

**BAD  
CHOICES  
MAKE  
GOOD  
STORIES**

*Going to  
New York*

**Oliver Markus Malloy**

"This generation's  
version of  
Catcher in the Rye.  
I kid you not.  
It's that good."

*-Ray Simmons,  
Readers' Favorite*



# **Bad Choices Make Good Stories**

## **Going to New York**

### **How The Great American Opioid Epidemic of The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Began**

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**"Bad Choices Make Good Stories" is a darkly funny coming-of-age novel based on true events. Oliver, a teenage hacker living in Germany, meets Donna online. She's an American girl living in New York. After chatting and talking on the phone for months, he finally decides to surprise her with a visit. But he soon finds out that things are not what they appeared to be, and that this visit will change his life forever.**

**"The most engaging memoir I've ever read."**

**★★★★★ (5/5)**

*-Caitlin Lyle Farley, Readers' Favorite*

**"One whirlwind adventure after another. I was enthralled."**

**★★★★ (4/4)**

*-Christina Rose, Online Book Club*

**"This generation's version of Catcher in the Rye. I kid you not. It's that good."**

**★★★★★ (5/5)**

*-Ray Simmons, Readers' Favorite*

**"An important book. Don't miss it!"**

**★★★★★ (5/5)**

*-James Okun, Bookplex*

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*Dear Reader,*

*This autobiographical novel is based on true events. It's my story. It's not pretty. It involves sex, drugs, crimes, betrayal, bad relationships and really terrible relationships, codependency and cruelty.*

*I like to think that I'm a good person. I like to think that I have morals and integrity. But nobody is perfect, and I have done things I'm not proud of. There are many things that I'm embarrassed about or even ashamed of. Looking back at them today makes me cringe.*

*So why am I writing about them? I'm not really sure. I just had to get it all off my chest, I guess. I hear confessionals are supposed to be cathartic.*

*Every person is the sum of their past experiences. I am who I am today because of every little thing I've done or gone through. Hopefully I've learned something from it all, and today I'm a better person for it.*

*Oliver*

# PROSTITUTION

*"Sex is one of the most wholesome, beautiful and natural experiences that money can buy."*

**Steve Martin**

*"I don't understand why prostitution is illegal. Selling is legal. Fucking is legal. Why isn't selling fucking legal? You know, why should it be illegal to sell something that's perfectly legal to give away?"*

**George Carlin**

Prostitution is legal pretty much everywhere in the world. Well, almost everywhere. Not here in the US. When I was younger, I never understood why it should be illegal. I understand it now.

I grew up in Germany. Europe is far more liberal than America. Even most conservative right-wing parties over there are to the left of the US Democrats on many issues. For example, it wouldn't occur to even the most right-wing party in Europe to oppose universal healthcare. But this isn't a book about politics. It's about sex and drugs. You know, the good stuff.

So, I grew up in a pretty liberal society, where prostitution is legal. Every city has a designated red-light district, where brothels do their business. But you won't find brothels just in the red-light districts. You'll find them in all sorts of neighborhoods, tucked between supermarkets and single family homes. They're not even hiding. Why would they? They're legal, and a normal part of society. You can quickly recognize them by the red lights they usually have in their windows. Or the big neon signs that say SEX CLUB or something to that effect.

The red-light district in Amsterdam is so famous, it's a popular tourist destination. You'll see whole families walk through the streets, pushing strollers with their toddlers, looking at the attractions. Entire bus-loads of Japanese tourists walk through those streets along the canals.

Most people don't know that Amsterdam has more canals than Venice. When you walk along those canals through the red-light district, you'll see half-naked girls from all over the world sit in large windows, as if they were store merchandise on display. You can walk

right up to them and ask them through the open window to show you the goods. They'll often pull their tops down with a fake smile and let you see their breasts. It helps them negotiate a good price. Often in broken English. Or they'll lift their short skirt and pull their panties aside. It's hard to argue over money when a girl flashes you her pussy.

The economic crisis didn't spare the red-light district in Amsterdam, and the girls in those windows will fuck you for bargain prices. There's an actual price war going on. Girls will underbid each other for a chance to have sex with you. Sounds like paradise for a horny guy, right?

So why aren't the streets in the red-light districts overrun by men looking to get laid? Because Europeans self-censor. For example, in Germany, people will agree in theory that prostitution should be legal, but they usually won't admit that they themselves have ever gone to a prostitute: "Yeah, it should be legal, and I have no problem with it, but I would never go to one. I'm above that." Then they secretly go to one anyway. On the down low. They won't admit it in polite company, because they don't want to look trashy.

Prostitution is not exactly a reputable business over there either, even though the girls actually have to pay taxes on their earnings, and submit to regular health check ups. Even the prostitutes have universal healthcare over there. The benefit of legal prostitution is obvious: tax income for the city, healthier girls, and safety. In Amsterdam, each girl has an alarm button next to her bed that she can press if one of her "customers" tries to rape or hurt her. The police will arrive within minutes and protect the girl from harm.

I saw a documentary about prostitution in Holland a few years ago, that said over there health insurance actually pays for monthly visits to a prostitute for the disabled, because they feel that sex is part of a healthy life, so unmarried disabled men have a right to have sex, even if it's with a paid prostitute. Pretty bizarre, huh? Can you imagine a US health insurance company picking up the bill for your romp in the hay with a hooker?

Growing up in a liberal society like that, prostitution was never really an issue of debate for me. It was just there. The fact that it existed was a part of life, like gas stations or grocery stores. And it never occurred to me that there should be any reason to outlaw it. If a girl wants to sell her body, so be it. None of my business. Don't

athletes sell their bodies, too? People can do behind closed doors whatever they want, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. And that was still my attitude, when I moved to the States in my 20s.

When I heard that prostitution was illegal over here, I thought it was silly. Quaint. Lame. Europeans often laugh about how prudish Americans are, when it comes to sex. In Europe, sexuality is a normal part of life. Fancy antique art museums are full of nudity. And you'll see naked girls in every major newspaper. Germany's biggest newspaper, Bild, has a topless girl on the backpage of every daily issue. Nobody thinks twice about it. Nobody finds it necessary to protect the children.

A naked breast is no more a threat to the well-being of a child than a naked hand or foot. So from a European point of view, American media censorship seems utterly ridiculous. People all over the world laughed at America, when the FCC fined Janet Jackson for her "wardrobe malfunction" and flashing her boob for a second during the Superbowl halftime show a few years ago.

A lot of bands make two different music videos for their latest songs. A censored version for American TV, and an uncensored version that includes nudity for European music stations. The so-called Land of The Free doesn't seem so free anymore, when you realize that other countries have a lot more freedom.

In Europe, nobody will bleep you, if you want to say a "bad" word on TV. The idea that some self-righteous little old lady at the FCC gets to tell other people which words they may or may not use, seems like a pretty strange concept in the rest of the civilized world.

Media censorship is a prohibition of words and pictures. The War on Drugs is a complete failure, and so is the American War on Words. When you forbid a word, you give it power. Self-proclaimed rebels will use words like shit or fuck, simply to shock and sound cool.

But every word serves a purpose. It conveys an idea. And the idea behind words like feces, stool, or poop is exactly the same as behind the word shit. They all conjure up the same mental image in your head. So why are stool and poop "good" words, and shit is a "bad" word? Who decided that, and why am I bound by that decision?

Why do some people feel offended by the word shit, but not by the word poop? Because some little old lady at the FCC decided that



good citizens don't use the word shit, and suddenly using a word like shit or fuck becomes an act of civil disobedience. Suddenly a little four-letter word has the power to shock.

If a guest host on Saturday Night Live disobeys the rules and uses the word fuck on the air, it's a big deal, and the morning shows talk about it for days. That's so silly.

If a German farmer is being interviewed on the news, because a severe storm ruined his crop, nobody would bleep him, and nobody would make a big deal of it, if he said: "That God damn storm ruined my fucking crop! FUCK MY LIFE!" If he doesn't curse on the air, it's not because he's being censored, but because he chooses not to, because he doesn't want to sound like an ignorant brute. Germans don't need someone telling them what they can and cannot say. They decide for themselves what is appropriate.

Medical studies have shown that cursing reduces levels of stress and pain. Repressing your anger is not healthy. It's much better to verbalize it, and let off steam. Maybe all that repressed anger is the reason why there are so many serial killers in America.

And although Europeans have a much more relaxed attitude when it comes to sexuality, and they don't feel the need to protect children from "bad" words or "bad" images of harmless nudity, the levels of teen pregnancy are much lower over there than in America. Telling American teenagers that words describing sex are off limits, makes sex a tempting forbidden fruit, and it only makes them think about it more.

Educating European teenagers about their own sexuality, and that it's a natural part of life, but teaching them to censor themselves, because it's important to get an education before you start a family, is obviously a much more effective way to reduce teen pregnancy.

Anyway, this is my book. I curse when I get really upset. Letting off steam that way makes me feel a little bit better. I've been through a lot, but I have never had the urge to go postal. I thank fuck for that.

And whether I write that I had sex with a girl, or I fucked her, or we screwed, or we copulated, or had intercourse, or a romp in the hay, it all conjures up the same mental image.

This book contains a lot of "bad" words. So if you are easily

offended, go fuck yourself.

# THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF HACKING

*"I was addicted to hacking, more for the intellectual challenge, the curiosity, the seduction of adventure; not for stealing, or causing damage or writing computer viruses."*

*"Hacking to me was like a video game. It was about getting trophies. I just kept going on and on, despite all the trouble I was getting into, because I was hooked."*

*"I could have evaded the FBI a lot longer if I had been able to control my passion for hacking."*

**Kevin Mitnick**

I moved to the States for love. I had met a girl over the Internet. This was in the 1990s, before the Internet was widely used by the public. As a teenager, I used to be a computer geek, when not everyone had a computer yet. I was a hacker. If you've ever seen the movie War Games, you get the idea. We used unbelievably slow dial-up modems and 8-bit computers. It was the stone age of the PC revolution.

My friends and I didn't hack into government computers to start World War 3 though. We didn't even hack into bank computers to steal millions. All we did was play video games, before playing video games became mainstream. And if the games had copy protection, we removed the protection so we could copy the games for our friends. That was called "cracking" a game. We felt like the Robin Hoods among computer geeks, because we "stole" from the rich software companies and gave to the poor kids who couldn't afford to buy games.

There was an active hacking/cracking scene in Europe, America and Australia, and hackers/crackers or "sceners" from all over the world met at gatherings that were called copy parties.

I never liked to be a follower. I didn't want to be a member of someone else's crew, so I started my own cracking group. It didn't matter to me if my group wasn't going to be the biggest or the best, as long as it was my own. Why be a follower when you can be a leader?

At first I only gave floppy disks with my cracked games to my friends in my own class at school. Soon kids in other classes got my games from their friends. It didn't take long until I was known among kids at other schools in my home town, the ancient Roman city of Aachen.

After a few months, my class went on a school trip to Trier, another old Roman city, a few hundred miles away from Aachen. We were supposed to go explore the ancient downtown area on our own, without adult supervision. But it was raining, so I decided to hang out in the computer section of a department store instead. I played some of the video games I had cracked, and caught the attention of some local kids.

Cracking groups back then used to put their own little intro or cracktro in front of a cracked game. It's similar to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox or Universal logo you see at the beginning of a movie. That was our way of getting famous. Cracktros with our crew's name were basically high tech graffiti. Every time someone played a game we cracked, they had to look at our name first. That's really what it was all about. Not money. Just fame. Kinda like kids who spray graffiti on walls all over town, to spread their name.

Anyway, the local kids in that department store recognized my hacking crew's name in front of the games I was playing. That was the first time I realized that I was getting famous in the hacking scene. People in cities hundreds of miles away knew my name. It was a pretty amazing feeling. As I found out later, it was addicting. At that department store in Trier, I ended up recruiting one of those local kids into my group that day, because he turned out to be an excellent programmer.

As time went by, my crew grew larger. At first I had only recruited some of my classmates at school. But now we had grown so much, that we had members all over Germany, Belgium, Holland, France, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia and America. Everyone in the hacking scene knew us. We were at the very top of the game. Our cocky slogan was "Europe's #1." That didn't sit too well with some competing hacking crews. There was constant bickering between the various crews about who was the best. A bit like the East Coast – West Coast war in the hip hop scene. The more successful you were, the more haters talked trash about you. And we had a lot of haters. But our fans far outnumbered our enemies.

Going to copy party gatherings was an amazing feeling. Everyone knew me and my crew. Everyone wanted to shake my hand or talk to me. I felt like a rockstar. I was literally world-famous. Among sceners anyway.

In order to spread our cracks to as many people as possible, cracking crews used online bulletin board systems, or BBS for short. They were the precursors to Internet websites. Each crew had members that specialized in different aspects of hacking. Almost like different members in a drug gang have different jobs. Some cook the drug, some stand guard, some sell the product on the streets.

In cracking crews back then, original suppliers provided the games through their connections at game stores or software companies. Crackers removed the copy protection from the games. Swappers exchanged floppy disks with the swappers of other crews. Spreaders uploaded the games to an online BBS to distribute the games as quickly as possible to as many people as possible. And leechers downloaded the latest cracks from other crews' BBS.

But in order to connect to a BBS, our computers had to make calls over regular phone lines. And long distance calls were still very expensive back then. There were no unlimited calling plans yet. International calls were virtually unaffordable. So every elite crew had members called phreakers. They were the ones who provided the means to make free international phone calls to connect to a BBS on the other side of the globe. The real world needs oil to move wares around. The hacking scene back then needed ways to make free phone calls to move digital warez around.

Usually phreakers got credit cards and passed them on to the spreaders, so they could use the cards to make expensive phone calls for free, to upload the latest cracked games to a bunch of boards online. Phreakers had several different ways to get their hands on credit cards. The most popular way was phishing. Basically the phreakers called a bunch of random numbers and tried to convince the people on the other end that they were talking to an employee of the fraud department of their credit card company.

If the phreaker was good at his game, the person on the other end would give him all their personal information, their credit card, social security number, date of birth, etc. It's amazing how gullible people are when you use the right inflection in your voice. Random

strangers will trust you very quickly, if you speak to them calmly, quietly, and with confidence.

If you saw the movie *Identity Thief*, you get the idea. Melissa McCarthy plays a phreaker who phishes Jason Bateman's identity, by convincing him that she works for the fraud department of his credit card.

Steve Wozniak, who co-founded Apple with Steve Jobs, once said: "A lot of hacking is playing with other people, you know, getting them to do strange things." A good hacker is a master manipulator. Some hackers are good at manipulating computer systems, others are good at manipulating brains.

Nowadays identity theft is a billion dollar industry. Even organized crime, like the Russian mob, employ phreakers to steal credit cards and then the mob uses these cards to make online purchases. There is a black market online, where hackers buy and sell people's information.

But back then, we weren't interested in making online purchases or selling people's ID to the mob. Crews back then just used the credit cards to make free phone calls around the world to spread their cracked games.

The phone system in Europe was more advanced than the American phone system. Countries like Germany had switched to an all digital phone network long before the US did. And on digital lines, it was much easier for the authorities to find and trace hackers who abused credit cards to make calls. So European hackers called the free 800 numbers of American phone companies, and from those American lines called back to European lines with stolen credit cards. The American phone lines were still analog, and didn't allow the companies to trace the calls back. So European hackers became invisible by re-routing all their calls through America.

But then at some point the US phone companies finally switched over to a digital network as well, and suddenly phreaking became a lot more dangerous. Hackers started getting arrested left and right. So more and more crews relied on a different way to make free phone calls, called "blue boxing." Instead of using someone else's credit card, hackers played a tone into the phone that had the exact same frequency as the tone the phone companies used to release a line for a free phone call. So, simply by playing that tone, you could

suddenly make a free phone call to China or Europe.

A phreaker who called himself Captain Crunch had discovered by accident, that the toy whistle that came in Captain Crunch cereal boxes played exactly the right tone at exactly the right frequency to get a free phone line. He became a legend in the hacking scene.

## SEX AND CRIME

*"Any publicity is good publicity."*

**Unknown**

Girls were rare in the hacking scene. I knew hundreds of guys in the scene, but there were only three or four girls. Two of them were famous because they ran popular online boards. And of course they hated each other and had cat fights online. Donna lived in New York, and her arch nemesis Tammy lived in California. Each one wanted to have the most important BBS, where the best crews uploaded their cracked games, or "warez" first.

Back then, having "zero day warez" (brand new cracked games that are not even one day old yet) on your BBS first was a big status symbol. The competition between the crews and the BBS they favored was fierce. Whoever had the most "first releases" (cracking and spreading a new game before anyone else) was considered the best or most elite crew. Being part of the hacker elite was everything back then. Kids today think they sound cool when they spell everything wrong. That wasn't any different back then. The word elite for example was often spelled "leet" or "1337."

If a hacking crew associated with the BBS of one of those two girls to spread their first release warez, they weren't really welcome on the other girl's BBS. Donna ran a very popular BBS that was frequented by many elite hackers from around the world. I decided to ask her to make her BBS in New York the exclusive headquarters for my European hacking crew, which meant we would upload all our warez on her BBS first. And then the leechers of other crews would have to come to her BBS to download our warez and upload them on other boards. It also meant that the hackers who were loyal to Tammy's board in California were now automatically our enemies.

When I called Donna, we hit it off, and we ended up talking for hours. I started calling her every day. Suddenly talking to her seemed so much more important to me than my hacking crew. I lost any interest in games, or whether my group was the most elite crew with the most first releases. All that seemed so stupid and unimportant all of a sudden. The other guys in my crew started to notice that I had lost interest, and they began to call Donna my Yoko Ono. They felt Yoko was the reason why the Beatles broke up, and Donna was the reason why I lost interest in my crew. They were right.



My crew had gotten so big, with members in so many different countries, that the different cells of the crew didn't even know each other or talk to each other. For example, the Scottish musicians and graphic artists never talked to the German crackers, and the Swedish programmers never talked to the Swiss original suppliers. I was the only link between all of them. I was the one who talked to everyone every day, and told everyone what needed to be done to work together as a team.

I would ask the programmer in one country to make a new cracktro, and then ask the graphic artist in another country to draw the logo, and ask the musician in yet another country to compose a tune, and ask the cracker in yet another country to use that cracktro in front of his latest release, and then ask the spreaders in yet another country to ensure that the crack was being spread around the world.

I was the backbone of the crew. Without me, nothing got done. So when I suddenly didn't call anyone in the crew anymore, and my line was always busy, because I was on the phone with Donna pretty much 24/7, things started to fall apart very quickly. My crew was suddenly a body without a head. My crew fragmented and different splinter cells joined up with other crews. But I didn't care. Donna was all I cared about.

Donna and I had gotten so close, we literally never hung up the phone. There's a six hour time difference between New York and Germany, so when I got up in the morning to go to school, it was still the middle of the night in New York, and Donna was sleeping, but we were connected on the phone. When I got home after school, we were still connected and it was time for her to wake up and we said good morning to each other.

The reason we never hung up and had a standing line was because at this time phreaking had become more and more difficult, because by now the phone network in the US was digital as well. It was getting harder and harder to get credit cards that lasted more than a day before they were shut down for abuse. And blue boxing was getting harder too, because the phone companies experimented with filters that blocked the tone hackers played into the phone to get free lines.

It was an arms race between hackers and phone companies. Every time the phone companies made a change to stop blue boxing, hackers figured out the new frequencies and released new versions

of their blue box software. So rather than hanging up and risking that we may never be able to get another free international line again, Donna and I decided to simply stay connected all the time.

My parents started to wonder what I was doing in my room all the time, and who I kept talking to in English all day and night. They had every reason to be worried, because I had become so notorious as a hacker, that the German FBI had raided my parents' house twice.

The first time the FBI had actually been looking for me. But I got off with a warning, because I was still under age, and there really weren't any laws against cyber crime yet, because hackers were so far ahead of law enforcement in terms of computer knowledge. A lot of the things hackers did back then were criminal but not technically illegal, because there were no laws against it yet.

After that raid, I decided to be extra careful, and moved all my equipment and software to a friend's house down the road. From that point on, there was nothing in my room, or anywhere else in my parents' house, that could get me in trouble. Well, except the fact that I was on the phone with America nonstop. But my parents didn't know that yet.

They were so pissed at me after the first raid, that they told me if I ever did anything illegal with computers again, they would kick me out and disown me. But being a rockstar among hackers was addicting. I couldn't imagine my life just being a regular teenager, without having people all over the world know my name. So even though I promised my parents I stopped, I didn't.

After I moved all my stuff to my friend's house, I told my crew to spread the word that I, Goliath, had retired from the hacking scene and that I had opened a legitimate software company that was now going to produce video games. And that someone new, a hacker named Lucifer, was going to run my crew from now on.

But the truth was, that the new hacker with the name Lucifer didn't actually exist. It was still me, just using a different name, instead of my old name Goliath. I liked the name Lucifer, not because I'm a satanist or devil worshipper, but because I thought it would be ironic, since the devil is also known as the Father of Lies or The Great Deceiver. And the existence of Lucifer the hacker was nothing more than a big lie.

After a little while, the new me, Lucifer, became just as famous as the old me, Goliath. Lucifer was the head of a hacking crew. Meanwhile Goliath was now the head of a software company.

There were a couple of official computer magazines that reviewed video games and occasionally mentioned the fact that there was an underground hacking scene. And then there were several underground fanzines, or "scene mags" as we called them, produced by hackers. In those scene mags, hackers wrote about the scene and its celebrities. I was interviewed as Lucifer as well as Goliath a bunch of times.

I decided that producing my own scene mag would be a great way to promote my hacking crew with articles that were biased in my crew's favor. Of course my scene mag wouldn't have any credibility, if people knew that I was just patting myself on the back. The praise for my hacking crew would sound a lot more legitimate, if it was written by a third party, who was not a member of my crew. So I decided that it would be a good idea to let Goliath, who was retired from the hacking scene and officially had nothing to do with my hacking crew anymore, write the articles about my crew as an independent third person. My scene mag ended up being one of my crew's greatest promotional tools.

I liked to blaze a new trail, off the beaten path, instead of following in someone else's footsteps. I always tried to dream up new ways of doing things that nobody else had thought of yet. Or come up with some new creative idea that would wow everyone. By now I had recruited so many excellent members into my crew, that every one of them was better at their job than I was. Except creative thinking. That was my specialty. I was the guy with the ideas, and then I asked one of my crew members to turn my idea into reality.

While thinking about the easiest and cheapest way to produce and distribute a scene mag, I decided to create the magazine as a software file, not on paper. It was the first time ever that a scene mag had been produced in a digital format. Later that idea became so popular that almost every other crew decided to produce a scene mag in digital form as well. There were hundreds of copycats trying to imitate my success.

But my digital scene mag wasn't just popular because it was the first. I had a natural knack for self-promotion and guerrilla marketing. I tried to come up with the catchiest title I could, so I ended up with

the name "Sex and Crime." Come on, admit it, the headline of this chapter made you curious, didn't it? Well, back then, when I called my scene mag Sex and Crime, it had the same effect. It had nothing at all to do with sex, but I knew everyone would be curious to read it.

And let's be honest, you really don't give a crap about all the hacking stuff I'm talking about right now. The first chapter about prostitution caught your interest, and now you're trudging through this chapter, hoping I'll get back to the juicy stuff soon. Don't worry, there's enough sex in this book to make a crackwhore blush. But I have to explain some stuff about my background first, or the rest of the book won't make any sense. So bear with me.

Anyway, I purposely used a pretty cocky, abrasive writing style in Sex and Crime, to stir up some drama. My confrontational style quickly became the talk of the scene. Some of the things I wrote were so inflammatory, people had to vent about it on online forums. So suddenly everyone in the scene was talking about Sex and Crime, just as I had hoped. I enjoyed playing the role of agitator, and people from competing hacking crews didn't even realize that the more they bitched about the things I wrote, the more credibility and notoriety they were adding to my scene mag. Thanks to all the positive as well as negative feedback I was getting, the things I wrote actually mattered. Suddenly I was the most important opinion maker in the scene.

The more popular Sex and Crime became, the more powerful of a promotional tool for my hacking crew it became. At the height of its popularity, about half a million sceners around the world were reading my scene mag every month. Germany's largest magazine publishing house ended up distributing Sex and Crime as a bonus on the floppy disk that accompanied their monthly computer magazine. So my mag ended up being sold on every newsstand, and I was actually getting paid to write about the scene and promote the shit out of my hacking crew. Sweet!

But of course I also wrote about other things besides my crew. At that time a bunch of right-wing skinhead extremists had discovered that the online hacking scene was a great medium to spread their verbal diarrhea. I wrote an article in Sex and Crime against those skinheads and their racist message. A computer show on German TV noticed my article and invited me to be a guest on their show and have a debate about racism with a skinhead. I was excited that they

asked me to be on TV, but I was too shy to actually go. And I figured, even if I win the televised debate with the skinhead, his bonehead buddies would just beat me up in the parking lot after the show.

Anyway, I lived a double life as Goliath and Lucifer for several years. I did whatever I could to not get in trouble with the law again, without actually stopping what I was doing in the hacking scene. So I fully committed to the story of there being two different people. I had two different PO boxes, one for Goliath and one for Lucifer. I even had two different hand writing styles. Whenever I mailed out a floppy disk with cracked games as Lucifer, the hand writing looked completely different than the hand writing I used when I mailed out a disk with the latest issue of Sex and Crime as Goliath.

Under the name Lucifer I was not only the leader of my hacking crew, but also the first mega-swapper. Conventional swappers had about 15 or 20 contacts in other crews with whom they exchanged floppy disks to spread their crew's warez. I took it to the extreme. Every time my crew released a new game, I mailed out floppy disks to about 200 different people. If I remember correctly, proper postage for an oversized envelope containing a floppy disk cost about \$1.70 back then.

Most other swappers re-used their stamps over and over again to save money. They shellacked their stamps with a coat of clear glue. Once the glue dried, you couldn't see it anymore, but when the post office cancelled the stamp, their ink didn't stick to it. So the receiving swapper could take the stamp off the envelope, wipe the ink off, and then use the same stamp on the return envelope. The same stamps were being re-used over and over again.

To me that seemed way too risky, because they were clearly defrauding the postal service. So I came up with a different trick: Instead of putting the proper \$1.70 postage on each envelope, I only put a one cent stamp on it. The German postal service delivered my packages to my contacts around the world anyway, but calculated the missing postage and charged the recipient \$1.69 plus a steep penalty. Even though people were happy to get disks from me with the latest games, they were pissed that they had to pay a few bucks every time they got one of my packages.

Then I figured out that if I sent out a massive amount of packages all at once, the clerk in the local post office who is supposed to calculate

the missing postage for each package would be overwhelmed and simply forward the packages through the system without doing all that tedious math. It worked! That's why I mailed out 200 packages at a time, instead of the usual 15 or 20.

After a while, the post office realized that what I was doing was intentional, and that I was defrauding the post office by overwhelming them with hundreds of packages with improper postage on purpose every few days. Suddenly the postal police was on my trail.

Luckily my uncle just so happened to be working for the main post office in Aachen, and he was in charge of the PO box department. So when the postal police investigated who owned Lucifer's PO box, which was the return address on all those packages with insufficient postage, the warrant landed on my uncle's desk. Back then PO boxes in Germany were free and anonymous, similar to Swiss bank accounts. All you had to do was ask a clerk for a box number, and he handed you a little pink card with a PLK number on it. Then people could send mail to that PLK number, and you could go pick up your mail at the post office by showing the clerk the little pink card.

My uncle knew that I had something to do with computers and that I received a lot of packages with disks from people around the world every day. But he didn't know any details. He called me and asked me if I knew someone named Lucifer, and if I did, to tell him to stop that 1 cent stamp nonsense or face jail time, because the postal police was watching Lucifer's PO box.

I had no choice but to abandon that PO box and rip up my pink card. That was the end of my career as mega-swapper. But I continued to hang out on my crew's online headquarter every day.

I realized that the police was circling closer and closer around me and that I had to be even more careful about my double life from now on. I even went so far as to ask one of my school friends to come to copy parties with me, to pretend to be Lucifer, so that people saw Lucifer and Goliath at the same place at the same time, and nobody would get the idea that it was really just me using two different names. All the other members in my crew knew the truth, but they kept their mouths shut and didn't reveal it to anyone else outside of our crew. They understood the necessity of my lie to avoid arrest.

A few months later, the German FBI suddenly raided my parents' house a second time anyway. But this time they weren't even looking for me, neither under my new name Lucifer nor under my old name Goliath. They had been looking for a different hacker, who called himself Pentagon. Someone had Pentagon's name in his little black contact book, and had accidentally written my address under Pentagon's name. So the FBI came to my house, looking for someone else. Luckily there was nothing incriminating in my room, but my parents totally freaked out on me anyway.

From that point on I was really on thin ice with them. And they started to become more and more suspicious about me locking myself in my room and being on the phone all the time. They even thought I might be on drugs and had a little intervention on one of the rare occasions they happened to catch me outside of my room in the hallway.

Then at some point they finally caught on to the fact that I was connected to America 24/7 and they went ape shit! They did the math, and it turned out that within just a few months, I had spent enough time on international calls, that if I got caught, they would have to pay over a million dollars in phone charges. This was before cell phones. Everyone still used regular landlines, and the phone in my room was on their account. So they locked my phone. I could still receive calls, but I couldn't make calls, because the dial pad was locked. Then I figured out that I could still dial numbers, if I took the receiver off the phone and tapped on the little contact button the receiver rested on, when you aren't using the phone.

If I had to dial a 3, I had to quickly tap that button three times. If I had to dial a 9, I had to quickly tap it nine times. It was incredibly tedious, especially for long international phone numbers, because if I miscounted, I had to hang up and start all over again. It was such a pain in the ass! Eventually my parents realized that despite the lock they put on my phone, I was still able to make phone calls somehow. So they took my phone away altogether.

That made my long distance relationship with Donna all the more difficult. Since I couldn't call her from the house anymore, I recorded the blue box tone on a tape and then I went to public phone booths and held up my walkman to the phone and played the tone that gave me a free international line to call Donna in New York.

I spent hours in phone booths every day. Winter came and it was

freezing. I ended up catching pneumonia. By then I had graduated from school and was now working in a school for mentally handicapped kids. Back then they still had a military draft in Germany, and every male over 18 had to join the army for a year.

I have always had a problem with authority. The idea that some knuckle-dragging sergeant, with half my IQ, was going to boss me around didn't sit too well with me. I figured as soon as someone tells me to crawl through the mud, I'm gonna tell them to go fuck themselves, and then I'll spent a year in some army jail cell. Not my idea of fun.

So I became a conscientious objector. If you refuse to join the army on moral grounds, you have to give them a good reason why you are against killing someone on command. You could either go to an oral interview and try to convince the panel that you're not army material, or you could write an essay.

The interview basically consists of a bunch of trick questions: Imagine you walk through the woods with your girlfriend, and suddenly a guy tries to rob you and kill her. You have a gun. Do you shoot the guy to save your girlfriend's life? If you say no, they tell you you're lying, because of course you would do anything to save her life. If you say yes, they tell you, "see, you would fire a gun and kill someone if necessary, so you are fit to join the army." There is no right answer for these types of questions.

I figured the essay would be easier. It worked. I didn't have to join the army for a year, and I got to work with handicapped kids for a year and a half instead. They made the civilian service longer, so that it deters people from taking "the easy way out" of their military service. I enjoyed working with those kids and I even planned on going to college to become a special ed teacher and work with handicapped kids for a living.



## DONNA THE RECLUSE

*“You don't love someone because they're perfect, you love them in spite of the fact that they're not.”*

**Jodi Picoult**

Even when I worked at the school for handicapped kids, I still talked to Donna for hours every day. I spent all my free time on the phone with her. Sometimes we talked until the sun came up and I went to work without having slept at all.

By now I had lost all interest in the illegal hacking scene, so Lucifer had retired. But I still continued to run my software company as Goliath and we had produced a few popular video games. Some of them were distributed by a German software company that later became part of Electronic Arts.

I was only 20, but I had already made a nice amount of money with those video games and I ended up flying to New York whenever I had a chance, to spend time with Donna. During one particular three month time period I ended up flying to New York six times. Sometimes just for a weekend.

The handicapped kids I worked with were always sick. Long time teachers are used to it. They have a pretty strong immune system and they don't get sick all the time from being around sick kids. But I hadn't been around these kids for that long, so I wasn't as immune as the other teachers were, and I caught every cold those kids had. One time I caught the chickenpox from them. I figured, while I was on sick leave, it was the perfect excuse to hop on a plane and go visit Donna in New York for a few days again.

I can't believe they actually let me on the plane. I felt like patient zero. I could have had the swine flu or Ebola or something. During the flight, my chickenpox got worse and worse. By the time I got off the plane, I looked like a leper. I was seriously afraid the customs officers at Kennedy Airport would take one look at me and quarantine me or something. But they let me right through. So much for border security.

A few weeks later I caught pneumonia. Not sure if it was the result of having caught 3 consecutive colds from the kids, or because I had spent so much time in freezing phone booths, talking to Donna.

Either way, I collapsed at my parents' house with a very high fever.

For days I had this really bad cough that just wouldn't go away. Then, while brushing my teeth one night, the bathroom suddenly turned black and white, and everything seemed to move away from me. Obviously that was just what it looked like, because the blood was leaving my head, so my eyes were playing tricks on me. But it really did look like the whole room turned black and white and moved away from me. I think that's why people see a tunnel of light when they die. I think it's simply the blood leaving their eye balls and their field of vision narrowing to a pinpoint.

I was able to call out for my mom and my stepdad right before passing out. They called an ambulance and I was rushed to the hospital. Turns out I had pneumonia for a while already, before I finally collapsed that night. The doctors told my parents they weren't sure if I was going to make it. For the first few days in the hospital, there was a pretty good chance I might die. But I got through it. After I got out of the hospital, I was on sick leave for a few weeks. So of course I hopped on the next plane and flew to New York again.

When I had first started talking to Donna over a year earlier, to convince her to make her bulletin board the exclusive online headquarter for my hacking crew, she had mentioned that she had a roommate. This guy Jeff, who worked as a technician in an electronics store, and spent all his time fixing broken TVs and VCRs and stuff like that.

Whenever Donna and I talked on the phone, I often heard her yell at Jeff to get out of her room, or to go let her dogs out, or get her cigarettes. She was treating him like shit. Like he was her personal servant or something.

As the weeks and months went by, and we talked every day, we got closer and closer. Donna and I started having phone sex. This was before the first time I flew to New York to visit her.

One night she asked me on the phone if I masturbate. Well, yeah, doesn't everyone? Then she asked me how often. She asked me to describe in detail how I do it. Then she asked me to do it on the phone with her and let her listen to me cum. I was shy at first, but she kept whispering all sorts of sexy things into my ear that got me hard. From that point on we had phone sex almost every night. That's why I always locked my bedroom door, so my parents wouldn't

suddenly walk in on me. And because I was locked in my room all the time, they started to think I was on drugs.

Donna asked me how big my dick was and asked me to take pictures of it before and after she made me cum, and mail them to her. And she sent me naked pictures of herself. It was pretty exciting to have a girlfriend in New York, who got a kick out of making me cum on the phone every night.

But I could tell that something was bothering her. I asked her what was wrong. Finally Donna told me she had a deep dark secret. She said if she told me what it is, I would never want to talk to her again. It was obvious that her secret really was weighing on her conscience, and I kept asking her to tell me, and I promised her that she would feel so much better once she gets it off her chest.

I told her that I know from experience that carrying around a dark secret has a way of making you feel trapped and alone: "I know what it's like to put up these invisible walls in your head that you hide behind, and you don't want to let anyone peek inside those walls and see the real you, because you're afraid they won't like you anymore once they know your secret and they know the real you. But it's a really good feeling when you find someone you can trust. And you can share your dark secret with them without fear of being judged or that they will like you any less. And then, when you can finally let it all out, that secret suddenly no longer has any power over you. Sometimes things seem really bad when they fester in the dark, but once you drag them out into the light, and you talk about them, they aren't so bad after all."

I tried to reassure her that no matter what, I wouldn't love her any less. But she just wouldn't tell me. That just blew my mind. We had gotten so close. Every day she told me she loved me. She had sent me naked pictures of herself. She had told me many times on the phone that she couldn't wait to finally meet in person and touch me, kiss me, and feel me inside of her. At this point she should have been able to tell me anything. What could possibly be so bad that she felt she couldn't talk to me about it?

Of course when someone says they have a dark secret, your brain automatically starts imagining all sorts of worst case scenarios: Maybe she's in a wheelchair? Maybe she has cancer and she's on chemo and she's bald? Maybe she used to be a prostitute? And that's where I hit the limits of my imagination. I couldn't think of anything

that would be worse. Anything else, no matter what, would be less bad than those three scenarios.

For the next few sleepless nights, I tried to play out each of those scenarios in my head. I tried to be honest with myself about how I would feel if she was in a wheelchair, with everything that entails. We would never be able to travel or go out to eat or go to the beach like a normal couple. The wheelchair would dominate every aspect of life. Everything would be a hassle. Everything would be complicated. And sex with her probably would never be the way I had pictured it in my head when we had phone sex.

But ultimately none of that mattered to me. I read somewhere that falling in love with someone through letters or on the phone is the truest form of love, because you are in love with the actual person, with their true essence. You are in love with their mind, not their body. And I really cared about Donna after all the time we had spent talking to each other. I figured I would be a pretty shallow asshole if I would let a disability change my feelings for her. That's not the kind of person I want to be. And I'm not. So I was going to stick by her, wheelchair and all.

But what if she had cancer? Do I really want to get attached to someone who has a terminal illness and who may die soon? I thought about that saying, "it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." That made a lot of sense to me. None of us really know how long we have left to live. You may be perfectly healthy, and then get hit by a bus tomorrow.

It doesn't make any sense to say no to love, just because it may end in a few months. Every day with that special someone in your life is a gift. If it ends up lasting a lifetime, that's perfect. But even if it only lasts a few months or years, nobody can ever take those days away from you afterwards. They will forever be a part of you and your story. So I decided that even if Donna has cancer and she's going to die soon, I won't let that stop me from loving her and spending as much time as possible with her now, for as long as possible.

But what if she used to be a prostitute? No matter how liberal I may be about most things, when it comes to love and sex, I am pretty traditional. I'm not into free love. I'm not into fucking around with just anybody.

Love is really just a word we use to describe a deep bond between two people. And the thought that the girl I love has sex with someone else is unbearable to me. I think of sex as the most intimate thing two people in love can share. It's the ultimate bonding experience. I can't have sex a bunch of times with a girl and not bond with her or care about her. And I can't handle the thought of the girl I love having sex with someone else and sharing that kind of intimacy with another person besides me.

So if Donna had been a prostitute while she and I were talking to each other on the phone every day, I wouldn't have been able to handle it. I would have told her to stop doing that or I wouldn't be able to talk to her any more, because it would hurt me too much to get attached to her any further, while she is having sex with other people.

But if she had been a prostitute in the past, before she and I met, I figured I would be able to deal with that. I wouldn't be happy about it. It would bother me a lot that every guy in town had his dick inside the girl I love. Disgusting! But as long as it's in the past, and she's loyal to me now, and we have a strong bond that nobody else can break, then I would be able to forget about it and focus on a future with her instead of worrying about her past.

While growing up in Germany, I read a book, called Zoo Station, about a teenage prostitute. It was a true story. Her name was Christiane F. She had grown up in a broken, abusive home. She started doing heroin at 13 and ended up as a teenage prostitute at 14, tricking on the streets of Berlin, near the Zoo subway station.

That book was a huge hit. It sold millions of copies and was made into a movie that ended up being one of the highest grossing films in German movie history. Christiane F made so much money off her life story that she ended up being a millionaire. Her book was required reading in most German schools.

Growing up, that book was the only thing I had ever known about drugs or addicts, until I moved to the States years later and met actual drug addicts in person. I think I was 14, when I read Christiane's book. And I felt really bad for her. I could relate to her, because my childhood wasn't all roses either. I was just lucky that there were no drugs around me while I was growing up.

My father was a violent alcoholic. What's your very first childhood

memory? Blowing out the candles on your birthday cake? Playing with your favorite doll? Your toy truck? Well, my very first memory is sitting in the backseat of the car. My mother was behind the wheel, as usual, and my dad was sitting next to her. He didn't have a license. They were arguing about money. She earned a lot more than he did. He wanted money from her to get drunk. She told him she couldn't give it to him, because she needed to pay the rent and bills. Suddenly he grabbed her by the back of her head and slammed her face into the steering wheel.

During my childhood, it was normal to me that my parents always argued and that my dad would disappear on drinking binges for days at a time. My mother knew that he was not just out there getting shitfaced, but that he was also cheating on her with barflies. Even as a little kid, I understood how much the things he did hurt her. She wanted to leave him, but he always threatened that he would kill her and me, if she ever tried to leave him.

Finally, after years of emotional torture and physical abuse, she had the courage to tell him that it was over. I guess she figured he was going to kill us sooner or later anyway, so she might as well take her chances and try to escape while she still can. She told him he had to move out. He actually did! He moved in with my grandmother. But the daily terror didn't end there. It just got worse.

Whenever my mother and I watched a movie in the living room, we cringed in fear, if we heard the front gate at the end of the driveway creak in the wind. We thought it was my dad, opening the gate and walking up to the house to kill us.

One night it wasn't the wind that made the front gate creak. It really was my dad coming to kill us. He opened the gate, walked down the driveway and banged on the front door. My mother had changed the locks, but that didn't stop him for long. He broke the glass door on the back patio and got into the house. We just quietly sat on the couch, holding our breaths, until he walked into the living room. We were in shock.

My dad was drunk out of his mind, and gave this big speech about how he was going to make my mother watch while he kills me, then he was going to kill her, and then he was going to kill himself. He seemed proud of himself for having come up with this grand plan. It was the perfect crime in his head. He kept repeating himself, relishing every detail of how he was going to kill us one by one.

I was just a little kid. What could I possibly do to stop a grown man from trying to kill my mom? I remembered that I had a Swiss army knife in my room. I decided to make a run for the knife and try to stab my dad to death before he could kill my mom.

I jumped off the couch and ran out of the living room. My mother was terrified and yelled, "Don't leave me alone with him!" and came running after me. We locked ourselves in my bedroom.

In Germany, doors are solid wood. Not the hollow crap doors they have in the States. So my bedroom door put up a pretty good fight, while he was trying to break it down. After a few minutes of throwing himself against the door, everything went quiet. We thought he might have given up and left. But then, after the longest minute ever, we heard his voice, right there, on the other side of the door: "Oh come on, guys, I was just kidding. Open the door. Everything is fine."

Of course my mother didn't fall for it. With a shaky voice and tears in her eyes, she begged him to go away. That only pissed him off more again. He went and got a hammer or a crowbar or something and started smashing the door with it.

In the Stephen King movie *The Shining*, Jack Nicholson plays a custodian who spends the winter taking care of an empty hotel in the mountains. His wife and kid are with him, and they watch in horror, as he slowly loses his mind, until he tries to kill them. At one point the mother and her kid lock themselves in the bathroom, while Jack Nicholson's character is trying to break down the door. After he broke a splintery hole in the door, he sticks his crazy-eyed head through it and says in this really creepy voice: "Here's Johnny!"

I lived through that exact scene in real life. My dad even kinda looked like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. He bashed my bedroom door until there was a hole and any minute now he was going to be able to reach through it and unlock the door and kill us.

Suddenly all my fear was gone. I just sat there on my bed and watched what was happening at the door, as if I was watching a movie. Nothing seemed real.

Years later I found out that that's pretty common when people go through traumatic experiences. When their mind can't handle what is

happening, during a horrible rape for example, the mind shuts down and just goes away, to some safe place somewhere else. Suddenly the world around them, and the horrible moment they are in, doesn't seem real anymore. Psychologists call it dissociation, depersonalization, or derealization. Those are symptoms often found in people suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

While I was sitting on the bed, perfectly calm, my mother grabbed my arm, opened the window and dragged me out. We ran to the nearest phone booth and called the cops. My mom got a restraining order against my dad. A few days later he hung himself from the big cherry tree in my grandmother's backyard. It was the best thing he ever did for me. Otherwise he would have just continued to terrorize or even kill my mother and me.

If someone had told me back then that swallowing a little pill or snorting some powder would make my problems and worries seem less important for a little while, and would make me feel better for a little bit, of course I would have tried it. And then I probably would be an addict now, too. That's why even now, many years later, I don't judge addicts or look down my nose at them. I know that I could have just as easily ended up in their shoes.

Christiane's book *Zoo Station* did a really good job explaining what it's like to be a drug addicted hooker, who hates her life and feels like she is all alone in the world, because not even her own parents really care about her. And she felt that if her own parents don't even love her, why would anyone else ever really love her? It seemed so obvious to me that drugs were just a substitute for love. She had been abused and abandoned as a young child, and that left a huge gaping hole in her soul that she tried to fill with drugs.

I felt so bad for her when I read her book at 14, I wished I could get in touch with her and just let her know that she's not alone, and that someone does care about her and the shit she had been through. After reading her book, I told myself if I ever met Christiane, or someone like her, I wouldn't make her feel like shit, but be kind to her and treat her nice and with respect, because it might actually make a difference in her life.

All these things were going through my mind, while trying to figure out how I would deal with the situation, if Donna told me she had been a prostitute in the past. I decided I wasn't going to let that stop me from loving her. We have all done things in the past that we are



not proud of. It's not fair to judge someone for who they used to be. Everyone deserves a second chance, and to be treated for who they are today.

Finally I told Donna that I couldn't stop thinking about her deep dark secret. I explained that I had come up with three worst case scenarios, and that none of them would be a deal breaker for me. She was touched, but she said it wasn't any of those things. It was worse. Wow.

Meanwhile I had heard rumors in the hacking scene that Donna was not who she claimed to be. I had asked her about it, and she said that the stories I had heard about her were lies that had been spread by her enemy Tammy, the other famous female hacker who ran the competing online board in California.

The rumors I had heard about Donna seemed so silly, I didn't pay any attention to them. She was really hurt by the things people were saying about her, but I was used to people in the hacking scene talking shit about each other on online forums all the time, and hating me for the things I wrote in Sex and Crime. It was called ragging or waging an online flame war. Since I was famous under two different names, I was a big target. Members of other crews always tried to get under Goliath's or Lucifer's skin. Especially since some people suspected, despite my best efforts to keep it a secret, that I had not really retired from the scene in the past, after those FBI raids, and that I had been using two different hacker names all along, and that I was really Goliath and Lucifer.

I had gotten so used to people trying to get under my skin, that I became an expert at defending myself in these online flame wars. Once I had realized that online bullies have no power except the power you give them, I became impervious to their attacks. There was nothing anyone could say that would hurt me, because I knew that if I didn't allow them to get to me, they had no power.

Attack is the best defense, as they say, so I became a notoriously vicious online bully, or "flame warrior." Every time a competing hacker tried to pick an online fight with me or my crew, or tried to spread rumors about my girl Donna, I would relentlessly barrage them with hatefully sarcastic diatribes, until they ended up crushed and defeated, with their tail between their legs.

All that happened many years ago, but some of those people still

hate me to this day, 20 years later, because my words cut so deep and left permanent scars, and their feelings were genuinely hurt after I trolled them online.

For example, when one of the old scene mags on paper interviewed me as Goliath, they published a photo of me along with the article. In the photo, I was at the historic Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy, with my hands in my pockets, squinting off into the distance, like I was doing some sort of Robert DeNiro impression. It was a pretty good picture.

A hacker from the competing crew Legion, who was loyal to Tammy's online board, and hated my guts for the things I had written about his crew in Sex and Crime, began to spread the rumor that that wasn't really me in the picture. He claimed that it was a picture of a male model from a fashion catalog. He didn't even seem to realize that he was actually flattering me in his attempt to insult me.

He had some kind of heart condition, and he had received a heart transplant. In retaliation for him trying to spread rumors about me, I spread the rumor that his new heart was actually a pig's heart. He died a few years later, at a pretty young age. And to this day the one thing many sceners still remember about him is that he was the recipient of a pig heart transplant.

Not one of my finer moments.

Anyway, since other hackers couldn't get to me with their online insults, they attacked Donna instead, and tried to get to me that way. Things got really ugly, but I always stuck up for her.

Then one day Donna told me that the rumors they were spreading about her were actually true. I was speechless. As it turned out, her deep dark secret was that Jeff wasn't really her roommate. He was her husband. And she wasn't really 22 like she had told everyone in the hacking scene. She was actually 32. Twelve years older than me!

## MY FIRST STREET FIGHT IN NEW YORK

*"I am never proud to participate in violence, yet I know that each of us must care enough for ourselves that we can be ready and able to come to our own defence when and wherever needed."*

**Maya Angelou**

It took me a couple of days to digest the fact that the girl I had been talking to on the phone for a year wasn't who I thought she was, and she had been lying to me this whole time.

But then I remembered those three worst case scenarios I had contemplated earlier. Was the fact that she was 12 years older than me really worse than her being in a wheelchair or having cancer? No, of course not. Her age really didn't make any difference at all. She was still the same Donna I had been talking to for a year. She was still the same person who knew everything about me at this point, and who could always make me smile.

At this point we still had not met in person yet, and now I understood why she had been hesitant about meeting. But now that her secret was out, I figured we finally needed to meet. I decided to surprise her.

I told her I was going to work, like every morning. And, like every morning, we were going to stay connected on the phone until I get home from work.

But I didn't really go to work that morning. I went to the airport, got on a plane and flew to New York for the first time. I rented a car and drove to Donna's house. I got there about 8 hours after I had told her I was going to work. So she was expecting me to get home from work and say hello on the phone any minute now. Instead I knocked on her door.

She didn't answer. I kept knocking. Finally she poked her head out the window and saw me standing there, wearing my new round John Lennon sunglasses that I had told her about on the phone a day earlier. She looked at me like I was a ghost. At first it didn't register in her brain who I was. How could that possibly be me standing in front of her door in New York? She thought she was connected to me on the phone in Germany and that I was going to get home from work any second now. Then she yelled I should wait for her in the

car and she'd be right out. She had to get dressed first.

I sat in the car for about half an hour until she finally came out. She got into the car and didn't know what to say. She just stared at me. Then she said that after talking to me on the phone for a year, finally seeing me in person felt like she was looking at a movie star. It felt unreal. We were both nervous. Then we hugged and kissed.

After a little while we both relaxed a little. We drove to the park that was one block away from her house and sat in the grass and talked. She was finally her old self and yelled at me for surprising her like that. But she was really happy that we finally met and we were laughing and kissing and having a great time. Once we got used to sitting in front of each other and not just talking on the phone, we both realized that we really did know each other very well after talking to each other for a year.

It was getting really late so I had to drive her back to her house. On the way she asked me to pull over. It was dark. She said she wanted to sit in the backseat with me and hang out for a little while longer. She took a map that was lying in the rental car and covered the window that was facing the sidewalk. Then she opened my zipper while we were kissing. She started to stroke my dick until I got hard and then gave me a blowjob. After over a year of knowing each other, this was the first time we had real sex, not just talking about it on the phone. And the way she sucked me was exactly like she had always described it: Slow and tender, with feeling. It felt amazing. But I was so nervous, I couldn't cum.

When I finally drove her back to her house, Jeff came out, yelling and screaming. He had obviously been waiting for us by the window. After Donna had finally told me the truth about being married, she told me that she and Jeff were married on paper, but not really. She said she had met him a few years ago and they were both lonely, so they decided to get married for financial reasons and live together, and split the rent and bills, but that they were really just roommates. She said they slept in separate rooms and never had sex. She emphasized again and again that she and Jeff weren't really married.

Apparently Jeff didn't get the memo. He was pretty fucking pissed that his wife was out all night with some guy from Germany. He confronted me and told me to get out of the car. Donna kept yelling at him not to make a scene. I was pretty startled by the whole

situation. This was the first time I was in America, the first time I was in New York, and here I am, on the first day, entangled in a street brawl, about to get my ass kicked, because I just had sex with a married woman. What the fuck just happened?

Jeff asked me if I knew that Donna was with him. I didn't really know how to answer that. So I said, "yeah, I guess." I was gonna go into how she had told me that they were not really together, but before I had a chance to say anything else, I already had his fist in my face.

Everything after that was just a blur. I'm not a street fighter. I'm not a redneck or a thug. I'm a thinker. I grew up living a pretty sheltered life. Well, apart from the FBI raids and my dad almost killing me. I went to an elite private catholic school. I lived in a good neighborhood. I didn't go to bars or clubs. So I was almost never in any kind of situation that would lead to a real fight.

Up until that point in my life, I had really only been in three actual fights, and all of them were over in a split second.

In junior high, some bully, who was two or three years older and a lot bigger than me, kept picking on me every chance he got. One day he tried to choke me from behind, so I grabbed his arm, threw him over my shoulder with some kind of Judo move that I had seen in a movie somewhere, and when he landed on the ground, I punched him in the face as hard as I could. I knocked out one of his front teeth. After that, neither he nor anyone else at that school ever bothered me again.

My parents moved a lot, so I had to change schools a few times. At the new high school I didn't know anyone yet, so during the five minute breaks inbetween classes, I just sat quietly at my desk and drew comics. The jocks in that class used to take the cloth the teachers used to wipe the chalk board and make it wet and tie it into a tight knot, so that it became almost as hard as a baseball, and then threw it at the smaller kids in class as hard as they could, to torment them. They thought it was hilarious.

I was still sitting at my desk in the back corner of the room, drawing, and politely asked them to please not throw it at me. Of course that only made them want to do it more. So next thing I know, that wet hard cloth ball suddenly landed on my drawing and ruined it.

I had seen some prison movie, where some new inmate had learned that in order to get respect in prison, you should pick a fight with the biggest, baddest motherfucker as soon as you get there. That way everyone will think you're a loose cannon and leave you alone.

I figured that sounds like a good idea right about now. So I took that cloth ball, walked up to the biggest jock in class, who had thrown it at me, and shoved it in his face as hard as I could. He flipped out and tried to beat the shit out of me. He was a lot bigger than me, but I held my own and managed to wrestle him to the ground and hold him down in a headlock. I was scared, because I knew if the teacher for the next class didn't show up soon, I was gonna get my ass kicked bad.

The jock was screaming for his buddies to help him get me off him, but they actually stayed out of it and laughed. They told him that he started it by throwing the cloth ball at me even though I asked him not to. When the teacher finally came, he separated us. The jock gave me some dirty looks during class, but afterwards he came over to me and we shook hands. He said that he respected that I stood up to him and that we were cool.

After that little incident, nobody at that school ever picked another fight with me and I got along great with everybody. Apparently the things you learn from prison movies really do have real world applications. Who knew?

My third and last fight in high school also happened during one of those five minute breaks between classes. We were all standing in a narrow hallway in front of the chemistry lab, waiting for the teacher to get there and unlock the door. We were all bored, so a bunch of the halfwitted knuckle-draggers in my class started to shove each other against the walls and other students.

When I was born, I had a hole in my heart. The oxygen-poor blood in one half of my heart mixed with the oxygen-rich blood in the other half. So there wasn't enough oxygen in the blood that was circulating through my body, and my lips and fingernails were blue. Some doctors told my parents I would die, unless I get surgery to close the hole. Other doctors told my parents that a baby cannot survive that kind of heart surgery, so if they put me under the knife, I would probably die from that. So my parents took their chances with the less invasive option, and decided not to put me through surgery. The hole finally closed on its own.

After that my heart still went out of rhythm sometimes, for no good reason. From one second to the next, it just shifts into overdrive and starts pounding like crazy, like I just ran a marathon. Even when I'm sitting perfectly still. It can happen after I drink soda that has a lot of caffeine, or I eat chocolate. Or it can happen if someone shoves me.

So while we were all standing in that hallway, waiting for the teacher to get there, I told the knuckle-draggers not to shove me, because of my heart. Of course that only made them want to do it more. You'd think I'd have figured out by then that telling a teenager not to do something always has the opposite effect.

Anyway, some guy shoved me against the wall as hard as he could, for laughs. So I grabbed him, turned him around so he would face the opposite wall, and shoved him, as hard as I could, face first against that wall. I broke his skull by accident. He had to go to the hospital. I was suspended for a week. Luckily the other kids vouched for me and told the principal that I didn't start it and that I specifically told the other kid not to shove me because of my heart. After that, once again, nobody ever messed with me again.

But let's get back to Jeff and Donna. So here we were, standing on the sidewalk in New York, and this guy took a swing at me. I'm six feet tall and not exactly scrawny. Although I don't ever start a fight, I can defend myself, if I have to. And Jeff was a lot shorter than me, and he was really just a little wet noodle. That fight was over in less than ten seconds. Somehow I grabbed him, knocked him to the ground with a leg sweep, and sat on his chest with his head between my knees. I had no idea what I was doing, but I sure looked good while doing it.

I grabbed his hair with one hand and made a fist with my other hand and was about to bash his face in, while screaming at him that I was gonna beat the shit out of him. He got really scared and backed down. It's not like he had much of a choice. Since he didn't try to fight back any more at that point, I didn't punch him in the face and got off his chest.

He got up and walked back in the house without saying another word. My adrenaline was pumping like crazy. What a bizarre night this was! Like I said, I lived a pretty sheltered, well-mannered, calm life as a teenager in Germany. Especially after my dad had died and my mother had married my stepdad. The most exciting thing that

might happen on any given day was that the grocery store at the corner had a new milkshake flavor. I definitely wasn't used to having sex with a married woman in New York and then getting into a street fight with her husband.

Donna followed Jeff into the house and they had a talk. He told her that he would file for divorce and move out as soon as he finds a different place to live.

So he was still there for the next 2 weeks, while I was visiting Donna in New York. I stayed at a hotel a few miles away, but Donna never wanted to go there. It took me a few years until I realized she had agoraphobia. Anyway, while I was there, we hung out all day every day and had sex every night. At first we did it in the car, in the same dark corner we had done it that first night. But that got old after a few days.

So then we had sex in the park near her house at night. Right in the middle of the lawn. Until a police cruiser drove through the park and put their spotlight on us. Luckily we weren't doing anything at that moment, but we were about to. Donna wasn't wearing any pants or panties, and while we were squinting into the police lights, and they told us to stand up, she asked me if her T-shirt looked like a dress. It didn't. But I said it did. The cops didn't arrest us. So it was all good.

During the second week, we just brazenly hung out at her house, and we had sex there while Jeff was at work. It was really strange. Even when he came home from work, I was still there, and Donna and I sat on the living room couch, watching TV, while he was hiding in his room, fixing a VCR or something. Occasionally he walked through the living room, right past us, without saying a word, to go to the bathroom. I kept expecting him to storm into the living room one day and pick another fight with me, or pull a gun on me or something, but he never did.

Donna told me that after the fight, Jeff had a lot of respect for me, because I didn't beat him to a pulp, although I could have. Suddenly I had street cred in New York, because I let him get up without hitting him back, after he suckerpunched me.

Eventually I had to fly back to Germany. But after that first trip I was hooked, and I kept flying back to New York every couple of days. Jeff did move out after a few days, so then Donna and I were able to just hang out at her place whenever I came over. No more



crazy sex romps in the park.

All these transatlantic flights were getting pretty expensive, and then my mom and stepdad had figured out that I was constantly on the phone with America, so they wouldn't let me use the phone at the house anymore. At that point I had to keep going to phone booths to talk to Donna. It couldn't go on like this. Especially after I caught pneumonia and almost died.

So I decided to move to New York and live with Donna, instead of going to college to become a special ed teacher in Germany. My parents flipped out. They thought I was throwing my life away.

# HOW TO BE A REALLY BAD CARTOONIST

*"Do not correct a fool, or he will hate you. Correct a wise man, and he will appreciate you."*

## Proverb

Every time I flew to New York, I came with a tourist visa, which allowed me to stay in the US for three months each time. After those three months were up, I had to leave the country for at least one day, or I'd be an illegal immigrant.

After I completed my mandatory civil service in Germany, I had no reason to fly back anymore. But after I stayed with Donna for almost three months, my visa was about to expire, and if I got caught overstaying my legal welcome, I could be deported and banned from re-entering the States.

So something needed to be done. I figured the easiest thing would be, if I fly back to Germany for a few days and come right back. Then I'd have a fresh three month tourist visa. But Donna was afraid I wouldn't come back, so she didn't want me to go. She told me if I fly back to Germany, for even just one day, it's over.

But what else could we do? She suggested we get married, because once I'm married to a US citizen, I could apply for a green card and they wouldn't be able to deport me, no matter how long the paperwork would take.

Even though we had known each other for well over a year at this point, we had only lived together for about 3 months, and I really didn't want to get married so quickly. I was only 20. I told her I wasn't ready to get married, and flew back to Germany. I told her I'd be back soon, but she was so upset, she said she never wanted to talk to me again. We didn't talk to each other for two weeks or so. I was miserable. I kept trying to call her from Germany, but she wouldn't answer. I wrote her a letter. Finally she called me, and asked me to come back.

When I arrived in New York the next day, I saw that she had fresh scars on her wrists. She had tried to kill herself after I left. Now she tried to trivialize it and said that she was only playing around and accidentally cut deeper than she meant to.

I felt so bad for her, I agreed to marry her. And it really didn't seem

like such a terrible idea. We did love each other, and hey, if it didn't work out, I could always get a divorce later.

But in the meantime, every nice day together would be a gift that nobody could ever take away from me afterwards. And how fucking awesome is it that some little computer geek from Germany is marrying this hot woman in New York? I felt like one of those two kids in that 80s movie *Weird Science*, who created the perfect woman on their computer and then brought her to life.

A few days later, on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1993, Donna and I ended up getting married. In the living room. By now the money I had made producing video games was running out. I needed to find a job, but while my green card application was being processed, I was technically an illegal alien fresh off the banana boat. Legally I was not allowed to work, because I didn't even have a social security card yet.

In school, I had always drawn silly little pictures, cartoons and comics, to pass the time when I got bored. Donna knew I could draw pretty well, so she asked me to draw her a picture of a knight fighting a dragon. It came out pretty good, and she suggested that I should try to make a living drawing cartoons or comics.

That seemed like a pretty cool idea. After all, if Mikey Mouse and Bugs Bunny can make billions of dollars, I should be able to make at least a little bit of money with my own cartoons. It was worth a shot. I had no idea at the time how tough it is to break into that business.

I drew a batch of ten single panel gag cartoons, similar to Gary Larson's *The Far Side*. Since everything in Europe is a lot more liberal than in the States, they have a much darker, edgier sense of humor as well. I was used to the uncensored cartoons in German humor magazines like *Titanic*, which often included nudity and very bad taste, like graphic dead baby jokes. Not the kind of stuff any American magazine or newspaper would ever publish.

I sent my first batch of cartoons to King Features Syndicate, the largest distributor of newspaper comics. They supply thousands of papers across the country with daily comic strips. I was so oblivious, I had no idea how remote my chances were of actually selling a cartoon to King Features. It's kinda like a kid writing a movie script with crayons and then sending it to Universal Studios, hoping to get a movie deal. It just doesn't happen.

And then it happened anyway. King Features bought one of the cartoons from the very first batch of cartoons I ever drew and published it in thousands of newspapers. I thought, "Hey, that was easy. Fame and fortune, here I come!"

It wasn't until a few months later, that I found out how lucky I had been. It was almost like winning the lottery. I was told that every year, over 3000 new artists submit their cartoons to King Features, hoping to make a sale and get their cartoons syndicated in thousands of newspapers. And from what I was told, only about three or four new artists get lucky each year. And here I was, selling a cartoon to King Features at my very first try. Woah!

I figured, making a living as a cartoonist would be a piece of cake. But after that first lucky sale, I didn't sell anything for a while, because my sense of humor was just way too dark for American magazines. It took me a while to understand the different sense of humor in America.

In the meantime I had also submitted a manuscript for a cartoon book to a German comic publishing house. The editor there wrote me a personalized rejection letter and politely explained that my cartoons were amateurish crap. He told me that a pretty famous German cartoonist, who had dozens of books published, just so happened to be living in New York at the time as well. He gave me that famous cartoonist's phone number and suggested I give him a call and get some professional advice from him.

Mr. Famous Cartoonist Guy was nice enough to meet up with me at his house. He looked at my German cartoon book manuscript and told me the same thing the editor at the publishing house had told me: "Kid, this is crap." Then he gave me a lot of good tips that really did improve my work a lot. He knew I wasn't making enough money as freelance cartoonist to survive, so he told me about a German language newspaper on 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan, which was always looking for people in New York who could speak German.

I met the head honcho at that newspaper and he hired me on the spot. He asked me if I knew how to use the desktop publishing software they were using at the newspaper. I lied and said that I did. I figured since I had grown up around computers, I should be able to learn the software on the fly. I was right. From one day to the next, I had a job in the graphic department of a newspaper in New York.

The boss liked my work and made me art director after just two or three weeks. I got to put some of my cartoons in the paper each week, and my boss told me he had always dreamed of being a book publisher, not just a newspaper publisher. He was just looking for the right kind of manuscript for his first book release. I told him I had a manuscript for a cartoon book ready to go. I really didn't. The book was going to be published in America, so my crappy German cartoon manuscript was useless. But I figured if he bites, I'd wing it and quickly throw together a bunch of new cartoons for a book.

He went for it. So now I had to come up with about 100 cartoons in a matter of a week. I drew cartoons every waking minute at home. Those hastily drawn cartoons were shit. Well, each new cartoon was a little bit better than the one before, but honestly, the book was crap. But now I had my first book published. Yayy! I felt like a real artist. I felt like I should be wearing black turtleneck sweaters and a beret.

Working at a newspaper is very stressful, and it wasn't really what I wanted to do, so I quit and decided to live off my book earnings and my cartoon sales as freelance artist. Well, there were no book earnings. I think I sold like three copies of that book. (By the way, thank you for buying THIS book. You rock.)

# MY FRIEND THE ESCAPED MENTAL PATIENT

*"Insane people are always sure that they are fine. It is only the sane people who are willing to admit that they are crazy."*

**Nora Ephron**

After a few weeks of pretending to be a freelance artist, I had to admit to myself that I wasn't actually making any money. I really shouldn't have quit my day job as art director at that newspaper. So I needed to find a new job. Not that easy.

Donna's brother's father-in-law Lou owned a limousine service. Well, that's what he called it, but it was really just a bunch of guys driving their own shitty cars. There were no actual limos. It was a typical New York ghetto cab service.

There are two different types of taxis in New York City. The yellow cabs that everyone knows don't have radios, but the drivers are allowed to pick up people on the street. Limousines are not yellow, and the drivers have two way radios to communicate with a dispatcher, but they are not allowed to pick up people on the street.

Lou was always looking for drivers, so if I had a car, I could start working for him right away. But I didn't have a car. Donna's uncle Rick had an old junk car rotting in his backyard. He said I could have it for free. He was probably happy to finally get rid of that wreck. The transmission was slipping, the seats were ripped, the ceiling in the car looked like it had cancer, and the body was so eaten up by rust, that there were holes in the floor in front of the backseat.

People sitting on the backseat could look down and see the asphalt through the holes between their feet. It was an old red Dodge. Rick jokingly called it the Red Baron. I called it the Flintstone mobile, because I felt if I kick down hard enough, my feet would be on the street, and then I could use my feet to move the car, just like Fred Flintstone.

As an added bonus, the muffler was broken. So the exhaust fumes were coming through the holes in the floor. The car was basically a rolling gas chamber. I inhaled so much carbon monoxide, I'm sure I lost quite a few brain cells, while driving around in that death trap.

If I remember correctly, I was a New York cab driver for about two years. Maybe a little less. I drew cartoons during the day and drove at night, from 6 pm until 2 am. A lot of crazy stuff happened during those two years.

There used to be a show on HBO, called Taxi Cab Confessions. The cab was equipped with hidden cameras, and the driver worked for the show. The people who got into the car had no idea that they were being filmed. They said and did such crazy stuff, I was sure that show was just as fake as wrestling. I figured these crazy people couldn't possibly be real. It had to be staged. Well, once I drove a cab myself, I realized that that show really had been real. You really do meet a lot of crazy people when you drive a cab.

Some of the craziest guys I met were actually the other drivers. One of them was a homeless crack addict. He drove an old black 2-door Chevy Camaro that he had bought a long time ago, during his better days. Now he slept in that car. And he drove it as a cab. When he picked people up, they had to move the front seat back to climb into the backseat, which was covered with his dirty laundry.

One of the other drivers was a retired cop. Later I found out he didn't really retire. He was fired for stealing cocaine from the evidence storage. He told me that one of his regular taxi customers was an old man, who paid the retired cop to have sex with the old man's hot young wife in the cab, while the old man watched.

Another driver, Will, was mentally ill. When he took his medications, he seemed to be high functioning. Or at least functioning well enough to drive people from point A to point B. But when he didn't take his meds, you could tell that there was something seriously wrong with him. He would stand in the middle of the room at the taxi home base, and bob back and forth, shifting his weight from his toes to his heels. And he was convinced his wife and daughter were being raped by aliens, and that the aliens had implanted tracking devices in their brains through their noses.

One of the other drivers was friends with Will and went over to his house every now and then. One time, when he got there, Will opened the door and whispered: "Shhhh, they're here!"

"Who's here?" the other driver asked him.

"The aliens!" Will replied with a whisper.

The other guy followed Will into the house. He looked around, but the living room was empty.

"I don't see anyone."

"Shhhh! They're invisible!"

A few weeks later Will boarded up the windows and doors on the first floor and then jumped out of a second story window. That's when his wife decided enough was enough, and she called 911 to have him committed to the mental health ward at Bellvue Hospital.

Will jumped out of the driving ambulance and ran away to Florida.

About a month or so later, he suddenly showed up for work again, like nothing happened. Since Lou was always short on drivers, he didn't ask any questions and just told Will to go pick up some people and drive them to wherever they had to go.

So these people were being driven around by an escaped mental patient. Literally. Food for thought for the next time you take a cab.

Another driver was this young latino kid who was a gang member. He had robbed a mall with a machine gun. He was arrested and went to prison, but hid the money. When he finally got out of prison, he invested the money into opening up a flower store. But business wasn't going so well for him, so he ended up driving a cab to make ends meet.

He was playing Tomb Raider at the time. I was playing it too, and I was farther along in the game than he was. There was this one spot he couldn't get past, so one day he said: "You're coming to my house tonight and you're gonna get me past that spot."

I really didn't want to. I figured if I don't get him past that spot, he's gonna get pissed and stab me or something. And if I don't go, that's gonna piss him off, too, and then he's gonna stab me for that. So I went home with him after work at 2 am. He turned on his Playstation. I was sweating bullets, but I got him past that difficult spot in Tomb Raider without too much trouble. Then he said, "Thanks, you can go now."

This other driver was a member of the mob. Or maybe he just



pretended he was. He was this little old Italian guy who looked and sounded a lot like Joe Pesci. He had been in prison for check fraud for a couple of years. All the other old time drivers knew him, but I was the new kid. When he got out of prison and started working at the cab service again, he kept staring at me, while we were sitting in the base, waiting for calls. I kept looking back at him, wondering why he was staring at me. It was getting uncomfortable.

Then he said: "Why are you looking at me?"

"Uhhh, I'm not."

"Why not? What? I'm not good enough for you or something? You think you're better than me?" He really did sound a lot like Joe Pesci.

"Uhhh, no. Look, I don't want any trouble. I'm just trying to make some money."

But he didn't let it go. He just kept making these confrontational comments. He really was trying to start shit with me for no damn reason. It was getting kinda scary. He was about a foot shorter than me. I'm sure I could have taken him in a fight if I had to. But who knows if this nutjob has a gun or something?

Finally Jim, the dispatcher, told Joe Pesci to back off: "Leave Oliver alone. He's a good kid."

Joe Pesci backed off immediately: "Aww, come on, I was only kidding." He gave me a big grin and slapped me on the back. Fucking douchebag. We ended up getting along pretty well though. We drivers were one big crazy family of misfits.

Jim the dispatcher liked me a lot, because he thought it was cool that I was a cartoonist, and because I ran personal errands for him inbetween my calls. Jim weighed about 350 pounds and had no teeth. Well, no, that's not true. Actually he had one front tooth left that was holding on for dear life. Most of the errands involved returning a couple of pornos each night, that he had rented from the video store the previous night. He rented a LOT of porn.

In return, he always tried to help me out by giving me the best calls of the night, even when it was really someone else's turn to get the next call. Airport calls were usually the best kind, because people who go to the airport tend to give big tips.

Short one-way trips within our neighborhood were only \$3.50 back then. Short round-trips were \$7. Sometimes people had to make short round-trips to go buy drugs. Jim knew all the local crack houses, so if someone called for a round-trip to one of the known drug hotspots, he charged them \$20 instead of \$7, because of the risk involved.

I didn't want to get arrested with drugs in my car for lousy \$20, so I asked Jim to never send me on any of these drug runs. He promised he wouldn't.

Then, during a particularly slow night, with hardly any calls at all, Jim sent me on a round-trip with this girl. She kept sniffing a lot while she was sitting in the car next to me. We drove to some really shitty part of town. She ran into some wretched house, came back out two minutes later, and handed me \$20 when I dropped her off at her home. She was obviously a coke addict and we had just been on a drug run.

When I got back to the base, I was mad at Jim and asked him why he sent me on that call, when I had specifically told him to never send me on a drug run. He said he felt bad that I wasn't making any money because it was such a slow night, so he figured he'd throw me a bone. He said he was just looking out for me. I told him I appreciated that he had the best intentions, but that I really really did not want to do these kinds of runs. After all, I was driving my own car, without a taxi license. So if the cops pulled me over with drugs in the car, I wouldn't be treated as a cab driver who had nothing to do with it, but as an accomplice in a crime.

A few weeks later it was another very slow night. Jim sent me to pick up some guy who lived near the base. We drove to some shitty part of town, and he ran in, ran out, and handed me \$20 when we got back. It was another drug run! Motherfucking Jim!

When I got back to the base, I told Jim again that I didn't want these types of calls. He grinned his toothless grin and said: "Stop complaining. You just made some easy money, and nothing happened."

I went on another call and when I was about to head back to the base, Jim called me on the radio and told me not to come back just yet. I asked him why not. He said because my previous passenger,

the guy who had gone on a drug run, had lost his drugs in my car, and was freaking out.

He was at the base, screaming that I had stolen his drugs. Jim tried to calm him down and told him that I didn't do any drugs and I didn't have his stuff, but the crazy guy kept screaming and freaking out.

Finally he left and I went back to the base. I was sitting in the back room, where we drivers sat and waited for the next call. People who walked up to the dispatcher's booth window could not see into the back room.

Suddenly the crazy drug guy came back into the base and started screaming at Jim through the window of his booth. He yelled that he knew I was there, because he saw my car parked out front. Jim told him that I had gone home for the night, and that I left my car parked in front of the base because I lived right around the corner. The guy wouldn't stop. He was going nuts. He was really fiending for his fix.

After screaming at Jim for about 10 minutes, he walked outside, to my car. He unzipped his pants, pulled out his dick, and peed all over the hood of my car. What the fuck?! I guess that was his revenge for me "stealing" his drugs.

That night I had a few more calls after that little incident. Then I went home and parked the car. The next morning I was going to go to the grocery store. I got into my car, looked in the back, and there were the drugs, lying right there on my backseat, in plain sight! I couldn't believe that the passengers I picked up after the crazy drug guy didn't say anything or take it.

So now I had a handful of white stuff wrapped in cellophane. I tried to figure out what to do with it. It looked like a lot. He had probably spent his whole paycheck on that stuff. I was so clueless about drugs, I didn't even know if that was cocaine, crack or heroin.

What to do, what to dooo? I was thinking about trying some of it. Just to see what it's like. But I was scared, so I didn't. Then I thought about selling it. I sure could have used the money. You don't make a lot of money driving a cab. After you pay for the gas and the base fee to rent the two-way radio, and pay the base their share of the night's earnings, you basically walk away with nothing, if it wasn't for the tips.

I had seen a news segment about racism. The news crew wanted to show that New York cab drivers were racist, because they would rather pick up a white person than a black one. The news crew had hired a black professor, and a white convict. The black professor tried to hail a cab, but virtually all of the yellow cabs passed him to pick up the white convict a few feet up the road.

But now that I was a cab driver myself, I knew the truth: It had nothing to do with them being black or white. They could have been yellow and purple. The simple truth was that white people usually tipped the driver, and black people usually didn't. And if you depend on tips for your survival, of course you're going to try to pick up as many tippers as possible.

Most of the other drivers drove twelve hours shifts, from 6 at night until 6 in the morning. And then they slept all day. But since I drew cartoons in the day time, and I had to get some sleep at some point, I only worked until 2 am. Those missing four hours made a big difference, because I still had to pay the same expensive rental fee for the two-way radio as everyone else. Some nights I came home with \$20 or less. Things were so bad that I actually had to resort to eating dog food one day. That was probably the lowest point of my life.

Donna's dad owned the house we lived in, and he gave us a break on the rent, because he knew we didn't have any money. But even the little bit of rent that we did have to pay was hard to come by. And then there were the bills. After everything was paid, there usually was almost no money left for food. And when I applied for my green card, Donna and I had to waive our rights to getting any kind of public assistance for the next few years. So we couldn't even apply for food stamps.

I couldn't ask my parents for help, because they thought I was the black sheep of the family and I was nuts for moving to New York. I didn't even talk to my parents at all for the first two or three years after moving to the States. Donna was worried that if I talked to them, they would try to talk me out of being with her and convince me to move back to Germany, so she didn't want me to talk to them at all. And we didn't want to ask Donna's parents for any more help, because they were already helping us out by charging very little rent, and they thought I was some sort of nutjob for trying to make a living drawing silly little pictures.

Donna and I usually didn't eat anything during the day, and when I got off work at 2 am, I stopped by a 24-hour grocery store on my way home. I picked up two cans of Dinty Moore beef stew and that was all we ate. Occasionally Donna's mom gave her \$20 to babysit her senile grandmother for a few hours. Those days were like Christmas, because we used that money to buy a family bucket of fried chicken and french fries. On those days we feasted like kings!

Whenever I came home with almost no money after work, we tried to find quarters between the couch cushions or in the change jar her parents had in their apartment above ours. If we were lucky, we could find enough quarters to buy two cans of stew. We didn't want her parents to know how bad things really were, because we were ashamed and embarrassed. And we didn't want to hear them lecture us.

One night there were no quarters left between the couch cushions or in the kitchen drawer. And Donna had already taken the last few quarters her parents had lying around upstairs a few days earlier. So we literally had no money. Zero. But we were starving. This situation would be unthinkable in Germany, because they have a much better social safety net over there. Nobody ever goes hungry.

I looked through the kitchen cabinets to find anything edible. I didn't care if it was stale Doritos, or dried up old bread. I just needed something to eat. Anything. There was nothing. And then I found a few cans of dog food in the bottom cabinet. I grabbed one of the cans and stared at the picture on the label. I was so hungry, the picture of dog slop started to look a lot like beef stew. And the dog in the picture looked pretty happy with it. I figured, hey, meat is meat, so how much worse than Dinty Moore beef stew could this can of dog food possibly be? Turns out it can be a lot worse. A lot.

When I told Donna I was going to eat the can of dog food, she started to laugh, because she thought I was kidding. Then, when I pulled a can opener out of the drawer, she laughed even harder because she knew I was serious. She just kept staring at me, from across the kitchen, hysterically laughing, while I opened the can and let the gooey slop slowly slide out of the can onto a plate. The chunks of meat really did look like stew. Kind of.

I held each chunk under the faucet to wash off the gelatinous goo. Then I put a bunch of those chunks onto a cookie tray and put them in the oven, as if they were chicken nuggets. After I heated them up,

I pulled out the tray and looked at my meal. It really didn't look all that bad. I put one of them in my mouth. The first thought that went through my head was: I made a terrible mistake.

Apparently dog food meat is really just some ground up dead animal, bones and intestines and all. When you chew one of those chunks of pressed, processed meat, the ground up bones in it feel like sand between your teeth. It's disgusting. I couldn't even swallow that one chunk in my mouth and spit it out. We went to bed hungry that night. The next day, Donna went upstairs into her parents' apartment and ate a can of Ravioli while they weren't home. I was too proud to go upstairs and beg for food or steal cans out of their cabinets. She brought down a can of Ravioli for me. I was so hungry at that point, I didn't care about my pride or my principles anymore and ate the Ravioli.

Anyway, let's get back to the bag of drugs I found on my backseat. I was thinking about selling it, because we could have really really used that money. But I was too scared, and I just ended up flushing it down the toilet. The thought of returning it to the guy who pissed all over my car never even occurred to me.

One of the regular customers who called the taxi service I worked for had Tourette syndrome. I picked him up a few times. He was a nice, quiet guy. He was into martial arts and said he wanted to move to Hollywood and become a martial arts trainer for actors or a fight scene choreographer for action movies. I honestly didn't see that happening, because of his condition. He would quietly talk about something and suddenly FUCK! SHIT! FUCK! FUUCK! he would blurt out all kinds of obscenities out of nowhere. And his arm would begin to twitch FUCK! COCKSUCKING FAGGOT! FUCK! and he'd hit the inside of the car door as hard as he could while shouting things that would even make a hooker blush.

And then there was this guy who lived right around the corner from the base. I don't remember his name, but let's call him Tony. Tony suspected that his wife (or girlfriend?) was cheating on him. He stormed into the base and demanded to get a ride so he could look for her. It was a slow night, and Jim the dispatcher wanted to help me out, so he gave me the call even though it wasn't my turn.

Tony told me to slowly drive up this block and down that block. We must have been driving around for about an hour. He didn't see his girl anywhere. So finally he told me to take him back home. When

we got there, he was just going to get out of the car, without paying me or even tipping me. Yes, he was black.

"Hey, wait a minute," I said. "You have to at least pay me the \$7 for a round-trip."

"For what? I didn't go anywhere. You dropped me off right where you picked me up. I never even got out of the car."

"Are you kidding me? I just drove you around for like an hour, dude!"

He didn't give a shit. He was just gonna get out of the car without paying and go inside his house. I was sooo pissed. How could this asshole do this to me?

I grabbed a crowbar and got out of the car, too. I shouted: "Look, you gotta pay me \$7. And really you owe me a lot more for all that driving around, because that wasn't just a regular short round-trip. But at least pay me the \$7."

He wouldn't. I walked up to him, and got in his face, until the tip of my nose was only about two or three inches away from the tip of his nose. We screamed at each other. Neither one of us was willing to back down or give in. I was about to bash this guy's head in with a crowbar for lousy \$7. Crazy!

One of the reasons I usually don't get into these kinds of situations is because I always anticipate what is going to happen next. And what will happen after that and then after that, like a chess player plotting his next five moves.

When people get into a fight, whatever the reason is, it may seem important at that moment, but in the grand scheme of things, it is utterly meaningless. Nobody will remember or care about the reason for the fight in a week or a month or a year from now, because it's really not that important at all. Usually fights happen because two chest-thumping, knuckle-dragging idiots can't agree on who has the bigger dick. But if you go to jail for battery with a deadly weapon, or you suffer a permanent injury during that fight, those consequences will be with you for the rest of your life.

Was I really ready to go to jail for bashing this guy's head in over stupid \$7? No, of course not. I'm smarter than that. But here I was,

nose tip to nose tip with this guy, with no way out, without looking like a total pussy. Luckily that guy wasn't a complete retard either, and the same thoughts were going through his head, and we were both looking for a way to end the stand off without looking like wimps.

He screamed at me: "Look, I'm gonna go in the house now. I'll call you back later, for a round-trip to McDonald's. And then I'm gonna pay you for that round trip, and for this one. Deal?"

"Alright then!" I screamed back at him, like I got my way. But really I was just glad that this gave me an excuse to stand down and walk away without getting hurt or going to jail. I walked back in the base and figured I was never going to hear from that guy again.

But a few hours later Tony really did come back into the base and specifically asked for me to give him a ride to McDonald's on the other side of the neighborhood. I was pretty tense in the car on the way there, because I felt really stupid driving this guy around again, when he was probably just going to try to stiff me again.

We didn't talk at all at first, until he said in a conciliatory tone: "You remind me of me when I was younger."

"Uhh, thanks," I said. I didn't really know how to respond to that.

When we got to McDonald's, he got out of the car and went inside. I waited for him while clutching my crowbar. If that motherfucker was going to play games again, I was gonna bash his damn head in! No, I wasn't. Deep down I knew I would just leave and chalk it up as a learning experience.

But Tony did come back out after a few minutes. I drove him back to his house, and he really did pay me for both round-trips. Still no tip though. But I was glad I got paid and left it at that.

A few hours later it was the middle of the night and it was slow again. I was sitting in the room in the back of the base. Suddenly Tony came in and asked to speak to me. Since Tony was a regular customer and Jim had known him for a long time, Jim opened the door and let Tony into the back. Tony sat down on a chair next to me, and pulled out a piece of paper. It was a love poem he had written for me! WTF?! Seriously. What. The. Fuck?!?



A few hours earlier I was ready to bash this guy's head in. And now I had this 40-year-old black man reading me a love poem about how he was like me when he was younger and we met for a reason and so on and so forth. Bizarre. He was gonna hang out at the base with me, but I told him it was time for me to go home. After that I told Jim never to give me a call with that guy again.

Another weird guy I still remember was this huge white guy with a big booming voice and a thick Brooklyn accent, who never went anywhere without his large German shepherd. This guy was pretty intimidating. He was the size of a refrigerator. I had to pick him and his dog up from bars a few times. He was always drunk or high when he got in my car, and he was very talkative.

I hate being around drunk people, because of what happened with my dad, so I was really uncomfortable with this guy in my car, even though he was always very nice. But I always felt that drunk people are totally unpredictable, and at any moment this guy could turn on me and try to pick a fight with me for no reason. And considering his size and the size of his dog, that fight would not have ended well for me.

He loved talking about drugs. He told me that LSD is a miracle drug and that I have not lived until I have had a vision on LSD. He said it enlightens the mind and broadens your horizon. I just nodded politely and agreed with whatever he was saying.

He always joked about my shitty old red car and the intense smell of exhaust fumes in it. He knew that even during the winter, I had to drive around with the windows rolled down, if I didn't want to end up with carbon monoxide poisoning. And he was ok with it, even though he was freezing in my car. He was just happy that I didn't mind having his dog in my car.

One night, when he got out of the car, the leg of his pants got caught on the jagged edge of some rusted metal right by the door frame. It ripped his pants from his ankle all the way to above his knee. Luckily he wasn't bleeding. I thought he was definitely going to lose his temper about it and fight me. But he just laughed and said: "Buddy, you need a new car."

There was this famous actress in the 60s or 70s. Her name was Karen Black. She was in a bunch of horror and disaster movies. When I was a kid, I watched some of those old movies with her, and

for some reason I couldn't stand her from the first time I saw her. I'm sure she was a lovely lady, but there was just something about her face that I couldn't stand.

And she looked annoying enough even when she wasn't doing anything. But when she cried in the movie (and she always did, hysterical bitch) I just wanted to punch her in her stupid face all day long. I couldn't even concentrate on the damn movie, because she was that annoying to look at.

I never felt this annoyed about a complete stranger again, until I moved to the States and started to drive a cab. Every once in a while I had to pick up this woman who was so unbelievably obnoxious, it made my skin crawl. Literally. She gave me goose bumps. She was a skinny white girl, and ugly as fuck, with warts all over her face, and a hook nose. She had these stupid ghetto cornrows in her hair. It just looked so retarded.

And she had these 3 mixed kids. They were from 3 different black guys. And she constantly, constantly screamed at these kids at the top of her lungs, threatening them with beatings and cursing them out: "What the fuck did I just tell you, you stupid motherfucker? If you fucking piece of shit don't shut the fuck up I WILL BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF YOU!"

That's the kind of stuff she screamed at her little kids nonstop. And they were so used to it, they weren't intimidated by it at all. Having her and her kids in the cab was so stressful, it just made my skin crawl. I think if that woman had lived a few hundred years ago, she would have been burned at the stake as a witch, because she just had this horrible, evil, negative vibe about her that made you want to run away from her.

This whole ghetto cab service I worked for was totally illegal and all the drivers were unlicensed. We always had to be careful not to get caught driving around as illegal taxis, because the New York Taxi and Limousine Commission had cops that were hunting people like us.

Whenever possible, we asked our passengers to sit on the front passenger seat instead of the backseat, because when people pick up a friend, the friend usually gets in the front. When someone gets in the back, that's usually a sign that the driver is a cabbie. And undercover TLC cops were staking out malls and supermarkets and

looking for people getting into the back of cars that looked like they were illegal cabs.

One day I left the base to go pick up some lady at a nearby supermarket. She got in the back with a bunch of grocery bags. Suddenly an unmarked cop car pulled up right in front of me, blocking my way. They had followed me from the base, but I didn't know that at the time.

Two TLC cops, wearing bulletproof vests under their plain clothes, jumped out of the car and pointed their guns at me and yelled: "GET OUT OF THE CAR! GET OUT OF THE CAR!!!"

The woman on the backseat and I were shocked. We got out of the car, and the cops asked the woman a couple of questions about me, wrote up my license, and then impounded my car on the spot.

Now the lady and I stood in front of the supermarket without a car, and I had to try to explain to her what just happened. It was so embarrassing. Then she called another cab and one of my buddies came to pick us up.

Without my Flintstone mobile I couldn't work for that car service anymore, so I applied at a different taxi company. They were a little bit more legit. They actually had a fleet of their own cars. They were old, crappy retired police cruisers. The first night I started working there, the dispatcher put me in the oldest, shittiest car that none of the other drivers wanted.

This was a bigger company, with more long distance trips. The dispatcher sent me to a neighborhood on the other end of Brooklyn that I had never been to. I had to take the highway to get there. As the highway was bending into a curve, my driver side door suddenly swung wide open. The lock was broken, and whenever the car was leaning into a curve, the door just opened up all the way. I felt like I was gonna fall out onto the highway. I had two or three more calls that night, until the car broke down, and I spent the rest of my shift waiting for a tow truck.

Canarsie, the Brooklyn neighborhood Donna and I lived in, had been all Italian and Jewish before I moved there. But right around the time that I moved there, the neighborhood began to change. More and more black people from Haiti and Jamaica moved in, and over the course of just a few years, the whole neighborhood had turned from

almost all white to almost all black. We were the only white people left on our block.

I'm not racist. After World War 2, the German school system was set up to never allow another Holocaust to happen. German children are being taught to be tolerant of all people and to never judge a person by the color of their skin or their religion.

But of course there are some right-wing extremist racists in Germany, just like anywhere else. Like those skinheads that started using computers to spread their message of hate online for example. Even one of the members in my hacking crew had been a skinhead. At first I thought it was just a poor fashion choice, but later I found out he really was a hardcore racist. He ended up in prison for arson. He had set fire to an immigrant shelter full of Turkish families seeking asylum in Germany. Psycho.

Anyway, when you live in Europe and watch American movies or sitcoms, you get the impression that racial tensions in America are a thing of the past. So when I moved to Brooklyn, and all the white people seemed to hate blacks, and all the black people seemed to hate whites, it caught me by surprise. This was not the tolerant melting pot America I had seen in movies.

At first I thought the white people I met in Brooklyn were just a bunch of racist halfwits, when they talked about how much they hated niggers. But then I even heard some black people complain about niggers.

Have you ever seen Chris Rock's stand-up routine about the difference between black people and niggers? It's so true. Most black people are nice, decent folks, but the ones who act like trash make all the other black people in their neighborhood look bad.

But niggers really come in every color. The only thing I hate more than black kids acting like thugs and niggers, are white kids acting like thugs and niggers. Is there anything more pathetic and ridiculous than some white kid from the suburbs trying to act like he's a gangsta from the hood? Pull your pants up, dipshit. You're embarrassing yourself.

Although most of the black families from Haiti and Jamaica who moved to Canarsie were nice, hard-working people, there were also a bunch of thugs and niggers who turned the neighborhood to trash.

There was this little convenience store right down the block from where Donna and I lived. I went there all the time, to get a bottle of Pepsi or a loaf of Wonderbread. One day I was just about to walk into the store, when I heard a popping sound behind me.

I turned around and saw a minivan drive by. At first I could only see the right side of the van, but as it was slowly rolling further down the road, I could now see the back of the minivan, and a foot sticking out of the left side of the vehicle. Suddenly the whole body was being shoved out of the door and fell into the street. Then the minivan sped off. The popping sound I heard right behind me a few seconds earlier was a gun shot. This guy had been shot and killed in the minivan, just as it was passing me.

There was a phone booth right outside the store, so I called 911 and reported that I had just seen a person being shot and that his dead body had been thrown out into the street just a few feet away from me. The 911 operator told me a cruiser was on the way to my location and asked if I was willing to testify. I said no. I didn't want to end up getting shot just because I was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

But this was now the new reality of our neighborhood. The crime rate had gone up dramatically. Local stores and banks were getting robbed on a daily basis, and suddenly there was graffiti and broken glass on the sidewalk everywhere. Canarsie was turning from a quiet suburban neighborhood into the hood.

I picked up some guy who had to get a ride to the projects nearby. When we got there, we saw two guys running across the parking lot right in front of the car. The second guy had a gun and was shooting at the first guy, while chasing him. My passenger was afraid to get out of the car and asked me to take him back home.

It was getting scary to drive a cab in New York at night. You never knew what was gonna happen. Then a cabbie murderer made the headline news. This guy kept robbing cabbies for the few bucks that they had in their pockets and then shot them, to leave no witnesses. I was not going to get myself killed for minimum wage, so I decided to quit my little adventure as NY cab driver and look for a safer job.

## BEING A PRODUCTION MANAGER SUCKS

*“You are part of the rat race because you are letting them treat you like a rat. This is the modern definition of a slave.”*

**Saurabh Sharma**

I landed a job in the graphic department of a weekly newspaper in Brooklyn. At first I had to create the ads for local advertisers. The old lady who owned the newspaper liked my work, and after just a few weeks I was promoted to production manager.

I was now in charge of the entire newspaper. I was the one who determined how many pages each issue had, how many copies to print, what the newspaper looked like, and where each article and advertisement went on each page. It was another job I had gotten by pretending to know their software, even though I didn't. I had to learn everything on the fly, without letting anyone know that I had no idea what I was doing.

After a few weeks, I was pretty good at my job and had made several improvements to the paper. Before I took over, the previous production manager still had cut and paste boards, where each page was literally being glued together with snippets of text on paper strips. And photos still had to be developed in a dark room. Like we were a bunch of savages or something.

I upgraded their computer systems, installed a network, optimized the work flow and went fully digital. The layout of each page was now being created on networked computers and all photos were digital images.

The old lady who owned the paper passed away just a few weeks after promoting me to production manager. A lawyer bought the paper and moved his law office into the back of the newspaper building. Every time one of his clients came to see him, I saw how his little law firm operated: If someone came to have a will or a deed prepared, the lawyer charged him \$1000 and then told his minimum-wage secretary to take care of it. She had an archive of legal document templates, and all she had to do was fill in the client's name and a few details. That's it. Pretty easy money.

For legal reasons, the newspaper was not in the lawyer's name, but in

his wife's name. I guess he figured if anyone was going to sue the newspaper, his wife would be the one to take the fall, not him, and they wouldn't be able to get to the assets that are in his name.

In order to make the story believable, we were instructed to treat his wife like the boss whenever she happened to stop by the office. It reminded me a lot of the precautions I took as a teenager, to create a believable story of how not I but my non-existent friend Lucifer was supposedly the one running my hacking crew.

Being the production manager was an incredibly stressful job. I was close to having a nervous breakdown once or twice, because it was up to me to make sure the newspaper came together in time for the deadline. Otherwise there would be no newspaper at the newsstands the next morning. If anything went wrong, it was my fault, because I had forced the old folks who had worked at that paper for decades, to welcome the 21<sup>st</sup> Century into their office. Change is never easy. And some of the old folks fought me every step of the way.

And on some days, it just didn't seem like the paper was going to come together in time, because everything went wrong. But somehow it always worked out in the end, even if I had to stay in the office until 11 pm, while everyone else went home at 5 pm. I was not on the clock. I was getting the same salary each week, no matter how long I stayed. So when I was in the office until 11 pm, I wasn't even getting paid for it. It was just my German sense of duty that made me want to do the right thing and get the job done, no matter how.

The old lady who used to own the paper was very supportive of me and the changes I had made to improve the paper. I was running the show, and she told the others to listen to what I was saying.

But the lawyer had no clue about the newspaper industry and why there even had to be a deadline at all. He told the lady who was in charge of taking ads not to turn away any ads, no matter how late they came in, even if it was past the deadline.

I started to hate my job. I tried to explain to him why a deadline is important. I can't put the paper together if all of a sudden there's a new ad that needs to be created, and then placed onto a page that is already full. So now I have to tear that whole page apart again, and I might have to re-arrange other pages to make room for whatever important information or ad was on the page I had to re-do to make room for the new ad. There's only so many hours in a day, and when

a few unexpected ads come in past the deadline, there is just no way to put the paper together in time.

But this lawyer just didn't get it. He kept giving these arrogant speeches. I guess in his mind they were supposed to be motivational. He would say things like: "I am fine without this newspaper, but you folks need this job. So you better do whatever it takes to make it happen. This newspaper is like a boat. If it sinks, you all drown. I am the only one here who can swim."

He was such a fucking douchebag.

Everyone else nodded politely and went back to work. Nothing he said made any difference to them, because they all went home at 5 pm. I was the one who always ended up getting stuck with the extra work if the paper wasn't ready by the 5 pm deadline. So I was the only one who stood up to him and tried to tell him why it couldn't go on like this.

He pacified me and pretended to take what I say to heart. But then he went behind my back and told Carol, the lady who was in charge of taking the ads, to ignore me and keep on taking ads past the deadline anyway, even if I tell her not to. He was just a greedy bastard who figured every ad is more money in his pocket.

One day an advertiser called way past the deadline and wanted to have a full-page, full-color ad in that week's issue. Carol took the ad but didn't tell me about it. She asked Kenny, one of the other guys in the graphic department, to make the ad, but not tell me about it, and then give it to her, so she could sneak it into the paper without me even knowing about it until the next day, when the paper appears at the newsstand.

Before I took over as production manager, the paper had always been black and white. One of the improvements I brought in was a full color front and back cover, and a full color middle insert. It allowed us to charge a lot more money for ads when people wanted their ad to be the one in full color in the middle. But I was the only one who knew how to make full color pages.

In order to print a newspaper page in full color, you actually have to break it down into four color separated templates. Each template has one of four colors. And when all four colors are overlaid on top of each other during printing, they create the full spectrum of every



color there is. Similar to the way a TV screen has only three different colored pixels, but the TV mixes those three different colors to create every other color.

So Carol had Kenny make the ad in full color, even though he didn't know what he was doing, and after I proof-read the final draft of the complete issue and it was about to be sent off to the printer, she removed one of the pages and replaced it with the full color ad, without me knowing about it.

The next morning the paper appeared on the newsstands, and the advertiser was livid, because his expensive full color, full page ad was a complete mess. Kenny had completely screwed up the color separation process, and some things that were supposed to stand out in bold colors, like the advertiser's phone number and address, weren't even there at all.

When the lawyer came into work later that day, he called me into his office. He told me that since I am the production manager, and I am responsible for every aspect of the paper, I should have caught and corrected any mistake before it went to print. He said he would deduct \$500 from my next paycheck to make up for the loss in ad revenue, because he had to refund the price of the ad to the advertiser.

I was SO pissed, because this whole clusterfuck clearly wasn't my fault. This was exactly the kind of thing I had always warned him about, if he kept telling the girls to ignore the deadline and keep taking ads. And because of his instructions to ignore me, Carol took it upon herself to put an ad into the paper behind my back, without me proof-reading it or even knowing about it. He was the worst fucking boss ever!

After work, I googled labor law. I found out that legally he was not allowed to just take any money out of my paycheck without my permission. I knew that during any legal conflict, you have to do everything in writing, so I wrote him a letter and explained to him that he had no right to dock my pay, and I quoted the exact paragraph of the labor law that said so.

When he came to work the next morning, I handed him the letter without saying anything. He went into his office, read my letter, and left without saying a word. He probably felt pretty stupid that I suddenly knew more about labor law than he did. The day after that,

he came into the office and greeted me way too cheerfully, as if the whole thing had never even happened. But I knew that I was a thorn in his side now, and he was going to fire me sooner or later.

Sure enough, when I put together the classified section for the upcoming issue, there was an ad for my job in it. He tried to disguise it, by using the phone number of his silent partner, an accountant. But the job description was clearly for a newspaper production manager. I pretended not to notice, and when the paper came out, I asked Donna to call the number and apply for the job. My job.

As soon as I went on my lunch break, Carol called Donna and asked her to come in for an interview. Carol didn't know that she was actually talking to my wife. Donna didn't go in, and the ad for my job ran for several weeks, and they obviously could not find a replacement for me. Ha!

Then the lawyer called Kenny into his office and secretly asked him if he wanted my job, without getting a pay raise. Kenny declined and told me all about the lawyer's schemes to replace me. Kenny and I had become pretty close friends, and he dreaded the thought of having to work there after I leave, because he knew how stressful my job was and that all that stress would fall in his lap once I'm gone.

So he looked for a new job and gave his two week notice. He was my right hand man, and without him things were going to be even harder on me, so we decided to both quit on the same day. Only I was not going to give them any notice, just like the lawyer had not given me any notice and he was scheming behind my back. And we tried to convince another guy in the graphic department to quit with us, but he didn't, until about a week after we had left.

# I'M AN INTERNET MILLIONAIRE, SO FUCK YOU

*"Formal education will make you a living; self-education will make you a fortune."*

**Jim Rohn**

*"Money, it turned out, was exactly like sex, you thought of nothing else if you didn't have it and thought of other things if you did."*

**James A. Baldwin**

I used to draw cartoons all the time, even when I drove a cab at night. But this job as production manager was so stressful, I had no energy left when I came home at night. There was no way I could be creative after work and come up with new cartoons.

For the first five years I had lived in the States, I did not even have a computer at home. Hacking is addicting, and now that I was over the age of 18, and I would be tried as an adult if I got caught, and law enforcement had finally caught up with hackers, I was scared to get in trouble again, because I knew this time I would really go to jail.

The best way to avoid the temptation of doing something with a computer that I shouldn't be doing, was not to have one. But after five years of living in the States, and not having had any contact whatsoever with the hacking scene for that whole time, I figured I was ready to own a computer again. So while I was the production manager at the newspaper in Brooklyn, I finally bought a PC.

This was during the early days of the Internet revolution. My hacker friends and I had grown up on the Internet. To us it was an old hat. It was our home. But now finally the rest of the world realized that there was a virtual online world. All these huge corporations wanted a piece of the pie and they all tried to figure out how to make money on the Internet. They knew there was money to be made, they just couldn't figure out how. They spent billions of dollars on Internet start-ups that really had no business plan, and who were bleeding cash like crazy, instead of making a profit, until they all ended up crashing and burning. All these huge companies lost billions of dollars during the days of the Internet bubble.

Meanwhile I had been playing around with my new computer at home, and I figured out how to put my cartoons online, by building a

very primitive little website. I hadn't drawn any new cartoons in months, but I put my old cartoons on the web.

Up until then I had relied on sending my cartoons to publishing houses, hoping that an editor would pick some of my cartoons for a new book or the next issue of some tabloid. And many did. I had a whole bunch of cartoons published in all kinds of magazines, and in over a dozen different books. Some of my cartoons were even hanging in museums for cartoon art or modern art. I was making a name for myself as a cartoonist, just like I had made a name for myself as a hacker a few years earlier.

But as a freelance cartoonist, you never know how much money you are going to make next week or next month. Some magazines, like the New Yorker, were paying \$500 for a cartoon back then. Other papers, like the SUN supermarket tabloid with all the crazy headlines, only paid \$5.

So if a couple of editors at well-paying magazines bought a bunch of your cartoons, you could make a lot of money that week. But if nobody bought anything, or you just made a sale to a paper that paid next to nothing, you'd go hungry. Being a starving artist was not exactly a glorious lifestyle. That's why I had to take that day job at the newspaper.

I discovered that there was a webmaster scene online, similar to the hacking scene I used to be a part of. A bunch of guys like me had their own websites and were trying to figure out ways to make money online. I picked up on what they were doing pretty quickly and surpassed them not much later, blazing my own path into unknown territory, and learning more and more about the ways of the web as I went along. I was now an online entrepreneur! A guerilla marketer! An Internet ninja! A lot of the ideas I came up with had never been done by anyone else before me.

Suddenly my cartoon website was making money. Not much at first, but then the next month my site earned about \$1000. Simply by being there. I wasn't even doing anything. I had just uploaded a bunch of my old cartoons, and now people were finding my cartoons in Google, came to my site, saw the banner ads on my site, and I was earning money.

I literally didn't have to do anything at all. The way my website made money was similar to a TV station. When you watch CBS or

NBC, you don't buy anything from them. But big corporations pay TV stations a lot of money to show you ads during the commercial breaks. Whether you actually get your ass off the couch after seeing that commercial and going out to buy a new car from Ford or the latest hamburger at McDonald's doesn't matter. NBC gets money from their advertisers, simply for showing you an ad for those products.

Online ad agencies, who manage and distribute online advertising for their clients, call that kind of banner a CPM ad, or Cost Per 1000 impressions. If one thousand people visited my site and saw a CPM banner advertisement on my website, I earned \$4, or whatever the current rate was for that particular ad campaign. My visitors didn't even have to click on the banner ad. Just the fact that they were looking at it was enough for me to get paid.

Then there were CPC banners, or Cost Per Click. Those ads only paid money, if one of my visitors clicked on the banner. And then there were CPA banners, or Cost Per Action. Those only paid something, if one of my visitors clicked on the ad, went to the advertiser's website, and bought something there. Then I got a sales commission. My favorite were the CPM banners.

The next month my cartoon site earned \$3000. Without me lifting a finger! \$3000 was the same amount I made as production manager at the newspaper, being totally stressed out, overworked, and miserable.

I decided to build a few more websites, about embarrassing true stories, the secrets behind magic tricks, funny video clips, weird news, celebrity gossip, optical illusions, and a few other popular topics, using the same basic recipe for make-money-in-your-sleep riches.

The next month my sites earned \$5000. The month after that \$7000. Then \$15,000. And I still wasn't doing anything to maintain my websites on a daily basis. I just built them and then basically forgot about them, while they took on a life of their own.

Thanks to my hacking background and my intimate knowledge of computers and the Internet, and my knack for cocky self promotion, and the things I had learned about advertising and catchy writing through my two newspaper jobs and my scene mag, and having learned how to get publicity by provoking people with my

incendiary rants, I intuitively did everything just right, to make my websites a success.

Back then there was no word for what I was doing yet. But a few years later, after the Internet bubble had burst and the dust had settled (What a horrible mixed metaphor. I probably just made an English lit major turn in his grave.) colleges started to teach classes on how to make money online. Today that is called "affiliate marketing."

The funny thing is, when I started thinking about ever new ways to make money with CPM, CPC or CPA ads, I figured that I could make a lot more money with CPA ads, if I posted my advertiser's links directly into search engines, instead of on my own sites. Think about it: How many people who came to my cartoon site were actually looking to buy a new car at that moment? Not too many. They were just there to look at my funny pictures.

So if I placed ads for a new car next to my cartoons, the chances of actually making a sale were next to zero. But when someone googles the nearest car dealership, he's obviously thinking about buying a new car. So I placed CPA ads directly into a bunch of search engines. The advertising companies I was working with told me I couldn't do that. They had never seen anyone do that before, and they felt it wasn't kosher. They felt that somehow I was cheating the system and they told me to stop.

I had been ahead of my time again when I did that back then. But nowadays, placing CPA ads in search engines is the backbone of affiliate marketing. Nowadays everyone does it. Go figure.

Ironically, a lot of hackers make money with affiliate marketing these days. Why bother hacking into a bank or credit card company, and risk going to prison, if you can hack into a search engine instead, and put a bunch of your own websites at the top of the search results, and make money with the banner ads on your sites? That way it's perfectly legal to make millions of dollars with your hacking skills.

Anyway, my Embarrassing Moments website became so popular back then, that a Canadian TV production company took notice. They were going to produce a new show about awkward true stories, for The Learning Channel in America, and they contacted me to ask for my permission to reenact some of the stories on my website for their show. The show was going to have a few regular commentators

who would introduce the next clip and put their two cents in afterwards. A little bit like the judges on American Idol, I guess. So I coulda been the next Simon Cowell! I coulda been somebody! But I declined. I was too shy to be on TV.

I did give them permission to use some of the stories on my site though and helped them get in touch with the actual people those embarrassing true stories happened to. A few of those awkward moments really did end up on the new TV show.

That Canadian production crew wasn't the only media company who took notice to my sites. A Japanese entertainment news show featured a segment about my Embarrassing Moments site and suddenly I had hundreds of new users from Japan on my forum, sharing their most intimate sushi-regurgitating mishaps and sake-soaked blunders.

A lot of newspapers and news websites liked my site about magic tricks. There was really no other site like it at the time.

I was in the right place at the right time and knew exactly the right thing to do to take advantage of a unique opportunity with these websites during the early days of the Internet. I felt like I was winning the lottery every day. It was crazy. My sites ended up making \$1000 a day, \$30,000 a month. I was making all this money without even really trying all that hard.

I think Bill Gates said something along the lines of: "Always choose the laziest person in the office to do a difficult job, because he will find the easiest way to do it." That was me. I always figured out the simplest, shortest route to my goal.

I designed and programmed all my websites myself. But I was by no means a good HTML programmer. I had taught myself the bare basics. Just enough to scrape by by the seat of my pants and get to my destination on the path of least resistance.

So when the lawyer was trying to replace me at the newspaper, I really didn't give a shit. I didn't need that job anymore at this point, because I was making more money than the lawyer and all the other people in that office put together. But the cautious German in me didn't just want to quit a steady job and rely on free online money. I figured it was a fluke and it couldn't be like that forever, so it was probably a good idea to hold on to my day job.

But I was miserable, and when that lawyer schemed behind my back to replace me, I knew it was time to go and take my chances with the Internet. I planned a grand exit. On the Monday when Kenny, my buddy in the graphic department, was going to start his new job somewhere else, I was going to go right up the lawyer and tell him that I quit and that he can go shove his stupid newspaper up his ass.

Monday finally came, but as luck would have it, the lawyer didn't come in that day. I sat at my desk, waiting two hours for him to show up, while I was playing games online. Around 11 am his wife came into the office to check the mail. I was getting sick of sitting there for no reason, so I decided to make my grand exit with her instead.

I took a copy of the classified ads. I had circled the ad for my job. Then I walked up to her, held the page in front of her face and asked: "What is that? Huh? What is that?? Are you trying to replace me?" I sounded like I was disciplining a dog who had just piddled on the carpet.

She was startled and didn't know what to say. Then I told her that I knew she and her husband had put that ad in the paper to find someone to do my job for less money, and they didn't even have the courtesy to give me any notice. And now I was going to quit without notice.

By now she had composed herself, and she was quick-witted enough to demand that I give her the keys to the office. I had already cleared out my desk earlier and prepared everything so I could storm right out the door after telling them off. But I had completely forgotten about the keys. Fuck! So instead of making a grand exit, now I stood there like a moron, fumbling around with my key chain, trying to get the damn keys off. Not cool. Not cool at all.

I went home and felt like an idiot, because that did not go as planned. But, oh well, finally I was freeeee!

When I didn't go to college in Germany and moved to New York instead, I had nightmares about it for weeks. I felt like I was being totally irresponsible and that I was ruining my life. Leaving everything you know behind and moving to another continent, and facing the great unknown, is scary. It takes a lot of courage. Don't ever look down at an immigrant who came to America to make a better life for himself and his family. You have no idea how much



courage that took, until you have walked a mile in his shoes.

Now, after I quit my newspaper job, I had the same type of nightmares again. Staying home all day and doing whatever the hell I wanted seemed so wrong, so irresponsible. A good German just doesn't do that.

I did learn one thing from all that though: I never look down on poor people now. I've been there. I've probably been poorer than most people will ever be. I don't think a lot of people have stooped so low that they had to eat dog food.

Capitalism has a dirty little secret: the system only works, as long as most people are poor, and only a few people at the top of the pyramid are rich. Think about it: if everyone was a millionaire, nobody would want to scrub toilets or flip burgers for minimum wage at McDonald's anymore. Having a lot of money is like having a big dick. It's only big as long as everyone else's dick is smaller than yours. If everyone else has a big dick too, then your dick is just average. The same goes for money. Rich people are only rich as long as everyone else is poor. Money is only valuable, if it's rare. If everyone has lots of money, it becomes worthless. But as long as most people don't have any money, there are always plenty of people who are willing to degrade themselves for a few bucks.

Self-righteous Republicans like to pretend that if someone is poor, it's their own fault, because they are lazy. But the truth is, the system can only survive as long as most people are poor. And I know from experience that poor people are not poor because they're lazy. I worked really really hard when I drove a cab, and made almost no money. And I worked even harder at the newspaper, but they didn't pay me all that much either. Now I was a lazy bum, doing nothing at all, and I was making more money than I had ever made in my life. That just didn't seem right. I felt like I didn't deserve it.

It took me a few weeks to get used to my new life of luxurious leisure. I started to enjoy the fact that I could sleep as long as I want, and do whatever I want all day long. I enjoyed the little perks, like being able to go to the mall during the week, when the stores were less crowded than during the weekend. And I enjoyed the fact that I didn't have to impress anyone.

I didn't have to dress for success. I could literally run around the mall in my pajamas if I wanted to, and not worry that I may lose my

job if a co-worker or my boss saw me like that. I didn't have to put on a suit and tie to look like a trained monkey. Suddenly I was no longer worried about what anyone thought of me. The fact that I had all the money in the world and I didn't need anybody for anything made me a lot more self-confident. I used to walk into a room of people and wonder if they liked me. Now I looked around and wondered if I liked them.

I bought my first brand new car, a Dodge Durango, all cash. It was my dream car, because when you fold down the backseat, the back of the car was big enough for me to lie flat, like in a bed. I figured I'd go car camping at some point and sleep in the back of the car. I only did that one time though. I went on a road trip to California. When I got to San Francisco, I parked the car at the Golden Gate Bridge and watched the sunset, and the sunrise the next morning. It was beautiful. Other than that I always stayed in hotels when I traveled. I never did go car camping.

Having so much money opened up a whole new world of opportunities. Americans think that drinking beer or soccer are Germans' favorite past time. But the one thing Germans love to do more than anything else, is to travel. It's no coincidence that "Wanderlust" is a German word. That word describes a strong desire to travel and explore the world. It's something almost all Germans have in common. It doesn't matter where you go, whether you visit the Great Wall of China or the Statue of Liberty or The Eiffel Tower or Fort Myers Beach, you will find German tourists there.

At first the fact that Donna was an agoraphobic shut in didn't bother me all that much. During the first few years we didn't have any money, so we couldn't really go anywhere anyway. But now that we had all this money, I wanted to travel with her. I wanted to show her Europe, take her to the places where I grew up, and go explore new places with her where I had never been before. But none of that was ever going to happen, as long as she didn't want to leave the house.

Every time I tried to talk her into going somewhere, even just to the movies or out to dinner, she got very defensive and hostile. Just like a drug addict, if you criticize their drug. She would instantly go to her nuclear option: Divorce. That was her kill-all argument: "If you have a problem with me not going to the movies with you, why don't you get a divorce and find someone better than me?"

She had always been very insecure about herself. She constantly

accused me of cheating on her, even though I never did. Years later, whenever I met someone new after my divorce from Donna, and I told them I never cheated on her, they often acted like that was adorable. Quaint. As if cheating is the new normal and the fact that I didn't cheat on her was weird. Well, it's not to me. Loyalty is very important to me.

When I had worked at one of my two newspaper jobs, Donna often asked me, if I talked to any of the girls in the office. Well, yeah, of course I did. They were my co-workers. I had to talk to them as part of my job. But if I said that, she accused me of having an affair with one of them: "Oh yeah, you talk to your little girlfriend at work? Why don't you go fuck your little whore girlfriend?"

And if I said that I didn't talk to any of the girls in the office, she would continue her probing interrogation, because she knew I was lying: "Oh yeah, so you're gonna tell me you are in the office with these girls all day and you don't say one word to them? Not even good morning? Not even when you pass them in the hallway, or you have to hand them a paper? You're lying! You're cheating on me! Why don't you go fuck your little whore girlfriend?"

There was just no right answer to her accusatory questions, just like those trick questions they asked conscientious objectors who refused to join the army in Germany.

When I drove a cab, and I got home a few minutes late, she accused me of having picked up and fucked some streetwalker. She would go on and on and on about it. When I got home at 2 am in the morning, I was exhausted. The last thing I wanted to do was argue with Donna all night. So I went to bed. She'd sit in the living room and wait until I'm asleep. Then she would storm into the bedroom, slam the door wide open so that it crashed into the wall, turn on the lights and start screaming at me.

My heart pounded like crazy when she did that. It causes so much anxiety when you are ripped out of your sleep with so much hostility. When she knew I was awake, she would turn off the light, leave the room and close the door. Then she would wait a few minutes, and then storm into the bedroom all over again. It was psychological torture and sleep deprivation.

She knew that I wanted to be nothing like my abusive alcoholic father, and that I would never hit her, no matter what. She perceived

that as a weakness and exploited it to the fullest.

Finally, after she had stormed into the bedroom three or four times in a row to terrorize me awake, I told her if she did that one more time, I would call the cops. Of course she did it again, and I really did call the cops. They filed a domestic dispute report and told her she had to stop doing that or they were going to take her in.

A few years later, when I didn't have to work anymore, and I was able to go on little road trips to Boston or Washington, or longer ones to Canada, California or Texas, Donna never wanted to come with me, because of her agoraphobia. So I went on road trips alone, again, but she and I were connected on the phone 24/7. By now we were using cell phones and we had unlimited plans. But other than that the 24/7 phone connection was just like it used to be when I still lived in Germany. It started to drive me crazy. It was like she was trying to keep me on a leash through the phone at all times.

One day I drove through a dead spot where my phone had no signal, in the mountainous forests of the Poconos. She redialed my phone over and over and over, and left a bunch of messages.

The first one was friendly: "Hey, sweetie, we lost connection. Call me back!"

But each subsequent voicemail got more impatient and belligerent: "Why aren't you answering the phone? What's going on?"

"Are you ignoring my calls on purpose? Are you with some girl?"

"Who are you with? Are you fucking her? What's her name? I hope you DIE!"

Her voicemails escalated from a loving "Hello sweetie!" to a hostile "I hope you die!" within about 15 to 20 minutes.

And then, when I finally had a signal again and I called her back, she acted like the biggest bitch for the rest of the day, for absolutely no reason.

Deep down of course she knew that I really didn't cheat on her, and I really just lost the signal for a few minutes. I was in the Poconos a lot, because I didn't think the Internet fountain of money was going to last forever. It was just too good to be true. I was sure that sooner

or later the money would dry up. So I wanted to have a back up source of income. I decided to invest in real estate and started buying lakefront lots in the Poconos.

The Poconos are a mountain range in Pennsylvania, about 90 car minutes from Manhattan. It's beautiful. Donna and I decided to build a house there. At first I was looking for a modest log cabin. But every builder I talked to tried to sell me a bigger and better house. The house we actually ended up building was a 5000 square foot mansion on a five acre property next to a beautiful lake.

During the construction of that house, everything went wrong. It almost felt like the property was an old Indian burial ground and there was a curse on the house. The builder went bankrupt. So I hired a second builder, and he went bankrupt, too. I ended up suing the first one in court, and threatened to do the same to the second one, if he didn't finish the house. Altogether that whole ordeal took about four years, and I had to drive to the Poconos many times to monitor the progress, or lack thereof.

So Donna already knew that the phone signal in the Poconos was very bad. But that didn't matter. It seemed like she was making my life miserable on purpose, simply because she was bored, and conflict was her only source of entertainment while she sat home alone.

I was under constant stress while living with her, because she went from being nice to being a totally psycho hostile bitch from one minute to the next. I never knew what would set off her next tantrum. Looking back at it later, I realized how abusive her behavior was. But at the time, while I was going through it, it just seemed like normal life to me.

Early on in our relationship, when I just moved to New York, I was writing a letter to my parents. I was answering one of their letters. They had written that the girl who cleaned their house, an architecture student from Bulgaria, asked them to tell me she said hello. Donna didn't like that, so she told me to ask my parents not to ever mention that Bulgarian whore in their letters to me ever again.

So in my reply to them, I asked them not to mention the Bulgarian girl anymore, because Donna was kinda sensitive about things like that. Donna decided to proof-read my German letter, even though she couldn't read German. She asked me to translate word for word

what exactly I wrote about the Bulgarian whore, while she stared at my letter.

When I got to the part where I had written that Donna was a little sensitive when it came to other girls, she asked me if that word she saw in my letter meant sensible. I said, no, it means sensitive.

She completely lost it and went on a rampage. She started screaming at me that I was making a fool out of her and she smashed plates in the kitchen. She grabbed my six page hand-written letter and ripped it up. I tried to stop her, and she screamed for help, as if I was raping her. Her younger brother still lived with his parents upstairs at that time. He heard Donna's screams, ran down the stairs, broke down the front door, and threatened me with a baseball bat, while I calmly tried to explain to him that I hadn't even touched her, and she was the one attacking me, not the other way around.

All that drama, because she felt that I should have used the word sensible in my letter, and that calling her a little sensitive when it comes to other girls was making a fool out of her. So it really didn't take much to set off one of her over-the-top tantrums.

I read an article on domestic violence and abusive relationships that said that people who grow up in an abusive home, tend to end up in abusive relationships, because that hostile dynamic seems normal to them. Without even realizing it, they are attracted to people who will abuse them in some form or another.

Back then I didn't even realize that the tension I always felt around Donna was very similar to the anxiety I had when my biological father was still alive and he would always start arguments with my mother for no reason, just so that he would have an excuse to storm out of the house and go on his next drinking binge.

The constant anticipation of Donna's next tantrum was not unlike the feeling my mother and I had while sitting on the living room couch, watching a movie, but always alert, and with our hearts pounding if we heard the front gate creak in the wind, always anticipating that my father was about to come and kill us.

One time Donna and I were arguing about some trivial bullshit. The next day, neither one of us could remember what we had even been arguing about the night before. It really was a non-issue that nobody in their right mind would ever argue about.

During the argument, she became completely unhinged again, as usual. She always figured that if she got crazy enough, I would give in at some point and do what she says. I had learned to just walk away from her when she got totally mental like that.

So I was trying to walk out of the house and go see a movie. She blocked my way by standing in the bedroom doorway. I shoved her aside and walked out. She started smashing the bedroom door with her fist, and punched a large hole in it. Almost like the hole my dad had put in the bedroom door when he tried to kill my mother and me.

## THE DIVORCE

*"When people divorce, it's always such a tragedy. At the same time, if people stay together it can be even worse."*

**Monica Bellucci**

*"A divorce is like an amputation: you survive it, but there's less of you."*

**Margaret Atwood**

*"Divorce is just the most awful thing in the world."*

**John Denver**

*"Divorce is probably as painful as death."*

**William Shatner**

*"I was so devastated by my second divorce that I had a nervous breakdown."*

**Jane Fonda**

*"People that go through what I went through and people going through divorce, it's really a difficult process; it's heartbreaking and it hurts really bad. It can really mess with your head."*

**David Arquette**

*"Breakups are a horrible thing for almost everybody I know. For someone who is a love addict, it's debilitating."*

**Alanis Morissette**

*"To get over my divorce, I got a prescription to live at the Playboy Mansion for a while."*

**James Caan**

Year after year, I told myself that I wasn't going to put up with her crazy bullshit anymore. I told myself that the next time she had one of her totally pointless, unreasonable, uncalled-for tantrums, I would get a divorce.

But then the next time we had a huge fight, because she didn't want to go to the movies, or she accused me of purposely buying the wrong kind of peanut butter, or I supposedly fucked a whore in the backseat during the few minutes my phone had no signal, I always



felt like I would be totally overreacting if I got a divorce because she didn't want to go to the movies. That just sounded so silly. Why did you get divorce? Because my wife didn't want to go to the movies with me.

But I was really just making excuses, because getting a divorce and totally changing my life was scary. She had managed to drive away all my friends with her tantrums. If she didn't want to go see a movie, I figured maybe I could go with my friend Kenny. But she became insanely jealous even when I hung out with other guys. She acted like any time I did not totally focus all my attention on her, and I dared to speak to another human being, I was doing something wrong, and it had to be met with fierce vengeance.

Even when I talked on the phone with my mother in Germany, Donna acted like my mother was "the other woman." She always accused me of conspiring against her with my mother somehow. And she often asked me, if I had to choose between Donna and my mother, who would I pick?

I did ask Kenny to come over once or twice, so we could play video games. Donna acted normal for the first few minutes, and then started some kind of argument over nothing that quickly escalated to the point where Kenny was really uncomfortable being in the middle of all that screaming.

Of course he didn't really feel like coming over anymore after that. And I didn't really want him to come over anymore either, because it was embarrassing to have one of my co-workers witness what a psycho Donna was.

Little by little I lost all my friends, and Donna was now the only person I hung out with. Especially after I quit my newspaper job and I didn't have to work anymore.

To be honest, I didn't even mind hanging out only with her. I'm not exactly a social butterfly. I'm perfectly content spending my nights cuddling on the couch with my special someone, watching a good movie or playing video games. I'm not a big fan of parties or large social gatherings.

I would have loved being married to Donna, if she didn't always go out of her way to make me miserable. She wasn't just my wife, but also my best friend. She really was the only person I wanted to hang

out with. If only she could have stopped throwing these pointless tantrums and if she could have gotten over her damn agoraphobia and come on little road trips with me, or go to the mall or a county fair with me or something. I would have been sooo happy and content.

One day, while I was at the Six Flags Hurricane Harbor waterpark in New Jersey, alone as usual, I finally had to admit to myself that no matter how much I wished for things to get better with Donna, they were never going to change. I was floating down the lazy river on a rubber tube, alone, while watching all these happy couples around me, floating down the river in double tubes, kissing, laughing, splashing, and holding hands. It hit me like a brick wall that day that I was never ever going to have that kind of experience with Donna.

That was the day I decided to get a divorce, because I realized that she wasn't just ruining her own life with her behavior, but my life as well. I didn't want to wake up one day, and be old and gray, and my whole life passed me by.

I knew that if I told Donna I wanted to get a divorce, she would fight me tooth and nail, to make my life as miserable as possible. Whenever she got something in her head, she couldn't let it go, like she was OCD or something. And she was relentlessly vindictive.

So if I was going to go through a long, drawn out divorce with her, she would sit there day and night, trying to find new ways to make my life miserable. If I was going to get a divorce, it had to be over as quickly as possible.

I started googling divorces. I knew that Las Vegas was the capital of instant marriages. I was hoping that getting a divorce there was equally easy. But, turns out, it's not.

Then I read that you can get a quickie divorce in the Caribbean. That sounded promising. But then I read in the small print that US courts don't necessarily honor a foreign divorce, and Donna would still have been able to contest it in a New York court and make my life miserable for months.

After some more research, I discovered Guam. Lovely, lovely Guam. You didn't even have to go there. All you had to do was mail the divorce papers there, a judge stamped the papers, and you were divorced. Boom! Just like that. And since Guam is part of the United

States (Surprised? Google it.) every court in every State honored the divorce. I had found the Yin to Las Vegas' Yang!

So if I filed for divorce in Guam, it would be over instantly, and then Donna would not be able to contest it in a New York court. The only catch was that she had to sign the paperwork before I sent it to Guam. I knew there was no way she was going to do that, unless she thought the divorce was her own idea.

I tried to figure out a way how to approach her, so that she would think the divorce was her idea. It took me four more years, until I finally had the courage to actually go through with it.

She had been the only person in my life for the past 15 years or so. I had no support network, no friends, and no family in the States. I knew that the divorce would be very very hard on me, and that was a scary thought. I knew I was miserable with the way things were now. But what if I was going to be even more miserable after the divorce?

Week after week, month after month, I made excuses why I wasn't going to file for divorce this week: well, it's almost Christmas. I can't divorce her right before Christmas. That would be terrible.

It's almost Valentine's Day. What kind of a cruel scumbag files for divorce right before Valentine's Day?

It's her birthday next week. I can't divorce her on her birthday.

The truth was, I was really just scared of the great unknown after the divorce.

By now I had heavily invested in real estate, and I owned two houses in Canada, a few condos in New York, four or five houses in Florida, a rental house in the Poconos, and the big mansion that was still being built in the Poconos.

After I had bought another house in Florida, I told Donna that since the mansion in the Poconos was probably never going to be finished, we should move into the new house in Florida. It was 3000 square feet and in a beautiful gated community called Olympia Pointe, on Lee Boulevard in Fort Myers.

Of course she didn't want to. I knew she wouldn't. But I wouldn't let it go. I kept asking her, showed her pictures of the house, and tried to

convince her how awesome living in that house would be.

It didn't take long until she pulled out her nuclear option: "Well, if you really want to move into that house, I guess we are going to have to get a divorce, because I'm not going."

I had anticipated that response while I had learned to navigate around her tantrums. I didn't like to be manipulative, but it was really the only way to survive the relationship with her without constantly arguing about every God damn thing. I had learned that with a little bit of reverse psychology, I could make her think that whatever I wanted to do was really what she wanted to do.

If I wanted to drive to the Poconos the next day, to take a look at the progress at the construction site, I knew she would have a tantrum and find 10 reasons why I shouldn't go tomorrow. It was like that every single time.

Everything was some sort of weird mind game with her. She always had to have the feeling that she was the boss and that I only did what she told me to do. If something was my idea, and I wanted to do something without her explicit orders to do it, she was against it. Every damn time. And not only did she not approve of whatever I did on my own accord, she turned it into something horribly bad that I supposedly had only done to spite her, and now it was her turn to take revenge by doing something spiteful to me.

In the animal kingdom, when lions or apes live together in groups, they establish a pecking order. They fight to see who's the strongest, and once everyone knows their place, they get along just fine. Humans do the same thing. When you start to work in a new office, you quickly learn who makes coffee for whom.

The idea that I was going to take orders from Donna went totally against my grain. Not because I'm some sort of male chauvinist pig who feels it's my God-given right as man to boss women around. I believe in equality. I looked at Donna as my partner, with equal value and equal say. But she constantly tried to be the alpha, the one who got to boss me around. Since I was never a follower, that just didn't work for me. And I stubbornly refused to do what she told me to, even if it was in my own best interest.

If it was snowing outside, and she told me to put on a jacket before I go outside, I would leave the house without a jacket, just so that she

wouldn't get the idea that she got to tell me what to do. And then I stood out in the snow, freezing like an idiot. If she hadn't opened her damn mouth, of course I would have put on a jacket. I'm not a child!

So, yeah, that caused a lot of conflicts, too. I explained to her many times that we can be equals, but I would never allow her to boss me around. If anyone was going to boss anyone around, I was going to be the one bossing her around. I really didn't want to keep fighting with her about who gets to dominate whom. But no matter how many times we went through this conflict, it was like it never even happened, and she tried to fight for the top spot on the pecking order all over again the next day. And the next day. And the next day. It was like the movie *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray. I fought the same battle with her over and over again. It was a giant waste of time and energy. So after a while, I learned to choose my battles wisely. Instead of daily conflict, I chose the path of least resistance to get through the day.

I knew that if I wanted to go to the Poconos the next day, and I didn't want to have yet another major fight over nothing on my hands, I had to tell her that I was going to have to go at some point during the next week, but that I really didn't feel like driving all the way out there.

Inevitably, she would tell me to go the next day, to get it over with. And I would reply, "Hmm, yeah, I guess you're right. I might as well go tomorrow, even though I really don't feel like it. It's such a pain in the ass."

Those kinds of crazy, manipulative mind games were really the only way to get anything done, without constantly fighting with her about it.

If we decided to rent two movies from Blockbuster, of course I had to go alone, because she wouldn't leave the house. If I picked out any movies on my own, she would make my life miserable afterwards, because somehow whatever movie I picked was the wrong kind of movie. If I picked a comedy, a comedy was the wrong kind of movie that day. If I picked a horror movie, that was wrong, too. You get the idea.

If a movie I picked contained brief nudity, she accused me of being a pervert, who specifically picked this movie for its nudity: "What are you looking at? You like her? Why don't you go fuck her?!"

But if she picked a movie, and it contained some nudity, it was no problem at all.

So whenever I was at Blockbuster, we were on the phone, and she told me to read off the new movies they had. If I made any kind of comment that I wasn't in the mood to watch a particular new movie, that would be the movie she wanted me to bring home. Every time.

So when I went to Blockbuster, while being on the phone with her, I simply didn't read the names of the movies I didn't want to see. So she could only choose from the movies that I knew I was going to like.

When I brought home her two movie choices, and it was now a matter of deciding whether we were going to watch movie A or movie B first, she would always, always pick the opposite of what I picked, and then start an hour long tantrum or walk out of the room, if I didn't cave in and we didn't watch the movie she wanted to watch.

So eventually I learned to always say the opposite of what I really wanted to do. If I wanted to watch movie A first, I pretended to want to watch movie B first. Then of course she picked movie A first and I politely gave in to her wishes like a gentleman.

I did the same thing with the divorce. I told her I really wanted her to move to that new house in Florida with me. But of course I knew she wouldn't, and that she would use her kill-all argument divorce again, like she always did. I was prepared. I had hired a lawyer in Guam, and he sent me the divorce papers. All I needed now was for her to sign them.

When she said we'd have to get a divorce, I said, "You don't really mean that. You wouldn't want to get a divorce just because I want to move to Florida with you."

"Yes I would," she replied.

So I pulled out the divorce papers, and told her, "I know you're bluffing. Here are some divorce papers. There's no way you're gonna sign them, just because you don't want to move."

"Oh yes I will," she said, and signed the papers.

Checkmate.

Four years earlier, when I had first learned the fact that Guam is the divorce paradise, it wasn't necessary to go there in person, and you could just mail the divorce papers.

But by now the government of Guam had decided that they should make more money of all these people who wanted to get a divorce there. So they changed the law and suddenly there was a seven-day residency requirement, before you could get a divorce. In other words, they wanted tourists to spend a one week vacation in Guam, and spend some money there, before getting a divorce.

I hopped on the next plane and spent a week in paradise. Guam is on the other side of the world, near Japan. It's a lot like Hawaii, but because it's so close to Japan, most of the tourists there are actually Japanese, not American.

A week later the judge stamped my papers and I was divorced. On the way back to the States, I stopped over in Tokyo for a few days. It was the first time I had ever been in Japan. It was pretty cool. Tokyo is like New York on steroids.

When I got back, Donna said that I could have my divorce if I wanted to, but she would fight me every step of the way, and make my life miserable. She said she would take me for everything I have.

I told her: "Sorry, you're too late. The divorce is already done and over with. Remember those papers you signed last week? That was the divorce."

She couldn't wrap her head around that and called a few lawyers in New York, to see if the divorce could be reversed or contested.

Nope.

## PATTY

*"I can sympathize with people's pains but not with their pleasures.  
There is something curiously boring about somebody else's  
happiness."*

**Aldous Huxley**

After the divorce, I moved into the mansion in the Poconos.

It was still not completed, but I explained to the building inspector that if he didn't issue a certificate of occupancy, I would lose a fortune in bank penalties, because the deadline for the construction loan had long expired. Thankfully he agreed to let me live in the house even though it wasn't totally finished yet.

The house was way too big for just one person. When I walked around, I could hear the echo of my steps. The loneliness was soul-crushing. I really missed Donna. I was so depressed, I spent hours just lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling, lost in thought. I was so used to having her around me at all times, that now there was a big gaping hole in my life.

But at the same time, I felt at peace for the first time in... ever? Finally I didn't have someone constantly telling me that no matter what I did, it was wrong. I didn't feel like I was constantly walking on egg shells, because if I said or did the wrong thing, someone would punish me with some psychotic tantrum.

That feeling of inner peace and serenity was nice. If only I had someone in my life to share it with.

The nearest town, Milford, was about 15 minutes away. My house was literally in the middle of nowhere, in a beautiful albeit desolate gated lakefront community in the woods.

As a teenager in Germany, I had gone to an all boys catholic school. So I never had any girls around me in school. And because my dad was the town drunk, I was embarrassed to try to meet girls in my neighborhood. I didn't want them laughing about me behind my back, because they saw my dad passed out drunk lying in a ditch somewhere.



The fact that my mother always wanted to move once my dad had humiliated her in front of the neighbors again, didn't make it any easier for me to meet someone as a teenager.

Then I met Donna over the Internet. She was my first girlfriend, and I ended up marrying her and spent the next 15 years with her.

I never cheated on her. Not just because she would have made my life a living hell if she had caught me, but because I really had no desire to cheat on her. I just wasn't interested in other girls. I was perfectly content with her.

I guess some guys enjoy the chase and love to bang a new girl every few days. To me those guys are total douchebags. Like animals in heat who will fuck anything that moves.

My mom and my stepdad have a really great relationship. They are each other's best friends. They do everything together, and they miss each other terribly when they are apart for even just a day. That's the kind of relationship I want to have. Like one soul in two bodies.

And despite its flaws, that was the kind of relationship I had with Donna. So for 15 years I had never even looked at another girl or flirted with another girl. I really had no dating skills whatsoever at this point. I had never experienced the things normal teenagers go through, when they begin to date: a first kiss at the prom from your high school sweetheart, casual sex with female friends, make out parties, or learning how to deal with a break up.

I felt a little bit like an alien from another planet, who had beamed down to Earth and was now posing as a human, but was unfamiliar with even the most basic human customs. And now I had to start meeting girls, if I didn't want to sit in this huge house all by myself every night. Terrific. What could possibly go wrong?

Patty was the first girl who answered my online personal ad. I think I was 38 at the time. She was 39 and lived in Scranton, about half an hour away. We decided to meet at a Chinese food restaurant in Lords Valley. Somehow we ended up at two different restaurants, waiting for each other for about twenty minutes, until we figured out the miscommunication.

When I met her, her voice instantly turned me off. She wasn't bad looking. She had natural blonde hair, a nice smile and big boobs. But

she had a deep man's voice. I almost felt like I was sitting across the table from a drag queen.

But the small talk with her went surprisingly well, considering that this was the first time I had to do that kind of stuff. We had a lot of fun and laughed a lot. Then she went to the bathroom, and tripped along the way. When she came back, her whole lap was wet. Somehow she had managed to spill a bunch of water on her lap in the bathroom. When she sat back down, she almost knocked her plate over. She was even worse at this than I was.

After we had dinner at the Chinese restaurant, we went back to my place. We sat on the couch in the living room. She kept gushing that this was the most beautiful house she had ever been in.

The building inspector, a no nonsense bureaucrat, had said the same thing when he had issued the certificate of occupancy a few weeks earlier. He walked into the kitchen and quietly looked around. Then he matter-of-factly told me: "I usually don't say this, and I don't bullshit people, but you got the nicest house in the whole county." That made me feel pretty good.

While Patty and I were sitting on the living room couch, I told her that building this house had been my dream, and that I had designed every little detail, from the type of crown moulding that was used, down to the color of the tiles and the type of door handles throughout the house.

Then I told her that I was thinking about selling the house and moving somewhere else. Maybe Florida. She couldn't understand that: "Why would you want to leave your dream house?"

"Because my dream has changed," I replied. "I thought having a beautiful house in the Poconos would make me happy. But it didn't."

It was getting late, and she went home. It had been nice to have some company for a change.

She came over again after work a day or two later. She made meatballs in tomato sauce for me. She made the sauce from scratch, using fresh tomatoes. She really went all out, and put a lot of effort into making dinner, to impress me. She was a good cook.

Patty ended up spending the night. We went into the huge hot tub in

the master bathroom. It was big enough for four people. You could float in it on an inflatable mattress. I loved that tub. The hot, bubbly water was so relaxing. I could spend hours in it, and just forget the whole world for a little while.

It felt kinda weird seeing her undress in front of me. But hey, I wasn't complaining. At least now I knew she wasn't a transvestite. She had all the required lady parts to qualify as 100% female.

I got into the tub first, and then she got on top of me, facing me, with her big boobs dangling in my face. I kissed them. In my head, I compared them to Donna's boobs. Patty's breasts were smaller than Donna's. And Patty's nipples were bigger and darker. Almost too big and too dark. Then she started playing with my dick and she tried to slide it inside of her and ride me.

I couldn't believe how easy it had been to meet another girl after Donna, and how quickly I ended up having sex with her. I really had thought it was going to take much longer, and that I was going to have to slog through dozens of awkward blind dates, until I finally connect with a girl, and we get close enough, where she would want to spend the night and have sex with me.

Somehow being in the tub seemed to be too distracting. I couldn't have sex with Patty. So we decided to go into the bedroom and try it again on the bed. Same thing. I just couldn't do it. My mind wanted to, but my dick apparently decided that this was a good time to go on strike. What I learned that night was that I really don't like one night stands with strangers.

Patty came over a few more times after that. She was a counselor at a drug rehab in Scranton. I thought that was pretty interesting, so I asked her a bunch of questions. All I knew about drugs or addicts at that point was what I had read in that book *Zoo Station*, when I was a kid.

We did end up having sex a few times, but it always felt forced to me. Fake. I neither felt horny, nor did I feel like I had a deep emotional connection with her that would make me want to make love to her. I really just did it, because I figured, hey, there's a naked girl next to me. Might as well have sex. But for some reason I really didn't enjoy sex with her. I wasn't sure why. There was just something off-putting about her.

I guess it wasn't even one big thing, but many little things, like her manly voice, and the way she would lie next to me in bed and closely examine my naked body, like I was under a microscope. She was looking for zits on my stomach, or my shoulders. She was a pimple popper. Hey, if you want to pop your own pimples, knock yourself out. But leave my zits the hell alone! Somehow she seemed to think that looking for a zit on me, and popping it, was very intimate. To me it was just crreeepy.

And while lying in bed, every few minutes she checked my belly button for lint. There usually wasn't any in there. But she'd stick her finger in it anyway, stir around in it for a second or two, and then examine her finger tip for traces of lint. Who the fuck does that?!

Two or three other girls had answered my online ad as well. I stopped seeing Patty after we got together four or five times and I decided to meet some other girls instead.

Jennifer was 26 and she looked like a model. She had actually been a stripper in the past. Now she worked as a realtor, selling time shares. She had long bleach blonde hair and huge breast implants. She had the perfect body and a beautiful face. She could have been Jenna Jameson's prettier sister.

The first time I had sex with Jennifer also started out in my hot tub. Her boobs were about as big as my head. And they were just perfect. Holy crap, were they perfect. Everything about her was perfect. I loved having sex with her. I could see myself getting used to that.

Then, after we had seen each other a couple of times, she finally told me that she was actually still in a relationship with this guy Ron, and they were living together and they had four children. Holy fuck.

She had three kids from her previous boyfriend, a drug dealer in Philadelphia. She left him when she met Ron. Ron was the father of her fourth kid, but he was raising all four of them as his own. He also worked in real estate.

Ron was an abusive alcoholic who beat Jennifer, and she wanted to get away from him, but couldn't do it on her own. So she was looking for someone else who would take care of her and her four kids. She figured my huge house would be perfect for them.

Once I knew Jennifer was still living with Ron, I kinda stopped

seeing her. But every now and then, when she and Ron were breaking up yet again, or he hit her again, or she called the cops on him again, she would call me, and we hung out and had sex.

She would tell me what a horrible person Ron was and we'd make plans for a future together, even though I knew that next week she'd be back with Ron anyway. And deep down I knew that no matter how incredibly hot she was, and no matter how much I enjoyed having sex with her, I really didn't want to be with her, because she was obviously a cheater and a gold digger.

One time, when she told me how great things would be once we live together, she said that she would hire a personal trainer for me, and a stylist, and she'd pick out a fancier car for me.

Obviously she didn't really like anything about me, except my wallet. She didn't like the fact that I had gained weight after my divorce, because I eat too much junk food when I'm depressed. She didn't like that I dress casually and wanted me to look more like a high roller. And she didn't like that I drove a Durango, and she wanted me to drive a Mercedes or BMW or Porsche instead. She was utterly shallow and empty inside. All she cared about was looks and money. She was beautiful on the outside, but ugly on the inside.

Then I met Linda. She was 30. She had dark hair, a nice figure and a pretty face, even though her nose was a little too big. She was a single mother and had a 2-year-old son. She told me that she had just lost her job as a receptionist in a doctor's office and that she was struggling to make ends meet.

After we had known each other for a week or two, and we had sex a few times, she asked me if I could maybe help her out with her electric bill. A few days later she supposedly needed help with her phone bill. Then she needed groceries, because her kid was starving. And so on and so forth. Every time we got together, she supposedly needed money desperately or her world was going to go up in flames.

Being the oblivious space alien that I was, it took me a while to catch on to the fact that she was just playing me like a fiddle.

One day she called me and told me she didn't get her period. She said she was pregnant and I was the father. She said we really didn't know each other well enough yet to have a child together, so she

wanted to get an abortion and asked me to pay for it. I gave her a couple of hundred dollars, when she came over later that day.

A few days later, when she came over again, and I asked her how she felt and how the procedure went, she told me the abortion didn't take. She said her cervix hadn't dilated enough, and that's why they couldn't perform the abortion, but since the doctor did start the procedure, they still took her money. She said now she was still pregnant, but had no more money left, and needed to go for another abortion. Naive as I was, I believed her, and gave her another couple of hundred dollars.

A few days later she told me that the second abortion didn't take either, because her cervix still wouldn't dilate enough. That's when I finally put two and two together and realized that she was constantly asking me for money. I wasn't sure if she really was pregnant or not, but I sure as hell wasn't going to give her any more cash ever again. I told her I would call the abortion clinic and pay over the phone with a credit card. She tried to make excuses for why that wouldn't work and why she needed me to give her cash: "They won't even talk to you if you call them, because you're a guy."

"Well, then tell them it's ok to talk to me," I said.

"I can't. They won't talk to you over the phone. Patient confidentiality," she replied.

"OK, then I'll take you to the clinic myself, and I will pay them with a credit card in person."

"They don't take credit cards."

"OK, then I'll give them a check."

"They don't take checks."

"OK, then I'll hand them cash. But I'm not giving the cash to you. I'm going to give it to the receptionist at the clinic."

"OK, fine," she said. "I'll go for the abortion next Tuesday."

On Monday night I tried to call her, to ask her when I should pick her up and take her to the clinic. No answer. I tried to call her a few more times on Tuesday. No answer. Then I gave up. She never called

me back. I guess once she realized I wasn't going to give her one more dollar, she lost all interest in me and moved on to her next victim.

For a few weeks after that I worried about her really being pregnant, and that once she had the baby, she'd try to come after me for child support. But she never did.

Then I met Liz. She was 24. She was going to college to become a school teacher. But she hated her job, and really wanted to be a yoga instructor. She was obsessed with weed. Eeeverything revolved around weed. It was almost like a religion to her.

The college town New Paltz, NY was about half an hour away from my house in Pennsylvania. I met Liz for the first time at a Sushi restaurant, and we ended up talking for hours. She was very short and petite. One inch away from legally being a midget, she said. She had dark hair, nerd-chic glasses and a pretty smile.

We ended up hanging out every weekend for a few months. We went out to eat, watched movies together, went to art museums, spent a weekend in Atlantic City, and saw shows like Cirque du Soleil and Blue Man Group in Manhattan. We visited the Bronx zoo, and got massages at the ritzy Mohonk Mountain House spa.

Liz always smoked weed when we hung out, and kept asking me to try it. She knew I had never tried any alcohol or drugs. Her argument that weed wasn't really a drug but a natural herb finally convinced me to try it at least once. She was so excited that my first time was going to be with her. She told me that we would have to go buy me my own glass pipe first. We went to a little smoke shop in New Paltz, that had a huge selection of weed paraphernalia.

Then we went back to my house and sat on the kitchen balcony, overlooking my back yard. It was dark. She showed me how to stuff a pipe, light it, hold the carburetor, how to inhale and how to hold in the smoke. Since I had never even smoked a cigarette before, it made me choke so bad, I felt like I was going to cough up a lung. Being so inept at this made me feel like a total space alien again.

She told me to take three hits. I did. Then we talked about God knows what. After a few minutes she asked me if I felt anything yet. Nope. Nothing. A few minutes later she asked me again. Nothing.

Then she told me that weed doesn't work on everyone. Some people are immune to it, and they don't feel anything no matter how much they smoke. She said apparently I was one of those people. She was clearly disappointed.

Suddenly I had the biggest chipmunk cheek grin on my face. For no reason. I felt like I looked like The Joker. I tried to push my cheeks down with my fingers, to stop that stupid grin. But it wasn't working. "I can't stop smiling," I said. She started to laugh and asked me how I felt. The weed had finally kicked in, and within a few minutes I was high as a kite.

We decided to go upstairs, into the master bedroom. Walking up the staircase wasn't easy. Everything was spinning like a kaleidoscope. I could barely even stand, never mind walk up the stairs.

After we finally made it to the bedroom, we were lying on the bed, watching Futurama. My whole body felt tingly, and the colors in the cartoon were hilarious to me. I thought purple and cyan were the funniest things ever. I was so high, colors were making me laugh. Liz told me later that the stuff I had smoked was called Diesel. She said it was pretty good.

Since I was getting more and more involved in real estate investing, I flew to Florida a couple of times. Usually to Fort Myers, because the Southwest Florida metro area was the second hardest hit area during the real estate bubble, after Las Vegas. So there were a lot of incredibly cheap brand new houses for sale at real estate auctions.

I asked Liz if she wanted to come with me to Florida for a week. She did, but she was afraid she wouldn't be able to have a good time without weed, and she was scared to take a big bag of weed on the plane with her. I told her my friend Sheila in Fort Myers might be able to hook her up. Sheila was from Iran. She had been a lawyer and then decided to move to the US and became a realtor in Florida. She was really cool. Very smart. And a progressive liberal, just like me. Since we were both immigrants, we had a lot in common, and a lot to talk about.

Once Liz and I landed in Fort Myers, I rented the most luxurious BMW they had at the airport and we stayed at the Waldorf Astoria in Naples. There was really no need for that gaudiness. I guess I figured it would impress Liz. But she wasn't the kind of girl who was impressed by money.



Sheila really did come through. We met her at the 711 on College Parkway and Route 41 and she gave Liz a bag of free weed. Liz had also baked some weed brownies before we left New York. She had taken those with her. She ate most of them, but I tried some, too. They didn't do anything for me.

During the week we spent in Florida together, we explored Naples, Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel, Matlacha, etc. We had a lot of fun.

A few weeks after that trip, she told me that her uncle worked as an instructor at a yoga school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The school had an opening, so she decided to leave New Paltz and move to Chapel Hill to pursue her dream. I never saw her again after that, but we still keep in touch on Facebook.

She gave me a little good bye present: my very own bag of Diesel. It probably would have only lasted her a weekend. But it lasted me several months, because I hardly ever used it. I just tried it a few times while I was relaxing in the hot tub. But it never really did much for me. My head would feel heavy, and I might get sleepy, but that was it. No funny colors and no spinning kaleidoscope. I never got as high again as that first time.

When the bag ran out, I threw away my glass pipe. I had no need for it anymore, since I really wasn't interested in weed.

After Liz left for North Carolina, I met this girl Raven. She was only 19. She had seen my online ad, and asked me if I'd be interested in a mutually beneficial relationship. She told me her dream was to become a porn star in Los Angeles, and she needed to come up with some money to move to California. Alrighty then.

After the shit I had gone through with Linda, I figured that an arrangement like that wouldn't really be all that different than what Linda had been doing to me. Really the only difference was that Raven was perfectly honest and upfront about the fact that she was simply looking to make some money.

Raven had long flowing black hair, a beautiful face, huge brown eyes, and a very nice body. But she was nowhere near as sexy as Jennifer. We got together a few times. Raven was cute, but she was a total ditz. She was such an airhead, it was impossible to have a conversation with her about anything other than her moving to

California soon, to break into the porn industry. That's all she cared about.

Raven really did end up in porn. When I googled her stage name a few months later, there were porn videos of her all over the Internet. Porn stars always seem so far away, so unattainable. It was weird to see videos of her on the web and think: "Wow, I actually had sex with that girl. I had sex with a real life porn star!"

I met her again a year or so later, after she had moved back to New York. We got together and she told me she hated Los Angeles and the people she had been around. They all treated her like a piece of meat. Well, duuuuh!

## ALICE

*"Be careful who you trust. Even the devil was once an angel."*

### Proverb

While hanging out with Liz, and then later with Raven, I became more and more involved in buying and selling real estate online. Making web pages for each property was a tedious, time consuming task that required a lot of concentration, because if you accidentally type the wrong tax map number, you're buying or selling the wrong property.

I placed a job ad online to find someone who could help me out with making these real estate web pages. Alice was one of the people who applied for the job. She was 24 and almost as petite as Liz and she also had long dark hair. She looked a bit like a tiny version of Angelina Jolie.

She had been the personal assistant of a real estate broker in the past. So she had some experience in this field. Perfect! However, since I do things my own way, I was going to have to explain quite a lot of stuff to her. It was a steep learning curve. But she was very smart and a quick learner.

I was buying and selling real estate like a realtor, without actually having a realtor's licence. You don't need one when you own the properties you buy and sell. You only need a license if you sell someone else's property.

And I did my own closings, without hiring a lawyer. Normally people hire a lawyer to prepare the new deed. I did all the paperwork myself, because when I used to work at the newspaper in Brooklyn, I had seen that lawyers really just use the same template over and over again and then charge an arm and a leg for nothing. I saved about \$1000 in legal fees every time I sold a property and prepared the deed myself.

So Alice had to learn how to be a web programmer, a graphic designer, a realtor, and a lawyer. And she pulled it off.

Then, after a few weeks, I started to notice that she had a hard time concentrating. Suddenly she made a lot of mistakes or just stared at the screen and couldn't remember the next step.

By now we had spent so much time together that we were getting pretty close. We started having sex. Liz had been gone for a few months, and I really wasn't all that interested in Raven the airheaded wannabe porn star. Especially not after Alice and I started getting intimate.

More and more, I got the feeling that Alice was hiding something from me. But I wasn't sure if I was just being paranoid. Who could blame me for being paranoid, after the crap I had been through with the last few girls I met? Within just a few months, I had sex with more girls than during my whole life before my divorce. And during those months I learned more about women, and how deceitful and manipulative they could be, than other people learn during an entire lifetime.

I asked Alice if she was hiding something from me. She said no. It was hard to imagine that anything could be wrong when she looked at me with her beautiful eyes and gave me that pretty smile of hers. And she had such a beautiful, carefree laugh. And her laugh came so easily. Sometimes all it took was to say a word in a funny voice or to give her a silly look, and she'd just crack up. She was just the sweetest girl. I loved being around her. Just being in the same room with her made me happy.

One day we were cuddled up under a blanket on the couch in the TV room, watching Wall-E. We were naked and we weren't really paying attention to the movie. She was about to give me a blowjob. She told me that I could cum in her mouth if I wanted to. She had given me blowjobs before, but never until I came. We always ended up having intercourse. I asked her if she swallowed. She replied, "Generally I don't."

Generally? Wait, what did she mean by generally? That sounded to me like she gave blowjobs so often, to so many different people, she had general rules about her blowjob performance, and exceptions to those rules. That sounded like there was a whole lot of blowing going on. Someone who only gives blowjobs to her boyfriend, wouldn't use the word "generally" in that context.

Barely noticeable gestures, secret winks, knowing looks, or the inflection of a single word, overlooked by most people, stand out to me. Sometimes I can extrapolate an entire page worth of information from just one look or one word.

For example, imagine you overhear a conversation between two people, and one of them says to the other: "We never talk anymore."

At face value, it's simply a statement that two people aren't talking. But when you really think about that sentence, there is a lot more to it. To me it sounds like those two people used to talk a lot more in the past, because they used to spend a lot of time together. And then something happened, and they grew apart. So they probably used to be in a relationship, the relationship went sour, they split up, and the person saying that sentence feels sad about the fact that things didn't work out between them. And the person who said that sentence misses the other person, because he/she still has feelings for the other person.

I guess women call the ability to read between the lines "female intuition." I think women are right, a lot of men are ignorant bores, who don't pick up on cues and they need to be hit over the head with a hammer to get a clue. But my intuition was always triggered by minute details. I think I have always been very perceptive, especially when I'm trying to find out something. Maybe because information gathering, and paying attention to the smallest clues, was an important part of being a hacker.

Alice's use of the word "generally" in the context of a blowjob made me think that she was a hooker. And suddenly the fact that she had a hard time concentrating lately made me think that she was on drugs. Suddenly I had the feeling that my sweet, innocent, lovable Alice was a drug addicted hooker just like that girl Christiane F in the book *Zoo Station*, with everything that entails: abuse during childhood, abandonment, being mistreated by guys, feeling all alone in the world, etc. All that popped in my head, because she used the word "generally."

But I couldn't just ask her, "Hey, sweetie, are you a crackwhore?" That wouldn't go over too well. What if I was wrong? She would be so insulted, she'd probably never talk to me again.

Now my senses were on high alert, and I was looking for any tiny clue that would prove that my theory was right. I looked at her arms, to see if I could find any track marks from shooting up. I couldn't. Well, I really didn't even know what track marks are supposed to look like. I had never seen any before. I could probably stare right at them and not even know that they are the track marks of a heroin

addict.

Then I noticed that Alice had a bunch of tiny dots on the back of her hands. I had never seen or heard about that before. Seeing those dots didn't ring a bell. I figured, well, they kinda look like needle marks, but why would they be on the back of her hands, and not on her arms? I had no idea at that time that long time heroin addicts have a hard time shooting up in the veins in their arms, because their veins collapse. So eventually they have to shoot up in the back of their hands, their legs, feet, neck or even their forehead.

I held Alice's hands in my hands, to get a better look.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"What are these dots?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"Are those needle marks?"

She started to laugh nervously: "Haha, no of course not. Why would I have needle marks on my hands?"

It was getting awkward. She pulled her hands away and changed the topic. I was sure I was right, but I still didn't want to make any false accusations, and destroy whatever relationship we had at this point. But from that moment on, that's all I could think about.

I flew to Fort Myers a few days later, to buy another property at a real estate auction.

I hadn't hacked in years. I had told myself I was never going to do that again, because once I started doing that again, I knew I would want to do it just one more day, one more day. There is always something else you're dying to find out about someone.

If you could press a big red button and find out every little secret about your significant other, would you? Oh stop denying it, you know you would.

Wouldn't you love to be able to read people's minds? Of course you would. Everybody would. Hacking is a little bit like that, because you can find out what people are hiding in the back of their heads.

So while I was staying at a hotel in Naples, Florida, I started to hack into Alice's medical records. Within a few minutes I found out that she had three abortions, that she had been in drug rehab for her heroin addiction, that she had overdosed on crack several times and almost died, and that she had to be resuscitated in the hospital. And that she had applied to be a surrogate mother and carry someone else's baby to term, to make some money, but that she had been rejected because of her medical history.

I couldn't say that I was surprised, but I was speechless anyway. Alice was such a sweet girl. She had an amazing personality and such an adorable, innocent little girl laugh. How could that girl be a heroin addicted hooker?

I texted her and told her I knew about her past. She texted me back and acted like I was full of shit. So I told her what I had just found out. She was shocked that I had found that information about her and told me that she was really mad at me, because supposedly she had planned to tell me the truth about her past as soon as I got back from Florida, but by finding it out on my own, I ruined everything.

Yeah, right. How convenient. When I asked her if she was hiding anything, she said no. When I asked her about her track marks, she denied everything. But now that I found out the truth on my own, she suddenly claimed that as soon as I was gonna come back from Florida in a few days, she was going to tell me everything. Bullshit.

When I got back home a few days later, she came over and we had a talk. She told me that she had been on heroin for about seven years, ever since she was a teenager.

Her father had left them. Her mother was so abusive, she had broken Alice's collar bone during one of her severe beatings. Then her mother started dating other guys and was way more interested in them than Alice. Her mother shipped Alice off to her grandmother in Tennessee, to be raised there. But after Alice got used to living with her grandma and got very close with her, her mother got jealous and wanted Alice to come back. Her mother ripped her out of the environment she had finally learned to call home.

Things didn't get any better when she was back in New York with her mother. Whenever her mother and one of her guy friends wanted to be alone, they would kick Alice out into the streets. Sometimes in

the middle of the night. If she didn't want to leave, they hit her. Alice felt abandoned and alone. She wanted to kill herself, and became a cutter. Then she turned to drugs.

She had smoked crack for a while, but overdosed a few times and had to be rushed to the hospital. She was able to stop smoking crack, but continued to do heroin.

She really used to work in a real estate office, but lost her job when they found out she was addicted to drugs. Drugs cost a lot of money. The only way for a girl to come up with that much money on a daily basis is to sell her body. She was so ashamed of the things she used to do for drugs.

She told me that when she first started doing it, some guy had hired her for his escort company. He promised her she wouldn't have to have sex with anyone, and that all these guys just wanted to hang out with her, or watch her strip. Of course that was a lie.

She found out pretty quickly that these guys wanted more from her than just watch her dance. She started giving them handjobs. That's all she was willing to do. She was so disgusted with herself, that it made her use even more drugs, to get through each day.

Her wrist started hurting from jerking off all these guys every day, so she decided that it was quicker and easier to just give in to what they really wanted her to do. She just didn't have the strength to fight it anymore, and she ended up just letting them have sex with her. It didn't really make much of a difference anymore at this point. Her self-respect was completely gone. But the only way she was able to get through having sex with all these guys day after day was by doing heroin before she walked into their hotel room, and then do heroin again afterwards to forget what she had just done.

She had been raped, beaten and abused by these guys. Finally she was so miserable with her life that she tried to get clean and went to rehab. All her so-called boyfriends up until then had been black or latin dope boys who hit her, abused her physically, sexually and emotionally. They all pimped her out. One of them even made her go trick on her birthday.

Eventually she met this man while escorting, who told her that he really cared about her. He was white, like most of her "clients." He convinced her to get clean. Everything seemed great, until she got



out of rehab and moved in with him, and he turned out to be even more abusive than those dope boys she had dated earlier.

He raped and beat her when she didn't do exactly what he said. He always demanded that she was naked in the house, even when she cooked or cleaned. That made her feel very vulnerable. And if she didn't obey him, he would beat her while she was naked. And then, when she was cowering on the floor, he would force her to give him a blowjob. She was his sex slave. One time he beat her so badly, he threw her through a sheetrock wall. Then he threw her out of the house, in the middle of winter, naked, while there was snow outside.

She relapsed a few weeks after getting out of rehab, while still living with her abusive "boyfriend." Who could blame her?

Then she went to rehab a second time. After she got out of rehab, she moved in with someone else and tried to turn her life around.

She was trying to find legitimate work, and that's how she had found my job ad. She said the reason why she hadn't told me all that stuff earlier was because she didn't want me to look at her as the person she used to be, but as the person she is trying to be now.

Unfortunately the guy she had moved in with, after her second rehab, was one of her ex-boyfriends. Some latin dope boy who called himself Curly. She didn't know where else to go.

She didn't tell me about moving in with him though. I didn't find out about that until a few months later. But of course he was the reason why she had relapsed yet again, and why she couldn't concentrate at work anymore after a few weeks of being so good at making real estate web pages for me.

Now that I knew the truth about her, I had to figure out how I was going to deal with it. Her drug habit was getting worse again, and at this point she was getting useless, when it came to doing work on the computer for me.

Should I just tell her to leave and lose my number? I couldn't do that. I felt so bad for her. She was such a sweetheart, and she had such a hard life. Who wouldn't end up on drugs if they were in her shoes? She was not a bad person. She was a victim, just like Christiane F in Zoo Station.

I used to think there really was no reason to outlaw prostitution. I thought, if girls want to do that kind of stuff, why should I care? But after Alice told me the reality of what it's like to be a hooker, and why virtually all hookers turn to drugs, and why almost all drug addicted girls become hookers, it was pretty clear to me that she and the other girls who did this stuff were absolutely miserable. They did not enjoy having to do this shit at all. It ate at them. It traumatized them. It destroyed their self-respect. No matter how much a hooker pretends she doesn't mind what she's doing, deep down she feels like she's the scum of the earth, because that's how men make her feel.

When I read *Zoo Station* as a kid, I told myself, if I ever met someone like Christiane F, I would be nice to her and treat her with kindness and respect.

When I tried to imagine what deep dark secret Donna could possibly be hiding from me, I told myself that even if she had been a prostitute in the past, I would still love her and be with her.

Now I really was faced with that very situation, with a girl who really had been through all that stuff. I gave Alice a hug and a kiss and told her I was glad she told me the truth. She started to tear up.

She still came over all the time after that. I didn't ask her to do any more work on the computer though, but I kept paying her anyway. I really cared about her at this point, and I couldn't bear the thought of her going back to having sex with all these other guys. I'd rather just give her money than have her go back to escorting. I didn't realize at the time that I was her enabler. I was making it easy for her to be an addict. So why would she ever stop?

We started doing the kind of things I used to do with Liz: we went out to eat, got massages at fancy spas, visited museums and shows like *Cirque du Soleil* and *Wicked* in Manhattan, and so on. Now that I knew she needed heroin to get through the day, she didn't hide it from me anymore. It became normal to me that she shot up two or three times a day. To me it was almost like she was a diabetic. They need injections of insulin to feel ok. Was heroin really all that different? Well, yeah, of course it was. I was really just deluding myself.

Eventually I kept asking her to go back to rehab, but she didn't want to. Of course not. Why would she? She wanted to have her cake and eat it, too. She wanted to have a nice life AND do drugs. Normally

you can only have one or the other, but I was making her life as addict easier and more comfortable than it had ever been.

She told me that she had tried rehab twice, and failed twice, so it was pointless. She said: "I'll quit when I'm ready."

"So, when is that gonna be?" I asked.

"I don't know. But not today."

That was her standard answer. I learned later that that's what all addicts say: "Yeah, I'll quit eventually. But not today." It's never today. That's the nature of addiction. The rational part of your brain knows that you should quit, and you really want to quit at some point, but not today. "Today I want to get high."

It doesn't even matter what you're addicted to. The principle is always the same. Even when it comes to food: "I know I need to stop eating candy and junk food. I know I should go on a diet. But not today. Maybe tomorrow. So I might as well enjoy eating candy and junk food today. A lot."

And when people tell themselves they will start a diet tomorrow, they feel it's ok to binge one last time today. Might as well make the most of today! So they stuff their face with way more food than they would normally eat, because the good times will be over tomorrow.

But then, when tomorrow comes, you really don't feel like starting the diet yet, so you allow yourself one more day of binging. And another one. And another one. Sometimes the thought of going on a diet soon actually makes you eat more.

And then there's the what-the-hell effect:

"I was doing so good on my diet, but then I screwed up today and ate a donut. What the hell, since today is already a lost day anyway, I might as well stuff my face with the whole box of donuts."

Drug addicts think the same way: They know they shouldn't do drugs. And if they have been clean for a while and screw up even just once, they feel now they might as well do a bunch more, until they go back to being clean. But of course once they start using again, the thought of getting clean is quickly forgotten.

Don't ever think you're better than a drug addict, because your brain works the same as theirs. You have the same circuits. And drugs would affect your brain in the same way it affects theirs. The same thought process that makes them screw up over and over again would make you screw up over and over as well, if you were in their shoes. You probably already are doing it, just not with heroin or crack, but with food or cigarettes, or something else you shouldn't be doing. Like hacking.

When you push someone's head under water for 5 minutes, they will drown. It doesn't matter if the person is a sinner or a saint. It's just a natural process. If their head is under water, the lack of oxygen will make them drown. That rule applies to everyone, good or bad, equally. It doesn't matter if the drowning person has strong moral fiber.

And it doesn't matter if you're a good or a bad person, once you become addicted to drugs. What happens next is inevitable. It's a natural process that happens in everyone's brain, once the drugs take over. So don't ever fool yourself into thinking that only weak or bad people get addicted.

Anyway, I went all out to show Alice how nice life could be if she were sober. I thought if I give her an incentive that's good enough, she will want to get clean and stay clean. So I asked her to come to Hawaii with me for ten days.

She was scared at first. Drug addicts don't like to go too far away from the place where they get their drugs. It's like they're mentally chained to it. Flying half way around the world, thousands of miles away from her dope boy, was a terrifying idea.

## THERE IS NO GOD

*"Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices, but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence and fulfills the duty to express the results of his thought in clear form."*

*"Few people are capable of expressing with equanimity opinions which differ from the prejudices of their social environment. Most people are even incapable of forming such opinions."*

*"I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation."*

Albert Einstein

*"The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality"*

George Bernard Shaw

*"All religions are equally sublime to the ignorant, useful to the politician, and ridiculous to the philosopher."*

Lucretius

*"Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful."*

Seneca the Younger

*"Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich."*

Napoleon Bonaparte

*"I am convinced that I am acting as the agent of our Almighty Creator. By fighting the Jews, I am doing the Lord's work."*

Adolf Hitler

Alice didn't really talk to her mother anymore, but she talked to her grandma Gina in Tennessee a lot. When she told Gina she was afraid to go to Hawaii, Gina asked to talk to me. Alice gave her my number.

Gina called me and asked me about my intentions with Alice. I

explained to her how I felt about her granddaughter, and that I wanted to show her a better life and convince her to get sober. We talked for over two hours. She wanted to know more about me, so I told her about my alcoholic father and how he had been the perfect negative role model, and that he made me want to be a better man than him, because I wanted to be nothing like him. And I told her what it was like to be married to Donna. And about my experiences with the girls I had met before Alice.

Gina could tell that I was not just some sleazy guy trying to get in her granddaughter's pants. She could tell I was sincere and that I genuinely cared about Alice. She understood that I didn't just see Alice as some drug addicted whore and I didn't just want to use her as my vacation sex toy. Gina loved me.

She was a very religious woman and told me she believed God had sent me to save Alice's life. She literally called me an angel sent by God. I was flattered, but it also made me feel pretty awkward. I was honest with her and told her I'm not religious at all. I told her I don't mind, if other people believe in God and it enriches their lives. It just doesn't do anything for me.

The one thing I didn't tell her was that when I was a teenager, my hacker name used to be Lucifer. Gina probably would have flipped out and tried to perform an exorcism on me.

She couldn't understand why I don't believe in God. I guess she had never really met someone who didn't believe in something that was so fundamental in her own life.

I told her that I grew up in Northern Europe, and people over there are far less religious than Americans. To most Europeans, the bible is really nothing more than a book of ancient fables, similar to Grimm's Fairy Tales. To many Europeans, it's bizarre that so many Americans still believe in gods, devils, angels and demons. It's like Americans are stuck in the Dark Ages.

I explained to her that as a teenager in Germany, I had studied theology at a catholic private school, and some of my classmates actually ended up becoming priests. So it's not like I hadn't heard the word of God before. And it's not like I was ignorant about who Jesus was, or supposedly was.

In those theology classes, we had to read up on different ancient

philosophers. Some argued in favor of the existence of a god, and some argued against his existence. I knew that I was supposed to write in my essays, why the philosophers who believed in God were right. But honestly, I felt the philosophers who said he didn't exist made a lot more sense to me.

There are two religious concepts that contradict each other: There's the idea of free will, and then there's the fatalist idea of predetermination. Those two ideas are polar opposites. Free will means we are the masters of our own future. Predetermination means God is in control of everything, and everything that's about to happen to us was already predetermined by someone other than ourselves, so our fate is not in our hands.

Whenever you ask a believer why God allows bad things to happen, they'll say that God doesn't interfere in free will. If someone chooses to do something bad, and it has bad consequences, it's supposedly not God's fault. He supposedly had nothing to do with it. Because if he had stopped it, he would have interfered in that person's free will.

But didn't God create the bad man, with all his bad habits? No, the believers say. God is always good, God never does anything bad, and anything bad about that man is a result of his own free will.

Meanwhile, believers also say the exact opposite, whenever it is convenient for them: everything happens for a reason. Everything that happens is part of God's great plan. If something happens that looks bad to us, it's just because we don't understand God's great plan, and how that bad stuff fits into the bigger picture.

Well, if it's true that everything that happens is part of God's plan, then we really don't have free will at all.

Take the Holocaust for example: why did God allow Hitler to kill millions of innocent Jews? Because God didn't want to step on Hitler's toes and interfere with his free will? That's a pretty lame excuse. What about the free will of all those Jews who died? I'm pretty sure that getting gassed to death was obviously not their choice.

So, was the Holocaust part of God's great plan? Is that why he allowed it to happen? Is that why God didn't answer the prayers of all those Jews who begged him to make Hitler drop dead?

Why didn't God just make Hitler have a heart attack before he could start World War 2? Why didn't he simply prevent Hitler from being born? How could a God who is supposed to be all good all the time allow something like the Holocaust?

Or did God not just LET it happen? Maybe God MADE the Holocaust happen, because everything that happens, happens for a good reason? Are our minds simply too tiny, too inferior, to understand God's divine plan? Are we just too stupid to see the greater good that came out of the Holocaust?

If that were true, and everything that happens, including the Holocaust, is part of God's perfect plan, then that means that Hitler really wasn't a bad man at all. He was actually doing God's work. And if Hitler did exactly what he was supposed to do in God's great plan, then Hitler obviously didn't have free will, but was just God's puppet. So that means Hitler was a good guy. A man of God.

Sorry, but there is no religion in the world that could sell me on believing THAT bullshit.

So that's my problem with free will versus predetermination. But it gets worse: both of those concepts contradict the idea that God answers prayers, like a genie in a bottle who makes wishes come true.

If God didn't come down from heaven to smite Hitler before he could kill millions of people, or at least snip his fingers and make Hitler die of a heart attack before he could start World War 2, although clearly millions of people were praying to God for just that to happen, then why would God answer your prayer when you have a flat tire and you're stuck all alone in the woods? If God won't spare the lives of millions of innocent Jewish men, women and children, then why would he answer your prayer when you ask for your hospitalized grandpa not to die from cancer?

To me, prayer is completely useless as a solution to any problem. It really just makes you feel better about yourself, without actually doing anything to solve the problem. The way I see it, it's really just a way for people who sit on their asses and do nothing, to feel like they're magically helping someone in need.

If Timmy needs a new kidney, don't sit at home and talk to yourself and pretend you're helping Timmy by talking to God for him. If you



want to help Timmy, get off your ass and donate some blood or collect money for a new kidney, or take Timmy's parents into your home if they can no longer afford to pay rent, because of the high medical bills. Do something!

And as far as Alice was concerned: It wasn't going to help her one bit if I sit at home or at church and "talk to God" about Alice. That wasn't going to do a damn thing for her. Because if God didn't influence Hitler in any kind of positive way, then why would God influence Alice in any kind of way, and violate her free will by making her go to rehab or changing her mind about liking drugs? And why would he do that anyway, if it's true that everything happens for a reason, and her getting raped and abused and becoming a drug addict was part of his great predetermined plan to begin with?

I thought I had lost Gina when I told her how I felt about all that, but she was actually very interested in what I had to say and very open-minded. She listened to every word I said, without making me feel like a crazy, blasphemous heathen who was going to burn in hell for saying these things. She agreed that there are a lot of hypocrites who go to church and pretend they are good Christians, but then never really do anything to actually help someone else.

I agreed. I told her that I have nothing against God or religion. If believing in an invisible friend who looks out for you makes you feel better about your life, why not? If having religion in your life makes you do good things for other people, why not?

My only problem with religion is that there are so many self-righteous people who pretend to be good Christians, and then really just do selfish, evil things, supposedly in the name of their God. How can you claim that your God has a problem with gay people? If God really created everything, then he created everyone, black, white, straight, gay, tall, short, Christian and Muslim. Don't go around telling other people they won't go to heaven just because they won't buy into your personal superstitions.

Gina asked me if I believed in heaven. I told her that if there really is life after death, then it's a natural process, that happens to everyone equally, whether they are good or bad. Just like in my drowning example earlier. Everyone drowns if their head is under water too long. It doesn't matter if you are a good or a bad person.

And if human beings really have some kind of spiritual energy or soul that can exist outside of the physical body after death, then we all come equipped with one. And whatever happens to that soul after death is just a natural process. As natural as drowning.

Do I believe anything happens after death? No. I think once we're dead, we're dead. You are who you are today, because of all your past experiences. You burned your tongue on a potato, and suddenly you don't like potatoes anymore. The color purple reminds you of your prom and the first time you made love to your spouse. So now you love the color purple. All that information of who you are and what you like is stored in your brain.

Look at Alzheimer's patients. Somewhere in their brain, they have information stored about their spouse of forty years. Then that part of the brain is destroyed, the information is lost, and suddenly they no longer remember who their spouse is.

Or look at car accident survivors with brain damage. If the part of their brain is destroyed that stored their vocabulary, or their reading skills, they can suddenly no longer speak or read. Sure, through years of therapy they can try to learn what they lost, but the fact remains that it was lost.

When you die, your brain is destroyed completely, and everything in it, everything that makes you you, is destroyed as well. Every bit of information that makes you who you are today, is gone. And that's why I don't believe I'll continue to float around as a ghost, or go to some kind of heaven, once my brain has died.

Stephen Hawking, the famous wheelchair-bound physicist, is considered by many to be the smartest man alive. The Albert Einstein of our time. Hawking said: "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."

And Albert Einstein once wrote: "The word god is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish."

I would love it if Hawking and Einstein were wrong. I love the idea of becoming some sort of immortal ghost that can fly around the

universe and explore other planets and stuff. How cool would that be? But do I believe that's what's actually going to happen? No. I'm pretty sure Hawking and Einstein are right.

Do I think that believing in an invisible man in the clouds will make any kind of difference in what happens to me after death? No, not for a second.

If God actually existed, that'd be kinda cool. Kinda like as if Superman or Spiderman were real. But they're not. To me, God is really just Santa Claus for grown-ups. A cute fairy tale that makes a lot of people feel all warm and fuzzy inside, but beyond that God doesn't do anything for anyone. So waiting for his help is pretty pointless. You have to help yourself. Or hope that another human being, who cares about you, will help you.

A lot of people simply believe in God, because everyone else around them believes it, too. They never actually took the time to really think about it on their own.

It's no coincidence that the bible keeps telling you to obey and believe, not to think for yourself and ask questions.

The bible is a tool. Throughout history, dictators have used religion, and the bible, to manipulate the masses. That's how and why the bible was created in the first place. The Roman Emperor Constantine, a pagan himself, decided he needed a tool to unify his fracturing empire. So he told a bunch of Christians to put together a book. He offered them money, and they produced the bible. And it has been a political tool to manipulate the masses ever since the days of the Roman Empire, right up until today.

How does one little guy with a funny mustache take control over an entire country and gets to tell millions of people what to do? By invoking God's will. Just like every dictator before him.

Nowadays the Nazis are portrayed as pure evil. But the reality is that most Nazis believed they were the good guys during World War 2. They believed they were good Christians. German soldiers wore belt buckles with the words "Gott mit uns" (God is with us) engraved on them.

And Hitler's violent anti-semitism really was nothing new among Christians. He was a big fan of Martin Luther, the German who, a

few hundred years earlier, had more or less single-handedly started the Protestant movement. Martin Luther, one of the founding fathers of the branch of Christianity that dominates America today, was viciously anti-semitic. He hated Jews and felt they were the root of all evil and they needed to be driven out of Europe or killed. He promoted the idea of a Holocaust hundreds of years before Hitler was even born. You never heard about that in your church, have you? I'm not surprised. But, well, it's true. Google it.

Anyway, even the ancient Egyptian pharaohs convinced ordinary people that God had put the pharaoh in charge, and that it was God's will that everyone else was starving and working themselves to death building pyramids for the pharaoh, while the pharaoh bathed in milk and honey.

For centuries, religion has been used by the rich people in power, to tell the poor, that it was God's will that they were poor: "God made me your king. Don't question my authority. It comes directly from God. If you don't obey me, God is gonna be really pissed at you."

And then the rich added insult to injury, by convincing the poor that God wanted them to have miserable lives, because everything happens for a reason, and God was testing their faith. And if they got through a lifetime of poverty and misery, they would be richly rewarded for never losing their faith by going to paradise, or heaven, after they die. Meanwhile the rich lived their lives of luxury and excess in the here and now, at the expense of the poor they exploited and fooled with promises of rich rewards in the afterlife.

Ever since the Age of Enlightenment, Europeans slowly learned to see through that scam, and today it is really really bad political form for a politician to ever mention God in a speech. In Europe, you can believe in whatever you want, but don't ever try to pretend that you are acting on God's behalf or that you are speaking for God, and that if someone disagrees with what you do, they are going against God's will. That's simply manipulative bullshit. If a German politician said that God told him to invade Iraq, his career would be over in a heartbeat. People would look at him like he has lost his mind.

But in America, that ancient religious scam still works. American politicians, especially right-wing extremist Republicans and Tea Party fanatics, still pretend they know God better than anyone else does. And they claim they know exactly what God wants, and if you disagree with them, you are a bad person, and God is really mad at

you, and you're going to hell.

To Gina it was pretty baffling to hear me say these things. A lot of the points I raised had never occurred to her before, because she never questioned her beliefs. She just assumed that what she was being told about God and the bible was true.

At the end of the conversation, she said that she could tell that I really cared about Alice, and that I was a good person, even if I don't believe in God.

Then Gina called Alice and told her that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for her and of course she should go to Hawaii with me.

## DOPE BOYS

*"The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."*  
Sun Tzu

Alice told me she wanted to come with me, but that she would need \$100 worth of dope for every day we were away from her drug dealer. Each bag of heroin cost \$10. She needed to shoot up at least 3 bags at a time, 3 times a day. That's 9 bags a day. The 10<sup>th</sup> bag was kind of a bonus.

She said without \$100 of heroin a day, she'd get terribly dope sick and the whole trip would be ruined. We were going to be in Hawaii for 10 days, so she needed to pack \$1000 worth of her medicine. Yeah, she seriously called it her medicine.

It didn't even occur to me that if I got caught at the airport with her, while she's smuggling \$1000 worth of heroin on board, I would be going to prison for a long long time. I just wanted her to have a good time, and show her how nice life could be sober. Don't ask me why showing her how nice sober life could be involved \$1000 worth of heroin. It seemed to make sense at the time. Shut up.

When we arrived at the airport, she stuffed the heroin between her legs. It was a LOT of heroin, so she had a hard time walking. But we made it. The TSA officer at the metal detector even tried to flirt with her, while we were sweating bullets.

We had so much fun in Honolulu. We stayed at the Outrigger hotel, right on the beach. Every day was filled with fancy filet mignon dinners at nice restaurants, Broadway-like shows, a helicopter tour of the island, a submarine tour of the ocean floor, massages at the spa, shopping trips, etc. We even visited Dog The Bounty Hunter.

There was a little gift shop next to his office. Alice talked to his employee for a few minutes. We ended up buying Dog's book, hand-signed by him. The employee in the gift shop told Alice that there was a really bad ice (crystal meth) problem on Hawaii. And then he told her that she should never start doing drugs. She gave me a look and smirked. She thought it was funny that a guy who should have a keen eye for who's on drugs and who isn't, couldn't tell that she was a heroin addict. And she really didn't look like an addict at all.

Anyway, we had a great time in Hawaii. One day she skipped across the street like a little girl and said that being here with me was the happiest she had ever been in her life. That made me feel really good. I figured, if this doesn't give her a good reason to get clean, then nothing will.

When we got back to New York, she called her roommates in Middletown to let them know she was back. I still didn't know that she was living with this dope boy Curly and his little crew of drug selling thugs.

She had told me she was living in a two bedroom apartment with a young lesbian couple. But I started to get that feeling again that she was lying to me about something. Especially when we drove from the airport to her house in Middletown, and she didn't want me to drop her off right in front of her house and help her carry all her bags in.

Instead, she asked me to drop her off one block down the street from her house, and she said she would carry everything herself. She was tiny, and her bags full of goodies from Hawaii probably weighed more than she did. That's when I knew something was up. I asked her who she was living with. She insisted it was only her in one bedroom, and those two girls who were dating each other were supposedly living in the other bedroom.

When I got back to my house in the woods near Milford, I just needed to know the truth, so I hacked her laptop in her house and turned on the camera on it, so I could see who was in the house with her. There were two girls, but also a couple of black guys. Now I knew she had been lying to me again. Then I saw that she and Curly were living in one of the bedrooms together. What the fuck?!?

I was sooo pissed at her. I texted her that I knew about her living with Curly and fucking him, and that I wanted nothing to do with her anymore. Lying whore! I didn't talk to her for a few days after that.

But I couldn't stop thinking about her, and I did keep track of what was going on in that trap house. A few days later, one of the two lesbian girls in the house was chatting with her sister who lived out-of-state but was going to come for a visit. Her sister was asking about who else was living in that house. So the lesbian girl mentioned Alice. Her sister asked who Alice was, and the lesbian girl, who was supposedly Alice's good friend, told her sister: "She's

nobody. Just one of Curly's hoes."

The fact that one of Alice's so-called friends would talk about her like she's worthless garbage hurt my feelings, even though I was still so pissed at her. I felt protective of her, because I really cared about her.

I fucking hated all these people in that house. In my mind, they were the reason why Alice was on drugs and why she couldn't tear herself away from that shit, no matter how much nicer sober life could be. As long as she lived in that place, she was never going to get clean.

After we hadn't talked to each other in a few days, Alice suddenly started texting me and told me she needed my help. She said she had a huge fight with Curly and the rest of his crew, and she told them all to move out. She said they had tried to kick her out, but her name was the one that was on the lease, so they couldn't get rid of her, but she could get rid of them.

I thought that was great news. I figured, once all these assholes are out of that house, maybe there's a chance I could convince her to get clean.

She told me she had asked them to leave tonight, but Curly had paid this month's rent as well as the initial security deposit, and he wasn't going to leave, unless she gave him \$2000. So I met up with her and gave her the money. Yes, I know now how stupid that was. But it seemed like the only right thing to do at the time.

After I gave Alice the \$2000, I didn't hear from her anymore for a few days. I was getting so pissed again. I felt like she totally played me. Finally she did return my texts. Turns out, that same night she had reconciled with Curly, and he didn't move out, and she just spent the \$2000 on a whole bunch of heroin.

I didn't talk to her for a few days. I was getting so disgusted.

Suddenly she started texting me again, because there was new drama. Curly's crew had come home after selling drugs all day, when suddenly some other crew held them up at gunpoint in the parking lot right outside their house and took all their money.

Now Curly and his crew were scared, because they didn't know how the other crew found out where they lived, and they didn't feel safe



in that house anymore.

Did I have anything to do with that? Did I tell the other crew where Curly lived? Maybe. Possibly. Alright, yes, I did. I wanted that motherfucker out of that house and away from Alice.

And the fight that had happened a few days earlier was because when Alice and I went to Hawaii, she had told Curly that she was going to Hawaii with her grandma Gina.

But I texted the lesbian girl who had talked shit about Alice to her sister, and I told her that Alice had been in Hawaii with me. The lesbian girl told Curly, and he flipped out. That's why he had told Alice to leave. That plan backfired royally, because it ended up costing me \$2000. Fail!

But the fact that another crew now knew where Curly lived scared the shit out of him and he really did move out. Mission accomplished! And the beautiful part was that Curly had no idea that I had anything to do with it. Like ninjas, hackers like to attack from the shadows.

Alice didn't want to put the next house in her name again, because the other people in the house had totally run it into the ground, and she didn't want to be responsible for the damage. I asked her if she wanted to come live with me and go to rehab. No, of course not.

She had met another latin dope boy. He called himself Tattoo. He gave her drugs, so she went to live with him. I was so sick and tired of this shit at this point, that I decided to just be done with it and move to Florida.

I told a realtor to list my house in the Poconos for sale, and then I told Alice that I was leaving for good. I was hoping that would mean something to her, and she'd try to stop me or come with me or something. But, nope, she was too busy getting high.

I figured she'll never have any reason to get clean as long as Tattoo keeps feeding her drugs. Maybe if I got rid of Tattoo as well, and being an addict became more and more difficult for Alice because all the dope boys she knew were getting arrested, she might finally want to get clean.

Have you ever played out one of those fantasy fights in your head?

You know, who would win a fight between Superman and The Hulk? Well, in a fight between a hacker and a dope boy, the hacker wins every time, because he can hit the dope boy without even being in the same state.

After the house in the Poconos sold, I moved into one of my houses in Lehigh Acres, Florida. While I was down there, I hacked into Tattoo's phone. When I heard him talking about driving from Middletown to the Bronx to re-up, I called the Sheriff's Department and told them what car he was driving, and when he was going to be back in Middletown, and that he would have a brick of heroin in his car.

They had cruisers on standby waiting for him. I could track the location of his phone, so when he was coming back from his trip to the Bronx to stock up on his drug inventory, I called the cops back and gave the Sheriff's drug task force a heads up. They were able to intercept him at the highway off-ramp. Tattoo went to prison. Another one bites the dust!

After Tattoo was out of the picture, Alice called me. She told me that Tattoo had gotten arrested, and I acted surprised. She said now she was staying with her friend Mary, another heroin addicted hooker. Mary's drug habit was even worse than Alice's. Alice shot up 3 bags of heroin at a time. Mary shot up 8 bags at a time.

In order to support her very expensive habit, Mary worked double shifts in a grimey little strip club just outside of Middletown. And while she worked there, she would try to find guys who would come home with her after work, to have sex with her for money.

Mary had a 12-year-old little boy, Mikey. I got to know him a little better a few months later, when Alice and I babysat him, while his mother was stripping. He was just a little kid, but he already knew all about heroin, and that he had to lie about it, if anyone at school or from Child Protective Services asked him about it. Mikey knew that his mom took her clothes off for money. She even tried on her stripper outfits in front of him. And he knew that his mom had a lot of male friends who gave her money. How sad is that? Mikey was so messed up in the head.

One time, when Alice and I babysat him, he was playing some video game on my cell phone. He couldn't get past a level, so he was getting really frustrated and became totally unhinged. He started

screaming, threw my phone on the ground and kept punching the couch. He is not going to have an easy life when he gets older, if he can't get his anger under control. He'll probably end up on drugs like his mom, or in prison like his dad.

Anyway, after Tattoo got arrested, Alice was now staying with Mary, but she hated it there, because Mary spent all her money on drugs, so her dirty little basement apartment had no electricity, no heat and no running water. They were basically living in a cave, like animals.

Alice called me and told me she was miserable and asked me if she could still come live with me. I said, yes, of course. But now I no longer had a place up north.

She asked if she could find a nice apartment in Middletown for us, and I could pay for it with a credit card over the phone, and she could start living there, until I come back from Florida. So that's what we did. She picked a 2-bedroom apartment in a condo development called The Regency. It was the nicest neighborhood in Middletown.

When I came back from Florida, we went furniture shopping at Ashley. It was a very nice condo, and once we decorated it, it really felt like home.

Things were finally going good between us. We were happy together.

Alice asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I told her all I wanted was for her to go to rehab, get clean and get a passport, so that we could travel to Europe together.

I was going to go to Europe for Christmas in a few weeks, and I wanted her to come with me. But I didn't want to have to smuggle thousands of dollars worth of heroin across the Atlantic, and I didn't want Alice to do drugs at my parents' house.

Of course she didn't get clean. So I was going to have to go to Germany alone. Alice was going to stay home and we were going to talk on the phone every day. I left her with \$2100. \$100 for each day that I was going to be gone, so that she wouldn't have to sell her body to get drugs. I made her promise that she wasn't going to sneak around my back, that she wasn't going to post any escort ads on Backpage, and that she wasn't going to fuck any dope boys for

drugs.

She looked me straight in the eye and swore that I could trust her. She told me she didn't want to fuck things up between us, and she didn't want to hurt me, that she was never going to lie to me again and that she was going to show me that I can really trust her to do the right thing from now on.

I was happy, because I could tell she was totally sincere, and she really meant what she said. (Stop laughing.)

So off to Germany I went. When I got there, I called her to let her know I landed safe and sound. But she didn't answer the phone. Hmm.

She had told me that while I was going to be gone, she was going to ask her best friend Kat if she wanted to have a sleep over. That way Alice wouldn't feel so alone. She swore they wouldn't do anything bad, just watch movies.

Kat and Alice had known each other for four or five years, and they had even lived together for a long time. They were almost like a married couple, even though each of them had been dating a guy while they were living together.

Patty the counselor had told me that a lot of drug addicted girls end up "dating" a dope boy, or some guy who gives them money, to feed their drug habit. But since they have been abused by guys so much, they feel they can't really relate to a guy on an emotional level. Their emotions have been so crippled by the things they had to do for drugs.

So a lot of these girls end up dating other drug addicted girls, because they feel they are the only people in the world who understand what they're going through. They think that only a crackwhore can really understand what another crackwhore is going through. So they feel like kindred spirits, and they end up dating, even when they're not really gay. They just need to feel close to someone emotionally, and they can't do that with men, because men are their enemies and their prey. Men either use them for sex, or they use men to get money or drugs. To drug addicted girls, who have to sell their bodies to survive, men are nothing more than wallets with dicks, Patty said.

I read in a German article about prostitution, that it takes years of therapy for a girl who has been a hooker, to learn to trust a man again, and have a normal relationship with him.

So, Kat and Alice had kinda been dating and living together like a married couple in the past, while each of them also had a boyfriend. They were two peas in a pod. They had met each other while they were both working for the same escort agency. They were both drug addicts, had both been abused by their parents and boyfriends, and they had posted escort ads on Backpage together in the past.

Alice had told me that drug addicted hookers like to post ads for threesomes, or "doubles" as they call it, because when there are two girls in a strange guy's hotel room, they feel a little bit safer, and there is always the chance one of them might have the opportunity to rob the "client" while he has sex with the other girl. And it's easier when two girls can split the work of making a guy cum.

I really wasn't crazy about Alice hanging out with Kat while I was gone, but I didn't want to be oppressively jealous and tell her what she can and cannot do, and she had promised me she'd be good. Now all I could do is trust her.

But I didn't. When she didn't answer the phone when I called after landing in Germany, I had a nagging feeling in my stomach. I knew she was up to no good.

I checked Backpage and found their ad. As soon as I had left, Kat came over, and the first thing they did was post an escort ad on Backpage. They took pictures of themselves in their underwear on my bed. So now my bed was on Backpage. Nice.

I was sooo hurt and upset. How the fuck could Alice do that to me? She looked me straight in the eye when she swore she was going to be good, and then the first chance she got, she betrayed me. What the fuck?!? It's like she couldn't cheat on me quickly enough.

I used one of my fake email accounts to reply to her and Kat's escort ad and set up a date with them, just to make sure they were really doing this shit, and really going through with it. They didn't know it was me. I pretended to be some guy who lived on the other side of town. We made plans for me to come to the apartment and fuck both of them. So not only was she cheating on me after I had given her all that money, she was doing it in my own damn bed!

I hated her so fucking much at that moment. Finally I called her and told her that guy they just set up a date with was really me. I told her I wanted nothing to do with her anymore, and she needed to be out of the apartment by the time I get back from Germany.

When I got back to Middletown three weeks later, she wasn't there. I guess she was staying at hotels, tricking. Or maybe she was staying with the next dope boy. Who knows. I wanted nothing to do with her anymore. I was so disgusted by her. What a soulless snake she was!

A week or two later, Alice suddenly called me and told me Kat was really dope sick, and that one of Kat's dates had stood her up, so now she had no money to get heroin. Alice asked me if I would do a date with Kat, have sex with her and give her money for drugs. I said no, of course not: "Fuck you, and fuck Kat. I'm sure as hell not going to have sex with your best friend."

Then Alice replied that Kat was really really sick, and if I wanted to, I could have sex with both of them. I told her no. Then Alice said: "What about if only I come, and we talk and try to fix things between us? Will you let me borrow some money so I can give it to Kat?"

I said no.

Another week or two later I found out that ever since I had told Alice to leave, she had been dating the next latin dope boy. He called himself Papi Chuloco. They were living in cheap motel rooms together, and he was pimping her out. It made me sick to think about it.

I wanted Alice to know how I felt. I thought maybe it would make me feel better, if I could make her jealous.

So I texted Alice and asked her for Kat's number. I told her that ever since I had seen those pictures on Backpage a few weeks ago, of Kat on my bed in her underwear, I couldn't stop thinking about her, and I would really like to know what it's like to fuck her.

Alice was pissed! She texted back that she wasn't going to give me Kat's number. She said I should get it myself, if I really wanted to fuck her that bad. She really did get jealous! And a bit later, she texted me again and told me that she misses me and that she wanted

to get together and talk.

But right after she had told me to find Kat's number myself, I looked up her number online. I texted Kat and told her who I was, and asked her if she wanted to come over and have sex. She texted back: "Sure, hun, I'll be there in a few minutes."

Then, a little while later, Alice texted me that she missed me and wanted to talk. Sure. I hadn't heard from her in a while, because she was so busy fucking Papi Chuloco and all these guys on Backpage, but now that I told her I wanted to have sex with Kat, NOW Alice suddenly missed me. Of course. I told her she could come in an hour or two. I wanted her to get to my apartment, while Kat was here, to really get under Alice's skin. But drug addicts are notoriously unreliable. They never show up on time. So Alice didn't come over until many hours later.

In the meantime, Kat came over. She was a lot taller than Alice. She had olive skin, long black hair, and she looked Sicilian. She wore a pair of those huge sunglasses and a tight black dress, and she carried an expensive Coach purse. She looked classy and stylish.

We went into the bedroom and sat down and talked. I was in no rush, because I wanted her to still be there when Alice came. Kat was in no rush either. She told me that she had heard a lot about me from Alice, and she had wanted to meet me for quite a while.

She told me that she and Alice had been best friends for a long time and that they had been through a lot of terrible things together. Kat knew that I was aware of her and Alice's drug problem, so she felt no need to hide anything.

We talked for hours. I told her how heartbroken I was over the shit Alice kept doing, and that she was with some stupid latin dope boy again. Kat told me she had met Papi Chuloco a few times already, and that he was a dumb caveman, who treated Alice like shit. She said he was very abusive, and a few nights ago, Alice had called Kat for help, because Papi was beating the shit out of her again and she hoped he would stop if someone else was around.

Kat told me she heard a lot of good things about me, and that Alice told her I always treated her very nice, and that she had really liked living with me and going to places like Hawaii. It almost started to sound like Alice had instructed Kat to say these things, so that I

would forgive Alice.

But the conversation took an unexpected turn, when Kat suddenly told me that she wished she had a guy like me in her life. She told me that she would never treat me as bad as Alice treated me. She said if I gave her a chance, she would show me that she could be a much better girlfriend than Alice ever was.

Kat stripped naked and asked me to take my clothes off and lie on my stomach. She started to give me a massage and asked me what kind of sex I liked, and what kind of things Alice did for me in bed. Then she asked me to turn around, and she began to suck my dick.

She always wore long black lace gloves, even while she had sex or slept. They looked sexy, but the real reason why she wore them was because, like Alice, she shot up in the back of her hands. But she didn't just shoot up heroin. She shot up cocaine too, and it caused really bad abscesses on the back of her hands. She didn't want anyone to see them.

After we had sex, I told her that really the only reason I had called her was to make Alice jealous. Kat didn't mind. She said she had a feeling that that's why I called her, but she was ok with that.

I told her that after the pain I had just been through with Alice, I would be crazy to date her best friend, someone who has exactly the same kind of drug problem, and does exactly the same thing to make money. It would be like dating a clone of Alice.

Kat replied that comparing Alice to Kat was like comparing a cockroach to a swan. Yeah, she literally called her so-called best friend a cockroach, after she had sex with her best-friend's boyfriend or ex-boyfriend or whatever I was to Alice at that moment. Nice friend, huh?

Over the next few years, after meeting a few more drug addicts, I learned that a drug addict really has no friends. Sure, they hang out with a bunch of drug buddies, and they all pretend to be best friends, and they all tell each other how much they supposedly love each other, but they all will sell each other out in a heartbeat. A drug addict has no loyalties to anyone. Every person they meet is just a means to getting the next fix somehow.

Kat and I talked for about five or six hours. She was clearly trying to



lay the groundwork for a relationship. She was not going to leave, until she was sure she had her foot in the door with me.

She finally left at night, when she had to get her next fix. About half an hour later Alice finally came over. We hadn't seen each other in a few weeks. As soon as she walked in, I realized how much I missed her. And the first thing she realized was that something was wrong.

"Someone was here," she said.

I played stupid. I had no idea how she knew that. Women's intuition I guess. Maybe something about the tone of my voice, or a guilty look on my face, had given it away.

We went in the bedroom, and took our clothes off. She spread her legs for me and I got on top of her. Suddenly she yelled: "Oh my God!! Mary was here! You had sex with Mary! I can smell her perfume on you!"

I told her no, that Kat just left half an hour ago, and that Alice was obviously confusing their perfumes.

She demanded to know what Kat did at our condo and why I smelled like her perfume. So I told her. Alice was livid. She was sooo upset and jealous. She was pacing back and forth, ranting and raving, while gesturing wildly. She was a woman scorned! She swore she would beat the shit out of Kat, if she ever saw her again. Then she lay down next to me, spread her legs again and said: "I want you to cum inside of me."

While I was inside of her, she was giving me dirty looks. The pressure was on. Somehow I knew that if I couldn't cum now, because I just had sex with Kat a little while earlier, it would make Alice even more angry. As if making me cum was HER job and hers alone.

They used to be best friends for years, but now this one incident ended their friendship. Alice never talked to Kat again after that day, because she felt so betrayed.

Funny how it didn't even register in her brain that she had been hurting me like that the whole time with the shit she did. In her head there was nothing wrong with her staying with Papi Chuloco and having sex with him for drugs, and letting him pimp her out and

having sex with all these other people. But me having sex with Kat was suddenly an earth shattering catastrophe. Pretty bizarre, especially considering that she had actually asked me to have sex with Kat a few weeks earlier, when Kat was dope sick.

We started hanging out a few times a week again after that night. But she was still living in hotel rooms with Papi. Mary and her little son Mikey ended up living in the same room with them. Alice and Mary had pretty much the same relationship as Alice and Kat had in the past. They were almost like a married couple, and they posted ads on Backpage together.

Papi had heard stories about me and knew who I was. When he found out that Alice was hanging out with me again all the time, instead of tricking with random strangers, he beat the shit out of her. He was ok with her having sex with strangers, or even with her regulars, but he didn't want her hanging out with me. I guess because he knew that she had feelings for me, or because he was worried that she would decide to come live with me again.

Every time Alice came over to the apartment, and Papi called her phone, she pretended to be somewhere else. She was scared not to answer the phone when he called, because she knew he would beat her because of it when she got back.

I remember one time, when we were in bed together, she was sitting on my lap, riding my dick, when Papi called. She answered the phone while we were having sex. He asked where she was, and she lied and told him she was sitting in a hotel room, waiting for a "client" but that he didn't show up yet. It was just so bizarre to me that he was ok with her having sex with "clients" but not with me.

Every time we got together, I asked her how she was feeling. And every time she said the same thing: "I'm fine." She was so emotionally closed off. She was hiding her pain behind a wall. Every time I saw her, it took a while, until she was comfortable enough to open up. To her, being honest about how she really felt wasn't easy. Having emotions, being sad or crying, was considered a weakness in her world. But the truth is, it takes courage to allow yourself to open up and be vulnerable.

She never wanted anyone to know how miserable she really was. For what? What would anyone who cares about her say if she told them she was miserable with her life? They would tell her to change her

life. And a drug addict does not want to hear that. It really really annoys them when you keep telling them that their lives would be so much better if they quit those damn drugs and stopped doing all those horrible things they need to do to get drugs.

It's not like they're stupid and they don't know that the drugs and that lifestyle is making them miserable. The problem is that they are so addicted, they can't stop. You might as well tell someone in a wheelchair that he would be a lot happier if he got up and walked. He knows that, but he can't.

So, first she would say: "I'm fine." And then a little while later she would finally thaw out and tell me what really happened during the day. She told me things like: "Today Papi tried to throw me off the second story balcony at the Howard Johnson. I really thought I was gonna die this time."

To her that was just another normal day.

One day, before I had taken her to Hawaii, I told her that she didn't even know how miserable her life really is, because it's all she knows. She had nothing to compare it to. To her, miserable was normal. But if anyone else had one of her normal days, it would probably be the worst day of their lives. She just smiled a sad smile and looked at the floor, but she didn't say anything.

I had to go to Florida again, to take care of one of my new rental houses, a duplex in Lehigh Acres. Alice and I had been hanging out a lot again lately, and she became more and more open about how abusive Papi was, and how badly she wanted to get away from him. By now almost a year had passed since we had been to Hawaii together.

I asked her if she remembered what she had told me back then: that our time together in Hawaii was the happiest she had ever been in her life. I told her every day could be like that, if only she would finally get away from scumbags like Papi.

That day was the first time she told me that of course she wanted to come back and live with me again, but she was scared that once she moves back in, she's trapped, and then I'll force her to get clean. I couldn't blame her for being scared, after what she had been through with that guy who treated her like a sex slave after she had been in rehab. And after what she had been through with every other guy,

really.

I asked her to come to Florida with me for a few days, but she was afraid of what Papi would do to her if she tried.

I went to Florida alone again. A few days later she called me and told me that she was finally ready to leave Papi and come live with me again. After all this time, she still had a key to the apartment. She asked if she could move back in and wait there for me, until I get back from Florida. "Of course," I said. I was sooo happy!

When I got back from Florida a few days later, my flight had landed much earlier than expected. I opened the apartment door and saw a bunch of her bags on the stairs. It looked like she was leaving. I walked upstairs. She was standing in the hallway, doing Papi's laundry. Her eyes got big. She hadn't expected me back so soon. She didn't know what to say. Papi was lying in my bed, naked. He had a dumb grin on his face and said: "Uhh, hi."

Apparently Alice and Papi had been living in my apartment together, while I was gone. I flipped the fuck out! I screamed at them to get the fuck out of my house. Alice tried to calm me down: "It's not what it looks like! I told him to leave!"

I wasn't in the mood for any of her bullshit anymore: "Just get the fuck out before I call the cops!"

"I can't, I don't have a car. I told Papi to leave, but he's waiting for a cab."

"GET THE FUCK OUT!!!"

Papi didn't say anything. He just put his clothes on.

Alice was visibly upset: "Can I at least borrow your phone for a second so I can call a cab? Mine is dead."

I handed her my phone.

"It's really not what it looks like."

"Shut up. Just get out."

A few minutes later a cab came and they left.

Later that night she texted me and told me that I had misinterpreted the situation. She said that she had asked Papi to drive her here so she could drop off her things here and come back to me. Papi threw her bags into the hallway, and they landed on the stairs. Then she told him to leave, but he told her he wasn't going to leave without her.

She kept telling him to leave. He got violent, grabbed a pair of scissors out of my kitchen drawer and stuck the tip of the scissors against her neck and threatened to stab her. She got really scared and told him he could wait there until I would get there and then I'd give both of them a lift back to the Howard Johnson. But she said that's only what she told him so he would stop hurting her. She said she really wanted me to kick out Papi, but not her.

At this point I was totally and utterly disgusted by her, and sick of her hurting me every chance she got. The next day I terminated my lease for that apartment and decided to move to Florida for good, like I had planned about a year earlier, when I had sold the mansion in the Poconos.

I had really only stuck around in Middletown for the past year to be near Alice. But she was obviously not worth the trouble. I had to admit to myself that things were just never going to get any better with her, no matter how hard I tried to get her away from the drugs and escorting on Backpage and living with drug dealers. So I was just done with all this bullshit. I decided to go to Florida and live there from now on. I had bought a nice apartment in Bonita Springs a few months earlier.

## TWO WEEKS WITH A SEX ADDICT

*“A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment.”*

**Jane Austen**

*“When we remember we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained.”*

**Mark Twain**

Remember pimple poppin' Patty, the drug counselor?

At this point I hadn't talked to Patty in over a year, ever since right after my divorce, back when I had hung out with her three or four times at the mansion in the Poconos, and she had made meatballs with tomato sauce from scratch.

After that I had met Jennifer, the gorgeous, impossibly perfect gold digger. Then Linda, the scam artist who was immune to abortions. And then Liz, the yoga pothead who moved to North Carolina. And Raven, the airheaded wannabe porn star. And finally, Alice, the heroin addicted hooker.

What a team, what a team! What an all-star team!

Now, a year later, while I was living in the apartment in Middletown and going through all this crazy turmoil with Alice, I suddenly got a call from Patty out of nowhere:

"Hey Oliver! Remember me? It's Patty. It's been a while. How have you been? I'm still thinking about you all the time. Listen, can I ask you a favor? Can I come stay with you?"

"Uhhh, wait, what? You want to come stay with me?" I asked.

"Yeah, things are crazy here. I need to get outta Scranton for a while. Disappear off the radar. Get away from the paparazzi."

"Paparazzi? What paparazzi? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Well, remember when we met last year and you took me out to dinner at that steakhouse in Milford?"

"Yeah?"

"Remember I told you I had been there before, because before I met you, I dated a musician who lived near you in Milford?"

"Yeahhh?"

"He was actually a really famous musician. You might know him."

I thought she meant he had a little local band and played at fairs or in bars and restaurants around town. "I don't think so. I don't really go to bars or clubs," I said.

"No, no, he was pretty famous. All over the world. Especially in Germany, so you probably know him."

"Hmm, I don't know. Who is he?"

Then she told me his name and said he was the lead singer of a famous heavy metal band. Im going to change his name, like everyone else's name in this book. So let's call him Rocky the rockstar, lead singer of a famous heavy metal band. Let's call the band Blood.

I was pretty underwhelmed. I had never heard of Rocky or his band Blood, so he couldn't be all that famous. "Nah, no idea who that is," I said.

"Google them. They really are pretty famous. They had platinum records. Their music has even been used in horror movies. And Howard Stern is a big fan," she said.

"Alright. I'll google it. So anyway, what's going on with all that? Why are you trying to hide from paparazzi?"

"Well, I met Rocky while he was in drug rehab in Scranton. He was one of my patients."

Woah! Big ethics violation! Huge no no! That's the kind of stuff counselors get fired for. That's kinda like a school teacher sleeping with one of his underage students, or a psychiatrist sleeping with one of his vulnerable, mentally unstable patients.

As it turned out, Rocky had actually dated his psychiatrist first. Go figure. Then he dumped his psychiatrist and started dating Patty, his drug counselor. Maybe he had mommy issues. Maybe he liked when women with authority told him what to do. No idea.

Anyway, Patty told me that Rocky had moved in with her after rehab. But if anyone at work would have found out that she was dating one of her patients, she would have been fired, and blacklisted. She wouldn't have been able to find another job in her field. So she decided to quit on her own, and go work at a different rehab, also in Scranton.

I guess while Rocky lived with her, he was on house arrest or something. I don't remember what exactly she said.

She told me he still wanted to get wasted, so he ended up drinking two bottles of mouthwash that he found in her bathroom. Mouthwash is basically concentrated alcohol with some mint flavor thrown in. She said the concentrated alcohol burned a hole in his stomach wall and he died in her living room from internal bleeding.

She said when he was hunched over in pain on the floor, she wanted to call an ambulance, but he told her not to. And by the time he finally agreed to go to the hospital, it was too late.

Apparently Rocky's friends, fans and family were convinced that this had been no accident. They accused Patty of poisoning him on purpose, to get his millions. Rocky's family told the cops about their theory, and Patty was now a murder suspect in a police investigation.

She said she just couldn't handle the pressure any more and needed to get away. She said she had felt really comfortable around me, and wanted to come hide at my place for a few weeks.

During that phone call, I told Patty: "Sorry, I don't even live in that house anymore. I sold it. I moved to Florida. So I'm too far away."

That was a lie. Yeah, I did sell the house in the Poconos, and I owned some houses in Florida, and I had just been in Florida a few days ago, but I hadn't actually moved down there yet. I was still living in Middletown, NY, in the apartment at The Regency that Alice had picked out for us. Middletown was about 30 minutes east of Milford, PA, where the big house was. Scranton, PA was 30 minutes west of Milford. So when Patty called me from Scranton and I answered the



phone in Middletown, we were really just less than an hour apart.

But I told her she couldn't come stay with me, since I was too far away in Florida. I didn't want a drug counselor to know that I was now dating a drug addict. Especially not after all the horror stories Patty had told me last year, about how you can never trust an addict, because all they do is lie and cheat, lie and cheat, lie and cheat. And that addicts are incapable of really bonding and being in a relationship with another human being, because they are in a relationship with their drug, and the drug will always, always come first.

Obviously she had been 100% right. It was as if Alice was on a mission to prove right everything Patty had told me about addict behavior last year. I felt so stupid that I got caught up in this clusterfuck of a relationship. And I was so upset over the things Alice was doing, the last thing I needed now was to hear Patty say: "I told you so."

After that first conversation in over a year, Patty called me back every other day or so and kept asking me to let her come stay with me: "Florida really isn't that far away at all. My sister lives in Tampa. And there's an airport right here in Scranton. I could hop on a plane and be in Fort Myers in 3 hours!"

Finally I gave in. I had caught Papi Chuloco in my bed just a few days ago, kicked him and Alice out, and terminated my lease at the Regency in Middletown. Now I was about to move to Florida for good. Alice was running around doing God knows what with God knows who, fucking drug dealers and Backpage dates, living the high life with Papi, while I was home alone, miserable. Meanwhile Patty actually wanted to be with me. So why the hell not? Why was I fighting it?

When I was back in Florida, I called Patty back and told her that I changed my mind, and yes, she could come stay with me for a while if she still wanted to.

Patty got on a plane the next day and I picked her up at the airport in Fort Myers. She was hungry, so we went straight to the IHOP on Route 41 in Bonita Springs and got something to eat.

Then we went back to my place. We were in the living room, and within ten minutes, she got comfortable. She slipped her dress off

and pulled off her panties. I sat on the couch, still fully dressed, and she was lying next to me, naked, with her head on my lap. She looked up at my face, took my hand and put it between her legs. She wanted me to rub her clit. I hadn't even seen her in over a year, and here I was, with my finger in her pussy, ten minutes after walking through the door. Boy, that was quick! But hey, I wasn't complaining. I figured, if Alice is out there having fun without me, I might as well have fun with Patty, too.

It didn't take long until I remembered why I had stopped seeing Patty last year. For some reason I just didn't like to have sex with her. Maybe it was her deep, manly voice. Or maybe because she always seemed to want it more than I did. I almost felt like I was being pressured into it. I wasn't even in the mood when we had sex. I wasn't horny. I didn't get a chance to be.

She had come to stay with me in Florida, not only to get away from the homicide investigation and the paparazzi, but also to spend her birthday with me.

Patty gushed that she and Rocky had gotten very close and that she was really in love with him, because he was such an amazing man, such a beautiful mind, such an incredible artist. She said they had planned to get married. And now he was gone. She was devastated. And she couldn't bear the thought of being all alone on her birthday.

I don't remember if we had sex once or twice on the first day she arrived in Florida. But sex was always on her mind. Every day revolved around sex. More and more sex, every damn day. One day we fucked five times while watching porn together. I could only cum twice. That was it for me for that day. But that was not enough for her. She kept sucking my dick after each time, to get me hard again, even if it took a while, and then she sat on my lap and rode me, for what seemed like hours. I couldn't believe I even managed to get hard that many times in a row. She made herself cum three more times. I honestly started to feel like I was being raped. It was just too much. But I couldn't tell her. What self-respecting guy would ever complain about too much sex? I might as well turn in my man card. Isn't having lots and lots of sex every man's dream?

When I had met her a year earlier, she told me that she felt very comfortable around me. She said I was unlike any other guy she had ever met. I figured it was because of my upbringing in Germany. She said it was very easy for her to open up to me, because being around

me was just like hanging out with her best female friend. I gave her a dirty look: "Did you just call me gay?"

She laughed and said: "No, no, it's a good thing. You're just so... understanding... comforting... nurturing... and supportive. When I'm around other guys, I feel like I'm being circled by a shark. It's like they're predators, and all they can think about is ways to get in my pants. But I don't feel like that at all when I'm around you. I feel like you actually listen when I talk, because you're actually interested in what I have to say."

Even back then, when we hung out at my house in the Poconos, she was very sexual. She told me all about how she liked to masturbate with dildos, and that she had a big box of adult toys under her bed. Then she asked me if I liked to watch porn. I said yes. She asked me if I liked to have sex while watching porn. I told her: "Well, for some reason I really like when a girl sucks my dick while I watch porn. It just feels kinky somehow."

Then she told me she loved to watch porn and sometimes she just masturbated all night long with her dildos, making herself cum over and over again, and that she had a whole collection of Andrew Blake films. She said he's one of the few porn directors who really knows how to make erotic films. I had never heard of him. I really wasn't THAT much into porn, where I would actually know the names of directors or even the names of the porn stars. Well, except for Jenna Jameson. I knew her name.

Now, one year later, Patty had brought a couple of Andrew Blake films with her to Florida. She told me she remembered what I said I liked, and she wanted to suck my dick while I watch my very first Andrew Blake porno.

Wow! Could this get any better? Yes, it could. Since she was also a good cook, and she knew that I liked brownies, she made these amazing brownies, topped with vanilla ice cream, strawberries, fudge and Cool Whip. She told me she wanted me to eat the brownies, while watching porn, and while she's sucking my dick. Wow. Just wow.

I was being stimulated every which way. I tried to make this perfect moment last, and I tried to hold out for as long as I could, but it didn't take me long at all to cum in her mouth, and she swallowed. Then she gave me a coy smile and asked me: "Did you like it?"

"Did I like it? Damn! That was probably one of the best moments of my life!"

We weren't in a relationship or anything, but she really really went out of her way to show me that she could be the best girlfriend ever. She told me she would do anything I want, just name it. I think if I had asked her to jump of the roof, she would have done that, too.

She told me she liked to be in pain while getting fucked, and she asked me to pinch her nipples really hard, and pull them away from her chest as far as I could. I just couldn't get myself to do it. I didn't want to hurt her. But she insisted. So I pulled on her nipples, like her boobs were rubber bands. I pulled them so hard and so far away from her chest, I thought if I let go, they'll snap back. I couldn't imagine that this felt good to her. It looked like I was about to rip her tits off. But she liked it.

She had a habit of scratching my back and screaming loudly during sex. That was a big turn off for me. I don't like when a girl totally overacts during sex. I almost feel like she's mocking me. Patty noticed that I liked her blowjobs better, so she did that a lot.

The next time she sucked my dick, she had an ice cube in her mouth. That wasn't bad either. But nothing topped the brownie-porn-blowjob trifecta.

She tried to make each blowjob experience different. And at some point she started to totally overact, like a porn star on steroids, moaning loudly and slobbering lots of spit all over my dick. She was twisting the shaft with her hands, while biting the head. Chewing it. She was going to town like she had lost her mind. Like a zombie on The Walking Dead, eating brains. It was painful. I was starting to worry about the safety of my little buddy. This was not sexy at all. It was just grotesque. Instead of cuming, I lost my erection.

Somehow she seemed to take that as a challenge. Every time after that, she always tried to include the wild slobbering, twisting and biting in her blowjobs, instead of doing what she knew I enjoyed, a slow, tender blowjob with feeling. She seemed determined to make me like getting fast and wild blowjobs, with lots of slobbering, instead of slow and sensual ones. But that wasn't gonna work for me, and from that point on I really didn't like her blowjobs anymore. Or maybe I was just getting sick of way too much sex.

One day she asked me if I would like to see her squirt when she has an orgasm. I told her no, not really. Especially not with her deep manly voice. She asked me to go down on her a lot. She really liked it. But she always asked me if she tasted good. It turned her on when I said yes. But it turned me off when she asked me that, because I always expected her to squirt in my mouth any second now. Yuck!

Then she asked me if I'd like to fuck her in the ass. I said: "No, not really. I mean, I have nothing against anal. I tried it once or twice. But it doesn't really do much for me. I'm perfectly happy with a pussy."

She seemed disappointed: "Aww, really? You don't wanna try anal with me? How about if I put my little lipstick dildo in my ass while you fuck me?"

She kept going on and on about anal. I was getting kinda impatient: "No, I'm really not all that interested in that. Can we talk about something else now?"

Maybe if it had been any other girl, I would have been more interested in trying anal. Maybe if Alice or Jennifer had asked me. But I was just getting sick and tired of the way Patty was totally preoccupied with sex.

I hadn't heard from Alice, ever since I kicked her and Papi out of my apartment. But now Alice suddenly texted me, and told me she wanted to come over. I told her that it was too late, that I had gotten rid of that apartment in Middletown, and I was living in Florida now. She was really upset. She acted like I had abandoned her.

"What are you talking about?" I asked her. "You're fucking around with Papi and all these other people, so why the hell would I stick around for that? I went to Florida with Patty. At least she wants to be with me."

Alice was upset, but she admitted it was her own fault. She asked me to come back. I told her Patty was going to be there for a few more days, until after her birthday. Maybe afterwards I would go get Alice, and we could spend some time in Florida together for the first time.

Alice asked me how things were going with Patty. I told her that I wasn't really all that happy having her at my house, and I would

much rather have Alice with me right now.

Later that day I texted Alice: "She's a squirter, a scratcher and a screamer. Kill me!"

I looked at my phone, and suddenly I realized that I had not sent that text to Alice. I had accidentally sent it to Patty!

Holy. Fucking. SHIT!

I was sitting in the bedroom while texting. Patty was in the living room. I didn't even want to go out there and face her after sending her that text message. My heart was pounding! But I figured I was gonna have to face that situation sooner or later, so I went in the living room and decided to play it off as a joke, and to pretend that I had sent that text to Patty on purpose.

Patty was on the computer, chatting with people on Facebook. They were fans of the rock band Blood, and they accused Patty of having killed Rocky on purpose. She was totally absorbed in that online argument.

I nervously giggled: "Uh, haha, uh, did you get my text?"

She absentmindedly took her eyes off the computer screen for a second, looked at me and said: "Yeah, I got it."

"Uh, haha, uh, did you think it was funny?"

"Uhhh, I guess," she said, and continued to furiously type rebuttals on Facebook.

Wheeww! That went a lot better than I feared. I really dodged a bullet there, I thought.

Later that night we were in bed. The lights were off. I thought she was sleeping. Suddenly I saw her cell phone screen go on in the dark. She was re-reading my text message about her being a squirter, a scratcher, and a screamer.

She put the phone down and the screen went off.

Then the screen went on again, because she picked the phone back up and re-read the text again.

The screen went off. She put the phone down again.

Then the screen went on again. She re-read the text again.

Her cell phone screen went on and off about ten times. She kept putting the phone down and picking it back up and re-reading my text over and over again, like a psycho. Then she got up, locked herself in the bathroom and started crying hysterically.

I felt like such a major ASSHOLE! Yeah, she was way over the top with all that sex, but I really didn't want to hurt her feelings about it. And now she was sobbing in the bathroom, because I had been such a total jerk, when I wrote that text about her.

I didn't even want to face her anymore. I'm not a praying man, but now I prayed: "Dear God, please let her not even be here tomorrow! Please make her leave before I wake up!"

God didn't answer my prayer. Go figure. Did he not want to interfere with her free will? Or was the confrontation I was about to have with Patty the next morning a predetermined part of God's great plan for me? Or is there really no God who answers prayers? Discuss! (Just kidding. Just checking if you've been paying attention to my book so far.)

The next morning, I found her sleeping on the couch in the living room. After she woke up, we both avoided the topic and acted like nothing had happened. Later in the afternoon, we finally talked about it. I told her that I was really sorry I hurt her feelings with my stupid text, and that she was just a bit too aggressive sexually. She teared up, and said: "I know. You're NOT the first guy to tell me that."

Wow. All I could think was, damn, woman, take a hint! If more than one guy has told you that you're too over the top when it comes to sex, then maybe you need to dial it down a little. But I didn't say that. I didn't want to hurt her feelings again.

During our sex talk, she started to open up more about her relationship with Rocky. She said that he had been an addict for a long time, and that he didn't have any money left when she met him. She said she definitely was not a gold digger who tried to kill him for his money. And even if that had been her plan, wouldn't she have waited until after they were married?

Then she told me about their sex life. She said since he had been an addict for so long, he had erectile dysfunction, and couldn't get hard. She said they expressed their love for each other in other ways. Not sexually. And she said she was probably so over the top right now, because she didn't have sex in a long time and wanted to make up for it, and because while she was having sex, for a few minutes she wasn't thinking about how unhappy she was.

So, sucking my dick was part of her grieving process. Ok. To each his own. But then the things she told me next took a bizarre turn into the Twilight Zone:

She had told me a few days earlier that Rocky had a few strange fetishes. She said he liked to play with fire and burn things. "Significant things," she said. Whatever that meant. She didn't elaborate any further on it at first.

But now, during our sex talk, she told me what she had meant by that. She said Rocky liked to go to the pet store and buy little hamsters, guinea pigs, rats, mice or gerbils, and light them on fire. And while those poor critters died an agonizing death, he'd get off.

"What?!?" My disgust was written all over my face. "Did you ever do that with him?"

"Uhhh, no," she said. But she paused just a little too long. My instincts told me that she was lying and that she did do that stuff with him.

Patty told me that Rocky kept asking her to burn animals with him: "Hey, you hate snakes. So how about we get a snake, I scare you with it, and then we light it on fire?"

She said she never agreed to do anything like that with him, and that she had asked him: "How about we get one of those rubber Halloween rats and light that on fire?"

He said that wouldn't get him off: "It's not the same, unless it's an actual live animal and it's squirming in pain."

Then she told me at one point he said: "I don't know if you've noticed, but I have all the symptoms of a serial killer."



And then she told me that he said: "My ultimate sexual fantasy is to kidnap a homeless girl, light her on fire, and rape her while she's screaming and burning."

While she was in Florida with me, every day Patty had been weeping about how she had lost the love of her life when Rocky died, and every day she kept gushing about what a beautiful mind he was. And now she was telling me that he wanted to light homeless girls on fire and rape them. What. The. Fuck?!?

How sick in the head did she have to be to think that sick fuck was a beautiful mind? Up until this point, I thought that she was just weird. But now I was starting to think she was really not all there in the head, or at least mentally or emotionally disturbed.

She told me that she had bought a wedding dress a few years ago, even though she had no wedding plans, and she didn't have anyone to get married to. She just liked the way she looked in a wedding dress, and walked around the house at home, imagining what it would be like to get married.

To me, that sounded like something out of one of those horror movies, where some crazy girl in a dusty old wedding dress never got over the fact that her high school sweetheart stood her up at the altar. And now, thirty years later, she kidnapped the balding, aging ex-jock and re-created her dream wedding in her basement, with dressed-up corpses she dug up at the cemetery. (Come to think of it, I've never really seen a movie exactly like that. Someone needs to get on that.)

Oh, and did I mention she talked in her sleep? One night, she said, loud and clear as day, as if she was wide awake: "You're going to hell! You know that, right?"

Another night, she said: "This isn't over yet!"

When I asked her about it the next morning, she said the antidepressants she was on had to be giving her vivid nightmares.

I was really starting to get very uncomfortable around her. I felt like I needed to sleep with one eye open while she was lying next to me, because it seemed more and more plausible that she really did kill Rocky.

Before Patty came to Florida to spend her birthday with me, one of her co-workers, Susan, had gone on a road trip to Florida. Then her mother got sick all of a sudden and had to go to the hospital. Susan decided to fly back to Scranton to be by her mother's side. She left her car behind in Florida.

When Susan heard that Patty was about to go to Florida to visit me, she asked Patty if she could drive Susan's car back to Scranton. Patty had planned on flying back the day after her birthday. But if she had to drive back in Susan's car instead, it was going to take her a lot longer to get back home, which meant she would have to leave two days earlier.

Patty asked me if I would take a road trip with her back up north, so that she wouldn't have to spend her birthday alone in Susan's car on the I-95. She said once we get up there I could stay with her in Scranton for as long as I want.

I really rreally didn't want to. I just wanted her to leave, because even after our sex talk, she really didn't tone down at all. She still wanted to have sex all the time, and she still tried to convince me that I liked her sloppy zombie blowjobs.

But I felt bad for her. She was obviously a train wreck right now. And spending her birthday alone, while she's in this vulnerable mental state, certainly wasn't gonna be good for her. So I told her I would join her on her road trip and spend her birthday in the car with her, but that I probably wouldn't stay in Scranton for more than a day or two.

This whole road trip thing actually worked out pretty well, because while Patty was in Florida with me, I had bought a condo in Liberty, NY, at an online real estate auction. Liberty was not far from the famous Woodstock concert site, and just a few minutes north of Middletown.

I figured once I'm up there, I could check out my new condo. And since Alice and I had been texting every day again, and she asked me to come save her from Papi, this all worked out perfectly. And as long as we were driving in the car, Patty wouldn't be able to rape me. As long as I wasn't alone in a room with her, I'd be good.

Only three or four days after Patty had arrived in Florida, I overheard her talking on the phone to her friends, co-workers, and

her family. We hadn't seen each other in over a year, and now we had not even spent a week together yet, but here she was, on the phone in my bathroom, telling everyone she knew that I was The One: "Oh my God, he is sooo nice! He is one in a million! I love him! I'm gonna marry him!"

I think that was really just her biological clock talking. I think she was so desperate to get married before she ended up old and alone, she was even willing to marry a guy who liked to burn little animals. And compared to that psycho, I looked pretty damn good.

And I don't mean to sound like I'm making fun of her for liking me or having a crush on me. I think that's sweet and I was flattered. But I think she should have talked to me about it first, before telling her family, friends and co-workers that she was going to marry me, four days after meeting me.

When the time for our road trip came, Patty told me she wanted to stop in Tampa along the way, and introduce me to her sister, Rita. She told me that Rita was a total bitch. Oh, great! I can't wait to meet her!

I really rreally didn't want to meet Rita. I just wanted to get this whole thing over with and go rescue Alice. But of course we stopped by Rita's house anyway.

As teenagers, Rita had always made Patty feel like she was an ugly heffer. Rita was prettier and skinnier, and all the boys wanted her. Patty was an overweight ogre with a hormonal issue. Too much testosterone. I guess that's why she had such a manly voice now. She told me for most of her life, she never got her period, and couldn't have a baby.

She obviously had a lot of issues growing up. She told me she had been in therapy for it.

So there was this rivalry between Patty and Rita, and I guess now Patty wanted to show me off in front of her sister. When we arrived, Rita was arguing with her ex-husband, who was dropping off their kid at Rita's house. I instantly disliked her. She really was a total bitch.

After she had scared off her ex-husband, her current boyfriend, Jake, arrived. He was a handsome, friendly guy. I got along well with him.

I asked him what he did for a living. "Construction," he said. Rita seemed embarrassed by his answer and tried to make his job sound much fancier than it is. I guess Patty had told her that I had made a lot of money with cartoons online, so Rita felt her boyfriend wasn't measuring up.

Patty and Rita had planned for all four of us to go on a double date at the International Plaza mall in Tampa. Patty and Rita loved the hand-made soaps at the Lush store. As we strolled through the mall, Rita and Jake were kissing and necking, while holding hands.

At Lush, I bought Patty three or four bars of fancy soap. Jake bought Rita one bar. Big mistake. He failed to measure up again. Suddenly Jake was dead to Rita. She wouldn't look at him, wouldn't talk to him, and walked with her arms crossed in front of her chest. All that because of some stupid bars of soap. What a petty bitch!

Patty and Rita had planned to end the double date with a dinner at the Cheesecake Factory. Rita and Jake were sitting across the table from us. Rita wouldn't even acknowledge that Jake existed. Patty and I didn't know whether to pretend we didn't notice, or try to help mend things between them. It was so awkward and uncomfortable. You could cut the tension with a knife.

Suddenly Patty put her hand between my legs, opened my zipper, and started to play with my dick. Un-fucking-believable! There's a time and place for everything. But the double date from hell is neither the time nor the place to play with my little buddy.

After the dinner, Rita gave me a long hug in the parking lot. Way too long. Then she whispered in my ear: "Thank you. Thank you so much for what you did for my sister. She has really come out of her shell since she's been hanging out with you. She was a wreck after Rocky died."

She was basically welcoming me into the family.

I didn't say anything. I just smiled politely. But I was thinking: "If you only knew."

Afterwards Patty said she was tired and wanted to get a hotel room. But I told her I wanted to keep on driving north. I drove until about midnight. Then we got a room. I hopped in the shower and went to bed. Then Patty went in the shower. When she got out, I pretended to

be sleeping, so she wouldn't try to have sex again.

She went back in the bathroom and started sobbing hysterically. I don't know if it was because I had pushed her hand away at the Cheesake Factory, or because she knew I was only pretending to be sleeping. She cried in the bathroom from 12:30 am until 6 am.

I couldn't get any sleep at all. My heart was pounding. This reminded me of those nights when Donna would wait for me to fall asleep, and then slam the bedroom door wide open, turn the lights on and scream at me so that I would wake up with a near heart attack. I expected Patty to storm out of the bathroom any second now and scream at me. But she didn't.

At 6 am the hotel started to serve breakfast, so I got up, knocked on the bathroom door and told Patty that since we were both still awake, we might as well get an early start. When she finally unlocked the door and let me use the bathroom, there was a love letter waiting for me next to the sink that she had written during the night.

This was the actual day of her birthday now. I took her on a ghost hunting tour in Savannah, Georgia, and then to a fancy restaurant overlooking the river. At the River Street Market Place I bought her a chain with a hand-crafted pendant that caught her eye. I wanted her to have a nice birthday.

Then we got back on the I-95 and kept driving north. Suddenly she pulled out her little lipstick dildo. The one she had shown me in my living room a few days earlier, when she asked me if I'd like to fuck her in the ass, or at least fuck her while she had that dildo in her ass.

"Remember my little friend?" she asked with a naughty smile.

"Yeah, I remember."

"Wanna watch me masturbate?"

Well, no I really didn't. But obviously she wanted me to, otherwise she wouldn't have asked. It was her birthday, so I really didn't want to make her feel any more rejected. "Sure," I said with a fake smile.

She took off her white summer dress and her panties. She was sitting next to me, naked, with her lipstick dildo in her hand. She turned it on, and it started buzzing while she was rubbing it against her clit.

Then she put her feet up against the windshield, like she was sitting in a gynecologist's chair. "Feel how wet I am," she moaned. I rubbed her clit for a second or two. She was wet alright.

All I could think was: Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.

I could not believe she was actually doing that, while cars and trucks were passing us and those people could see her right through the window.

I just wanted this to be over with sooo badly. But I didn't want to make her feel like shit on her birthday. She obviously thought she was being incredibly sexy. Carpe Diem! Seize the day! YOLO! It was her birthday, and dammit, she could masturbate in plain sight for everyone to see, if she wanted to! I think I would have completely crushed her, if I had told her: "God damn, put some clothes on, woman! You're making a spectacle of yourself!"

I kept thinking to myself: eyes on the road, eyes on the road, eyes on the road.

Eventually she came and told me again to feel how wet her pussy was. There was white slimy foam all over it. It was like her vibrator had churned her wetness into butter. Really not sexy.

I loved watching Alice masturbate with her little vibrating egg. She was cute when she did it. Understated. She wasn't putting on a Broadway show. I loved to see and feel Alice get all wet. And she looked beautiful when she had an orgasm. That didn't happen very often though, since heroin makes a lot of girls pretty numb down there.

And I'm sure I would have liked it, if Alice had masturbated next to me in the car. Maybe not the feet against the windshield. That was a little much. But with Patty, all that over the top sex was just making my skin crawl at this point.

And then she did it againnn! A few minutes after she finished masturbating, she gave an encore performance. Up her feet went against the windshield and there she was, going to town again.

Eyes on the road, eyes on the road, eyes on the road.

We arrived at Kennedy Airport late at night. I had left my car there

when I flew to Florida, right before I called Patty to let her know she could hide from the paparazzi at my place in Bonita Springs.

Patty asked me to follow her to Scranton and stay with her. I said: "No, I got no sleep at all last night, because you were crying in the bathroom til 6 am. I really need to go to sleep. I'll get in touch with you tomorrow."

## GOING TO REHAB

*"Don't bother trusting me. Don't bother waiting. Don't bother changing things that won't give into changing. Just let me go away."*

### Blue October

After Patty and I parted ways at Kennedy Airport, I called my ex-wife Donna, who lived less than ten minutes away from the airport, and told her I was in New York. I asked her if I could stay there for a day or two.

After our divorce over a year earlier, Donna and I didn't talk for a few weeks. She was very bitter. But eventually, little by little, we started talking to each other again, and remained close friends. We talked on the phone a lot, and I visited her in Brooklyn every so often.

We used to have four dogs together. I traveled too much to take care of them properly, so they stayed with Donna. They were like our children, so I was always happy to see them when I was in Brooklyn. Donna and I didn't have sex anymore, but we had been family for so long, she was always going to be my family, no matter what some paper says. She was like a sister to me now.

After my crazy two weeks with Patty, I really wanted to tell Donna what happened. But I couldn't. I never told her anything about my personal life, or other females, because I didn't want to hurt her feelings. As far as she was concerned, I was celibate.

The next day I ended whatever relationship Patty thought we had. I took the coward's way out and texted her: "Hey, I had a good time. But I'm still in love with Alice, so I'm gonna go back with her. I hope u understand." Short and to the point.

Patty's reply was surprisingly civil: "I understand. U gotta follow ur heart."

But then half an hour later I got another text from her. A little snippier. Then I got another text from her. And another. And another. Each text was nastier than the one before. Sooner or later I started replying in the same mean tone. By the end of the day we were sending each other hateful tirades.



While Patty was staying with me in Florida, I had come clean about Alice. So now Patty knew exactly which buttons to press to get under my skin: "Ur dating an addict? Ur so stupid! They never get clean! She doesn't love u. She's just using u! All she wants is money for drugs. She'll never quit heroin!"

And I knew exactly which buttons to press to get under her skin: "WTF is wrong w u? Sex 5 times a day? I felt like u were raping me! And that shit in the car? Sick! And u give the worst blowjobs ever!"

I found out much later that Patty had become so unhinged when I "broke up" with her, she quit her job at the end of that day. Then she left Scranton, because she couldn't face her family, friends and co-workers anymore, after she had been gushing to them that I was The One and she was gonna marry me. She moved in with a female friend in Washington DC. Then she decided to be gay, and posted a profile on a lesbian dating website. I guess I had ruined men for her for good. Well, no, actually her lesbian phase didn't last very long. But she did try to kill herself.

Anyway, a day or two after Patty and I parted ways at Kennedy Airport, and I stayed with Donna in Brooklyn, I drove to Liberty, to check out my new condo.

It was in a complex called Grandview Palace. It used to be a fancy resort called Brown's Hotel. The Browns was one of the most popular Catskills resorts a few decades ago. During its heyday, Jerry Lewis, Bob Hope, Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, Billy Crystal, Rodney Dangerfield, Harry Bellafonte, Tony Bennett and many other famous celebrities performed there regularly. In 1997, it was converted into a condo complex and renamed The Grandview Palace. The lady at the front desk told me that the movie Dirty Dancing with Patrick Swayze had been filmed here in the 80s.

I bought the condo dirt cheap at an online real estate auction, while I was in Florida with Patty. The previous owner had simply abandoned it, and didn't even take his stuff. So the condo was fully furnished. Perfect! I could move right in. I just had to clean it up a little.

I picked Alice up in Middletown and she helped me clean. She liked the condo. It was small, but cute. It was on the third floor and the living room balcony overlooked the pool.

The reason why Alice had started texting me again all of a sudden, while Patty was visiting me in Florida, was because she had found out that she was pregnant, and she needed someone to talk to.

Hookers obviously have sex with a lot of people. But they usually don't like to kiss them, and they insist on using a condom. Making love, with kissing and no condom, is usually reserved for their boyfriend.

Alice and I had made love without a condom hundreds of times, but I respected her wishes and always pulled out and came on her stomach or back. I wanted her to trust me, and I didn't want to be the kind of guy who would make her feel powerless by cuming inside of her, unless she told me it was ok.

Papi didn't give a shit. If she tried to tell him to use a condom, or at least to pull out, he hit her. So she ended up getting pregnant by him. Just like she had gotten pregnant a few times by other dope boys in the past, and that's why I had seen those abortions in her medical records.

When Alice told me that she was pregnant by Papi, while we were lying in bed at the new condo in Liberty, it was pretty obvious that she was horrified by the idea of being tied to this abusive scumbag for the rest of her life. But she had promised herself that she would never get another abortion. So now she felt trapped. She really wanted to terminate her pregnancy, but she needed someone to tell her that it was ok to get the abortion.

When Alice had told her grandma Gina a few days earlier that she was pregnant, she had hoped Gina would tell her not to keep the baby and not to throw her life away with a guy like Papi. But Gina was convinced that Alice's baby was God's will. Gina believed that the baby was sent by God to turn Alice's life around. She was convinced that once Alice had this tiny little person to take care of and love unconditionally, she would get clean and stay clean.

Although I do believe that unconditional love is the key in a drug addict's recovery, I didn't believe for a second that having a baby with Papi Chuloco, the abusive drug dealer, was going to get Alice clean. Being tied to this violent lowlife would probably drive her to commit suicide, before it made her consider getting clean. I had seen enough girls like Mary, and Alice's other close friend Becky, who had kids and then continued to do drugs anyway, because the fathers of

their children were garbage.

I told Alice that I disagreed with Gina, and if she had this baby, her life would not be idyllic like a Norman Rockwell painting, but like the miserable life in Turn The Page by Metallica.

Remember I mentioned earlier that many bands produce two versions of their music videos? A censored one for America, and an uncensored one with nudity for European music TV. Metallica's uncensored version of the music video for Turn The Page shows a blonde woman who lives in hotel rooms with her little daughter. During the day she works in a dirty strip club, taking her clothes off in front of oogling perverts, while her little daughter waits for her backstage. And at night she walks the streets as a hooker and has sex with abusive men who rape and beat her in the same hotel room she shares with her daughter. It's a really, really sad video.

That video is one of the reasons why I don't like going to strip clubs. How is it sexy to sit in a dirty room filled with a hundred sweaty predatory douchebags staring at a naked girl? The dick to pussy ratio in that room does not work for me.

And the one time someone had talked me into going to a strip club with them, I just felt bad for the girls. I just wanted to give them a hug, not stare at their naked bodies. These girls all had this empty stare in their eyes while they were on stage, like they really didn't want to be there, and their mind was somewhere completely different. Kinda like what happened to my mind when my father tried to break through my bedroom door and kill my mother and me.

Anyway, Alice agreed that having a baby with Papi would definitely not make her life better and she definitely would not get clean because of it. She knew how miserable her friend Mary's life was. It really was just as bad as the girl's life in that Metallica video. And Alice knew how messed up in the head Mary's little son Mikey was because of it.

Alice's friend Becky was not much better. Well, she wasn't a stripper or a hooker yet, because she had managed to limit herself to shooting only one bag of heroin at a time, and only twice a day, so her habit was just \$20 per day. But even she couldn't quit drugs when she had her baby, and her daughter ended up being taken away from her. Alice did not want to go through that, so she decided to get an abortion.

I heard when Papi found out, he beat the shit out of her, as usual. She was afraid for her life whenever she was around him. It broke my heart to hear that.

I told her she could come live with me at the condo in Liberty whenever she wanted: "Just say the word, and I'll drop everything and come get you. The one thing I ask is that you go to rehab and at least TRY living a sober life with me for a while, and see if you like it."

That was a deal breaker for her. As much as she liked being with me, because she felt safe and comfortable around me, and I treated her with love and respect, she didn't want to get clean. Not today. At some point in the future, yeah. When she's ready. But not today. Never today.

Finally she couldn't take the beatings from Papi anymore and ran away from him. But she didn't come to me. She ran back to Curly and stayed in motel rooms with him, while he pimped her out. I was so upset. I fucking hated all these God damn dope boys!

I heard that Papi was looking for Curly, because Curly stole "his" girl. I hacked Curly's phone and got his location. Then I sent an anonymous text to Papi and told him where to find Curly.

Curly and Alice were alone in the motel room together, when Papi knocked on the door. Papi was huge. Curly was tiny. He never stood a chance. As soon as he opened the door, Papi suckerpunched him. He stormed into the room and threw Curly to the ground and just started beating the shit out of him, while holding Curly's frizzy hair with one hand so that he couldn't get up or fight back.

Curly was crying for help. Alice screamed at Papi to stop or she was going to call the cops. When she picked up the phone, Papi ran off.

Hacker vs Dope Boy: Hacker wins. I wanted to beat the shit out of Curly, but I didn't even have to do it myself. I made Papi do it, and he never even knew I was using him.

Now Curly was thirsting for revenge. He had been utterly humiliated in front of "his" girl. Papi had made him scream for help like a little bitch. Curly couldn't just let that go. He needed to restore his honor.

Curly said he was going to kill Papi. He called his homies. They had guns, knives and baseball bats. They went on a manhunt, looking for Papi. Papi didn't have a crew. He was fresh off the boat from Puerto Rico. Now he was hiding somewhere, because he didn't stand a chance alone against a bunch of armed thugs. Nobody knew where he was. So I hacked Papi's phone and sent an anonymous text to Curly and his homies, with Papi's location. Nobody ever heard from Papi again after that night.

Curly was still pissed at Alice, because he was sure that she had told Papi where she and Curly were staying, so Curly believed that whole clusterfuck had been her fault. He beat her and kicked her out. Now she had nowhere to go, and she called me and asked me if she could stay with me at the condo in Liberty.

From that point on she lived with me and she didn't escort or sleep around anymore. We stayed in Liberty, close to Middletown, because that's where her latest drug dealer, Enrique, was. Enrique was Tattoo's cousin. Somehow word got around that if I was pissed at a dope boy, bad things started happening to him. So Enrique was always very polite to me, when Alice and I stopped by his house to get her "medicine." He seemed scared of me.

By now Alice's habit had gotten worse. She could no longer get through the day on 10 bags of heroin. Now she needed 20 bags, so her habit was now \$200 a day.

Drug addiction is a progressive disease. In the beginning one bag of heroin will get you high and make you feel really good. Then, after a few weeks, your body gets used to it, and shooting up just one bag won't do anything for you. So now you need to shoot up two bags at a time, to get the same effect one bag used to give you. And then, after a few more weeks, you need to shoot up three bags at a time. And so on and so forth. And the more heroin you shoot each time, the sicker you get when it starts to wear off. It's a vicious cycle.

I hated throwing away \$200 a day, but I would rather do that than see Alice go back to escorting or staying with some abusive dope boy. But every chance I got, I tried to talk her into going to rehab. But any time I brought up the topic, she'd get very defensive: "You promised you wouldn't push me to get clean if I come live with you! I'll get clean when I'm ready. But I'm not ready yet!"

It had been a long time since we had been to Hawaii together. She

had told me a few months ago that Hawaii seemed so far away now, like it was all just a dream. I hoped, maybe if I refreshed her memory about how happy she was, it would encourage her to get clean. We went on a two week trip to Florida, so I could show her the condo in Bonita Springs. She smuggled 280 bags, \$2800 worth of heroin, on the plane between her legs. I'm sweating bullets just thinking back about it now.

She absolutely loved Florida. It was like Hawaii, but everything was cleaner, newer. We went to the Miromar Outlet Mall, the Coconut Point Mall, Coastland, Mercato, Sanibel, Captiva, Fort Myers Beach, Barefoot Beach, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Naples, the pier, Matlacha, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, South Beach, Orlando, Disney World, and a bunch of other places. She felt just as happy as she had been in Hawaii.

I told her we could live here forever, instead of the tiny condo in Liberty. For the first time, she really seriously talked about going to rehab, and starting a new life in Florida with me.

When we got back to Liberty, it seemed so gray and inhospitable. It was getting cold and the trees had lost their leaves. The difference between Bonita Springs and Liberty felt like the difference between District 1 and District 12 in The Hunger Games.

We were in Liberty for just a week or two. Then we flew to Tennessee, to surprise her grandma Gina. They hadn't seen each other in over five years, ever since her mother had ripped her out of her home at her grandma's house. We pulled a similar stunt like what I had done to Donna, when I showed up at her door unexpectedly, while she was waiting for me on the phone.

Alice talked to Gina in the morning and mentioned how good the bagels in New York were. Gina said she really missed those bagels. She used to live in the Bronx as a child.

Then Alice and I bought a bag of fresh bagels for Gina, got on a plane and drove to her house. Right before we knocked on Gina's door, Alice called her on the phone. They started to talk about bagels again. Then she said: "You know what, grandma, let me give you some."

She knocked on the door, with the phone in one hand, and the bagels in the other. Gina opened the door, still talking to Alice on the phone.

She looked right at Alice, but didn't recognize her at first, and said into the phone: "Hold on, Alice, there's someone at the door."

Alice started to laugh and said: "It's me, grandma!" She gave her a hug. Gina was shocked! She was ecstatic, she didn't even know what to say. She just kept hugging and kissing Alice. They both started crying. Then Gina started hugging me and kept saying: "Thank you, thank you, thank you." I started to tear up, too. It was just really touching to see how happy this reunion made them. We spent about a week in Tennessee and took Gina to Nashville. She had always wanted to go to the Grand Ole Opry.

When we got back to Liberty, life seemed like it was in black and white. It just felt so drab and dreary, even though we tried to make the best of it, and we went to shows in Manhattan or to a spa for massages. But now Alice was starting to realize how much better life could be. She asked if we could go to Florida again.

This time we drove, because I did not want to keep taking our chances at the airport, smuggling thousands of dollars worth of dope between Alice's legs.

Alice actually began to feel at home in the condo in Bonita Springs. She started thinking of ways to decorate it. We spent my birthday and Thanksgiving down there. She made a fancy turkey dinner with brownies for dessert. The things she had been through with Curly and Papi and that guy who treated her like a sex slave, and all those guys on Backpage, seemed like nothing more than a bad dream now.

She really wasn't crazy about going back to Liberty at all anymore. But we had to, because that's where her drugs were. At this point I had no idea yet how easy it is to find drugs in Fort Myers.

When we were back in New York, she talked more and more about going to rehab so we could move to Florida. I was so happy to hear her talk like that. She even wrote some of her friends on Facebook, that she wasn't going to be in New York much longer, because we were moving to Florida for good. Everything finally seemed to come together.

Through the grapevine Alice's mother Tory had heard that Alice and I had visited Gina. Tory didn't like that one bit, because she was jealous of their relationship. Alice was her daughter, but Alice kept acting like she was Gina's daughter. And Gina had even started

referring to me as her son-in-law while talking to a waiter, when we had been at the Ruth's Chris Steak House in Nashville together.

Tory started calling Alice and asked her and me to come over and spent time at her house. Their relationship was strained at best. They were more like sisters than mother and daughter. And they had a weird rivalry, just like Patty and Rita. Tory always seemed to be in competition with Alice, and always wanted to have better things than her. She wanted to be prettier than Alice and made her feel ugly and fat, even though that wasn't true at all. Alice was beautiful. But her mother Tory wanted to be more beautiful. If Alice told her mother she was happy about a new pair of earrings, Tory told her they were tacky. If Alice told her she was happy about having eaten at a nice restaurant, Tory said she had eaten there, too, but she didn't think it was that good. She had better.

I really didn't like her. She was a toxic person in Alice's life. She was the reason why Alice had started taking drugs in the first place, and her parenting skills had not improved one bit. Tory had another daughter, more than twelve years after she had Alice. Alice's little sister Brianna.

Tory spoiled Brianna rotten. She got whatever she wanted. She could do no wrong. Meanwhile everything Alice did was always wrong. Tory made no secret out of the fact that Brianna was her favorite, and Alice was a huge disappointment. Tory kissed Brianna on the mouth all the time and was loving and affectionate towards her. But she never wanted to kiss Alice on the mouth. Alice told me she thought it was because Tory kept thinking about all the dicks Alice had sucked. I could tell how much it hurt Alice, to feel like even her own mother didn't love her.

While going through these years of turmoil with Alice, I read whatever I could find on the subject of drugs and addiction: Psychological profiles, medical reports, studies, statistics, interviews, and whatever else I could find. I figured, in order to try to help Alice, I needed to know as much about what goes on in her brain as possible. And I probably knew just as much about addiction as Patty at this point. Maybe more.

One thing every drug addict I met or read about seemed to have in common was a traumatic childhood. Almost all of them had been abused in some form or another, or abandoned by someone important in their lives. I've met many more addicts since then, and I



have yet to find one who did not have traumatic abuse or abandonment in their past.

Anyway, Tory invited Alice and me to spend Christmas with her and Brianna. Alice was so excited, because this was the first time ever that her mom had allowed Alice to bring her boyfriend. I couldn't really blame Tory for that. Virtually all of Alice's previous boyfriends were dope dealing scumbags.

Christmas morning, Alice handed me a card:

*"Merry Christmas, Sweetie!*

*I truly hope you have a great Christmas with me and my family. I am soooo glad you're here with me this year. You've helped to make it special. I don't know how to make that up to you. You've done so much for me and my family. I wish I could do more for you. This is a very special Christmas for me. It's the first time I and my mom have allowed someone to share it with me and my family. I wanted to give you all that I have. But it wasn't that much. I feel like I owe you everything. Merry Christmas.*

*I love you. Princess"*

I was so touched. That card meant the world to me.

A few days later, we went to Florida again. Then we spend New Years Eve in Savannah. It's supposed to be the most haunted city in America. And the Kehoe House, a ritzy bed and breakfast, is supposed to be the most haunted house in Savannah. So that's where we stayed, hoping to see a ghost. Well, we didn't. Go figure. We also went ghost hunting at an old civil war cemetery at night. No luck.

When we got back to Liberty, Alice, on her own accord, set a concrete date for her rehab. She said she would check herself in on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011. 1/11/11. What a great date for a new beginning!

One or two nights later, we were watching the movie Dreamland in bed. I fell asleep, and while I was sleeping, she wrote me this letter:

*"Hey there Sweetie :-)*

*As you're lying in bed sleeping next to me, I was just thinking how sweet and kind you are to me. I don't think I've ever said a simple "thank you." But, thank you! Thank you for e-v-e-r-y-t-h-a-n-g! Literally, jokes aside. Thank you.*

*Thanks for "taking me on" so to speak. Thank you for being kind.*

*And as much of a cliché as it may be, it's true... Thank you for being you.*

*I just watched Dreamland (as you know.) And in this one scene, after the sick girl goes out on a date, her first date with her soon-to-be boyfriend, who she deeply loves, she walks in her house and asks the two people in the room something to the effect of:*

*"Have you ever had that feeling when something great is happening, and you feel like God is giving you this great moment that you're not good enough for, and you're not sure why, but it feels great?"*

*This, our time together, our relationship, the things we do, that's my great moment from God. Like when something good happens & you can't believe it's happening to you. You feel like you don't deserve it or it's not meant for you.*

*Well, you are my great moment, sweetie. I just wanted to say thank you for that. I appreciate you and the things you do for me. You should and deserve to know that sweetie. xoxo*

*Love, Alice aka Princess"*

When I read that letter the next morning, it actually made me tear up. I was so touched. I loved that girl so much. When Alice saw me tear up while reading her letter, she smiled. She told me she loved me, hugged me, gave me a kiss, and then we made love.

It was only a few more days until January 11<sup>th</sup>. We decided to take a little trip to Niagara Falls. We had ordered Alice's passport a few weeks earlier, and it finally came. So we were going to go check out the Canadian side of the Falls. Our first international trip together! It was great. We had a lot of fun. We even went to Toronto for two days.

When we got back to Liberty, January 11<sup>th</sup> was only two or three more days away. Suddenly Alice began to change her mind and started saying that she wasn't ready yet and she would go to rehab on February 1<sup>st</sup> instead. It was the same old story: Not today. Not today. Not today.

I reminded her that it had been her own idea to go on 1/11/11 and that she was so close to finally changing her life for the better and being happy. She didn't want to hear it. She got hostile and told me if I didn't stop pressuring her into getting clean, she'd leave me, stay in a motel and post an escort ad on Backpage.

So I applied what I had learned from dealing with Donna, and used some reverse psychology. I told Alice that I was sick and tired of all

her broken promises and that if she really wanted to go back to spreading her legs for every guy in town, and she really wanted to go back to sucking everyone's dick again, then go ahead. I told her I had tried my best, but obviously nothing I did was going to get her clean. She was a lost cause. Completely hopeless and worthless, and I told her to pack her things and I'd drive her to the Howard Johnson in Middletown right now.

She began to cry and told me she didn't want to go, and she promised she would go to rehab.

On the morning of January 11<sup>th</sup>, she woke up early and packed her bags like a little trooper. She didn't complain. She didn't argue. She didn't try to bargain. She didn't offer me sexual favors to let her do drugs just one more day. She really kept her word, and let me take her to the rehab center in Rhinebeck, New York.

That was probably one of the happiest days of my life. After everything we had been through together, she was really finally going to rehab, and we really were going to move to Florida together. Yayyyy!

When we arrived at the rehab center at 11 am, they told us Alice's insurance wouldn't approve her for a 28-day program, unless she showed signs of withdrawal. She had just done heroin before we left our condo, so she wasn't going to go into withdrawal for a while.

The admissions people told us there was nothing they could do, until her vitals showed signs of distress. So now Alice and I sat in the waiting room, waiting for her to go into painful withdrawal. This was insane! It's hard enough to get an addict to go to rehab, but to make them jump through hoops once they are there is just crazy. Everyone else in the waiting room was in the same boat. A bunch of them couldn't take it anymore and left to get high.

I expected Alice to cave any minute now and start whining that she wanted to go home and get high. But she didn't. She sat there quietly, with her head leaning against my shoulder, holding my hand, waiting to get dope sick. Hours went by. She seemed to melt like a snowman. She got weaker and weaker. She ended up lying down across some empty chairs. She started to feel like shit, and they still wouldn't take her in, until they got word from the insurance company. This kind of shit does not happen in Europe, where they have universal healthcare.

Finally, at 7 pm, they took her in. We kissed and said good bye. I never saw her again after that.

Some guy I had met a few months earlier, who was also dating a drug addict, told me that his girlfriend had been in rehab 27 times over the years. And a bunch of times she had met a dope boy in rehab and ran off with him. He said that happens a lot. He warned me that it might happen with Alice, too.

I mentioned that to Alice, while we were waiting for her insurance to approve her. I told her I was worried she might meet someone in rehab and run off with him. She laughed and said: "I would never leave you. Where would I ever find another guy like you? You have treated me better than I have ever been treated in my life. Trust me, you don't have to worry about me leaving you."

Well, she left me anyway. That guy had been exactly right. About ten days into the program, Alice ran off with someone she met in rehab. It wasn't even a latin dope boy this time, but some old white lady who pimped out young girls to pay for her own drug habit.

I was devastated. I couldn't believe the rehab administration didn't even bother to call me to tell me that Alice had run away. I was her emergency contact, for fuck's sake. But the lady in the administration office told me that "running away" did not constitute an emergency. It happened on a daily basis. I told her that I was worried sick, because I had no idea where Alice was. She said I should call the cops and file a missing person report.

Later that night I went to the police station in Liberty. It was snowing. There was only one cop in the building. He sat behind a glass enclosure. I walked up to the window and told him that my girlfriend had run away from drug rehab and I would like to file a missing person report.

He looked at me for a second and asked: "Why would you even want to find her?"

"Uhhh, because I love her," I replied.

What kind of a stupid question was that? What the hell was wrong with this cop?

He said: "Yeah, you obviously love her, otherwise you wouldn't be looking for her. But trust me, she doesn't love you. She's just some drug addict. They're all the same. They don't love anybody. That girl doesn't give a shit about you or anyone else. If I were you, I would run the other way. Don't go looking for her. Count your blessings that you got rid of her."

Then he got up out of his chair, opened the door of his glass enclosure and came out into the room I was standing in.

"I'm not talking to you as a cop right now. I'm talking to you as Dr. Phil. You look like a nice guy. You obviously care a lot about this girl, but take my word for it, she's not worth it. I don't even know her but I can tell you she's garbage. You know, we cops, we are guys, too. But nobody in this police station would ever want to date a drug addict. We'd rather be single. You're better off without her. Drug addicts are the scum of the earth."

"Uhhh, ok, thanks for the advice," I said and left. I was speechless. I really didn't know what to say to this guy. He was a cop. He dealt with drug addicts on a daily basis. So it's not like I could tell him he didn't know what he was talking about. And what got to me the most was that he wasn't trying to be an asshole. He genuinely tried to be helpful and give me good advice. Somehow I got the feeling that he had been in my shoes at one point. Maybe he used to date a girl who got addicted and then broke his heart.

I went home. The next morning, I called the police department in Rhinebeck. I spoke to a detective who was a lot more sympathetic. Maybe because he worked in the town where the rehab center was located, so he probably dealt with distraught family members of runaway addicts every day. Or maybe because he had seen how desperate those addicts in rehab were to turn their lives around. Who knows, maybe he even had a drug addicted teenage daughter.

He told me that there really wasn't much he could do to find her, but he would help me any way he could. He told me to talk to all of Alice's friends and acquaintances. He asked me if I had ever driven her to a dealer's house so she could get drugs. I was scared to admit it, but I figured I owed it to this guy to be honest, if I expected any kind of help from him.

"Yeah, I did. I know I shouldn't have. But I didn't know what else to do. If I hadn't taken her there to get drugs, she would have just run

off and gotten them anyway," I said.

The officer told me not to worry about it. He said he knew what I had been going through, and that loved ones of addicts always fall in that trap. They try to help the addict, and then end up enabling them instead and making things worse: "You try to help them get off drugs, but somehow they manage to make you help them get drugs instead. Funny how that works."

Patty had told me a long time ago that love makes you vulnerable and addicts know that. When their addiction takes over, it turns them from loving human beings into sociopathic predators with the singular mission of chasing the next high, no matter who they have to betray to get it. And they know that the easiest, most vulnerable targets are the people who love them.

When you love someone, you do things for them you wouldn't do for anyone else. And when you really love someone, you forgive them over and over again when they hurt you. Addicts consider love a weakness they can exploit. And when their families have finally learned how an addict operates, the addict searches for new victims. Addicts throw the word love around, because it's the mightiest weapon in their arsenal. Even more powerful than sex.

Patty told me that they really can't feel love the way a sober person does, because the drug disrupts their brain chemistry to the point where they can't bond with another human being, the way sober people do. But they get really good at pretending to love you, because it gets them what they really want: drugs.

A drug addicted hooker will tell some random guy after having sex with him two or three times that she loves him, because she knows that if he believes it, he will end up being her braindead goon who will do almost anything for her, like give her money if she claims she is about to get evicted, or her cell phone is about to get shut off, or her baby hasn't eaten in two days, or she needs to get bailed out of jail, or she supposedly needs an abortion.

Not every guy is stupid enough to fall for the big love lie. But if a hooker tells enough guys that she loves them, one or two lonely guys are bound to fall for it. It's almost like going fishing. Or phishing. Phreakers used to play the same game when they tried to get people's credit cards. Not everyone fell for the big lie, that the hacker was an employee at the credit card company's fraud department and needed

the victim's personal information to examine some unusual activity on their account. But there always were a few gullible people, so if the hacker kept calling enough people, and kept repeating the same lie often enough, eventually he ran into someone who fell for it.

I like to believe that Alice really did love me. But who knows. Maybe I was just another sucker.

Anyway, I did what the officer told me: I searched for her on Backpage, in case she had posted an escort ad. Nothing. I contacted all of Alice's friends. Nobody knew where she was. Not even Becky or Mary. I even called Kat. Then I called Enrique, her drug dealer. I guess I should have started with him.

He seemed nervous when he heard my voice: "Look man, I want no trouble with you. And I don't want to get in the middle of this."

"Don't worry," I replied. "I just need to know if you have seen Alice or you know where she is."

"Uhh, yeah, she's been coming around every day, buying dope from me. Look, even if I didn't sell it to her, she would get it from someone else. At least I know my stuff is good. She's staying with some old lady she met in rehab."

Once he told me that, I hacked his phone and got Alice's new number. Then I hacked her new phone and saw who she had been talking to and where she was staying. At the Super 8 in Newburgh.

She had called all her old "clients" and went right back to escorting, even without posting on Backpage. She was in some sort of weird relationship with that old lady. Maybe she felt that the old lady was a substitute for her mother, and giving that lady drugs would make her love Alice the way her mother never loved her. I don't know.

I called Alice's new number a bunch of times. She kept ignoring me. Then, finally, after a few days, she answered the phone. I tried to convince her to let me take her back to rehab. No chance. Then I asked her to at least come home with me. Nope. Wasn't gonna happen. When we were together, she had been the sweetest girl in the world. When we said good bye at the rehab admission office, everything was ok between us, and we were about to move to Florida after she got out of rehab, and we were going to live happily ever after.

But now she was suddenly acting like a total bitch. Like I was her worst enemy. Well, in her drug-crazed mind I was. I was the guy trying to get inbetween her and what she loved most in the world: her drugs. That made me the bad guy in her eyes. The way she talked to me reminded me of a dog growling at me because I'm trying to take away his bone.

Alice's friend Becky was worried about her, too. So she kept calling me to find out if I had found her yet. I told her that I had talked to Alice, but she didn't want to come home. Becky asked for Alice's new number, so maybe she could talk some sense into her. But Alice wouldn't answer the phone for Becky either.

Becky and I started talking every day, and we ended up hanging out a few times. Becky was really nice, but of course it didn't take me long until I realized that Becky wasn't just concerned about her missing friend Alice, or trying to cheer me up because I was so heartbroken and needed a shoulder to cry on, but that in the back of her head she figured it couldn't hurt to get on my good side now that I was unexpectedly single.

Oh, and guess who I found on Backpage while searching for Alice. Linda, the scam artist who had conned me into paying for her fake abortion not just once but twice about a year and a half earlier. Apparently she had moved from answering personal ads and scamming unsuspecting guys, to placing escort ads. Aaand she now had a new baby girl! Just a few months old. At first I thought I suddenly had a baby daughter. But Linda said it wasn't mine. Once I did the math, I found out that Linda had already been pregnant before I met her. She told me she was sorry for scamming me into giving her money for an abortion by pretending it was my baby back then. She said she really had planned to get an abortion, but then she changed her mind.

When I asked her about what made her start escorting on Backpage, and whether she was on drugs, she said she wasn't. I didn't believe her. She was way too squirrely to be sober. She told me that she wasn't proud of being an escort, but she just couldn't find a regular job, so she did what she had to do. "It is what it is," she said. I hate when girls who escort use that phrase as if it justifies everything.

She told me she hated doing that stuff, because no self-respecting guy wants to be in a serious relationship with a whore, so it was a



very lonely life. And most of the guys who tricked with hookers made these girls feel like shit. There were even online forums, where guys rated girls on their looks and their "skills." I had found some reviews of Alice. It broke my heart to read what a bunch of random strangers had to say about having sex with my little Alice.

Linda agreed that a lot of these guys enjoyed being cruel in their reviews. They liked the sense of power they got from talking about a girl like she was a piece of meat or a toy. Linda told me she tried not to let her bad reviews get under her skin, but that wasn't easy, because she was ashamed even of her good reviews. She told me that after getting too many complaints, she had even learned to allow random guys to cum in her mouth and swallow. Something that had always made her gag and throw up in the past.

I had called her, just in case she might know where Alice was, because Alice and Kat had told me a long time ago that most of the girls on Backpage know each other. But Linda didn't know Alice. She hadn't been in this "business" long enough yet.

Like Becky, Linda also figured it couldn't hurt to get friendly with me again, now that I was single. So Linda started calling me almost every day, acting concerned and offering me her shoulder to cry on. She had a lot of insights into the mind of an addict and told me that I shouldn't take what Alice did to me personal, because that's just what addicts do. I told her she knew way too much about drugs and the drug mentality for a sober person. She finally admitted that she "used to" smoke crack and had been in rehab for it. I was pretty sure she didn't want to admit that she had relapsed, and her crack addiction had made her resort to escorting. I felt bad for her young son and baby daughter.

I had bought and sold about four or five condos in the Grandview Palace in Liberty. I decided to sell the last one, the one Alice and I had been living in. I made up my mind to finally end things for good with her. Well, actually she had made up my mind for me, since she was the one who broke up with me and refused to come home. Anyway, I got rid of that condo and moved to Florida.

Bonita Springs, and the whole Southwest Florida metro area, from Fort Myers to Naples, had seemed like paradise, the few times Alice and I came here together. We thought it was the perfect getaway to escape the drugs in New York. We had no idea that Fort Myers has a drug problem that is probably even worse than in New York.

Everything that had happened so far was about to seem like child's play, compared to the bizarre things that were about to happen next.

*"The truth brings with it a great measure of absoluton, always."*

**R.D. Laing**

*"Truth that is naked is the most beautiful, and the simpler its expression the deeper is the impression it makes; this is partly because it gets unobstructed hold of the hearer's mind without his being distracted by secondary thoughts, and partly because he feels that here he is not being corrupted or deceived by the arts of rhetoric, but that the whole effect is got from the thing itself."*

**Arthur Schopenhauer**

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