

# A Dispatch from an Environmental Lawyer Who is Trying to Grow a Mustache

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Dispatch No. 8: I Come as Close as I Ever Will to Winning the Love of Angelina Jolie

Mustaches are magical things. My decision to grow one, for example, has been part of a larger adventure in which I have traveled to Chicago, joined a creative non-profit with a noble mission, suffered a mustache-related existential crisis, and enjoyed an amazing evening at the ballet. Some of these things might have happened without the mustache, but not all of them. Pluck a petal from a pasque flower, Aldo Leopold once said, and you disturb a star. Grow a mustache, and things begin to happen.

In the week after it appears, my mustache surprises me with its power. It's one thing to disturb the universe by plucking a flower. It's another to grow a mustache and thereby lure Angelina Jolie to your office.

But that is what happens to me.

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The escalator at the Archives metro station surfaces just behind the U.S. Navy Memorial. The memorial is a circular plaza ringed by a cascading fountain in the form of a low-rise amphitheater. Just across Pennsylvania Avenue, the colonnaded facade of the National Archives provides a dramatic backdrop to the plaza's stage. The Metro escalator lifts you right into all of it – the fountain, the plaza, the cinematic urban scene.

On Thursday morning, a man at the top of the escalator with a headset and a clipboard tells me to double back to Seventh Street. The memorial plaza is apparently closed.

Seventh Street is lined with white travel trailers. Along the sidewalk, working men unload light stands from moving trucks. Klieg lights shine in the morning sun. I'm bewildered for a second, then I realize: They're making a movie.

Back in my office, a Google search reveals that *Salt*, a thriller starring Angelina Jolie and Liev Schreiber, is filming in Washington. Today, apparently, it is filming around the corner from my office.

Angelina Jolie, seducer of Brad Pitt, tattooed mother of rescued orphans, the unlikely daughter of Jon Voight who broke Billy Bob Thornton's heart – Angelina is less than two blocks from me, in a travel trailer on Seventh Street, gently rousing herself from sleep. Or, perhaps, she is having makeup applied. Or she is at a fancy Georgetown hotel, naked in the arms of Brad Pitt. Wherever she is, she will be spending the day less than three blocks from me.

Late last summer, before I ever attempted to grow a mustache, Monaliza and I had a conversation about celebrities we'd like to take to bed. We were having drinks on the rooftop deck of the Cleveland Park Bar and Grill, a neighborhood place on Connecticut Avenue across the street from the historic Uptown Theater. Angelina was high on both our lists. "Did you see *Gia*?" Mona asked. "You have to see it. She's incredibly sexy in that one."

Angelina, we decided, is a force of nature, and now, even from three blocks away, her presence has a noticeable effect. She seems, for example, to have rendered the men in my office indifferent to her. It's like she's neutralized them. When I tell my colleague Marcello that Angelina Jolie is filming a movie nearby, he shrugs and returns to his work. John, another colleague, gives me a blank stare, then laughs at his own lack of interest, then asks how my day is going.

The women, however, are under a different spell. They duck into each other's offices to spread the news. They talk excitedly in the hall. On my way back from the men's room, I am nearly flattened by

five of them as they rush down the hallway in a panic. They are headed outside, hoping to catch a glimpse of the set. I e-mail Mona. At her place of work, too, the men are nonchalant but the women are buzzing.

The atmosphere is charged. My mustache has brought Angelina within my reach. But what am I supposed to do? I think about wandering over to the set. I imagine Angelina catching a glimpse of my mustache and taking five to introduce herself. She asks if, perhaps, I would like to serve as an extra. One thing leads to another and, before I know it, Brad Pitt is relocating to a boutique hotel in Dupont Circle.

It could happen. The significant men in Angelina's life – Billy Bob Thornton, Brad Pitt, Jon Voight – have at times worn thin, cheesy mustaches of the very style that now adorns my face. My kind of mustache, apparently, wields an unlikely power over the woman who once played Lara Croft and serves as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Refugee Agency.

It feels, in other words, as if fate, in the form of my mustache, is guiding me toward an epic encounter. But when I walk by the set on my way to get lunch, Seventh Street is closed and the traffic nearby is jammed. A large crowd has gathered on the plaza. The fans in back are jumping on their toes, trying to get a view. When I return with my sandwich, the area is even more congested. I don't even bother going over. Angelina would never see me or my mustache.

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By the time I leave work it is getting dark. The trucks, trailers, light stands, and film techs have disappeared. The Navy Memorial is its busy, routine self again, kids pulling skateboard tricks on the low wall by the Metro entrance, office workers streaming across the plaza to get home.

Angelina has come and gone. The mustache bringeth and the mustache sendeth away. I have come close to a glory of nature, yet I have not come close at all. There is only one indication at the Archives station that she was ever there. I find it after looking for

several minutes, two pieces of black gaffer tape marking an X on one of the Metro entrance's granite walls.

