. Now unless you have any questions you can join Roy tomorrow at 6 AM for the Morning on the Lake Show."

2.

The next morning, Ophelia comes in the studio at 6:10. As she closes the door behind her, a song ends, Roy opens his mike and says, “That was *Shape of You*, by Ed Sheeran, thanks for the request. I’m being joined this morning by our new music host, Ophelia. Welcome aboard Ophelia.”

She takes a CD from her purse and slides it in a player.

“Thanks Roy, and good morning listeners, I’ll tell ‘ya I’m not used to getting up this early in the morning. I’m used to staying up this late at night, but not getting up this early in the morning. Let’s play something to get me, and everybody else cranked up this morning.”

She presses a button, the music starts, then she looks at Roy’s cup and says, “Where’s the coffee?”

Roy laughs, “I’ll go get you some.”

When he comes back, Ophelia is standing and looking out the big dormer windows where a grassy slope with dense woods on both sides leads down to the lake. She says, “Wow, that’s quite a back yard. How come nobody’s out there on the lake?”

Roy turns the handle on the cup around so it is facing her, and gives her the coffee, “I don’t know, too early I guess. Sometimes there’s people out there, probably more on the weekends.”

She sits, opens a mike, and says, “If I had a theme song I guess that would be it, *Ophelia* from The Band’s 1975 album *Northern Lights – Southern Cross*. And this is... well, see if you can guess.”

She closes her mike, and cues a turntable. Roy is impressed with her confidence in the studio.

They sit in silence for a minute with their feet propped up, drinking coffee, and watching the sun streak across the lake.

“So, where you from, Ophelia?”

“LA, how ‘bout you?”

“Kansas.”

Roy tries to sound nonchalant, “Are you married?”

Ophelia, “I have been, but not for long. You?”

“No, came close a couple of times, lived with a girl for a while, but...

What do you mean by, ‘not for long’?”

“I’ve been married twice, but added together it was for less than six months, long enough for me to learn my lesson; never again.”

She opens her mike, and says, “That was Lowell George and Little Feat with their 1973 song *Dixie Chicken*. This is my first day down here at WSAS, and I want to tell ‘ya I’m proud to be here. This house looks like the Munsters used to live here, but we got this great view of Lake, uh, Lake, how do you say that, Roy?”

“Thonotosassa.”

“Right, we got this big lake right out there, and Roy looks like he’s going to be fun to work with. He’s from Kansas, grew up picking corn, and shucking corn, making corn liquor, I don’t know. Anyway, I’m sure we’re gonna get along, he looks awfully young though. How old are you boy?”

Roy can’t stop smiling at her, “I’m 26.”

“Well I’ve got about ten years on you so if you have any questions about the grownup world, let me know. While Roy Boy is trying to think of something to ask, let’s listen to this.”

She flips a couple of switches, smiles at Roy, and says, “I hope you don’t mind me yammering away like that, it’s just a way to engage with the listeners.”

“No, I don’t mind. You can say anything you want, your voice is amazing, what do they call that? A whisky tenor?”

“I don’t know, I’ve been called lots of things. I have to go find a bathroom, I’ll be right back.”

Ophelia wanders around the building, then goes in Eddie’s office and opens an old, wooden, cabinet about the size of a medicine cabinet that contains rows of keys hanging on little hooks. Each key has a round, white paper disk attached to it with a string, and each disk is labeled. One of the disks is labeled, “No. Wing”. The North Wing is the old, closed wing.

Later that day, Ophelia goes in a hardware store. The next morning, she leaves Roy to run the show, while she explores the long abandoned North Wing.

3.

“Roy, there’s probably female listeners out there who’d like to know if you have a girlfriend.”

Roy, “No, not right now.”

“Are you gay, Roy, is that it?”

“No, I’m not gay, I’m just kinda between relationships right now.”

“I believe you. If you were gay, you’d probably dress better. You dress like a guy who plays golf wearing those little three-button, pull overs, and pleated slacks. Maybe you do, do you play golf, is that what’s holding you back?”

Roy laughs, “No, well I have played golf, but I haven’t played since college. I don’t own clubs; let’s put it that way.”

“Oh, a college boy, I shoulda known. What’d you major in?”

“History.”

“Well that’s good, there’s always a demand for historians out there in the high paying field of History, I guess that’s why you’re working down here, huh? I quit school in the 9th grade, and after that I majored in rock n’ roll.”

She drops the needle on Joan Jett and the Blackhearts doing *I Love Rock N Roll*, closes her mike, and smiles at Roy.

“Are we good? I don’t want to go too far and piss you off.”

Roy laughs, “Yeah, we’re good. Don’t worry about it, it’s not like anybody’s listening to us anyway.”

They both laugh.

People are listening, and they’re forming opinions about Ophelia. Many of the female listeners don’t like the way she talks to Roy who they have been listening to for over a year, but many of the male listeners like Ophelia; they think she sounds hot.

4.

Ophelia uses a small flashlight that she stole at the hardware store, and explores the old North Wing of the building. She goes down a hall opening doors to bedrooms with canopy beds, armoires, claw foot bathtubs, beveled mirrors, and paintings from long ago. She tries the water and is pleased to find that it works, so - no electricity, but running water. She’s had it worse.

Her mind is racing as she thinks of the lies that will work to explain her car being there all the time, and why she comes in the side door every morning, and why she never talks about where she lives, and...

5.

“Ophelia, you’ve been here a week now, and we still don’t know much about you. Give us some details.”

“Well, my rock ‘n roll roots run deep. My parents got together in 1967, the Summer of Love, and lived together on communes for 10 years, first in Oregon and then in Taos, New Mexico, before settling down in LA, and that’s where I was born and raised. My parents were Roadies on several tours in the seventies, and my Dad was an uncredited session musician on some pretty successful albums. I grew up surrounded by musicians, and Classic Rock.”

The phone lights up and Roy answers it while Ophelia continues talking about herself.

“This is WSAS, go ahead.”

A female voice says, “Hey Roy, I just thought I’d let you know that your little co-host is full of shit. I went to school with her in Hollywood, that’d be Hollywood, Florida not Hollywood, California. Her mother was our fifth-grade school teacher, her father wasn’t around, he left when Ophelia was little. I lost track of her after we graduated from high school, I heard she was singing in a band for a while, but she was always such a liar it’s

hard to tell. I just thought I'd warn you, so you don't fall for any of her BS."

"Well, uh, thanks for the information, I'll keep it in mind. But wait, how do you know it's her?"

"That voice for one thing, but I also saw her picture in that free alternative newspaper about music and entertainment. There was a little picture of her and under it, it said that she was a new DJ at WSAS."

Roy thanks the caller, hangs up, and looks at Ophelia, who is still talking about herself.

"Yeah, while my peers were going to high school dances I was following a reunion tour around the country. This reunion tour as a matter of fact." She starts an Eagles song.

6.

In the middle of the night, Ophelia carries a duffle bag from her car to the North Wing and chooses what was once a luxurious master bedroom on the top floor. She stands on chairs to reach up and hang linens over the windows, then lights candles, and makes herself at home.

Roy would have loved to see her standing on those chairs, and reaching up to cover the windows; he really looks forward to coming to work every morning. To him, she's beautiful, shapely, and she has a signature scent

that is erotic, not the J'adore, just her early morning, natural body odor makes him dizzy with desire.

While music is on, they sometimes play a game where Roy picks out an album without letting her see it, then tells her the name of the album. Then she leans back in her chair, looks at the ceiling, and tells him the name of the group, the year the album was released, some of the songs on the album, the musicians, and more. It never fails to amaze him and is another reason why he is so intrigued with her, even though about once a week a different person calls in, and tells him not to believe everything she says.

8.

Ophelia, "That was *Water Song* by Jorma Kowkonan, now here's another one from that same era."

Roy stands, and looks out over the lake with his back to Ophelia, she looks him up and down and smiles. Soon after her remarks about his style, he started dressing more casual and wearing jeans and tee shirts. Today he's wearing baggy, cargo pocket khaki's, a Hawaiian shirt, and sandals. He also got Lasik after she told their listeners about his old-fashioned glasses, and then asked where his pocket protector was.

He glances back at her, and says, "There's a steak house on the other side of the lake over there, supposed to be a great place to eat. You want to go over there tonight and check it out? We could take Eddie's boat, they have a dock."

“No, not really, but I’m glad you finally got up the nerve to ask me, I was beginning to worry about you. No wonder you don’t have a girlfriend, you need to be more aggressive, Roy.”

9.

People, mostly young ladies, drive to work or to school, every week day, listening to Morning on the Lake, and talking on their Bluetooths about Roy and Ophelia.

“I’m getting to where I don’t believe anything she says.”

“I know, did you hear her yesterday talking about how she sang backup on that Bodeans album? She woulda been about 16 years old, but we all know she lies about her age so...”

“And my brother loves her.”

“Every guy I know does.”

“I don’t get it. She’s down right mean to Roy.”

“I know, and he acts like he’s crazy about her.”

10.

“That was *I Love This Bar* by Toby Keith. You have any favorite bars here in the Bay Area, Roy Boy?”

“Not really.”

“Of course not, you’ve probably never been in a bar, have you?”

“Yes, I’ve been in bars, Ophelia.”

“But did you drink?”

“Yes, I’ll have you know that in college I went out drinking more than once.”

“Wow, more than once, you wild thing you. If you’d go out once-in-a-while you might meet someone, and not have to spend your nights alone watching TV, or whatever it is you do of an evening. You’re not completely unfortunate looking; you might could get somebody.”

Roy laughs, and Ophelia cues another record.

Their show ends and Roy asks, “Want to go out for brunch?”

“No, I’ve got to go see my Probation Officer.”

“Really?”

“No, I’ve been off probation for years.”

She laughs, and turns away. He tilts his head, frowns, and watches her walk away.

People call in and tell him things that she has lied about, but he still can't tell when she's lying, telling the truth, or just kidding. And in a way, it makes her more challenging.

11.

Roy is sitting across the studio desk from Ophelia, who is just a few feet away, when she says, "That was Otis Redding's 1968 hit, *Sitting on the Dock of the Bay*. I played it because I'm looking out the window at Roy Boy who is sitting on the dock of the lake down there in a huff because he got mad at something I said."

Roy puts his hand over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

"All I said was that he should find somebody his own age and quit asking me out all the time."

Roy stops laughing.

"He's wasting his time with me anyway, the competition is too great for him to be asking me out. Not a week goes by that some guy who's never seen me doesn't call down here and hit on me."

Roy stands up, walks over, and looks out the window with his back to Ophelia. It's raining.

"Here's another song by someone who was killed in a plane crash."

12.

One afternoon, Ophelia finds a storage room down the hall from her room, that is full of albums. Bookcases sagging under the weight of albums, cardboard boxes stuffed with albums, stacks of albums, boxes of 45's, and more albums. Albums, vinyl, are her favorite thing, and she smiles as she starts to methodically go through the thousands of old records.

After a few months with Roy and Ophelia doing Morning on the Lake together, they are the top-rated morning show in the area, and they provide the background music in places of employment all around Tampa Bay. They are invited to MC local concerts and are introduced at sporting events. Young ladies call the station every week and ask Roy out; some of them do it just to spite Ophelia. Men of all ages ask Ophelia out, some of them send her CD's, and other little gifts. However, neither of them go out with anyone.

Roy is walking down a hall in the North Wing when he comes to a room where the door is open. He looks in, and sees Ophelia curled up in a huge, wingback chair beside a window reading an album cover.

She looks up, "Ahh, man."

He steps in the room, looks around, laughs, and says, "What the Hell? Are you living here? How long has this been going on?"

She ignores his questions, "What are you doing up here?"

“I came to look through some old records, but I’ll tell you what I’m not doing up here – I’m not living up here.”

She gets up, barefooted, and starts to slowly walk toward him, “Now Roy, nobody knows I’m up here, I’m not hurting anything, and no more than they’re paying us I thought a free place to crash was only fair. This can be our little secret, right?”

She stops in front of him, smiles, and looks up at him. He can smell her, and he feels an energy radiating from her that makes his pulse quicken; he steps away.

“I wondered why you never complained about the traffic in the morning. And why I never saw you arrive, or leave.”

He looks around, and moves toward her bed, “So this is your room” he looks at the bed, “and this is your bed”. Suddenly, the bed seems huge. She notices it too.

She changes the subject, “So you were going to look at old records, yeah, I’ve been going through some them, there’s some amazing stuff in there.”

He has stepped up in front of her. He bends down while pulling her up to him and kisses her on the mouth. She kisses him back for a few seconds, then pushes him away, and says, “No, this won’t do, we work together, and that’s always a problem, so... no.”

She pulls free, walks to the open door, and looks down. As he walks passed her, he pauses, looks down at her, smiles, and says, “See you in the morning, Sweetie.”

She continues looking down, her face is flushed, and she replies quietly, without much conviction, “Don’t call me, Sweetie.”

That kiss. They both know something has changed in their dynamic, and that things will never be the same between them.

13.

From six to ten AM, Monday through Friday, thousands of people are now tuning in to hear what Roy and Ophelia are going to say and play. Whether they like her or not, listeners agree that the music has gotten much more interesting since Ophelia joined Morning on the Lake. She plays songs that people have forgotten about, songs that surprise people, and deeper cuts that didn’t get the attention they deserved when the album was first released. And lately, she hasn’t been picking on Roy as much as she used to.

Early one Friday evening, Roy comes back to the station to look through old albums. He walks past Ophelia’s closed door, and continues down the hall to the storage room. When he walks in the first thing he sees is Ophelia sitting cross-legged on the floor going through a stack of albums. She’s wearing a headlight, and looks so cute he can’t help but smile at

her. She doesn't know why he's smiling, but she smiles back, and says, "Hey, what are you doing here?"

"I was just riding around the lake, don't have anything to do, thought I'd come explore our treasure room some more. This place is amazing."

"Tell me about it. I just found a cardboard box back there with dozens of rolled-up old posters, promo literature, all kinds of cool printed stuff, some of it pretty artistic, and probably worth something."

He looks around, "Is there any logic to it? Is the older stuff in the back, and the newer stuff in the front, or ...?"

"Yeah, we should be so lucky. No, a few of the boxes have a date on the them, but mostly it's just... helter skelter. It's kind of ironic that we're up here surrounded by music, yet we don't have any music."

He takes a small flashlight from his pocket, and wanders further back into the room, while saying, "It's not really ironic, but it is unfortunate."

A few minutes later, he shows Ophelia an album he found, and she freaks. "Holy shit, Roy, you're up here 10 minutes and you find an album that's worth a fortune. This is the original *Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* from 1963, his second album, and the one that features 11 original songs."

Roy doesn't believe her, "No way."

“Yes, way. This album has the 4 songs that were deleted in releases that came later. About a year ago, I heard that one of these was auctioned off at Sotheby’s or Christie’s, or someplace, for, I think it was \$35,000.”

They examine the record and the jacket, as if they have never seen one before.

Ophelia shakes her head, “I’ve been coming in here almost every day, and this is what, your second or third time here? I say we sell this bad boy on eBay, split the money, and go our separate ways.”

He makes a doubtful face, “But it’s not ours to sell, it belongs to the station.”

Thus begins an on-again, off-again argument.

“If we give it to Eddie, he might tell us we can have it.”

“Yeah, right, and he might just say, thank you.”

“The station should benefit from it, not us.”

“That’s easy for you to say, you’re a lot better off than I am, Roy. I could really use the money.”

“It’s stealing, Ophelia.”

“They don’t even know it’s here.”

An hour later in her suite, under candlelight, they drink wine, and sit in silence, having run out of arguments. The album is propped up on a dresser.

Roy spots a box in the corner, “Good Lord girl, you buy wine by the case?”

“They were having a sale. And, yes, I do, what the hell’s it to ya?”

“Okay, okay, you don’t have to get all feisty with me.”

She gets up, and says, “I’ll show you feisty” and playfully punches his shoulder. He grabs her, they tussle, she laughs, they fall on the bed where he holds her down and kisses her; she doesn’t resist.

Later, he starts off counting how many times she says, “Oh God” but, he eventually loses count.

14.

As usual, he wakes up at 5 AM. He looks around the room, she’s gone, her clothes are gone, all of her belongings are gone, the wine is gone, but the album is still on the dresser. Above the album on the oval, beveled glass mirror, is a message written with lipstick, “I hate you.”

When Roy goes outside, he sees that her car is gone. He goes down and sits on the dock until he comes to grips with the fact that she is really gone. Later that morning, he calls Eddie and tells him about Ophelia, and about the record. Eddie says he’ll see what the family wants to do with the record, and that he knows someone to fill in for Ophelia; maybe she’ll come back.

Becky, a college girl who once told Eddie she would like to intern at the station shows up Monday, full of energy and good cheer. Roy shows her how to work the studio, and lets her do everything, including answering the phone. When people call in and ask about Ophelia, or ask why Roy is so subdued, he instructs her to say that she's new and doesn't know, which is true.

A couple of weeks later, Becky answers the phone, then says to Roy, "You might want to talk to this lady."

"Hi, this is Roy, what's up?"

"Hi Roy, this is Sheryl. Me and my husband are long-distance truckers, and a few nights ago, we were driving through Marfa, Texas, in the middle of the night, and I heard Ophelia doing a, I guess it was a midnight to 6 AM show on an FM station. I didn't get the call letters, but it's probably the only FM station down there. I just thought you might like to know."

"Wow, thank you so much, Sheryl, you have no idea what this means to me. Thank you."

Roy walks over, and looks out at the lake for a few minutes. Becky has music playing, she's talking on the phone, and doing something on her laptop, all at the same time.

He starts gathering his belongings, Becky stops and looks up at him, he says, "I'm leaving."

Becky smiles and frowns at the same time, "What? Where are you going? Are you coming back? What should I tell people?"

"I'm not coming back, and when they ask where I went" he pauses and looks out at the lake, then looks back at her and says, "just play, *Ophelia*."

"Play who? What?"

"*Ophelia*, by The Band, it's right over there."

A few minutes later, in the parking area, he gets in his car, cranks it up, and *Ophelia* is playing on the radio. He laughs, and drives away into a promising sunrise.

end