

# **VIRGIN TERRITORY:**

## **50 Years Without Sex**

*My Life As An Involuntary Virgin*

**By**

**Timothy Draper**

# **INTRODUCTION**

This book is an attempt on my part to examine and understand the circumstances and reasons surrounding the fact that I am, as of this writing, an involuntary fifty-year-old, heterosexual virgin. When I say ‘involuntary’, I mean that I have not remained sex-free due to religious or moral beliefs, physical limitations, chosen celibacy, “saving myself for marriage”, or any other restrictive behavior. As sad as it sounds, I am still a virgin simply because, in my 50 years on this earth, I have never been able to get laid. No woman whom I’ve ever dated has ever wanted to go beyond the friendship stage with me. Despite all attempts (which will be covered in detail in this book) to seduce a woman - not unlike what every man has done since the beginning of time - I have always been rejected when it came to getting physical or amorous with a woman. The frustration I have felt and endured ever since I was in my late teens has only grown worse with every passing year. Whenever I was in situations where I thought that my time had finally come, I would be blindsided by the almost schizophrenic behavior of whatever girl I was with at the moment – the abrupt changing of her mind, the misread signals, or the most common occurrence - the revelation that she had a boyfriend.

Over the years, there have been many debates among scholars and the general public about the actual definition of being a virgin. Some say it’s anyone who has never had intercourse (but may have done every other sex act), while others suggest that it means no sexual contact whatsoever other than perhaps light kissing and petting. With the exception of one brief encounter that I’ll discuss later, I fall into the latter category. This means of course, that I have never had any sexual contact with women including intercourse, oral sex, rolling around naked, or anything else that involves carnal behavior.

As I recount my experiences here, I have changed the names of all the women who were objects of my affection as well as the names of friends and colleagues. It is not my intention to embarrass, humiliate, or denigrate anyone. I have also been deliberately vague about some of the locations mentioned. As much as I want to share my story with the reader, I have no desire to be “unmasked”. In this age of Facebook and other social media outlets on the internet, my true identity would only make matters worse. I can tell you that everything here is the absolute truth, but who in their right mind would want to admit they’ve never had sex at my age? I have, however, tried to maintain a sense of humor about my situation. It’s probably the only thing that has kept me from going insane. And for anyone who thinks I’m on the verge of doing something unspeakable to lose my virginity (rape, sexual assault, a date-rape drug), you needn’t worry. Even though I haven’t lost my virginity, I also haven’t lost my sense of what’s right and wrong. This should go without saying, of course, but the world is full of men who will do whatever it takes to have their fantasies fulfilled, even if it means hurting a woman. I’ve also never considered getting a prostitute, and that discussion will also be covered in this book.

It’s important to know that this book is not meant to be a sob story or to get the reader to feel sorry for me. I’m not interested in sympathy, or letters from hookers or prostitutes offering to come to my rescue. I feel it is more of a self-examination as I approach my twilight years, and even the hope that I will not die never knowing what it is like to experience what is arguably the most pleasurable and intimate act that two people can do together. (I

guess that's why they call it the *joy* of sex). And if there are others like me out there that feel they, too, have been left behind, always on the outside looking in, never being able to take a relationship to that next level, maybe my story will be a lesson or even a comfort to those who feel their time has run out with regard to finding a sexual partner.

*September 15, 2011*

# CHAPTER ONE

## PART ONE

### When Pleasure Is A No-No

I remember my first orgasm. I was probably about ten years old and was attempting to do chin-ups on one end of the clothesline that was in my backyard. This was your typical T-shaped clothesline that was so prevalent in the 1960's, made of cast iron and painted an uninspired rustic brown. The chin-ups started as the result of a neighborhood kid about my age who challenged me while trying to prove his masculinity to some of the young prepubescent girls that were hanging around. I can recall that I began to do a few myself, except I cheated by wrapping my legs around the main pole and pulling myself up as far as I could using my legs for support. I'll never forget the exploding pleasure I felt in my groin when I managed to reach the top of the pole after a few tries and began squeezing it by wriggling my legs around it like a boa constrictor preparing its prey. And I remember muttering to myself the obvious words, "*Mmm, that feels so good...*" Of course, I had no idea what had just happened, and no one else around me appeared to notice my pleasure. When I dropped to the ground, my first thought was to try it again as soon as I could. For the next several days I would be in the backyard, telling myself I was going to do chin-ups knowing full well that physical fitness was not my priority. I did manage to reproduce that ecstatic sensation a couple of more times, and there were a few instances when nothing happened at all. Of course, these feelings had nothing whatsoever to do with sex. I had not yet been introduced to that concept. All I knew is that if I caressed the pole, I'd get a nice, warm sensation 'down there'.

But all this came to a halt when, one summer afternoon, my mother was watching from the porch of our suburban, one-story, three-bedroom home. I distinctly remember her yelling, "*What are you doing?!*" in a rather suspicious and admonishing tone. "*Chin-ups!*" I instantly yelled back. "*Well you don't need to be doing that. Get down*" she said. My mother, who was raised Catholic in a very strict home, had probably figured out that I had discovered my manhood accidentally and was enjoying it a little too much. Actually, enjoying it at all was not a good thing. My mother's upbringing encroached upon my childhood in many ways, and anything having to do with touching myself inappropriately would be sharply reprimanded. Of course, I never did this in front of her (or anyone else), but like any conservative and critical mother, she didn't want me to be doing anything that I "*had no business doing,*" as she was so fond of saying. When I discovered later on that I no longer needed the clothesline to arouse my pleasure center (good old-fashioned masturbation had entered the picture), I always felt a bit paranoid that my bedroom wasn't as private or soundproof as I would have hoped. I believe my mother had the ability to float weightlessly down the hallway as she silently approached my bedroom door. On a few occasions, the door would suddenly burst open as my mother uttered in a seemingly nonchalant voice, "*What are you doing?*" Other times, she would walk in to tell me something of no importance just as an excuse to check in on me. I don't believe she ever suspected that I was doing drugs, drinking, or even looking at porno mags, but if I was jerking off, then I was breaking a major taboo. That kind of pleasure with one's self would not be tolerated. Most of the time, I was discreet enough (and quiet enough) to do my business unnoticed and unheard, but it was those few instances when Mom was in the wrong place at the wrong time, that I had to utilize the bed sheets to quickly cover myself up or yank my trousers up to a graceful position. Interestingly, I don't remember ever having the stereotypical 'wet dreams' that young boys usually have. Maybe, because I had discovered other ways of pleasuring myself during my waking hours, I didn't need to do it in my sleep.

I won't attempt to psychoanalyze my mother in these pages, but suffice it to say that I was constantly at war with her over many things, but most often my appearance, lack of interest in sports, and ungodly acne when I was in high school were the main topics of humiliation. A rather infamous story that I shared with my close friends many years ago illustrates this point perfectly. One summer afternoon when I was in my late teens, I was lazing around on the porch, taking a nap on a glider couch that we had had for many years. Unlike my sisters who felt the need to get a suntan as early as February, I chose not to expose myself to the dangers of skin cancer (although that would change many years later). On this particular day, I was content just to enjoy the weather and have a peaceful siesta while the birds chirped outside. About ten minutes after I dozed off, my mother opened the porch door and stuck her head out to see me sleeping. She stared at me and said, "*Shit...and you want some girl to look at you...*" She wasn't referring to any particular girl, just women in general. She always talked about how I was "*white as a lily*" in the summer while all the other boys in the neighborhood had "*healthy tans*." This type of contempt and criticism no doubt contributed to my eventual lack of both self-esteem and confidence around women, but I'll get to all that in good time.

## **PART TWO**

### **First Lesson In Love**

I entered the first grade in the fall of 1967, but it wasn't until the fourth grade that I had my first crush. It was non-sexual of course, but the feelings of desiring to be with a female definitely permeated my thoughts both in and out of school. Her name was Pamela, and she was my first official rejection. Unlike a lot of the girls I had seen in kindergarten and previous grades, Pamela did not have the typical long haircut or curls so prevalent in the late sixties. Hers was a short, cropped, blonde flourish that draped over her forehead into lovely bangs. Her "independent" look captured me almost immediately upon seeing her for the first time. Now, I don't pretend to be the only kid in elementary school who got his heart broken by a cute girl, but Pamela was not playing hard-to-get or being coy in any way whatsoever. This girl really, *really* didn't like me, for reasons I never truly understood. To make things worse, there was a much cuter boy, who happened to be a good friend of mine (we even shared the same birthday) whom she was crazy about. He brushed it off and never tried to move in on my territory. He was a stand-up guy even at that early age. But I always felt I was competing with him, and so I would try to find ways to impress Pamela to win her heart. On Valentine's Day during that school year, all the students had made greeting card receptacles out of construction paper, scotch tape, ribbon, and any other artistic devices. We were instructed to make our own card, or bring in a package of those multiple-copy greeting card sets, fill them out for each student, and drop one into each student's "mailbox", all of which were hanging on the wall of the classroom. I complied with these instructions, but for Pamela I was going to do something extra. I had gotten hold of a necklace of some sort that had a pretty heart-shaped locket in the middle. I probably bought it at the drug store for a couple of bucks. I remember putting it in a box and attaching it to the card I had so meticulously prepared for her. When I got to school that morning, I stood on a stool and stuffed my offering into her Valentine mailbox while my heart was aflutter with anticipation of how she would respond. At the end of the day, everyone took their li'l mailboxes home to see what magical messages had been written on his or her cards and from whom. If I recall correctly, this was on a Friday. I had the entire weekend to think about how my beloved might acknowledge my heartfelt act.

The following Monday, I saw what I thought was a miracle. Pamela was actually wearing the necklace! Several friends of hers commented to me that she really liked it and how nice they thought it was that I gave it to her. I was elated that my gift was accepted and that she was actually displaying it in public. All of this was great except for one thing – Pamela never said a word to me about it. No ‘thank-you’ or even as much as a smile in my direction. After that day, I never saw the necklace again. Over the remainder of the school year, my fourth-grade passion for her remained intact, but we were never to be boyfriend and girlfriend. The closest we ever came was at an afternoon school basketball game when a couple of cruel (but perhaps well-meaning) kids spotted the two of us and decided to force us together on the bleachers. We were literally mashed up against each other sitting down while the kids yelled, “*Get ‘em together! Pamela and Tim! Whooo!*” Harmless fun, I know. Pamela, of course, was mortified, and the expression on her face revealed her disgust. For me, however, even though I was embarrassed and felt that the kids’ treatment of her and me was unfair, I can unmistakably remember the feelings of closeness and contentment I felt as my right shoulder pressed up against her. It was the first true intimate touching of a female that I can remember outside of hugging members of my immediate family. This was different but not in a sexual way. There was no erection or carnal thoughts, just a feeling of *connection*. Even at that young age I realized that having a crush on a girl was more than just desiring her from afar. But for the rest of the school year the two of us would never again have any physical contact and barely any conversation. On the last day of school, I was just as excited as all the other kids of the approaching summer and its good times. But I do remember the feeling of loss knowing that I would not see Pamela again until the following fall – an eternity to a nine-year-old – and the possibility that she would not even be in my fifth grade classroom. I never did see her over that summer, and when autumn came, she was, in fact, in another class. Once school started up again, I do recall seeing her playing kickball across the huge field amongst the dozens of other children where we had recess, and wondering if she remembered who I was. And I still harbored a bit of hope that maybe her feelings had changed. When I caught her glancing across the field back at me a couple of times, my heart pounded a little faster, and there was a little bit of an extra spring in my step just at the thought of her maybe wanting me, too. But as the school year went on, I saw less and less of her, and like most young kids who have so many things that need paying attention, I eventually stopped thinking about her altogether. Once in a while, a thought would flicker in my head about the year before, but then I’d move on to something else.

Pamela wound up moving to another school district before we even got to junior high. I never saw her again after that, but many years later when I was in my twenties, my mother found a photograph of her in the local newspaper and showed it to me. She still had that cute, cherubic face I remembered from so many years ago. The photo was next to her wedding announcement.

## PART THREE

### A Cross-Eyed Lion

Fifth grade didn't hold as much suspense in the romantic department as the previous year. In May of 1972, at age eleven, I had auditioned and gotten the lead in my very first play and a musical nonetheless. It was a very popular play that had run off-Broadway for several seasons and was being put on by a children's community theater in my town. Any thoughts of making a girl fall in love with me gave way to learning lines and songs for this play which was a full-blown production complete with a set that was an exact replica of the original off-Broadway show. In the weeks that led up to the play's opening night, I and the cast did a lot of publicity including an interview with me in the local paper as well as appearing on several local morning TV shows. I was minor celebrity in town (very minor), but this was my first taste of show biz. The play went on and was a local success. A few of my classmates dragged themselves to the show, and it was a real kick to be able to perform in front of them as well as total strangers. I would continue to pursue a life on the stage for the next forty years and counting.

There was a little girl with long, dark brown hair who sat behind me in class that I knew from my church that I - along with other boys - had a crush on. I never really entertained the idea of trying to become her boyfriend, but as the school year entered its final months, I made a few fruitless attempts to flirt with and charm her. I figured, "Hey I was in a play that got lots of publicity, and I was on television to boot!" This young lady was already savvy enough at her age to recognize desperation when she saw it, and thus rolled her eyes at my feeble efforts at seduction. She was obviously not impressed with my thespian skills and walked away from me on the last day of school like I was invisible. The year ended without further incident, and I never really gave her another thought once summer began. I was too caught up in doing summer stock productions at other theaters, and that's where my attentions lain.

I managed to get through the sixth grade without any fixations on specific girls. I was still caught up in 'actor' mode and was also passing my free time with my other passion - music, rock & roll. I was barely old enough to appreciate The Beatles when they arrived on American soil in 1964, but I do remember playing their records and being fascinated and thrilled by what I heard. They were as big an influence on me as they were on most other young people at that magical time. I had also been a drummer as a kid, starting with toy kits and eventually moving up to professional sets. As I got older, I began to take my art more seriously and wound up playing in many different bands. As I'll explain later, trying to become a rock & roll star did not lead to a flood of women at my doorstep.

My next year in junior high was revelatory to me in many ways. I began seeing other students my age do more than simply talk about being someone's boyfriend or girlfriend. I actually saw boys and girls together, holding hands, wrapping their arms around each other at school dances (known as soc-hops in the day - you would remove your shoes upon entering the gymnasium and then dance in your socks), and even kissing. It was my first awakening to what human beings did when they liked each other more than as friends. And so I inevitably began to set my sights on a young woman who would envelop my senses and prompt me to take the next logical step in the world of boy meets girl.

Melinda was a girl I had known since the second grade, but when I reached the seventh grade at age 12, I started to see her through different eyes. With her brown, wavy hair and sweet gaze, she gradually got her hooks

in me as the school year progressed. I remember how her nose would flare up a bit whenever she laughed, and this made her even more attractive to me. Like most girls approaching puberty, she had started to become a young woman, and I began to notice her development. But again, this was not particularly a sexual attraction on my part. It was still about being attracted to a pretty girl for the chance to be close to her and have a female connection, and the pride that came with having a girl “go” with me. In junior high, there was a tradition of boys asking girls to “go” with them – be their significant other – probably a variation on the phrase “go steady” from ten years earlier. It also precipitated the act of going out on a date, since no one our age could drive a car. Before I asked Melinda to go with me, I would attempt to go a more traditional route.

There was a movie theater not far from where I lived; centered in the middle of a strip mall which included everything you could need in 1973: a drug store, ice cream shop, book store, and even a Pier One Imports emporium. On Saturday afternoons, this theater would run older movies (*really* old – some from 15 years prior) for children. The admission was usually 75 cents, and I saw such films as *The Time Machine* and probably the occasional Disney flick. One Friday night, I saw a movie trailer on television for a curiosity called *Clarence, the Cross-Eyed Lion* that was going to be showing at this theater over the weekend. A 1965, G-rated film that was the pilot for the CBS-TV series *Daktari*, it was the story of an actual cross-eyed lion that was discovered in Africa. (Any more details of the plot of this masterpiece can be found at [IMDb.com](http://IMDb.com)). I didn’t really care what this movie was about. It looked safe enough to invite a young lady to see with me, not to mention there was a monkey that appeared to laugh like a human in the ad, no doubt courtesy of a voiceover artist. How could I resist? It wasn’t Kubrick, but I just wanted to spend some time with Melinda outside of school. Saturday morning came, and I decided that I was going to take a chance and call her. My heart pounded as I dialed her number from my parents’ bedroom on their rotary phone. (I always used their phone to make private calls, with the door locked and shut, because it was in the back of the house, away from any potential family eavesdroppers). Her phone rang a couple of times, and then her mother answered.

*“Hello?”*

*“Is Melinda there?”*

*“Who’s calling?”*

*“This is Tim from school.”*

*“What do you want with her?”*

*“Well, there’s this movie that’s playing up at the Mall Cinema-“*

*“Yeah, the one about the cross-eyed lion”,* she interrupted. Not sure how she knew so fast.

*“I wanted to see if Melinda would like to go see it with me.”*

*“Hang on. I’ll go ask her.”*

I then heard her put the phone down and walk a few steps away. I was expecting Melinda to be the next voice on the line so I could ask her myself. No such luck. A few seconds later, I heard what sounded like a screen door open and close.

*“She doesn’t want to go”,* her mother told me politely but emphatically.

*“Okay, thank you”,* I replied, as if there was anything else to say.

I hung up the phone, disappointed. And that was the end of that.

I’ll never know if Melinda’s mother ever relayed my invitation to go see the lion flick, so I decided I would speak only to her the next time. Since “going” with someone seemed to be the order of the day, I figured I may as well just go for the gold. I liked this girl, so I was going to ask her to “go” with me. One evening, later in the school year, I mustered up the courage to take this giant leap. I once again barricaded myself in my parents’ bedroom to use the magic phone to make my all-important call. This time, Melinda answered the phone. She was pleasant enough upon hearing my voice, and we amicably chatted about typical school-related crises. After a few minutes of our fascinating discourse, I dove right in.

*“Well, hey, I wanted to ask you something.”*

*“Okay.”*

*“Nothing weird or anything, but I was wondering if you’d like to go with me”* I said, hardly believing the words that just clumsily rolled off my tongue. (My fear made me justify my request with the words ‘nothing weird or anything’).

*“Hmmm”* she responded, as if I had just made her a low offer on a used car she had for sale.

Silence.

*“Let me see...”* she continued.

*“The tough question”* I suggested, or something to that effect. And then, as if a light suddenly went on in her head, she blurted out quite enthusiastically, *“Okay, I guess so. Yeah!”*

Was I imagining this? Did she really say ‘yes’? I started floating and replied, *“All right, I’ll see you tomorrow. Bye!”*

After I hung up, I went into my bedroom and did a few silent shouts of victory while some woman sang a song of joy on the black and white TV that was turned on in the background. I felt that even this woman on TV knew I had just succeeded at finding love, at finding a girlfriend. Melinda had agreed to “go” with me, and as far as I was concerned, the woman on TV was celebrating with me.

This elation was of course, very short-lived. What happened, or rather, didn’t happen, the next day was inevitable (and probably my fault), but it didn’t really matter. When I discovered what Melinda’s real motive was for conceding to be my one and only, my world returned to reality.

A few weeks earlier when I was contemplating asking Melinda to go with me, I made a mistake I would repeat with women throughout my school days and beyond. I felt the need to spread the word about my unending

affections for her to everyone on the playground. Not all at once, mind you, but over a slow, agonizing period of time. One of the individuals I made the mistake of telling was a guy named Ted who was a bully-in-training (he would achieve full bully status a few grades later). He and I got along fine, but he was a jock and womanizer and normally went for the cheerleaders and beauty queens. While Melinda was certainly as desirable as any girl her age, she wisely stayed away from the cliques and jet set crowd. She was that modest, girl next door that every guy secretly wanted. One day at recess, I took Ted into my confidence and almost made him guess which girl was my heart's desire. After staring at me for a few minutes, I finally told him it was Melinda. He nodded and raised his eyebrows in a curious fashion, and that was the end of it. A few days later, someone who was also in the know, came running up to me and announced that Ted and Melinda had just started going together. I couldn't believe it. Did he steal her away from me to be an asshole? Was he secretly in love with her, too? It didn't matter, because he was a star football player, and I was just the class clown. It had not taken Melinda long to agree to be his girlfriend. After I learned of his little act of treachery, I approached him one day on the playground to ask him why he would knowingly go after the one girl I desired when he could have had any other cutie in school.

*"Ted, don't you remember I told you that I like Melinda?"*

"Yeah?" he said smugly.

*"Well, I was going to ask her to go with me."*

*"Well, you can't have her,"* he stated in no uncertain terms, almost daring me to challenge him. I stared back at him for a few seconds, shrugged my shoulders, and walked away. I wasn't afraid of this prick, but I felt no good could come of trying to reason with him or get into a brawl over it. Yeah, he probably could have kicked my ass, but that never entered my mind at that point. I felt betrayed and hurt that he had "taken" someone from me. This was my first real introduction to what assholes most men can be, especially when it came to women and other men.

Ted and Melinda's affair lasted maybe two weeks before he dumped her. This action devastated her. One of her friends told me the day after it happened, *"Her heart is broken."* I, of course, felt that an odd sense of retribution had occurred, even though Melinda was in no way whatsoever at fault.

So now back to the present where Melinda has agreed to make me the happiest man... er... boy on earth. I arrive at school the next morning in anticipation of seeing my new girlfriend. But for some reason, I was frozen with fear about walking up to her and saying hello. Looking back, I'm sure it was absolute insecurity and doubt that she really did want to be my girlfriend. I mean, how could a girl this pretty want to be with me after she was with Mr. Hot Shot? I found myself avoiding her, taking extra long routes to get to classes so as to not run into her. I made no eye contact with her when I saw her walking toward me. I was terrified that I could never live up to what being a boyfriend required of me. *Tomorrow. I'll talk to her tomorrow,* I told myself every day for two weeks. One afternoon, when everyone was walking to the school buses at the end of the day, I noticed Melinda walking a few feet away from me, alone, peripherally watching me. I was talking to a friend, trying to look cool as if I didn't need to speak to my woman. Huh? What was my problem? I got on the bus like a fool, and another day had ended without me so much as saying 'Hi' to her.

Finally, I could stand this no longer, I called Melinda one evening and humbly apologized for my evasive and mysterious behavior. I told her I was shy and not sure how to proceed with everything. She amazingly accepted

my callow explanation, and we proceeded to have a very normal, carefree conversation about school, other classmates, and even *Star Trek* (or, as she so charmingly mispronounced it, “Star Track”). We ended the conversation with mutual goodbyes, and I promised her I would not ignore her anymore.

The next morning, I kept to my word, and immediately sat down next to her before class started to continue our “relationship”. Things seemed to be moving along; I hung out with her at recess and walked her to the bus every day after school. I remember glowing with pride when I told my friends and even members of my family that Melinda and I were going together. I felt like I had finally ‘arrived’. As Valentine’s Day approached, I knew I had to do something special for Melinda. Unlike my non-relationship with Pamela, I felt that buying her a special gift was not only warranted but expected. One night, my father drove me to a drug store that was in that same little strip mall where Clarence, of cross-eyed lion fame, had failed to get past Melinda’s mother. It was about a week before February 14. This particular drug store was the go-to spot for all things relating to candy, cards, bubble gum, and other assorted knick-knacks. I started combing the aisles searching for the perfect Valentine’s Day sentiment, one that would let Melinda know how special she was to me. A card, perhaps? Nah, too cliché. A box of candy? Maybe, but that’s what she would probably expect. After considering several options, I happened upon a rather bulky-looking item that stuck out amongst the special cards, ones that were oversized or odd-shaped. I picked up this behemoth of a card, which had a huge lump in the middle, to inspect its contents. The following words were written on the cover:

*“Why do I love you, Sweetheart?  
Somehow I cannot say...”*

This poem went on for several more verses that I’ve long since forgotten, but I do remember the final couple of lines:

*“It doesn’t really matter why I love you,  
It only matters that I do.”*

Not exactly Walt Whitman, but it wasn’t the poem that stood out for me anyway. When I opened the card, I discovered an actual music box that was attached to the inside. As the card opened, an instrumental version of “Love Is A Many-Splendored Thing” automatically began to play in a slow, somnolent treacle that would have made the writers of a Harlequin Romance novel gag. But I knew I just had to buy this thing to let Melinda know how I felt. I flipped the card over to see the price. Five dollars! Remember, this was when an average greeting card cost about fifty cents. I may as well have tried to purchase a bicycle. But, price be damned, I was determined to walk out of that store with it in my possession. So I coughed up what little money I had from my allowance, and took it to the checkout. The woman behind the counter glanced at the card and then gave me a rather bewildered look before ringing it up. She probably wondered if I was much older than I looked, or maybe I was just a young romantic at heart. I managed to get out of the store with most of my dignity, and my father drove me home. I didn’t tell him what was in the bag, and he never asked. My dad was always good like that. He would always be there if I needed to discuss the facts of life, but he never interfered in my lovelorn quests. When we got home, I went straight to my bedroom to look at the card again and to sign my name on it. As I was sitting there on my bed taking pride in my purchase, my mother came in and asked if I had found anything at the drug store to give Melinda. I excitedly told her yes and handed the item to her. She took it from me and stared at the cover. She read the first few lines, opened it up, and the music box began to play. She finished reading the rest of the poem and then calmly closed the card. She was dumbfounded. I don’t think she knew quite what to say. So she said as gently as she could,

*“Tim, I don’t think this is an appropriate card to give to Melinda.”*

I never liked the word ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate.’

*“Why?”* I asked, seriously not understanding what she was talking about.

*“Well, this is more for an adult to give to another adult. Not for someone your age. Melinda is too young for this kind of card”.*

I also hated the word ‘adult’ when I was a kid.

*“What’s wrong with it?”* I insisted. After all, I had toiled in that drug store a long time. My mother then began to read the card out loud to me, emphasizing certain words to drive the point home.

*“Why do I love you – Sweetheart?!”* she quoted. *“I just don’t think this is the right card. Let’s see if we can find another card here at home that might be better”.*

We did eventually dig up a less quixotic offering, a humdrum card that probably said something to the effect of “Happy Valentine’s Day”. *That’ll* charm her! While I was mulling these events over, my sisters had apparently gotten curious about the music box they had heard coming from my room. My mother must have taken it into their bedroom and shown it to them, because the next thing I remember was hearing one of my sisters reading the card out loud, laughing while she read it, and like my mother, emphasizing certain words in mockery. My other sister laughed along with her while the music box was trilling underneath their glee. I was the Big Fool that night, not because I wanted to give a girl a Valentine gift, but because of my unrealistic romantic expectations. My mother was right, of course. Had I given that monstrosity to Melinda, the entire school would have probably been reciting parts of the poem back to me for a week and singing “Love Is A Many-Splendored Thing” at me in class. A phone call from her parents or the police would have probably been next on the list. But I was determined to add something else to the second, more *appropriate* card, so I got a box of candy the next day, and scotch-taped the new card on top of it.

I decided not to give my card/candy combo to Melinda in school, but rather mail it to her. It’s always fun to get something special in the mail, so I thought it might add to the allure of the gift if it was waiting for her when she got home from school. The postal service did not let me down, as the next day when I saw Melinda she looked up at me from her desk and said *“Thanks!”*

*“For what?”* I naively asked.

*“For the candy!”* If she had added the word ‘dummy’ to the end of her sentence, I wouldn’t have blamed her. I wish I could tell you she ran into my arms and hugged and kissed me with all her might. But she never got up out of the chair. A friend of hers who wasn’t particularly fond of me for whatever reason was sitting next to her, and she looked at me with a certain sadness that hinted at what was to come.

One afternoon a couple of weeks later at the end of a school day, after the final bell rang, I opened my locker in the hallway, surrounded by a swarm of other kids running around to get out and get home. In addition to my books and other items that lined my locker floor, there was a note that had been folded and deposited through

the locker door's slats. I knew what it was before I even opened it. But I opened it anyway, and in very feminine handwritten pencil were the following words, as best I can remember:

*Dear Tim,*

*I'm sorry, but I don't think we should go together anymore. I would rather just be friends.*

*Your friend,*

*Melinda*

I was crushed, of course, but not really surprised. I tried to think of the reasons why she broke up with me, and I'm sure it had something to do with my two-week avoidance of her in the beginning. But I also suppose I just wasn't stimulating enough for her. But years later, I figured the whole thing out.

Her courtship with me had been nothing more than a ruse to win back the heart of Ted who had dumped her weeks before. Her hesitation on the phone the night I asked her to go with me quickly changed to an epiphany because she realized that going with me would be her ticket back to Mr. Sensitive. If Ted saw Melinda and me together, he might come crawling back. This never happened, of course, but at the time, all I knew is that I had been dumped by way of a message written on notebook paper.

When I got home that afternoon, I read the note one more time and then balled it up and flushed it down the toilet. I watched the crumpled paper swirl around the bowl as tears streamed down my face. I have a vague memory of calling her up later that night to plead my case and asking her to reconsider, but I don't honestly remember if this happened. What *did* happen a few months later is unmistakable.

The final soc-hop of the year, which took place in the school gymnasium as all of them did, occurred in the spring of 1974. This was the Big One - the last chance to slow dance with pretty girls who wouldn't normally give you the time of day. Oddly enough, girls would dance with guys at these events that they wouldn't even speak to in school. I think this was because we were actually taught by the faculty to be courteous at these dances and not hurt anyone's feelings. I can remember dancing with girls who probably didn't even know my name. On this particular evening, Melinda attended the soc-hop with some of her girlfriends. She and I had managed to get past the awkwardness of our break-up and move on with our lives, so when I ran into her, we were cordial. At some point that night, I asked her to dance with me. She accepted, and I took her in my arms and held her tightly as a slow romantic song began to blast from the record player's one speaker over in the corner. It felt so good holding her, smelling her perfumed hair, and caressing her pretty white cotton blouse/shirt that illuminated her sweet face in a way I hadn't seen in a long time. She seemed to hold me just as lovingly, but that was only wishful thinking on my part. She was simply dancing a slow dance with a friend.

*"I'm really having a good time dancing with you. How are you doing?"* I stammered.

*"Okay"* she quietly replied.

*"I was thinking how much I'd still love to go with you again"* I confessed, surprised at my own words.

She said nothing and continued to sway to the music. I made another attempt to reach her.

*“Do you think we could try again?”* I asked in an almost beseeching tone. There was virtually no space between the end of my question and the beginning of her response.

*“No...”* she said with an air of exhaustion. But she said it so gently and mellifluously it only endeared her even more to me. When the song ended, so did Melinda and me for the last time. I thanked her for the dance, and she walked away into the sea of kids. My heart still ached for this lovely girl, but it was time to let go. I would see her again the following year in the eighth grade; in fact, she and I would be members of the drama department. We were in several small productions together along with other students, and she and I got along rather well. She was also in other classes with me, and it was business as usual. She was, however, turning into a woman and filling out in all the right places, and I was beginning to look at her (and other women) in a more sexual light. But I had abandoned the idea of romance with Melinda during the summer of '74, and it never came up again. I got through the eighth grade without any romantic entanglements. My attention was once again focused on music, and I spent the majority of my free time playing the drums and rehearsing music with a couple of buddies who went to another school. We even played at my school's final soc-hop in the spring of 1975, in between the records that were played for dancing. As was the case doing the children's theater play three years earlier, it was a blast performing in front of my peers. We played mostly material we'd written ourselves mixed in with a few cover songs. I'm not sure if Melinda was in the crowd that night, watching me bang the drums. But winning her back was no longer a priority.

## **Part Four**

### **First Kiss**

The summer of 1975 was my favorite three months in between school years growing up. It's also my favorite summer, period. I was 14 and making that awkward transition between being a kid and becoming a young adult. I could write a whole other book about that special time - the songs on my local Top 40 AM radio station (where I would occasionally hang out at night with the DJ), the friends with whom I planned world domination (well, city domination at least), a ritual of making prank phone calls to unsuspecting citizens as well as businesses (this was, of course, before Caller ID) and recording them on cassette, and a 2-week vacation that my family took that August. But rather than venture into every aspect of that period, I'll continue to look back on my sexual exploration, which no doubt began with this summer and an older girl who lived across the street.

Valerie was a tall, tomboyish girl who was a year older than me. She and her family had moved into the modest, wood and brick, 3-bedroom home on the opposite side of the neighborhood cul-de-sac a couple of years before my family took up residence there. She and I had always been friends as kids along with several other youngsters in the neighborhood. We certainly had our share of arguments, but it never got ugly. I remember getting a mini-bike for Christmas one year, and Valerie was always trying to make deals with me for the chance to let her ride. These “deals” were usually nothing more than innocuous favors such as buying me a candy bar from the store or helping me out with a magic trick I was trying to learn (I was an amateur magician that summer, performing small shows for children's birthday parties. Doug Henning had nothing to worry about). I usually relented and let her ride the motorized bike, but all the other kids naturally wanted their turn, too. I tried

to be fair, as some of the older kids were just too big to sit on this small scooter. But I managed to avoid alienating anyone while also trying to enjoy riding it myself. Valerie and I also played kickball in our front yards, and she was a pretty good baseball player, too. I felt a little threatened by her masculinity at times. Unlike all girls I had known before her, she had a slightly huskier build, and I was always asking her to flex her biceps for me. She wasn't particularly overly muscular, but her athletic prowess turned me on in ways I had never felt with previous infatuations. My increasing appreciation for her female physique led me to dream up a scheme that would hopefully result in my experiencing my first real romantic kiss.

I would have never had the balls to approach Valerie and ask her to make out with me. My track record with girls up to that point was zero, so I had to concoct another way to achieve my wanton goal. A male buddy of mine, with whom I shared a mutual interest in films, science fiction, and of course girls, had discussed the possibility of writing and shooting a short movie. It would be a western comedy, no doubt influenced by Mel Brooks' film *Blazing Saddles* which was a hit in theaters a year earlier. We had outlined some semblance of a plot and even decided which friends of ours would play each role. This potential Oscar winner would never go before the camera, but it did give me the idea to create a different kind of cinematic production. In order to make out with Valerie, I would have to write it. I came up with a premise that involved me and two other buddies encountering Valerie in a room and her having to kiss one of us for a few minutes, and then switching to another guy. As much as this sounded like it was one step away from porn, it was actually no more scandalous than a game of Spin the Bottle. No clothing was ever to be removed, and the eventual outcome of the story would be the sudden disappearance into thin air of two of the guys courtesy of a trick I had learned using my father's 8mm silent film camera. We never got around to actually putting this novelty on celluloid, but we definitely rehearsed it. Since I had written it, I was going to direct the action. I had one of the guys engage in silent conversation with Valerie while sitting on a bed, and then the two of them proceeded to make out. After a couple of minutes, Valerie motioned for me to come over and take his place. I walked over, sat down next to her, and she grabbed me and threw me back on the bed. When her lips made contact with mine, I experienced a new sensation of epic proportions. The softness and light sucking of her lips against mine exceeded my expectations of what it would be like to kiss a woman in a romantic way. Both of us were inexperienced, of course; there was no groping or writhing in ecstasy on the bed, and we never even moved our heads. It was awkward, but I got a very good idea of how wonderful and sensual this kind of behavior could be. When we finished our business, I continued to direct the action which involved my other friend making out with her (although when I went in for a "close-up", she wasn't actually kissing him for some reason), and then the magical ending where she snaps her fingers, and us three Casanovas disappear. I later heard from one of the guys that he thought, of all the weird ideas I'd ever come up with, this was by far the best one. In fact, they were somewhat in awe that I, the neighborhood goofball, would create something so adult and risqué. Naturally, this brief exercise in teenage erotica also never went before the 8mm, but it did start a chain of events that would be my first real introduction to the world of sex albeit in a very limited capacity.

I had a friend named Barney who lived down the street from me and was a year older. He wasn't one of the guys who were part of the little film I wrote, but he would soon surpass those actions. In the summers of '75 and '76, Barney and I use to camp out in either his or my backyard a few times a month in a tent he owned. We would stock up on snacks and magazines, and I would bring my small cassette recorder into the tent to document whatever hell we planned to raise on those nights in the wilderness. This tent would eventually be the setting for more encounters with Valerie, both for Barney and me. One afternoon, Valerie had invited the two of us over to her house to hang out, and we started talking about "what adults do". We must have used every word in the dictionary except 'sex' to talk about our feelings and the mysteries of male/female relations. I remember standing on her front porch as she suggested that Barney and I take turns kissing her. So he and Valerie sat

down to give it a try. I thought it was going to be a quick peck and then switch partners. But as Barney began locking lips with her, it turned into a full-blown make-out session. He was caressing her and getting pretty heavy with the petting as I watched in amazement. I said, *“Uh, guys, don’t you think that’s enough?”* after a minute of standing there. They ignored me and continued. Then things got even heavier. I saw Barney move his right hand down between Valerie’s legs and start fondling her groin. Like a kid seeing an amazing magic trick for the first time, my jaw literally dropped open at Barney’s boldness. He had taken things to the next level.

Then it was my turn. Of course, I had already experienced Valerie’s charms during that brief rehearsal some weeks earlier, but when she took me in her arms that afternoon and began to kiss me again, the experience was ever better. Unlike the previous effort, this time I was more relaxed and felt more sexually aroused. The first time we had only kissed for the purposes of my little film, and it had been staged. This time, I felt more free and adventurous even with Barney looking on. As we made out, I began to explore Valerie’s curves, running my right hand underneath her T-shirt to feel her bare, soft midriff. This was the first time I had ever touched a woman’s skin in this manner, and it felt like silk. I could definitely get used to this! After a few minutes, I stopped to let Barney get back in on the action. This back and forth exchange lasted maybe 20 minutes, and then we all decided it was time to say goodnight. All three of us clearly enjoyed ourselves without feeling awkward about it. As far as we were concerned, we were just having fun. As Barney and I walked away from Valerie’s stoop, we didn’t dwell on it; no high fives or bragging, but we did ask each other a lot of questions about our feelings. *“I can’t believe you touched her down there!”* I exclaimed. *“I thought you were just going to kiss her!”* Barney wanted to know, *“When she kissed you, was there a sucking sound? And did you feel her tongue?”* For two 14-year-old boys moving toward adulthood, we both knew that we wanted to do this again.

For the rest of that summer, Barney and I would get together with Valerie, both together and separately. One evening when we had pitched Barney’s tent in my front yard to camp out, Valerie wandered over to hang out with us. She was wearing one of her signature T-shirts, but this time she had upped the ante. She was also wearing a pair of short, cut-off jeans. Her silky thighs made my heart skip a beat as she walked toward us, and I anticipated the possibility of taking my previous encounter with her even further. As dusk settled on the neighborhood, Barney and Valerie crawled into the tent to enjoy themselves. I patiently waited outside and tried to pass the time without getting too anxious. After about ten minutes I asked, *“Are you guys just about finished?”* Barney responded, *“Uh, well, give us just a few more minutes.”* I continued to wait. Finally, Barney came out of the tent, and I hastily rushed in. Valerie and I lied down on the multiple blankets that covered the grass, and I crawled on top of her. This was also new – we were in a horizontal position as we began. I spent the next few minutes kissing her, fondling her body, and learning more about what turned me on. Again, no clothing was removed (I can’t speak for Barney here), and I did not ejaculate. In fact, she never touched my penis. That move would come soon enough, though.

Sometime later that summer, I was sitting in Valerie’s house in her living room. Her parents and little brother were out, so we decided to take advantage of our privacy. We began our ritual as usual, but this time she added something new to the mix. She unzipped my fly and put her hand inside my underwear. I could feel her probing around, looking for my erection. I remember being partially aroused, but I was still concentrating on kissing and caressing her. Perhaps I wasn’t quite ready to be that vulnerable, as pleasurable as it would probably have been. So Valerie gently fondled me without incident. At that point, she asked me if I’d like to touch her in the same place. So she unzipped her pants, and I began to slide my hand down to her crotch. All of this was simply to learn about a woman’s body; I knew nothing about clits, g-spots, orgasms, or anything else of that nature. She never suggested jerking me off or giving me a blowjob. And the thought of intercourse never even entered our minds.

Valerie and I would continue our get-togethers for a few months, but then I discovered that I was not the only guy in the neighborhood who was paying her visits. A year or so after Barney and I had so innocently kissed her on her doorstep, word got out that she was going further – much further – with some older guys. She supposedly had a voracious sexual appetite and had sowed her wild oats by the time she was 18. This was nothing really unusual of course; she may have done the dirty deed before she was of legal age, but nowadays that's still very common for both boys and girls. As she moved up to more adult behavior, I somehow got left behind. I would see her occasionally around the neighborhood, but we ceased having any physical contact by the middle of the summer of '76.

I had entered my freshman year of high school in the fall of 1975 and managed to get through all nine months without any crushes or dating dilemmas. Since 9<sup>th</sup> grade began at a different school than my previous eight years, I had to adjust to a new location, new teachers, and a new set of rules. So scoping out girls and thinking about losing my virginity was not in the forefront of my mind. I just wanted to get good grades, keep playing music, hang with friends (more prank phone calls!), and wait for the Christmas holidays. It was a pretty easy year emotionally and mentally. My grades were above average, I was meeting new people in class, and the teachers seemed to appreciate my odd sense of humor – well, most of them anyway.

But all my days of innocence came to a thudding halt in August of 1976. After Valerie faded out of my life earlier that summer, the next young woman to enter my world changed everything. It was the beginning of a dark, downward spiral that would last throughout my entire sophomore year and make me realize just how horrible and painful desire can be.

# CHAPTER TWO

## PART ONE

### When Clearasil Is Not Enough

*“And those of us with ravaged faces, lacking in the social graces...”*

- “At Seventeen” by Janis Ian

I was never a part of the jock crowd or straight-A student bunch. The closest I ever came to being on an athletic team in school was a lame attempt to play junior high basketball in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (at which I failed miserably). I also joined the tennis team when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Despite our best efforts, we never won a single tournament. Not having tennis courts on school grounds didn't help either. We were constantly looking for public courts to snag after school where we could practice, and on some occasions we had to cancel altogether if we couldn't find any. This just made me realize even more that a sports career was not in my future. I really did enjoy playing tennis and still do. But I think my motives for getting involved with a group of guys who were jocks was to try to seem manlier to girls, but there was only one girl who mattered to me.

One of my two sisters, who was a year younger than me, was the perfect student – perfect grades, perfect complexion, lots of friends, and beloved by the teachers. She was a cheerleader, member of the student council and Beta Club (a type of honor society for students who maintained a 'B' or above grade average), and on the homecoming court. Because she was involved in so many school activities, most of her girlfriends were also a part of these groups. At least once a week, she would invite as many as five friends over after school to discuss upcoming events, dances, cheerleader squad formations, boys, and other topics so relevant to their world. One girl in particular who was always showing up at our door was a feisty female named Carrie. A spunky, 14-year-old blond cupcake with playful eyes, I had seen Carrie around school for probably a couple of years in earlier grades but never paid her much attention. Now that she was also a part of the same academic clubs as my sister, I was seeing more of her. She and I got along as well as anyone in school. She was friendly, outgoing, and always seemed interested in my extracurricular activities whenever I ran into her. When she started coming over to the house more often in the summer of 1976, our conversations picked up and I found myself increasingly smitten with her. I distinctly remember sitting in my parents' den one Friday night that July watching TV. My sister was having a slumber party out in our playroom, which had been converted from a two-car garage a couple of years earlier. Since the bathroom was at the other end of our house, the young ladies that had been invited to sleep over that night would have to cross through the den to use it. When they passed through the room, some would say 'hey' to me while others would just shuffle through without saying anything. At one point Carrie walked past me to use the facilities. When she walked back through the den to get to the playroom, I was focused on the TV, probably watching Johnny Carson, and not particularly noticing her. I heard her say my name in a somewhat coy tone. I looked up and saw her standing there in her light blue nightgown with one side of it pulled up to her knee exposing her bare calf. As soon as I looked, she immediately dropped the gown back to the floor, just enough to entice me, and gave me a stare that made me forget about Johnny Carson. I acted unimpressed and gave her a slight grin. She didn't say another word and then disappeared into the playroom, shutting the door behind her.

My senses were rattled and excited. Is it possible that Carrie was flirting with me? And was she doing it because she actually liked me? Or was she just being a little tease as she was so wont to do with all the boys? I wasn't really concerned about it. I had just been "flashed" by a pretty cheerleader in my own home on a Friday night, and I wanted to believe it meant something more. For the next several days, I thought about that magic moment. I started to wonder if it was an isolated incident or the beginning of something else. One day, I was on the phone with my friend Steve who had played in my band at the 1975 spring soc-hop. I told him what happened with Carrie, and he said, "*I think she might like you, Tim.*" He was only making a subtle suggestion, of course. He had no idea what Carrie's motive was for showing me some skin. I continued to think about it over the next couple of days, and then an idea occurred to me that I thought would get me closer to finding out if I had a shot with her.

My sister's birthday was going to be in about a week, so I was talking to Steve about how I might use that event to further my connection to Carrie. He suggested a surprise party and that I should call Carrie to help me set it up. Between the two of us, we would get in touch with several of my sister's close friends to see if they could attend. We would also have my band play at the party, and then later that night, we would all take different cars and drive out to a part of town where there was a rather dangerous stretch of country road that contained humps, known as *quicks*, over which your car would literally lift a few inches off the ground if you drove over them fast enough. Even if you drove at the posted speed limit, the sudden drop on the other side of the quick would leave you with your stomach in your throat. I loved doing it as a child, and I thought it might be a fun and daring activity to do with a bunch of young, pretty girls in the car. Steve said that when we divided up into groups in order to fill up a couple of cars, we would have to make sure that Carrie and I wound up in the back seat of same one. This would allow the two of us to bounce off one another as we sailed over the quicks while laughing, talking, and (hopefully) getting closer. When I called Carrie to suggest giving my sister a surprise party, she thought it was a great idea. We discussed different ways my sister could be lured out of the house while all her friends gathered and waited for her return. Once we came up with our plan of action, the date and time were set, people were notified, and everything was ready to go.

I don't recall exactly where my sister was taken while Carrie and I set up the playroom for the party, but many of her good friends, both boys and girls, showed up and helped us out. And then we waited. When she walked through the door, we all yelled, "Surprise!" and the party started. Food was laid out, I started putting records on the turntable, and I announced that my band was going to play later that night. But all I could think about was that car ride out in the country, sitting in the back seat with Carrie and hoping for...actually, I guess I didn't know exactly what I was hoping for. Sex? No way. Making out with her? Probably not. Holding her tightly as she feared for her life when the car flew into the air like a jet? Yeah, that would be a splendid goal. So the party went on, and my band set up our equipment and played some jams. We had a guest guitarist that night that all the girls were swooning over. He was older, good-looking, and went to another school. This, of course, made *me* look good. I played drums behind him while my other band mates sang and played their instruments. I felt that I was a part of something special again – performing for my peers, but this time in a more intimate setting. And having all my sister's pretty girlfriends around didn't hurt either. And then there was Carrie, who seemed to be mesmerized by our little rock and roll fantasy. I was on cloud nine.

Once the music stopped, we got ready to head out to the quicks for a thrilling experience. We all went out to the driveway and people started to pile into cars. Steve was doing his best to organize everything to make sure that Carrie and I wound up in the same vehicle. Unfortunately, this was not going to happen. Carrie jumped into a car with several other girls and it filled up fast. I wound up in Steve's car with one or two other kids, but I did

sit in the back seat with a pretty girl just the same. This young lady, Rose, was a striking blond that I had certainly noticed in the past but never entertained the idea of dating. She usually had a boyfriend anyway, and I never saw much of her at school to begin with. She was rather soft-spoken, at least in my presence, and had a very sweet demeanor. We all drove out to the country and proceeded to risk our lives driving too fast over these humps and having a blast doing it. In the back seat of Steve's car, Rose and I were tossed around, back and forth, up and down, and into each other. Every curve Steve's car took slid Rose toward me or me toward her, and we were laughing and screaming along with Steve and the other passenger in the front seat. My left arm was bouncing against Rose's right thigh, and our shoulders were practically glued together with every leap the car took. Even though it wasn't Carrie there beside me, I still enjoyed myself. Rose was a doll, and the feel of her tight body falling on top of me as the car twisted and turned once again made me realize how wonderful a physical connection with a woman could be. But all good things must come to an end, and we eventually drove back to my house once we had conquered the quicks. I remember Rose getting out of the car and sweetly saying 'good night' to me in the same way someone might say 'thanks for a wonderful evening'. She actually made eye contact, and there was a tone in her voice that suggested she might have enjoyed our automobile excursion more than she thought she would. I'm not implying that this young girl wanted me to ask her out, but there was definitely a moment between us. But I'm sure that's all it was. I would eventually see her again in school, but the car ride was long behind her. Besides, my sights were still set on Carrie.

If there was any doubt in my mind how strongly I felt about Carrie, that doubt was erased one afternoon when I was riding with her and my sister in my mother's car. I was in the front passenger seat, and my sister and Carrie were in the back. My mother was dropping Carrie off at her house after she had spent a summer afternoon with my sister at the mall or some other hangout. As the weather was still hot and humid, she was wearing a pair of very short shorts. Once we reached her house, she got out of the car, and I turned to see her feet hit the pavement on her driveway. But what I also saw was a turning point in my perspective of girls. Carrie's muscular thighs shimmered as she touched the ground in a way that revealed to me the wonders of a woman's anatomy. It was that fine line between being a chaste schoolgirl and becoming a sexual being. I'm in no way suggesting that Carrie was sexually active at that age, but she was on her way to becoming a beautiful young woman that guys would inevitably desire. For me, it was like peaking behind the curtain and seeing what goes on in the world of pleasure on a pure adult level. This was different than my innocent philandering with Valerie in a tent; remember she wore shorts, too. No, this was my curiosity and puberty coming into play. My playful crush on Carrie had gone to another place. I knew for the first time what real desire was. My feelings of closeness and bonding had morphed into a sexual urge.

Now we come to the part of the story where the good times turn into the hard realities of life. I was naïve enough to believe that because Carrie and I bonded over planning my sister's surprise birthday party, that we were now joined at the hip, and that us going together (yes, "go" was still the term) was the obvious next step. My friend Steve kept asking me when I was going to call Carrie and ask her. He was rooting for me all the way despite not putting us in the same car together. I told him it would be soon enough. It was almost the end of summer vacation, the days were getting shorter, and my sisters and I were getting new notebooks and other materials for the impending school year. Yet, I still had the notion that this year would be different with Carrie in my life.

One afternoon, I picked up the phone in my parents' bedroom (again) and dialed Carrie's number. She answered, and I tried to compose myself. I thanked her for helping me make the surprise party a success, and we discussed how well we pulled it off. She had no idea what my intentions were, so she was just as gregarious with me on the phone that day as she had been in the past.

And then came The Question.

*“Well, listen. I wanted to ask you something. You’ve been such a good friend, helping me out with the party, and I really think we get along great. I was wondering if you would be interested in going with me, Carrie.”* I’m paraphrasing here, but believe me, the anxiety was real.

*“Tim, that is so nice of you to ask me, and I’m really flattered. But I’m going to be starting 9<sup>th</sup> grade over at the new school this year, and it’s going to be hard as crap to have to deal with all the changes and getting used to the new teachers and everything else. Plus, you know I’ve been seeing Tom for a while, and we’re not sure if we’re still together or breaking up. So it’s just not a good time.”*

*“I understand”* I replied, trying to convince myself that her answer was acceptable and pain-free. I should mention that Tom was indeed her main squeeze, and they had been together for a couple of years off and on. The night of my sister’s party he was nowhere in sight, so I assumed he was out of the picture altogether. I had also heard through the grapevine that their relationship had ended. I was wrong.

*“Well, if you change your mind, let me know.”* This would not be the first time I would ask a woman to keep me posted in the event that her feelings changed, but I did learn later in life that it never, ever happens.

We said polite good-byes and hung up. I was disappointed, but something deep down inside of me could not quite deal with the reality of it. Instead of mourning the rejection and moving on, I somehow convinced myself that her answer wasn’t final. I started looking ahead into a fantasy future and imagining all these scenarios where my wish to be with her would be fulfilled. I mean, she had pulled up her nightgown and shown me her leg! We had planned a complicated surprise party together! Of *course* she should want to go with me! What did I do wrong? I made it my life’s mission to find out.

When school began that fall, I was once again thrust to an institution that passed judgment every day on its attendees. What you wore, how you looked, how tall or short you were, and a myriad of other labels defined your value as a person at my high school. I felt more pressure to fit in that year more than any other as a result of my growing obsession for Carrie and the normal desire to be accepted as just a nice, normal guy. I would see Carrie around the halls, the commons area, the cafeteria, and my mind would take off into the world of what my next move would be. If I could only talk to her and make her see how much I cared for her, then maybe things could change. Plus, I was falling in love with her, which just added to the misery. We still had a civilized relationship; she was unaware at that point how distressed I was becoming over her. I tried my best to keep my feelings hid and get on with things. But every time I saw her, the feelings would overtake me again. In addition to the romantic fantasy, I was also developing sexual feelings that I had never really experienced in the past. This, of course, was perfectly normal for a 15-year-old boy, but it overwhelmed me to the point of delirium. I began talking to everyone that was kind enough to lend an ear – my band mates, friends at school, and sometimes even strangers. I was determined to learn the magic formula for winning the girl of my dreams. As expected, I got all sorts of advice - Forget about her, ask someone else out, back off and make her want me, send her flowers - you name it. But the consensus amongst most of my advisors was, *she’s not interested, so move on*. I politely listened to their words of wisdom, but then I would find myself discarding them and starting my debilitating cycle all over again. After a while, my behavior began to become obvious to members of my family, to whom I never revealed my secret desire. And of course, it didn’t take long for the gossip to start

flying at school and for my sister to become attuned to what was going on. There are no such things as kept secrets at that age, and word was slowly starting to spread that I had a thing for Carrie.

I can think of no other affliction that can disrupt a teenager's life more than a bad case of acne. Most kids that age get pimples and blackheads to some degree, while others are mercifully immune to it. I had a very mild case a year earlier, but it was nothing to get alarmed about. 10<sup>th</sup> grade was a different story altogether. As autumn turned into winter, and my feelings for Carrie intensified, my face turned into a walking horror movie. My mild acne developed into a case so bad that it even had my dermatologist wincing. Leprosy would have been preferable. I had tried virtually every over-the-counter acne medication that was available, but they did very little good. While both of my sisters got through these years relatively zit-free, my condition literally made me want to put a bag over my head. There wasn't one inch of my face that wasn't splattered with every shade of red, black, or purple. To make things worse, the dermatologist put me on a medication called Retin-A Gel that, as he warned me, would make my face look much worse before it got better. He wasn't kidding. He explained that this goo brings all the pus and junk to the surface before it eventually clears up. Gee, what a wonderful prospect for the next few months. In addition to this miracle drug, every visit to his office once a month involved me enduring an archaic procedure known as acne surgery. I would lie down on a table while he put a very bright light directly over my face. He would then take a small instrument – a knife or scalpel of some sort – and prick and squeeze each pimple until it either popped or bled. This was a very painful procedure that resulted in a lot of squirming on my part. He explained that it was necessary to avoid infection. After this “surgery” was over, I would go to the sink and put cold water on my face to lessen the redness. Looking in the mirror over the sink as I splashed my face was a humiliating and soul-crushing experience. But, the doctor assured me, if I stuck with the medication, everything would clear up in good time. That day could not come soon enough.

The winter of 1976–77 was one of the coldest I can remember. The frigid, dry wind that cut through me as I stepped outside each morning to go to school only aggravated my facial condition. I actually had an oily complexion – hence the severe acne – but the dry cold that permeated the air that winter caused my skin to flake and just look repulsive. I never realized how repulsive it was until the night of our school's homecoming game and dance. About three weeks earlier, I had called Carrie and asked her if she'd like to go with me to the dance. I justified this action by telling myself that, unlike asking her to go steady with me a few months earlier, this was only a simple one-night event. I thought maybe she had forgotten about our previous phone conversation and would be willing to spend one evening with me. While most kids waited until the last minute to secure a date for the homecoming festivities, I wanted to snag Carrie before anyone else did. And there were at least two other potential suitors that would be vying for her hand. The conversation that day on the phone was not really unlike the one before. She was very congenial and polite when I asked her if she'd like to attend the dance with me, but she said since it was over three weeks away, she hadn't had time to decide if she even wanted to go. Fair enough. But the truth is, Carrie was just not attracted to me in any way, shape, or form. Plus, she was actually waiting for one of the other two acne-free dudes to make the same call. Just before we hung up, I could hear a nervous twitch in her voice. She knew my pursuit of her wasn't over, and it had the potential to become a problem. But, things were still status quo, and no irreparable damage had been done.

I got through the next three weeks without giving any thought whatsoever to asking another girl to the homecoming dance. It was Carrie or bust. Since this was obviously not going to happen, I would have to decide if I was going to go solo. As the date approached, I made up my mind to attend both the game and the dance alone. I suppose my motives for going to the dance were getting out of the house and mingling with other students. The night of the big game, I found myself sitting up in the bleachers, all the way in the back at the top.

It was one of the coldest Octobers I can remember. The cruel wind cut through me, and the dryness of the air made my complexion suffer even more. I was also wearing the most hideous, lime-green suit that you can imagine. My mother had picked out these hip threads for me at least a couple of years before. It was not a comfortable suit. It was tight, scratchy, and difficult to move in. But it was my only suit, and considering this was 1976, it fit right in with the attire of the day. Up in the stands, there were other football fans sitting around me, but I was still by myself. I don't know how I missed her, but sitting about five bleachers in front of me was Carrie. She had come to the game and appeared to be sitting alone, too. When I spotted her, I felt completely naked and vulnerable. I was alone and wearing a clown costume. And my face would have frightened any small children who happened to see me. Carrie was looking around, searching the crowd for other folks she might know. Her head was turning left and right, and she had a radiant glow despite the severity of the weather. I was trying to play it cool – Hey; I was at the game just like any other loyal team supporter. Carrie then turned and looked behind her, and within a couple of seconds, she spotted me. She gave me a big smile and waved as if she was happy to see me (remember – we were still reasonably friendly with each other). I forced a smile as best I could and nodded; I so wanted her beside me that night. But if I thought my pain had reached its apex believing it couldn't get any worse, I was in for an immediate awakening. After Carrie and I exchanged our brief glances on the bleachers, she turned back around. But less than a second later, she quickly spun her head back around to look at me again. Instead of having that sunshine smile that had perked me up the moment before, her face now had a look of absolute horror and disbelief. She had seen my acne and how bad it had become, and turned back to get a second look if only for an instant. She wasn't being rude or making fun of me. She simply had a natural reaction to catching a glimpse of something that stunned her and then turning back around to respond. After all these years, I'm convinced that's what happened. There's no other logical explanation. This entire action only took a couple of seconds, but it seared itself into my brain and left a scar that probably hasn't completely healed. Even though I'm long, long over this girl, that brief instance took me to new depths of despair that night. The football game had barely started, and I already wanted to jump off the back of the bleachers to my death. Carrie eventually disappeared into the crowd, and I didn't see her again that night.

After the game ended, I prepared myself for the homecoming dance, which I had also decided to attend, against my better judgment. *Maybe I can talk to somebody at the dance about my dilemma with Carrie,* I thought. *Maybe someone can give me some never-before-heard suggestions on what my next move should be,* I hoped. I was probably the only person at the dance that night who went stag, save for a couple of ne'er-do-well guys who may have shown up only because their mothers had forced them to go. There were no single women there that night. In fact, it was all couples, as one would expect at an event like this. I wandered around the dance, which was held in the commons area of the school adjacent to the cafeteria. There was a live band playing, and some of the kids would go into the cafeteria to take a break from dancing to sit down and converse. I spent most of the night watching all the lovebirds dance, hold each other, and sneak in a kiss (which was strictly forbidden at my high school). All I could think of was how wonderful it would be if I had Carrie there to dance with me, to hold her close and feel her warm body against mine on that frigid October night. I had a knife through my heart that no doctor on earth could remove. I inevitably sought out a sympathetic ear in the cafeteria. I just had to talk to someone or I would burst out of my monkey-vomit suit. I went into the cafeteria and sat down at a table where a girl I knew was sitting with her date. She was a senior and a very smart girl who was on many athletic teams and school committees. I gave her a sorrowful look, and she asked me who I came with to the dance. I told her my story without mentioning Carrie's name, and she listened attentively. Both her and her date advised me to move on and find somebody else. *"There are plenty of other fish in the sea,"* they told me. Of course, everything they said to me went in one ear and out the other. All I wanted to hear was how to win my lady love.

When the dance ended, I walked outside along with all the other kids. Most were still holding hands, and I'm sure for the older kids, the night was just getting started. I watched as people loaded into cars as their parents showed up to retrieve them. The over-16 crowd dispersed to another parking lot where they had driven themselves. I was waiting for my father to come get me, so I stood on the sidewalk in front of the school doors. All the pain and heartache I had been carrying around with me all night finally collapsed under its own weight while I was waiting for my ride. I looked up at the sky as couples filed pass me, and I said a silent prayer to whatever god might be up there. The next thing that happened would be right at home in some German avant garde film. My mouth dropped open, and I let out a silent scream while tears poured down my face. I didn't make a sound, but I thought someone somewhere might hear it anyway. No one seemed to notice my display, but then I saw a man sitting in an old station wagon with the motor running staring at me. He was obviously waiting for his child to come out of the dance, and he happened to see me standing there in all my despair. He looked a little concerned, but he was more fascinated than anything else. Maybe he thought it was some kind of after-dance performance art. A few minutes later, my father finally showed up and took me home. What happened after that is a blur, but I'm sure it was just another typical Friday night in my household. Johnny Carson was waiting for me, and I had the whole weekend to plot my next move toward eternal happiness.

By the way, I found out that Carrie did indeed get asked to the homecoming dance. One of her two potential men had the foresight to invite her *on the day of the dance*. Of course, no respectable girl would be able to find the proper dress to wear to such an important event on such short notice, so she declined his invitation. I still wonder - if she had known that no one else was going to invite her to the dance other than the latecomer - would she have gone with me just to be able to have gone at all? A little voice in my head from thirty-five years ago whispers, "*I doubt it.*"

The holidays came and went without any respite. My sister had a New Year's Eve party to which I was not invited, even though it was in our own house. All her friends, including Carrie, were in attendance. I managed to wrangle my way into the party to try and be a part of something other than my ongoing solitary existence. Also at the party was Carrie's on-again, off-again boyfriend Tom, who I believe was trying to solidify his relationship with her that night. He was this dark-haired mop-top who, despite being even shorter than Carrie, was on all the major sports teams in school and had rugged good looks that I even heard my mother comment on one afternoon. I was certainly no competition for him, and he had already won her anyway. I mingled with my sister's friends that night while always watching Carrie from out of the corner of my eye. And then the big countdown to the New Year finally began. There was no official counting backward from ten, but everyone was aware of the approaching magic hour. Just before midnight, everyone started chasing their significant others outside in the yard. I tried to participate, but I was really just trying to keep up with Carrie and her whereabouts. She was out of my sight at the stroke of twelve, and like a fool, I asked another one of my sister's friends who had become my confidante and advisor if Carrie and Tom had kissed at midnight. She told me that of course they had, and it wasn't on the foot. 1977 had not gotten off to a good start for me.

Rather than resolve to make some changes in my life and look elsewhere for companionship in the New Year, I continued to plan, scheme, and talk everyone's ear off about Carrie. I just couldn't let go. I even went so far as to listen in on my sister's phone calls whenever I suspected Carrie was on the other end of the conversation. I'm certainly not proud of this behavior, but it was my attempt to be in control of the situation. The more knowledge I could gain from being an eavesdropper, the better chances my wants would come to fruition, I stupidly thought. As a result, I managed to hit rock bottom on Valentine's Day that year, and it didn't involve music boxes. I was determined to do something very special for Carrie in order to drive my point home, to somehow make her fall in love with me. My friend Steve once again volunteered to be my romantic consultant and

suggested that I send Carrie some roses. He even told me which florist to use. I was certain this would be the magic spell that would do the trick. I went to his recommended flower shop and ordered six long-stem red roses in a vase to be delivered. I handwrote a card that said something simple yet clear. I arranged to have them delivered on February 14 while we were all in school. She would discover them when she got home that afternoon, and then hopefully everything would change. But I felt that a \$30 floral arrangement (a lot of money for a 16-year-old in 1977) wasn't enough. I also bought her a heart-shaped box of candy from the store and then attached a heart-shaped red sucker to it, which I had purchased at school from some group trying to raise money.

Valentine's Day fell on a Monday that year. Monday evenings were also when a Christian youth group called Young Life would meet for fellowship, singing, and light sermons at a nearby church. Many students from my school were regular attendees. I went to these meetings most Mondays to try and connect with other students and to have my prayers about Carrie answered if that were at all feasible. On this particular Monday, I was responsible for giving some folks a ride home at the conclusion of the meeting. Those people were my sister, Carrie, and the girl who was still my sympathetic Dear Abby. Since Young Life met around 7:30pm, I knew that Carrie had already seen the roses by the time the meeting started that night. So giving her a ride home only raised the stakes for me even more. Up to this point she had said nothing to me about the flowers and had understandably avoided eye contact with me at Young Life. The ride home was like something from a Hitchcock film. The tension in the car was quite palpable, and the conversation between the three girls was very hushed. Carrie's house was the first stop on the ride home. She was in the back seat. I pulled up alongside the curb in front of her home, and she got out. She said good night to her two friends and shut the car door. I waited for her to go inside before pulling away from the curb. But I wasn't about to leave. I drove about 5 mph for a few feet and then stopped the car. My sister cautiously asked, "*Tim, what are you doing*"? I said nothing and turned the car off. I grabbed the heart-shaped confections that I had on the floorboard and got out of the car. I determinedly walked up the front steps to Carrie's house and rang the doorbell. Her sister answered the door and looked at me with a blank stare. "*Is Carrie here?*" I asked. At that moment, Carrie appeared out of the shadows and her sister stepped back. Carrie opened the screen door that separated us and quickly said, "*Thank you for the roses...*" I then handed her more gifts, the candy and sucker, to which she responded, "*Oh you didn't have to do this, Tim.*" I practically bled all over her front porch as I moaned, "*I know, but I wanted to, Carrie.*" Every bit of dignity I may have ever had in my life drained out of me at that moment. She looked so helpless - unable to return my affections, and at the same time, at a complete loss as to how she could convince me that she and I were never going to happen. While I stood there like a starving dog waiting for table scraps, Carrie's father appeared in the background and politely but firmly told her that she would have to come in. She told me she had to go and shut the door. I walked back to the car, hunched over like a wounded soldier. When I opened the car door, my sister and her friend were motionless and probably terrified. I started the vehicle and drove on to the next destination. The two of them eventually broke their silence and quietly began chatting about various things. I dropped passenger #2 off at her house, and then drove me and my sister home. Not another word was spoken for the rest of the ride.

At this point in the continuing saga, my parents had become quite convinced and concerned that I was falling apart and on a very fast downward spiral. My grades were below average (I was even failing one class), my moods were bordering on sociopathic depression, and everyone in our circle of friends knew about my obsession with Carrie. One afternoon, just before school let out, I was called down to the guidance counselor's office. I was instructed not to get on the school bus that afternoon, as my father would be picking me up from school. I immediately thought that someone had died (This is how I learned of my grandfather's death when I was 6). My father showed up and assured me that nothing of the sort had happened. When we got to the car, he

explained that he was taking me to talk to someone about my “problem”. He and my mother were scared that my obsession with Carrie was leading to disastrous results on my part, including the fear that I was considering suicide. I have to admit that ending my life to escape the heartache had crossed my mind, but I can honestly say I would have never gone through with it. But my parents were very smart and informed, and they were taking no chances. As we drove downtown, I told my dad that there was in no way I was going to see a shrink. The stigma associated with such a visit would only add to the humiliation I was already enduring. *“I’m not crazy! I’m not suicidal!”* I insisted. My dad continued to explain to me that he just wanted me to talk to this doctor. When we arrived at the medical building, he parked the car, and I was forcefully pulled from the passenger seat by my insistent father who would not relent until I had gone into this appointment. Once he finally got me inside, I sat in the waiting room feeling like I was about to go on trial. Had it really come to this? A nurse came out and took me into another holding area and handed me four pieces of 8 x 10, plain, white paper. She asked me to draw a picture of a house, a family, and two other items that I’ve thankfully forgotten. Since drawing has never been a skill of mine, I raggedly scribbled some line configurations that approximated what she requested. Finally, Dr. Freud called me into his office. He was a man of about 60, European (I detected some kind of German accent) with long, graying hair. He looked at the pictures I’d drawn, and I explained that I couldn’t draw a straight line, but he didn’t judge my artistic prowess. He then spoke to me about my situation.

*“Tim, I understand there’s a young lady that you are quite fond of.”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Do you love her?”*

*“Yes I do. And I know that some people have suggested that there’s no way I could be in love with her because I’ve never gone out with her, or that I’m too young to have such feelings.”*

He nodded and said,

*“And you figure that if you love her, why the hell can’t she love you, right?”*

Surprisingly, I didn’t feel he was patronizing me, but rather stating what I’d been thinking. But then I quickly came up with a logical answer.

*“Oh, I know why she doesn’t love me. I’m too ugly. She only wants to be with good-looking guys.”* I rationalized.

*“Well, your father is concerned that because this girl isn’t interested in you, that you’re going to do something foolish like go jump off a building.”*

I assured him this wasn’t the case. We talked about some other aspects of my situation, I’m sure, but the main gist was making sure that I wasn’t going to end it all. He then called my father in to join us. He explained that I had promised not to do anything stupid, and that if those thoughts ever did cross my mind, I would willingly come back for a second appointment. My dad seemed genuinely relieved at this arrangement, and so he thanked the good doctor, and we left.

Over the next few months, my obsessive-compulsive behavior over Carrie seemed to calm down as the cold winter turned to spring. There was something about the approaching warm weather that actually thawed out my pain that had been frozen inside me for all those months. And maybe the trip to the psychiatrist had knocked some sense into me. I still wanted Carrie, but my attention was once again turning toward my first passion – the arts. I had been cast in the school’s spring production of a very popular musical, and I gradually came out of my depression and focused on rehearsals and learning my lines. I had also tried feeling something new toward Carrie since my visit to the psychiatrist – anger. Of all the emotions I carried around for her – love, infatuation, desire, heartache, disappointment – I had never considered how angry I must have also felt about the situation. They say there’s a fine line between love and anger, but I had only experienced one side. I mean, how could I possibly get angry with the girl I loved? What had she done that was so wrong? It was all *my* fault that she didn’t love me. I was pissed at myself for failing to win her heart. I wasn’t good enough or so I thought. But the truth is, I was just too immature to have the confidence or experience to deal with rejection on an adult level. I had experienced it in elementary school, but when sexual feelings entered into the picture, the rejection took on a whole new degree of pain.

In retrospect, Carrie didn’t do anything wrong at all. She never went out of her way to hurt or embarrass me. She was just a 15-year-old girl responding to a very unfortunate set of circumstances that were thrust upon her. Any anger I attempted to feel was just another device I tried to use to get over her. So rather than conjure up some false sense of superiority, I just moved on as best I could. Even after all these years, I harbor no ill will toward Carrie. She eventually got married and raised a family, and she’s still friends with my sister. I saw her last year at a family function, and we chatted briefly. Even though there’s still an odd bit of lingering awkwardness between us, she really hasn’t changed all that much. Her bubbly spirit has remained intact, and sometimes I swear she hasn’t aged a day. Of course, I’ll probably always think of her as that cute friend of my sister who helped me plan a surprise party, and as the ravishing beauty who waved at me in the bleachers on a cold October night.

## **PART TWO**

### **The Definition of Insanity**

Before I wrapped up my sophomore year, I had appeared in another play, started practicing guitar for the first time since I was a child, and continued to hang out with my buddies who went to another school. I had also been in the drama class that year and was becoming friends with a girl who was a year older than me. My feelings for Carrie had all but dissipated, and I was turning my attention to a new stimulus. Elaine was a tall, black-haired beauty with gorgeous porcelain skin that would light up a dark room. She, like Carrie, was also a member of many school clubs and organizations, was a cheerleader, and a straight-A student. She sat next to me in drama class and laughed at virtually every bad joke I dared to utter. We had a silly but solid chemistry, always joking around but also discussing serious topics if they ever came up. I was slowly becoming more attracted to her, and I was once again convinced that she felt the same way. On the last day of school, everyone was parading around with their high school yearbooks - *annuals*, as they were known then. They had just been

printed, so the goal was to get all your friends to sign your book on the back pages. Sometimes people would write funny or uplifting messages as a keepsake to be read over the summer as a memory of the previous school year. Since I assumed that Elaine and I were fast on our way to becoming summer lovers, I confidently walked up to her on the final day and handed her my annual. She was standing with friends, but she didn't seem to mind my intrusion. I asked her to sign it, and she gladly complied. What she wrote in my yearbook would be my umbilical cord to another fantasy.

*Dear Tim,*

*It was really fun being in the play with you. You were fantastic! I hope we can get to know each other better next year. Have a terrific summer. May God ever guide and bless you.*

*Love,  
Elaine*

Her handwriting looked like something that would have been written during the Victorian age – cursive, elaborate, and with large flourishes that looked like they had been put to paper with a quill. A classy message from a classy lady. I mistakenly took her lovely sentiment to mean that perhaps she had feelings for me, too, and that we would soon be together running through a field holding hands while symphonic music began to swell.

Thus began another summer of false hope, delusion, and awkward phone calls. There's not much about the next ten months of yearning that were radically different from the previous ones with Carrie. At least my acne had cleared up to an acceptable level, and I had started going to a new dermatologist who, in addition to my current treatments, would give me a monthly injection of antibiotics. Eventually, I stopped going altogether and returned to using over the counter meds. (Oddly enough, as bad as my acne affliction was, I have no visible scars).

I called Elaine one summer afternoon, and we had a great conversation about vacations, getting our driver's licenses, and other pressing topics. After about thirty minutes, I asked her if she wanted to go see a movie. Not surprisingly, she delicately explained to me that she "*just didn't feel like dating right now*", but I was welcome to stay in touch. She unwisely suggested that maybe we could get together another time, but of course she was simply trying to let me down easy. I, however, took her supposed invitation and ran with it. I started scouting out several restaurants in town that had been recommended to me by friends who were apparently in the know about such things. I checked out the menus, the décor, the views, whatever I could learn about each dining establishment. I was determined to show Elaine a good time when the day actually came for us to go out. Of course, this day was never going to come.

A local Top 40 AM radio station that all the kids listened to was a regular hangout of mine. I had gotten to know several of the disc jockeys, and they were happy to invite me into the studio and show me the ropes and the inner workings of the radio station. I would stop by mainly in the evenings and bring a few friends to congregate in the disc jockey booth along with me. The disc jockey was an easygoing fellow who would share stories of working in the trenches at other stations, and we would always discuss the up and coming music trends and artists. That summer of 1977, the station held a contest that would allow several lucky winners to be a "guest jock" one Saturday night for an hour. They would sit in a chair behind the regular DJ and do all the talking in between records into a separate microphone. The winner would also be allowed to pick out the play

list for the hour while the regular DJ ran the control board. The way you won a coveted spot on the air was by simply mailing in your name and phone number on a piece of paper or postcard, which would then be put into a weekly drawing. Since I had that all-important connection with the regular DJ, he drew my name one day during the week, and then called to tell me I was going to be on the air the following Saturday. As excited as I was to know that my voice was going to be heard all over the city as well as outlying areas, I mainly saw this as an opportunity to bring Elaine into the mix. There was a lovely song by England Dan and John Ford Coley that had been a hit the summer before called "I'd Really Love to See You Tonight." The lyrics perfectly described how I felt about Elaine and how much I really did want to see her. This song would be part of my rotation that Saturday night, and I would dedicate it to her on the air. I was allowed two oldies as part of my song selection, and the rest had to be current Top 40 hits. Even a song from one year earlier was considered an oldie.

When that night in June finally came, I had everything ready to go. I picked out my songs from a list the DJ showed me, I took my place behind the microphone, and put on my headphones. The DJ decided the order in which the songs would be played, as he had to work in the commercials, too. About halfway through the broadcast, after introducing myself, exchanging jokes with the DJ on air about my life and ambitions, and spinning other stacks o' wax, it was time to do my special dedication. The song started, and the intro gave me just enough time to say, "*This next song I would like to play for Elaine \_\_\_\_\_*" before the vocal started on the record. As the song faded out, I managed to add, "*That one's for you, Elaine.*" On this night, I had no idea whether or not Elaine was actually listening. It was pretty much a common thing for kids my age to be driving around town or even staying at home on a Saturday night and listening to this radio station. This was, of course, several years before FM radio played all the hits or pop music of any type. FM was still designated for talk and classical music. So it made sense that this AM station was the only real source for all your favorite disco and soft rock hits of the day in my little town. After my hour on the air was up, I thanked the DJ and headed home where my parents, their best friends, and my cousin had been listening. My cousin had been good enough to make a cassette recording of the broadcast for me to listen to later. (I still have that tape to this day). It was now just a matter of me waiting for the fallout from my dedication to Elaine that had been heard by thousands of people. I waited for the phone to ring the next day, but it didn't.

Over the next couple of weeks, the reports started coming in. Most were positive; people told me they enjoyed my personality and patter on the air, and thought I might even have a future in that biz. But I was only concerned about Elaine's reaction. Was she even listening? Was she flattered? Or was she mortified? I found out later that she was, in fact, out of town that night. She never heard the show or my dedication. Friends of hers, who told her about it and the song I played for her, let me know that she was not particularly happy about it, though. In fact, she was quite embarrassed. I didn't think that I had done anything improper that night. I was simply playing a sweet song for someone that I thought might appreciate me thinking of her. But, as I should have learned with my Carrie experience, Elaine was not interested in me at all. I would later learn - much too late in life - that if a woman likes you, little stunts like the one I pulled on the air only serve to endear you to her more, not less. Because Elaine never entertained the idea of dating me, my romantic gesture only served to push her further away, as I would find out with the next phone call.

When I worked up the courage to call Elaine again about a week later, the subject of my little radio gig wasn't the first one that came up. Once again, we discussed what we had done that summer such as her part-time babysitting gig and my family's annual beach trip. But inevitably, the white elephant in the room (or on the phone) came to light. I told her that I hoped she didn't mind me dedicating a song to her, and I inquired as to how she found out about it. She said that a friend had called and told her, and that it had embarrassed her to know that her name had been heard all over town in that manner. I assured her that it was never my intention to

cause her grief, but it didn't matter what I said. She wasn't attracted to me, so my goal of winning her would never be achieved anyway. But I had to follow through with why I called her in the first place, so once again I asked her out. The answer she gave was obvious, but it turned into a long, drawn out discussion about dating and why she didn't want to at least give us a try. She insisted that we could still be friends if I let it drop, but going on a date was out of the question. I reluctantly agreed, with a tone in my voice like that of a child who was just told he couldn't have another cookie. The conversation ended, but unfortunately, history was about to repeat.

When the school year began that fall, I once again started repeating a pattern that would become all too familiar for the next thirty years. (The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results, but I didn't know this at the time). My obsession with Elaine grew, and I created a carbon copy of events that I had carried out with Carrie the year before – talking to all my friends about her, trying to think of my next move, gearing up for the Christmas holidays and what gift I may attempt to give her – whatever I could do to win this woman. I also became the subject of ridicule among some of Elaine's friends. She had a lot of platonic guy friends who thought it would be cute to spread rumors about me and my crush. One day, one of her girlfriends ran up to me in school and told me Elaine couldn't believe that I put a love note in her locker. "WHAT?!" I exclaimed. "What note? I didn't put any note in her locker!" And the truth is I didn't. I would have never resorted to such immature antics. But neither Elaine nor her friends were convinced of my innocence. For the next several weeks, I was constantly derided by the asshole jocks that had perpetrated this act. "Hey, Tim, Elaine really loved your note!" they would snicker as they passed me in the hall. I begged her girlfriends to tell her it wasn't me. Since they didn't believe me either, it was of no use. I eventually convinced Elaine on the phone one day that I had nothing to do with her friends' little joke. As far as I could tell, she finally accepted this as the truth. But it was minor sticking point in the grand scheme of things.

One of Elaine's friends was a girl who was also in the drama department. She had become my pal as we both shared similar interests in music and performing. When I told her of my feelings for Elaine, she tried her best to make me feel that everything was going to be okay. Like the young girl who played a similar role with me during the Carrie situation, this woman would listen to my angst about my unrequited feelings. I spent hours on the phone with her trying to figure out what to do next. She told me that I should probably ask someone else out, but I wouldn't hear of it. As a last resort, she even asked Elaine if there were any way she would possibly just give me a chance and go out with me once. Elaine said that was not going to happen. This girl remained friends with me until the end of the school year and managed to tolerate my constant whining and self-pity. She had romantic problems of her own, so I did my best to return the counseling favors. While not as dire as my situation, she actually did date the man who was the object of her affections and eventually married him.

The homecoming dance that year wasn't much different for me than the one from the year before. Except this year, Elaine attended the dance with a date - a guy who went to college and was apparently some kind of genius. Like a fool, I attended the dance knowing full well that the two of them would be there together. I stood in the shadows again and watched them boogie and hold each other close when a slow song was played. I did manage to socialize with people, but my heart was still yearning for companionship. At the end of the dance I watched Elaine and her date leave the building, arm in arm. I don't think they dated much after that, but it didn't matter. All of my actions and behavior surrounding her was basically Carrie, Part II.

I suppose the end of this whole episode occurred when I cornered Elaine out in the parking lot one afternoon after school and tried to reason with her about my feelings for her. She was at the end of her rope as anyone would be in this case. But once again, I was trying to understand why I wasn't good enough for her affections.

Like all my previous crushes and obsessions, I just had to find out what I was doing wrong. Why wasn't my sense of humor, artistic abilities, and friendliness enough? What was missing in this equation? Of course, that's a question that can't really be answered. Chemistry between two people is one of the greatest mysteries of life. Elaine and I had the friendship, but I believe she was looking for a more promising prospect in a mate. She was a straight-A student who would go off to a very prestigious college; I was an average student who was the class clown and had rock & roll and a life on the stage as a dream. I was also shorter than her, which is rarely on the list of qualities that women look for in a guy.

As warm weather returned, so did my love for acting. I got cast in another spring production at school and gradually gave up my quest for Elaine's affections. We didn't really have that much to say to each other for the rest of the school year, but at least I backed off from chasing her. The last time I saw her was about seven years later when I had a job delivering pizzas to support my musical career. I had no idea that the customer to whom I was bringing this pie was going to be Elaine. When she came to the door of her house, I couldn't believe it. I had heard a few years earlier that she was married; in fact, she married a guy that went to our high school but never dated actually dated in high school. We looked at each other.

*"Elaine?"* I said. *"Hey! I didn't know this was your pizza."*

*"Tim! How are you?"* She seemed happy and surprised to see me, but I have to say I felt rather humiliated standing there wearing a pizza uniform.

*"I'm good. How long have you lived here?"*

She told me that she and her husband were staying there temporarily. I believe it was a guesthouse or was owned by her husband's parents or something like that. Then she asked me a question about the company for which I was working with regard to discounts for large orders. I told her that she could call and ask the manager, but I felt like a total loser talking about my pizza-delivering occupation instead of my music. This is what it had come to seven years after I graduated. And that was the last time I ever saw Elaine.

These two back-to-back experiences with Carrie and Elaine drained the life out of me. I was convinced while in the middle of both of them that there would never be another girl that would ever make me feel as I did. Not that any other women were begging me for my phone number, but I had tunnel vision during these two years, and I absolutely refused to believe that my life had any future without Carrie or Elaine in it. Both infatuations caused me to feel completely left out of life, on the outside looking in. Everyone else in school appeared to be in a relationship, happy, and looking forward to each day. The two homecoming dances I attended alone were a form of self-torture; why else would I voluntarily go to an event where I knew Elaine would be with her boyfriend? As would be the case with future loves, it was a way for me to stay in control of the situation, even though I was in control of nothing. If I were that age today, it's very likely I would have been in a weekly therapy session and put on an antidepressant (two things that would indeed happen in my 40's). My compulsions and refusal to let go of these hopeless situations were no doubt partially a result of a chemical imbalance in my brain. Of course, every other song on the radio is about unrequited love, and I know that there are people all over the world who "suffer in silence" on a daily basis pining after a fellow student or work colleague whom they'll never have. But I turned my actions into a soap opera performed live for everyone to see. Both Carrie and Elaine were pushed to the point of exhaustion, embarrassment, and avoidance of me. I went from becoming a minor intrusion in their lives to a major headache and probably a stalker. I hate to admit it, but I did my share of drive-bys past Elaine's house to see what cars were parked in her driveway. I knew

when she was home, but I also knew when her college squeeze was in town. If his car wasn't there, I felt relieved, a stupid reaction because it didn't matter anyway. Like all the women I would encounter over the next thirty years, their private, sexual lives were going to happen whether I was aware of it or not. A missing car from a driveway was no indication that my chances with these women were improving, and it gave me a false sense of security. It's unfortunate that I was unable to leave this type of behavior behind after I graduated high school.

I thought I might actually experience a night of carousing one evening in the summer of 1978. After my embarrassment with Elaine had ended, I was hanging out with a guy named Drew who went to my high school and who had quite a checkered past; he had been known for stealing cars, breaking into apartments, and other criminal acts of mischief. He was also quite the ladies' man, as evidenced on this particular summer night. The two of us, in addition to several other young, disaffected teenage boys and girls, were hanging out in the parking lot of an apartment complex. Most of them were smoking, drinking, and just generally bitching about how unfair life was. One of these future rocket scientists was a 16-year-old blond bombshell named Megan who spoke her mind and flaunted her tight jeans in no uncertain terms. She had a cute face, toned body, and an attitude to match. She was there with another, taller girl, and while not as vivacious, certainly had her own appealing assets. While we were all hanging out and talking, I noticed Drew lying on the ground, face up, chatting with the taller girl. Within a few minutes, they were kissing and fondling each other while the rest of us just carried on with conversation pretending not to notice. After a few minutes of this, the two of them stood up, and Drew said to me, *"Well Timmy boy, I've got some business to take care of, so I'll see you in a little while."* The two of them then strode off into the night to a more private location to "take care of business." After about thirty minutes, Megan started to get restless and announced that she was going to go looking for her friend and find out what they were up to. She took off, which left me and the other guys to carry on with the party. About fifteen minutes later, the first girl came back alone, and said that my buddy was now having fun with her friend. I felt like I had witnessed one person win the lottery twice in one night. While I stood there lusting after both of these women and wondering what I could possibly say to seduce them, Drew winds up with both of them, one right after the other. Even though neither one of these girls were the type of woman that I would ever fall for, it didn't matter. I just wanted to get laid that night. Megan just oozed sex, and I was dying to touch her. When Drew finally returned from his sexual sojourn with his second willing participant, it was after midnight. We said goodbye to everyone, got in his car, and drove back to his apartment where I was sleeping over. As he was driving, the giddiness and excitement he felt was pouring out of him. He told me in detail what happened between him and the two girls, and I was incensed and jealous. I wasn't angry with him, in fact, I was happy for him. But hearing him talk about the sex just whetted my appetite even more. I wanted him to turn the car around and go back to the parking lot so I could get my share. When we arrived at his apartment, he seemed lost in the memory of what had happened that night. We retired to our respective bedrooms without much further conversation.

The next day, I begged him to advise me how to warm up to Megan, who would no doubt be hanging out in the same apartment complex later that night with some of the same people. He promised me that he'd casually suggest to her, *"Hey why don't you go be nice to Tim tonight"* when we were all together. She would be a little drunk anyway, and Drew was certainly not the first guy to fool around with her, as she did have somewhat of a loose reputation. As expected, she was there with a few new people, and the evening commenced much like the night before. Drew didn't seem as interested in her as he did the night before, but he did cozy up to her to make small talk. Other couples were making out in the parking lot, which wasn't unusual. As promised, my friend went to bat for me and tried to convince this girl to "be nice" to me. She was sitting in the back seat of a convertible, giving him a neck massage, when all of a sudden he called me over. He said to me, *"You remember*

*Megan from last night, don't you?"* I rushed over to the car and tried my best to be cool. *"Yeah! How's it going?"* I said. Drew then said he was going to take a piss or get a cigarette as an excuse to get out of the car and leave me there with her. God bless him – he really did try to get me laid that night. After he left, I leaned up against the side of the car while Megan remained in the back seat. And then she actually started to give me a neck massage. She wasn't shy in the least, and started to talk my ear off. I listened to whatever she had to say, occasionally inserting my two cents worth just to keep the conversation going. And then this exchange happened, which I thought was going to lead to my fantasy-come-true:

*"Yeah, I really like to party. Do you like to party?"* she asked.

*"Oh yeah, you bet!"* I eagerly replied.

*"There's a lot of people hanging out around here right now, but you know what you and me can do when everybody goes home?"*

I could barely answer. I was convinced that this young sexpot was about to invite me into her private world just as she did with Drew the night before. I would finally graduate from erection-less messing around in a tent to no-holds-barred kissing, blowjobs, ass nuzzling, and maybe even ejaculating in a woman's presence.

*"No. What?"* I said.

*"We can leave and go find another party with a bunch of folks and party some more!"*

And there it was. All my hopes were dashed and my desire crushed. She had no intention whatsoever to fool around with or fuck me. Like Carrie and Elaine – two very respectable young ladies – Megan, who perhaps was not so respectable, saw me as the "nice guy", a description that continues to haunt me to this day. Drew was a bad boy, a criminal even, and Megan loved that. He smoked and drank, didn't really care what others thought of him, and fooled around with Megan's friend right in front of her the night before. After Megan revealed her party plans to me, she stopped massaging me and jumped out of the car to go hang out with another parking lot loiterer. I stood there, my head swirling with the fantasies of 'what ifs' and trying to come up with another way to get laid. But it just wasn't going to happen. I had driven my own car that night, so Drew and I left separately. I told him what happened (or what didn't happen), and he just said not to worry, that there are plenty of other hot girls in the world, and to just be patient. He was right, of course. But I wanted to get laid NOW. I was 17 and still reeling from not even getting a date with Carrie or Elaine. A one-night stand would be perfectly acceptable at this point. I probably saw Megan around again that summer and the following school year, but the brief massage she gave me in the back of that convertible was as close as I would ever get to a sexual experience in high school.

After a trip to California that summer with Drew and still no women in my life, I still had my senior year to get through. For the first time since being a freshman, there were no women that occupied my thoughts or drove me into that deep, dark place. All I cared about was getting through the next nine months and escaping the confines of classes and exams. I certainly noticed pretty girls, but I avoided falling in love. I didn't attend my senior prom, as there was really no one that I cared to ask. Plus, I was starting to go through a rather rebellious phase of my youth. No doubt incited by my buried anger at females in general, I took on an almost misogynist attitude, laughing off the idea of ever dating or falling in love again. Most of my friends were single, and I think they actually preferred my newfound hatred of all things romantic as opposed my hangdog, hopeless desires for

unavailable women. Maybe they thought I was actually growing a pair, but I was just suppressing those desires. It was less painful than rejection. So I started acting out in ways that could have probably landed me in jail if my friends and me had been caught carrying out our little transgressions. I turned to vandalism, not on a major scale, but enough to get a reaction out of school authorities and fellow students. My partners in crime and I usually had a different plan in mind every weekend to leave our signature somehow on the school grounds so that everyone would see it the following Monday morning. It was my way of saying “*Fuck you!*” to all the women who had hurt me and even those who I know *would* have hurt me. This same sentiment was also directed at all the jocks and bullies who had tormented me and who thought they were in charge of the school. Since my virtuous ways and kind-hearted attempts to become a part of relationships and groups had been dismissed with ridicule, I decided to shit all over them. Nowadays, we read terrible stories of bullied kids who either go on a shooting rampage at their school or turn the guns on themselves to escape their pain. I never had any intentions or thoughts of committing such atrocious acts. My posse never wanted to hurt anyone. We simply wanted to smash a few light bulbs, leave tread marks on school property, and at the very worst, shatter a couple of windows. There were those who suspected I had something to do with the destruction, but my acting skills had to come into play whenever the vice-principal gave me a watchful stare. I just got on with my day and never discussed it with anyone outside my little circle.

When I graduated in June 1979, I was already playing in a band. A guitarist friend from my school and a couple of guys who I had known since I was 14 (including Steve) had put together a retro-sounding combo, performing our own material as well as popular hits. This was essentially the same group that performed at my eighth grade soc-hop with two additional members. I felt right at home rocking out with these guys, and I was convinced that music would be my one and only future. We stayed together through the summer of '79 and played mostly outdoor festivals and a few dance clubs. Playing in these clubs also introduced me to a whole new category of women – the bar-hoppers, the college and post-college girls, and women who might actually take you home or back to their dorm at the end of the night. I was becoming an adult and learning the ways of being 18. I was hoping that, since I was a complete failure with women when I was in high school, I would make up for it by being a rock and roll drummer in the real world. I was convinced it was only a matter of time before some hot, young thing would cozy up to me during one of our band's set breaks and start whispering in my ear with her beer breath. I imagined it would be just like all those great R-rated comedies I had seen – *National Lampoon's Animal House*; *California Dreaming* (a little-seen film starring Dennis Christopher that I caught on Cinemax one late night); and *Saturday Night Fever* to name a few. The women in those films seemed to instigate and enjoy sex a lot, so I was naive enough to think that life would imitate art in my world. My wide-eyed curiosity about sexual behavior had moved way beyond my days making out with Valerie on her front porch. I was now ready for the real thing, or at least getting in very close proximity. Little did I know that my rock drummer status would change nothing in my attractiveness to women, and my future attempts at carrying on conversations with pretty girls would continue to turn into unintentional sitcoms.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **PART ONE**

### **Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll (except for the first two)**

When my band broke up at the end of the summer of '79, I continued to hang out with most of the guys with whom I played and even got together and jammed with them occasionally. I had met some new musicians through a record store that had recently opened, and I was beginning to widen my social circle. Like me, they all had dreams of writing and performing their own material in local clubs and ultimately chasing after that elusive recording contract. Unlike today, there was no Youtube, Facebook, or MySpace to post your demos or finished albums. In fact, even compact discs were still at least four years away from hitting the mainstream market, so aspiring musicians were restricted to putting out everything on either vinyl or cassette. All of the bands of which I was a member recorded endless cassette demos and mailed them to record companies, publishers, and producers. Most were never seen again, so we just had to plod on and play live to get heard. I had thankfully not fallen in love with any girl in over a year, as I was totally focused on my music. I also think that being out of high school allowed me a type of freedom from daily routines that had added to my constant misery about women.

In the spring of 1980, another band was formed with a slightly different line-up than the previous incarnation. My friend Steve was the designated leader of the band, because he wrote and sang 90% of the songs. We played throughout the summer in various clubs, and our music emphasized melody and harmony rather than ten-minute guitar solos and hair down to our asses. Unfortunately, we didn't have much luck with Steve's songs, as great as they were; the audiences in my town still wanted to hear Lynyrd Skynyrd and Molly Hatchet. The Beatles were always a safe bet, but once we started playing more obscure power pop from the sixties and seventies, people would stare at us like we were singing in a different language. After a particularly horrific and humiliating gig at an out-of-town club where we were booed off the stage and heckled because we weren't hot babes in mini-skirts (you had to be there), Steve quit the band. He had had enough of trying to become a rock star, and decided to go back to school and pursue a new ambition. I continued to mess around with music, writing my own songs for the first time, and deciding what I wanted to do next. I had a part-time job working in a drug store that I had gotten in my senior year in high school, but it was obviously not something I wanted to do full time. I had also come up with the brilliant idea to try and change my appearance to a more macho image by growing a moustache. This unfortunate decision, made during the summer of 1980, only served to make me look even more ridiculous than I already did. My fear of getting contact lenses relegated me to wearing a pair of wire-frame glasses that confirmed my nerd status (I had worn glasses since the seventh grade, but only in rare instances), so adding a silly moustache to my face simply made me look 20 years older than I was (not a good thing). But it was only a matter of time before I would be rockin' out again and setting my sights on another unavailable woman.

The main street that ran through the campus outskirts of a nearby university was starting to come alive in the late seventies. This was where all the college students would hang out on the weekends. There was a pizza joint, a used record store, a bakery, coffee shop, and a couple of small clubs that were steadily gaining notice and popularity. One of these clubs was really just a restaurant with a small area over in the corner where bands

would set up. But by the fall of 1980, this dive turned into one of the most popular venues for bands to play. The space for the bands widened out a bit, and a small stage was eventually installed. Every weekend, students would flock to this club to hear the kind of live music not played anywhere else in town. New wave and punk rock were starting to permeate the college radio stations, and so many local bands started to learn these tunes. Songs by Elvis Costello, The Clash, Ramones, The Boomtown Rats, Nick Lowe, Joe Jackson, and other emerging artists like these could be heard blasting from this club on Friday and Saturday nights. As the club's popularity grew, the owners started booking bands during the week as well. Even bands from out of town started to play there, including a then-unknown group called REM. It was the hot spot to be seen, and I was down there every weekend with my buddies and meeting new people as well. It seemed only natural that, since I graduated high school, new experiences would start to come into my life. There was no shortage of a social life in those days, and I felt like I was finally a part of something, bonding with people who appreciated my musicianship and personality. And of course, there were plenty of beautiful women, mostly college girls, who would be scattered all over the street and inside the club. The smell of stale beer never turned me on more than it did in those days. Beer + girls = sex. Rock & roll + girls = sex. This was the way my mind functioned at the age of 20. Even though I didn't smoke or drink, I didn't mind talking to the girls who did. My sex drive was at its peak, and I was determined to lose my virginity as soon as possible. Unfortunately, that chemical imbalance in my brain that I mentioned earlier quietly took over. I was too shy to talk to strange girls in a club. I didn't have the balls to walk up to one and ask if I could buy her a drink or if she'd like to dance (I can no more dance than fly to the moon). I was under the mistaken belief that if I hung out by myself long enough, or pretended like I was content to talk to my male friends, that some horny, pretty girl would wander over to me and start rubbing up against my crotch. I had no idea at the time that girls want guys to do all the work, to have *confidence* – a word that wasn't in my vocabulary. So, I did the best I could. If I saw one of my buddies chatting up some girl, I would drift over in hopes that I could get in on the conversation. Once in a while I would blend in, but it would never lead to a one-on-one conversation with a woman who planned to take a lover home with her that night. Because I refused to just have one stinking beer to loosen up, I stood there in the club like a statue. I justified my actions by saying that I didn't like beer. But would it have killed me to tolerate a little bitterness on my taste buds if it meant appearing less inhibited and more open to women? While the band was playing and people were dancing like it was the last night on earth, I just stared. I was asked from time to time why I didn't join in with everyone. I just shrugged my shoulders and brushed them off. There was, of course, no wrong way to dance; it was just a free-for-all, letting all your pent-up anxieties and week's worth of bullshit be drained from your body while your limbs flailed around and the band played loud enough to make your ears bleed. It was good old-fashioned rock & roll liberation on a Saturday night. But my stubbornness and cowardice, probably leftover traits from my high school days, kept me immobilized from taking that next, necessary step in my growth as a man. My fear of rejection from women was in full play whenever I spotted a young lady whom I would have loved to have invited out for coffee. And after what I had gone through in high school with Carrie and Elaine, I refused to go down that road again.

I witnessed a lot of pickups during those lascivious late night hours. The club usually shut down around 2am, and when I stayed until the bitter end, I would be hanging around with the guys while watching the drunk, hot girls out of the corner of my eye – again, foolishly thinking that one of them was on her way over to ask me to give her a ride home. There's nothing un-sexier than a 20-year-old guy wearing a badly stripe-patterned, three-buttoned, knit shirt from K-Mart, tucked too far down into his cheap jeans, standing with his hands in the pockets of a windbreaker that has dark grease stains around the collar. I was so oblivious to my wardrobe and lack of any style or charisma that I could have thrown hundred-dollar bills at these women, and they would have passed right by me. I would get home sometime between 2 and 3am, eat a microwave pizza, fall into bed, jerk off, and sleep until noon the next day. This was a weekly ritual. Go to the club, stare at the pretty girls, lust after

the pretty girls, and not talk to the pretty girls for fear of humiliation. My friends were all doing it, so why not me? Ah, yes. My drink of choice was sugar-infused iced tea instead of a calming beer or even a glass of red wine. My virginity was still a guarantee.

Even though I had sworn that I would never again go through the hell of obsessing over a girl that didn't want me, I guess I was still too immature to make such a decision. There were just too many young ladies that went to this club on a weekly basis that were desirable and single. Surely one of them would take an interest in me. As my eyes scanned the crowded, sweaty room each week, I would always spot at least one or two girls who would be my fantasy that night. But when I spotted a young beauty named Chloe one random evening dancing her heart out, I knew I was in big trouble. Chloe usually arrived at the club either with another girl or alone. She was a student at the university, and like so many others, discovered that this was the club where everything was happening. She was a dark-haired stunner, who usually wore very tight blue jeans, a button-down shirt or t-shirt, and had a face that crippled me with its cuteness. I wasn't the only one who noticed her. One of my musician buddies would always watch her walk into the club or down the sidewalk and comment on her perfect ass. Another friend, Rob, who was probably secretly in love with her, did manage to form a friendship with her. She would always gravitate toward him when she saw him on the sidewalk outside the club, and they would have cheerful conversations, although she had no intentions whatsoever of dating him. He talked to me about asking her out, but he knew he would just have to settle for dancing with her at the club. She was definitely looking for something else, as I'll get to later. But at least this friend of mine was able to connect with her. She called him by his name, and she would playfully touch him and laugh at his jokes. Even though Rob was quite overweight, he didn't let this inhibit him from talking to girls. In fact, he used it to his advantage. He came across as a large, jolly fellow that everyone liked. I thought that if she warmed up to him, surely she would welcome me into her little crowd. Boy, was I wrong.

With my ridiculous moustache, goofy glasses, and crappy clothes that the Salvation Army would have rejected, I nervously approached Chloe one night when she was talking to Rob and a couple of other folks. I stood there and politely listened before trying to contribute to the conversation. Finally, I turned to Chloe and attempted to introduce myself.

*"Do you like the band?"*

*"I guess"* she said, feigning interest in my fascinating question.

*"My name's Tim"* I offered, extending my trembling hand.

*"Oh, hi"* she responded as if she was about to fall asleep. Her hands remained in her pockets and she didn't bother to tell me her name. She was also looking around, searching for someone to rescue her from this encounter.

*"You're Chloe, right? Rob is a friend of mine."*

She nodded and told me she was going to head back inside to hear the band's next set.

And that was the amazingly brilliant first impression I made on her. I watched her go inside, and then I congregated with my usual group of misfits inside the club. I continued to stare at Chloe the rest of the night, watching her dance and have the occasional beer. I was paralyzed with ignorance as to how to reach this girl. The night ended at its usual time, and I went home sulking.

For the next several months, I never managed to get in Chloe's good graces. I would see her around during the week sometimes, hanging out at the used record store that was across the street from the club. I would say hello, and the only thing she ever said back to me was "*What did you say your name was?*" Even when I told her, not only did she never utter it, but she also forgot it. What little self-esteem I had was running on empty and soon ran out. It got to the point where I dreaded going down to the club every weekend. I wanted to see Chloe, but I knew that I didn't have chance in hell with her. If she refused to have a conversation with me, what the hell made me think she would ever go out with me? Still, I continued to go there with my friends to see bands and try to enjoy myself. I guess I thought that each new weekend was another chance to talk to Chloe and maybe take it to the next level (or *any* level). My status with her never changed for six months. I would make attempts to talk to her, but she would only stare back at me and answer me in one-word replies. I was dying inside, silently telling her that I loved her and wanting to make love to her. Her non-interest in me made me want her even more. Things only got worse when she started showing up at the club with a guy who was also a student. This Romeo was the complete opposite of me. He was very attractive, tall, in good shape, confident to the point of arrogance, and a great dancer. He had long hair, hip clothes, a beaming smile, and loved his beer. Chloe was enamored with him, and the two of them danced together like they didn't have a care in the world. He also danced with other people, but he and Chloe were inseparable. And I couldn't stand it. I just knew for a fact that they were sleeping together. And why not? That's what young, beautiful people do. Still, I couldn't let go of my fantasy. As usual, I talked to all my friends about it, basically repeating every discussion I'd had in high school with them about Carrie and Elaine. It just didn't end. They told me in no uncertain terms that Chloe was never going to be interested in me. They were right, of course, but I refused to see it. I was 20 years old, desperately wanted to have a girlfriend, and get laid. But self-pity is not an attractive trait, as I would learn later in life. But at the time it was all I had.

At some point Chloe and her prince charming would break up. I knew this because they stopped hanging around together, and one night I overheard him tell one of his buddies at the club, "*Yeah, she's just looking for a husband*" with a lot of contempt in his voice. He obviously still wanted play the field, and marriage was not in his immediate plans. She still continued to make appearances at the club, but they were becoming less frequent. Over the next year, some of the regulars disappeared and a new breed of crowd started to show up. These were youngsters who had just discovered the new wave and punk movement for the first time, just as it was starting to make its way to American mainstream radio. It had already peaked in Europe and, while still a popular genre, was already transitioning to the next new style of music. But the kids in America saw it as a hip novelty; an excuse to put fake safety pins through their noses, wear ripped t-shirts with indiscernible logos, and call themselves punk rockers. Of course, they had no idea the origins or meanings of their rebellion; they were just latching onto a trend that had popped up on the last vestiges of AM radio stations. The ironic thing was this was during a time when my last true rock band would play at this club. From spring 1981 until summer 1983, we played there several times a month, sometimes during the week when there was barely a soul in the audience. Chloe saw us play a couple of times but she never said a word to me about my efforts. At this point, I didn't really care. Once again, my love for what I was doing on stage was more important. Eventually, Chloe joined the ranks of other women who used to hang out down there, and by 1983 she was gone completely. I heard a few years later that she had married and moved to the Northwest. Like Carrie and Elaine before her, she had drifted out of my fantasies.

## PART TWO

### Pen Pals and Autographs

Once my band started to play in the spring of 1981, I felt as if I was finally on the road to making something of myself. I still had my part-time job at the drug store, but I was more serious about my music than ever. After many combinations of different musicians and short-lived musical projects, I was finally playing with three guys that would be my last hurrah. We were together for a little over two years, we played in clubs that were out of town, and we were more determined than ever to get noticed. We performed mostly our own material but would throw in a cover tune just to keep the audiences interested for three minutes or so. And of course, we recorded a lot of studio material that was sent to record companies, local music magazines, and radio stations. While we were pursuing the rock and roll dream, I was far removed from chasing after some unavailable girl. I suppose I was still convinced that my drumming and singing skills would attract some groupie if even for only one night. I was the only member of my band that had never had any sexual experience. And at this point, most of my other pals either had girlfriends or were sleeping around. They weren't studs, but they were certainly getting more action than me.

This is the part of my tale that gets very weird and a different kind of sad. Since it happened thirty years ago, I can only look back on it and shake my head and chuckle. But at the time, I managed to make a fool of myself and do things in front of my friends that even they thought were over the edge. My behavior was no doubt a direct result of more rejection from women, either the ones I had pursued for months on end, or the ones I would just try and chat up at the clubs where my band played. I didn't see this episode in my life coming, but I suppose it wasn't surprising that it did. My romantic fantasies soared to new heights, and at one point, I thought I was turning into a stalker.

In March of 1981, my family's 15-year-old television set bit the dust. It was an old floor console type with rotary dials for VHF and UHF channels. We didn't have cable TV yet, so it was connected to a roof antenna like every house in our neighborhood. One afternoon, my father brought home a brand new TV, and we were all excited about the bigger, better picture. On the back of this new set was some kind of wire pin that stuck out that had something to do with the tuning mechanism. Whenever the picture started to get fuzzy, jiggling this wire pin would clear it up. One morning about 8:30, I was asleep when my mother opened my bedroom door and asked me to get up and come in and adjust this pin. She was getting ready for work and was watching one of the morning news shows when the picture went on the fritz again. I dragged myself out of bed and stuck my arm under the TV as far as I could until I found the pin. I pushed it in and out until the picture finally cleared up. I sat up to look at the screen to make sure it was stable and noticed a very attractive blond sitting there reporting some news story. Because I never watched morning television (after all, it *was* before noon), I had no idea who this beauty was. I was still half asleep anyway, so my mind was groggy and unfocused. But the sight of this woman stirred something inside me that I hadn't felt since I was 14 years old. You see, in addition to having crushes on those young girls in elementary and junior high school, I would occasionally find myself fantasizing about certain TV and movie actresses. I don't know anyone who hasn't had some kind of infatuation with a celebrity, and there are still thousands of people in the world who idolize and collect memorabilia on Marilyn Monroe, Natalie Wood, Elvis Presley, and many other famous folks. And with the internet and video sites so readily accessible these days, keeping tabs on your favorite celeb is easier now than ever. When I was 14, all I could do was check out the magazines each week at the local bookstore to see if my crushes were on the covers or wait for them to appear on Johnny, Merv, and at one point, Sammy Davis Jr.'s, short-lived talk

show. So now when I noticed this attractive woman on the morning news show, something inside of my subconscious said *"This is safe. No rejection. You can fall in love with this person and not worry about getting hurt."* Of course, I didn't even think about it in those terms at the time. All I knew is that I hadn't felt any passion about a woman since Chloe, and seeing TV Girl reminded me how "fun" it was to admire someone from afar like I did nearly ten years earlier. At the age of twenty, however, I should have been way past that kind of crap. Even though I can sort of laugh about it now, I feel more ashamed about it than anything else. Here's why: My happenstance of being asked by my mother to fix the TV picture that morning led to an obsession over a woman who would occupy most of my waking life for the next *two years*. I would wind up collecting magazines, newspaper articles, and anything else I could get my hands on that was connected to her. I even sent out over fifty typed letters to television affiliates all over the United States, asking their promotional departments if they had any extra photos, press releases, or souvenirs with this woman's face on it. Surprisingly, most of these TV stations would actually send me the requested materials ranging from a single photo to an entire presskit about her and the show she was on. Some afternoons were like Christmas morning as I rushed out to the mailbox and found it stuffed with manila envelopes that had the stations' logos in the upper left-hand corner. I would also make trips to the public library several times a month to look up past articles on her from other cities. Again, no internet in those days, so I had to settle for microfilm. I would thread it up in those huge, bulky machines and run it through until the article would appear. I even went so far as to write a song about her that my band actually played live a few times in our favorite club. My band mates were certainly puzzled by my fanatical fixation over this woman who, by the way, they had never heard of. But for the time being, they just went with it, because it never affected my position in the band. My insanity continued when I started to set the timer on my VCR (which cost a thousand dollars in 1979) to record this morning talk show every day so I could watch it late at night to see what she was wearing. I *knew* she was a married woman. I *knew* she lived over 500 miles away. I *knew* she didn't even know I existed. I *knew* that she had children. I *knew* that my affection for her would never, ever be returned. I *knew* that I would never attempt to reach her by hanging out at the building where she worked. (I didn't turn into one of those delusional souls who actually believed that the object of their desire felt the same way). Yet despite all these indisputable facts, I continued to feel alone and empty whenever I thought about abandoning my fantasy. The height of my sickness came when I wrote a letter to her one day explaining that I was a musician and songwriter who played in a band. I told her that she was one of the things that inspired me to write songs. She was my muse. I ended the letter by complimenting her on her beauty and asking her to send me an autographed photo. Remember, I was twenty years old when I committed these acts of lunacy. I mailed the letter and waited for a response. The feelings I had surrounding the next couple of weeks were not unlike those I felt when I had flowers delivered to Carrie. I wanted to get her attention. I wanted her to notice me, to make me feel important. My insecurities were exploding all over the place, and I was losing control of reality.

One afternoon, about two weeks later, I opened the door to the outside world to go retrieve the mail. A stiff, 9 x 12 envelope had been placed in the door by the mailman, as it wouldn't fit in the mailbox. It dropped to the floor when I opened the door, and I saw the network logo in bright, colorful letters. My heart stopped. I knew what it was, and for a moment I felt like I had won a prize. I took it into my bedroom and carefully pried open the flap, which had been sealed with a single piece of tape. I pulled out a black and white photo along with a piece of cardboard. It was an early photo of the newswoman with her signature in the lower, right-hand corner. I stared at it and examined it from corner to corner. I then started to compare her signature with my address that was also handwritten on the front of the envelope. Did she also address it herself? Did she sign the picture and then insert it into the envelope? All of these useless details that didn't matter one bit caused me to investigate the matter even further. The fact that I had actually gotten a signed picture from her wasn't enough. I just had to know if she wrote my name and address on the envelope, too. That's how sick and twisted I was over this. I was so desperate for female companionship, even if it was only from a Sharpie pen, that I plowed on to find an

answer. There was even some dispute that it was her actual autograph on the photo, as she had mentioned one morning on the show that her secretary would sometimes sign documents for her using her name. I panicked when I heard this and proceeded to contact autograph collectors that I had located from a list at the library to see if they could help me learn the truth. When I spoke with some of these people on the phone, they told me that it's not unusual at all to verify the authenticity of a famous person's signature. But when I told them whose signature it was I was confirming, they nearly hung up on me. This autograph, regardless of whether she really signed it or not, was so insignificant, that wasting time trying to find out was ludicrous. They assumed I was checking to see if the signature had any collectible value (which it did not). When I told them it was for personal reasons, they assured me that it was probably the real thing and that I had nothing worry about. No one would have any need to forge her signature, not even a secretary. Her autograph just wasn't that much in demand.

Once I closed the case on the autograph dilemma, I continued on with my band. We quickly dropped my ode to the girl on the TV screen (I never really liked the song anyway) and continued to write newer, better material. While we played and recorded new songs, my magazine collection and recorded TV appearances by this woman also multiplied, and I started becoming pen pals with other movie and TV collectors around the globe. People would send me articles from their local papers, and I would send articles and local TV inserts to them that concerned their fantasies. There was a woman in Massachusetts who had a big thing for actor Charles Haid, who played "Renko" on the NBC-TV show *Hill Street Blues*, so whenever I found a picture or article about him in my local paper, I would mail it to her. She would then send me junk on the woman from the morning news show, and we would write each other letters about what was going on in our lives (very little it seemed). I must have had at least a dozen contacts from around the world with which I traded music, tapes, records, and other collectibles. These types of exchanges and trading were very common before there was a Facebook, Google, or email. As much as I love using the computer, I miss the days when a handwritten letter would be waiting for me in my mailbox. But I shudder to think about how silly I must have looked while participating in these fanboy antics. My fellow band mates were playing sports, writing new music, or dating women in their spare time while I was holed up in my bedroom searching collector magazines for more kindred souls to connect with over celebrities. I have no problem with people sharing their enthusiasm for a particular TV show, movie, actor, sports figure, or whatever else excites them; there are thousands of forums on the internet these days devoted to various cults of personality. I even take part in some of these discussion forums myself. But there's a huge difference between having a point of view, opinion, or admiration for someone, and obsessing over and hanging on every word that person says to the point where your own happiness depends on it. I fell into the latter category, of course, and all the baggage from my previous disappointments with women just compounded the problem. To add to my growing sense of paranoia, in the middle of all my self-induced hoopla over the TV newswoman, there were two major films that were released in theaters that nearly paralleled my situation. Both concerned obsessed fans trying to get in touch with the objects of their desires. The first one was a little-seen 1981 film called *The Fan*, starring Lauren Bacall as a Broadway actress who becomes the target of an obsessed admirer played by Michael Biehn. He writes letters to her, even asking her for an autographed photo, and does everything in his power to let her know how much he loves her. He's under the delusion that they belong together, so he starts to kill anyone who stands in his way. Biehn's character is clearly deranged, and that's where the similarities stopped between him and me. I never even considered trying to form a real relationship with the newswoman, but seeing this film made me feel uncomfortable, because it painted an ugly portrait (and rightfully so) of a man whose disconnect with reality leads him to murder. The following year, another film called *The Seduction* came out, starring Morgan Fairchild as...a TV newswoman who is stalked by an obsessed fan played by Andrew Stevens. When I saw the ads for this thriller on TV, I couldn't believe it. I asked one of my band mates if he'd like to go see it with me out of morbid curiosity. Normally, I wouldn't shell out one dime

to see such a badly reviewed film in the theater, but I felt like I needed to. The plot of this movie just hit too close to home. Like *The Fan*, Stevens's character is convinced that Fairchild is in love with him, so he sets out to have her. It inevitably leads to violence from Stevens, and ultimately with Ms. Fairchild taking matters into her own hands to get rid of this creep. The trailers for the film featured her cocking a shotgun in her home to show us she means business. The absurdity of this junk was not lost on me, but I felt too close to Stevens's character to ignore it. Again, I would have never made any attempt to form an actual relationship with my idol.

So the big questions remain, what was my goal with all the collecting I did surrounding this woman? Why did my peace of mind rely so heavily on the actions and whereabouts of her? What did I expect to get out of it? Thinking about it all these years later, I'm convinced that "falling in love" with her was no more than a safe alternative to asking a woman for a date in the real world. Since there was no chance of rejection from a TV star, I could fawn over her pretty face without having to talk to her. Collecting all the magazines and videotaping her TV appearances were just other ways for me to stay in control and feel like I had a purpose. I could stare at her in print and on VHS without her turning away. This was all because I simply couldn't take the pain of rejection from another girl in the real world. Of course, this did nothing to improve my chances of losing my virginity. By the time I became interested in an actual girl again, I was 23 and feeling as if my time was running out.

### **PART THREE**

#### **Who Doesn't Like Music?**

My band's days were winding down in the summer of 1983. As much as we loved playing, writing, and recording together, we had gotten to a point where we felt we were banging our collective heads against a wall. Despite playing in clubs and even having a manager book gigs for us, we just couldn't break through. Audiences largely ignored our melody-heavy, three-part-harmony songs. My theory is that we didn't look like a typical rock and roll outfit, and we weren't exactly beaming with confidence on stage in our early days. There was also that indefinable "hip" factor that we never latched onto, at least in the eyes of the fickle public. We did have a small following, however. A few choice fans would come see us at the university club and comment on how good they thought our songs were. They actually listened to what we had written. I've discussed this with my former band mates over the years, and they even feel that maybe we were ahead of our time. Actually, we were behind the times, which wasn't a bad thing. Our influences –The Beatles, Badfinger, Eric Carmen, Bread, Jimmy Webb, XTC, and other melodious artists - shone through in our songs, and we were absolutely a better recording band than live band. Of course, there were thousands of other bands all over the world, recording their own brand of pop music and playing in dingy clubs. Most of these groups never "made it", but that's the law of averages. Today, with the advent of Youtube and Auto-tune, anyone can sit in front of their computer and become an instant pop star. And some of these pre-teens have gone on to become international sensations and millionaires all because of one song that clicked with the Facebook and Twitter crowd.

I did continue to write and record songs on my own, pairing up with another high school friend with whom I played in several earlier bands. He helped me put together some local musicians to record my own solo demo tape which I hoped would garner the attention of some local big whigs in the music industry (some of the same people my previous band had tried to contact). We recorded four of my new songs at various studios and

utilized the talents of a couple of semi-famous producers and musicians who were happy to lend a hand (for a price, of course). Once we had finished these sessions, we proceeded to put together a presskit with photos, lyrics, and the cassette demo itself. I felt very good about what we recorded, and I had no shyness about sharing it with my friends and fellow musicians. Comments were mostly positive, and I felt like I was back in the real world again, with only a fading interest in the activities of my TV newswoman. In fact, I was starting to take an interest in a young woman who I had gotten to know at the drug store where I still worked. This is the same store where I'd been employed since 1978 part-time. In 1984, I went full-time to make some extra money to put into my music career. I was still living at home with my parents who graciously let me live there rent-free, so I was able to start building a little nest egg in my savings account. This girl, Maggie, was a part-time employee who was going to school at a community college. She was a very delicate flower – quiet, demure, easy to get along with. Her big eyes would sparkle whenever she smiled, and I took notice of this immediately. When she first started working there, she was just another employee who showed up, said very little, and went home at the end of her shift. But as with my past loves, her presence grew on me, and by the summer of '84, I found myself once again in the throes of another fantasy.

Maggie had a boyfriend. I knew this. I would see him drop her off at the store and pick her up at the end of her shift if she didn't drive her own car to work. I even saw them together one night in a local cafe, watching a band that some of my colleagues played in. It was an indisputable fact that Maggie and this guy were dating, but for some reason, my feelings for her continued to grow that summer. Now, I know this type of thing happens all the time. People fall in love with people who are unavailable, married, not interested, etc. But I had a sort of unspoken deal with myself that I never chased after a girl who was already taken. To this day, I've never pursued a married woman. But there was something about Maggie that I couldn't let go of. I think it was the misguided belief that she and her boyfriend weren't exclusive, that she was not tied down to him. And because I didn't actually see him come into the store that often, this perpetuated the fantasy that they were only friends. I felt very drawn to her, and my desire to make love to her was getting more intense every day. Her body had toned up quite a bit since she started working there a year before, and it was making me crazy. I talked non-stop about her to my friends, and even wrote a song about her. At 23, my pattern of obsessing over one woman for an extended period of time had remained unchanged. So I had no choice but to put it all on the line again and ask her out.

She and I usually worked the Saturday shift together, so I knew when she took her lunch break. The break area was in the back of the stock room at the end of a long hall. It was fairly secluded with a table and a couple of chairs at which employees sat to eat their Big Macs. I had decided this one particular Saturday I would approach Maggie and ask her if she would go out with me. But I brought a prop this time to strengthen my odds of success, unlike my past attempts with women. This prop was one of my demo tapes. As I mentioned, I had been distributing this tape around to friends and musical colleagues, and they all seemed to like what they heard. Since my music was the only thing in my life I felt confident about, I figured I would try and use this to my advantage. I would talk Maggie up about my rock and roll exploits, and then maybe she would see me in a different light. And if she actually listened to the tape, maybe she would want to fuck me (Yes, this was the way I thought, not unlike many, many other 23-year-old budding rock musicians of the day). So I made a copy of the tape with a cover and song listings, making sure to list all the credits. I wrote all the songs, played drums, sang lead and backing vocals, and played guitar on it as well. I wanted her to know that I had done something more important than stock the drug store shelves with shampoo and tampons. She took her lunch break around one o'clock that afternoon, and we weren't so busy that I couldn't sneak in the stock room to talk to her. I had the demo tape in hand, and I walked to the back of the long hallway where she was sitting at the table eating her lunch. She was alone, and there were no other employees within earshot. What happened next is still, to this

day, one of the most humiliating, embarrassing, and puke-inducing attempts I've ever made at getting a date with a girl.

I walked over to her. She was eating a burger and fries from Mickey D's.

*"Hey Maggie!"* I said brightly.

*"Hey."*

*"Listen, I've got a question for you"* I stated, like a game show host interviewing a contestant.

*"Okay"*, she said curiously.

*"Do you like music?"* I preposterously inquired.

*"Do I like music...? Well, yeah, I guess I like it like anybody else."*

*"Uh-huh. Uh-huh."* I searched for any dignity I could find in order to continue.

*"Well, I have this demo tape that I recorded. It's songs that I wrote and played on. I'm shopping it around to record companies, and I'd like for you to listen to it and give me your opinion."*

She seemed dumbfounded as to why, of all the people I could ask, I would ask her.

*"Well, I don't know that much about music, so I don't know if my opinion will help you."*

*"Oh, that's okay! It's good that you don't know that much about music. I want an opinion from someone who isn't in the music business."*

Of course, all this babbling on my part was just an excuse to lead up to what I really wanted. So now that she had agreed to be my music critic, it was time to move on to the next order of business. I handed her the tape.

*"Okay"* I said, as if preparing to dive off a cliff into a tiny pool of water. *"Part Two!"*

She looked at me like I had lost my mind. I had actually said 'Part Two'. At this point, I started to shuffle back and forth very nervously, like a little kid who had to pee.

*"I was wondering if...if...uhh...if..."*

This went on for what seemed like an eternity. Finally I vomited out the words,

*"...if you'd like to go out sometime."* As the word 'out' rolled off my tongue, I collapsed forward onto the table where she was sitting, grabbing the edge for dear life, and looking her straight in the eye. To any casual observer, it probably looked like I had pounced on the table in order to give her some bad news, as my body language was so desperate, and my knees buckled to the point of almost falling.

She alarmingly responded, *“Well I would, BUT...”*

I said “BUT” right along with her as if we were singing in a choir together. I had anticipated her answer and even helped her answer it.

*“I have a boyfriend; in fact you may know him.”* She told me his name, which I already knew because we went to the same junior high school, and he was on my short-lived basketball team. She went on to tell me that they had been dating for about a year and weren’t seeing anybody else at the time.

*“Well, okay. If you change your mind...”* (God help me, I actually said those words again). And then to embarrass her even further, I added, *“You still have the prettiest eyes I’ve seen in a long time.”* Her face reddened like a ripe tomato, and she sheepishly said thank-you. In order to end this nightmare, I asked her to listen to the tape anyway, but she needn’t rush. At this point, I had already made a complete fool of myself, but maybe the tape would serve to rescue me from total self-destruction. If she liked my music - great. If she didn’t, it didn’t matter anyway. But I was still hoping against hope that she would love my demo and want to go out with me. What a stupid imbecile I was. Did I actually think she would be so blown away by my songs of heartache that she would ditch her boyfriend to start a sexual relationship with me? My desperation was at an all-time high. Oddly enough, a few days later, she brought the tape back to me and said she really liked it. She didn’t go into detail, but she told me she had a platonic male friend that loved it, and wanted her to make him a copy. I told her to keep the one I gave her.

Over the next few weeks, I tried to play it cool and act normal around Maggie. I was still aching to be with her, and my sexual fantasies were in overdrive in my bedroom. Every time I saw her boyfriend pick her up, I died a little inside just knowing what was going on behind closed doors. There were one or two other instances when I tripped over myself trying to talk to or compliment her. I finally stopped doing anything at all and tried to forget about her. And then one day I was up in the pharmacy, when I saw a note that someone had written and left on the counter: “July 30 – Maggie’s last day.” She was quitting the store and had given her notice. I saw this note and almost passed out. What would I do now? Do I tell her I love her before she leaves, or just let her go in peace? I knew the answer. Her last day was a Saturday evening shift, which ended at 9pm. I worked that same shift and was determined to say some final words to her before she walked out of my life...I mean...fantasy. Once the store was locked up and everyone left, I watched her walk to her car and then called her name.

*“Maggie?”*

*“Oh, hey”* she cautiously said. I walked over to her.

*“I just wanted to tell you that I really enjoyed working with you, and that I hope we can see each other again.”* A noble and fair attempt to say goodbye to her, I thought.

*“Well, I’ll be coming into the store every now and then to shop and see other people, too, so I’m sure I’ll see you”* she said.

I told her that if my band (which didn’t actually exist at that time) ever played at the café again where I had seen her and her boyfriend earlier that year, she should stop in and check us out.

“*Sure...okay, bye*” she said. She then got in her car and left. I slumped to my car and then drove to a friend’s house, and we talked about it for the umpteenth time. (By the way, this particular friend of mine was also a virgin and probably still is. He’s now 54 and has been through some nutty religious situations that convinced him that sex was something evil). About three years later, I thought I saw Maggie in a department store. I’ll never know if was really her, but her face and those eyes seemed unmistakable. She had on a pair of short shorts and was looking mighty fine. I never heard anything about her after that.

I wound up finally quitting the store myself in January 1985. I decided I was going to go to New York to visit my friend Andy who had moved there the previous October. Since I didn’t have to worry about rent, I had enough money saved up to take a trip and decide what my next move in life was going to be. I stayed in New York for a little over two weeks, caught a horrible cold to the point of laryngitis, and came home to re-group. In April of that year, I took a trip to Los Angeles to go look at a music school. I thought since I was having no luck putting a band together in my hometown, maybe I should explore the idea of getting some kind of formal training. This institution – The Dick Grove School of Music – had been recommended to me by someone I had met in New York. I had joined the Songwriter’s Guild in the Big Apple a few months earlier and had gotten lots of career advice. So I took off to sunny L.A. and met with the registrar of the Grove School, and we listened to my demo tape. He said he really liked what he heard, and thought I would benefit greatly from becoming a student there. After hanging out in L.A. for a week and doing all the tourist-y stuff, I flew back home. Over the next few weeks, I decided not to move to Los Angeles and go to the school. I wanted to be playing my music live, not sitting in a classroom having someone teach me how to write songs the way *they* thought they should be written. So I continued to write and record more material, and network with fellow musicians around town. I also got a temp job working in a cough drop factory, which lasted a little over a week. There are probably worse jobs, but that one stripped me of what little pride I had left in my 24-year-old body and mind. Wearing a hair net and watching thousands of cough drops rush by on a conveyor belt so I could pull out the odd-shaped ones were not my idea of career advancement. Fortunately, a fellow drummer who was working for a major pizza delivery chain told me that his store needed new drivers right away. He told me how much money I could make and how fun the job could be. I jumped on this immediately, and for the next two years, I was wearing a pizza uniform and delivering pies all over town.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Beautiful Girls In 30 Minutes Or Less**

From September 1985 until January 1988, I was free from heartache over any one woman. Maggie had disappeared into the wind, and I was once again focused on making money and trying to put a band together. I was writing more songs than ever at this point, so I wanted to record them (which I did) and play them live (a harder task to achieve). I made frequent trips to New York during this time to visit Andy and shop my demo tapes around. I also made new friends working at the pizza place and began hanging out with some of them during my off-hours. One of these friends, another driver named Earl, was nineteen when he started working there, and had a history of girlfriends even at that young age. Earl and I would spend our days off with some other friends of mine, going out to eat and seeing bands. On the days I didn’t see Earl, he was usually out with various women he knew from high school or from the pizza place. This guy had no problem attracting women,

and although he was very discreet about his encounters, I knew that he was getting laid quite a lot. His stories of seduction only fanned the flames of my wants to experience the same thing. I was almost 25 years old and still clueless about how to approach women.

During my many deliveries over the next two years, I encountered hundreds of beautiful women in houses, apartments, hotels, and trailer parks. Some of these girls were regular customers, so whenever their addresses came up on orders, I would know who they were. Some of the other guys remembered certain addresses, too, and would comment on how “hot the girl was that lived there.” Whenever I delivered pizzas to any of these women, I would get nervous for many reasons.

1. Is she going to look so hot tonight that I’ll be at a loss as to what to do?
2. Will she think I’m attractive when she opens her door?
3. Can a pizza guy get a date with a customer?
4. Will she think I’m a loser because I’m wearing a pizza uniform?

These, along with many other queries, were things that ran through my head as I approached the doors of these girls. I kept wondering if I would be invited in and get lucky. The truth is I was a geek. I was still wearing glasses (although I did eventually start to remove them when I got to a customer’s door), and did not feel good about myself at all. I was in a subordinate position in the first place; a servant waiting on a customer, so the idea of scoring a date with one of these women was ridiculous. Of course, I know that it has happened; a young, hot stud delivers a pizza to a young, hot babe who isn’t looking for any strings or long-term romance. So, they flirt a little, numbers are exchanged, and they meet up later that night for some dessert. But that type of thing rarely happened to most guys, and it certainly wasn’t going to happen to me. But seeing these girls, and wondering what it would be like to touch their skin, kiss them, and ultimately make love to them, just continued to permeate my thoughts. In addition to Earl, there were other guys at my pizza place that either had girlfriends or were partying with various women. It was such a huge mystery to me. How did these guys get past the initial stage of meeting and seducing these women? What was their secret? How could I learn how to do what they did? I was always on the outside looking in – a theme that still follows me to this day. It was as if everyone had been invited to this big sex party, and my invitation somehow got lost in the mail.

During the summer of 1986, Andy returned home from New York. He had been in school there and was taking a break between semesters. I convinced him to get a job at my pizza place, as I knew he would fit right in. He got hired immediately, and everyone there took a liking to him right away. It should be noted here that Andy was a year younger than me and had been with more women at that time than most guys his age could even dream about. Women were (and still are) drawn to him as a result of his good looks, boyish charm, and carefree demeanor. As I’ll talk about later on, Andy has never had any trouble getting laid; in short, his history with women is quite literally the complete opposite of mine. After he had been delivering pizzas for a couple of weeks, there were several women customers who started to request Andy as their personal pizza delivery boy. Nothing ever transpired between him and the willing women, but he did get some numbers. There were also a few women drivers at our shop who got chummy with him and even introduced him to some of their female friends. He saw more action in the six weeks he worked there than I’ve seen in my life. At the end of the summer, he went back to school in New York, where he had so much sex with different girls that he could rival Wilt Chamberlain’s claims.

I continued to deliver pizzas, write and record new songs, and make attempts at putting a band together throughout 1987. In August of that year, I made a pilgrimage to the Washington, DC area to visit my friend

Sean who played in my 1979 and 1980 bands. He was trying to convince me to move to that part of the country, as there were many more opportunities there than in my hometown. We recorded what would be my final big demo tape sessions, with Sean producing and playing on the sessions with me. When I returned home a couple of weeks later, I had a decision to make. Do I stay where I was and continue to pursue music in my safe little haven? Or do I move to the nation's capitol and start a new life chasing after my dream? In January 1988, I got a call from another friend who was also living in the DC area, telling me that he had a co-worker who was looking for a third roommate in a 3-bedroom townhouse. I went back to DC to meet this guy, and he showed me what turned out to be the master bedroom with a private bathroom. I decided at that point that to remain in my hometown would just keep me in the rut I'd been in too long. I needed a change. I'd seen enough pizzas. DC wasn't my first choice, but Sean, who I'd known since high school, was living there and was eager to help me put a band together and play in the many DC clubs. Plus, he had already secured a job for me working in a record store where I was to make more than minimum wage. So, in February I moved to DC and began an odyssey that would eventually lead me to another batch of unavailable and uninterested women.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **PART ONE**

### **Welcome To the Freak Show**

*“Leaving home ain’t easy, but may be the only way”*

- “Leaving Home Ain’t Easy” by Queen

Little did I know that leaving home for the first time, at the age of 27 no less, would be so difficult. My old routines were interrupted and displaced, and saying goodbye to my friends and family was hard. But it’s what I needed to do. I tried my best to settle into a new home, new job, and new roads, and after a few months of adjustments, I began to get use to everything. My two roommates were upstanding guys about my age, and I got along with them fine. My work colleagues were a different story. Like most record stores, the crew that was employed there was a cache of characters, a dumping ground for unemployed musicians and misfits. There was a devout Christian working alongside a staunch atheist; a teenager with anger issues packing boxes next to a serene British chap; and the usual group of chain smokers who refused to go outside to light up (That rule eventually changed). If you ever wanted to meet a group of folks who saw the worst in everyone, hated the way the world operated, and re-defined the word ‘cynic’, this was the place. I managed to fit in as just another innocuous weirdo who was trying to make it in the music business. I did my job, avoided confrontations, and went home at the end of my shift. Sean and I worked a few shifts together, but he also had a wife and young children waiting for him at home. What spare time he had would be devoted to helping me with my musical endeavors. With his help, I managed to put together a band during the summer of 1988, and this new combo played in a few clubs for a couple of months. But these guys, as good as they were as musicians and singers, didn’t gel with me outside the rehearsal space. For some reason, they shunned me even from parties they would have after our gigs. I was the songwriter and lead singer of the band, but they wanted nothing to do with me socially. Maybe it’s because the oldest one of these guys was 21, and the other two were still in their teens. A 27-year-old man was just too close to their parents’ age, I suppose. That August, they wound up getting back together with their original lead singer and told me to take a hike. I floundered around after that, still looking for another door to success. Through an ad in the local musician’s rag, I did meet a terrific guitarist who was also looking to collaborate. But his style of music was more of the progressive rock variety – Yes, King Crimson, etc. and guitar wizards like Eric Johnson and Steve Vai. He could learn my material in seconds flat, but he didn’t really have an interest in being in a Beatles/Badfinger/Raspberries- influenced band. We rehearsed several times and had some great conversations about the state of the music industry. But after discussing our musical goals, we realized that the two of us weren’t the right fit. In March of 1989, we amicably decided to part ways.

Toward the end of 1988, Sean decided that he had had enough of the District. He and his wife didn’t want to raise their kids there, so they retreated back to a smaller town down south. I felt Sean had abandoned me after convincing me to uproot myself and move there earlier that year. He was my only musical confidante since the break-up of my summer band, so when he left town, I was at a loss as to what to do next. But by the time things

failed to work out with the prog-rock guitarist, I had already stepped into a new and even more volatile tender trap.

One of the supervisors at the record store was a 22-year-old girl named Becca who looked older than her years, no doubt as a result of her constant cigarette smoking. She rarely smiled, and had a swagger that suggested she could either kick your ass and/or fuck you to death. She was all business, but wore jeans that never failed to turn the heads of all the guys who worked there, even the righteous Christian dude. For a girl who admitted she never exercised, ate mostly junk food, and smoked incessantly, she had the body of a gymnast. Her toned legs and immaculate ass were what every woman who's ever gone to a gym yearns for after a workout. I suppose Becca was genetically blessed, as she didn't have an ounce of fat on her, but she was by no means skinny or anorexic. And even for a smoker, she managed to maintain a pleasant aroma when she was in close proximity. It's as if her clothes automatically ridded themselves of any lingering cigarette stench.

When I first started working at the store in February 1988, I rarely paid Becca much attention. The fact that she smoked was a turnoff, and her aloof disposition wasn't exactly that of the girl-next-door variety. I was so focused on putting together a successful band that I didn't even think about women or dating, and Becca would have never entered my mind for that anyway. But by December of that year, my schedule at the store had changed, and I was now working mainly afternoon-evening shifts. On most of these nights, Becca and I would be the only two employees working after 8pm, with the exception of another guy in the stockroom. I had also gotten a mini-promotion at the store, which simply gave me more responsibilities for a tad bit more money. And as a result, Becca and I were working more closely together. We actually had pretty good chemistry, and I could lightly chastise her for her smoking habit without her getting offended. She also knew I was a good employee and appreciated that fact. 1988 came to a close without incident, and I headed back home for the Christmas holidays.

## **PART TWO**

### **Peering Through Windows**

The beginning of 1989 was very unremarkable. I was still jamming with the prog-rock guitarist, but that was slowly coming apart. Becca and I continued to work closely together, and unfortunately, my feelings for her started to intensify. You may wonder why I would fall for a woman who smoked and had practically nothing in common with me, even my tastes in music (she even told me once that she didn't like The Beatles and "*couldn't give two shits about them*"). The answer was simple. I wanted to lose my virginity, and she had the body, experience, and sexiness to make it happen. Only, she had absolutely no interest in me from any perspective. The only reason she was conversing with me in the first place was because we worked the same hours together on the same projects. We simply got along as well as any two people would in the workplace without any flirting between them. Since I had never learned to flirt as a young man, my approach to women was still one of desperation and neediness, and Becca was no exception.

As my feelings for her grew, I tried to think of the best way to ask her out. Once again, I naively thought that, because we were getting along so well and relating in a friendly mode at work, that we would naturally metamorphose into a relationship outside the store. She never suspected that I was carrying a torch for her, as I never showed my hand. So when I finally did spring my offer of going out to dinner on her, I may as well have

dropped an anvil on her desk. One night in March, she was in her office working, and I walked in and sat at the other desk that was behind her. We were both working on computers and having a light conversation about music, orders, stock, etc. I was feeling like I was about to throw up; Becca looked amazing that night in her signature spray-painted-on jeans, and she even smiled a few times while we were chatting. Suddenly, right in the middle of our forgettable conversation, I swung my chair around and said,

*“Becca, would it be crazy if I asked you if you’d like to go out to dinner sometime?”* I blurted out at double-speed. She sat up straight instantly; the anvil had been dropped.

*“Well, I don’t know if it would be ‘crazy’, but I don’t think it would be a good idea.”* she said, grasping for a suitable answer.

*“Why?”* I said, trying to reason with her. I didn’t want to fail again with another girl.

*“Well, you probably know that James and I recently broke up, and I’ve decided that I’m not going to date anyone I work with anymore.”*

James had been her boyfriend for about two years, and he worked at one of the other stores. He was actually a decent fellow – very easy to get along with, non-judgmental, smart, and very professional in his role as one of the chain’s computer programmers. He was also more her type – longish hair, good-looking in an exotic way, and also a smoker. He had broken up with her about six months earlier, and she did not take it well. To make matters worse for her, James started dating another girl almost immediately after he dumped Becca. I don’t think Becca was over James, but of course, that had nothing to do with her refusal to go out with me.

When Becca explained her reasons to me for not wanting to date a co-worker, I started grabbing at straws.

*“I’ll quit!”* I said half-jokingly (but I wasn’t joking. I would have done anything to make love to this girl).

She rolled her eyes at the absurdity of my suggestion and said,

*“Tim, that’s not necessary and it wouldn’t matter. I think you’re a great guy, and had we met under different circumstances, maybe things would have turned out differently, but I think we should just remain co-workers and leave it at that.”*

Of course, I don’t believe for a second that ‘had we met under different circumstances’ that anything would have been different. She was just trying to let me down easy. But I accepted her answer, and told her I didn’t mean to make her feel uncomfortable. She seemed okay with it (even though I doubt anyone had ever approached her in a rolling chair for a date) and told me it was time to go home anyway. We both left, and I thought that maybe I could put this one to rest early and not turn it into another prolonged lovesickness. I even remember standing in my kitchen later that week and telling myself “no way, no way” was I going to let it get out of hand. If only I had listened to myself and thought with my head instead of my dick.

For the next few weeks I played it cool. It was business as usual with Becca, and she seemed to have forgotten my dinner offer. She certainly never mentioned it again, but my behavior around her ever since that night in the rolling chair started to change. I made ill-fated efforts to flirt with her, I would go out of my way to say *“See you tomorrow”* at the end of my shift in a tone of voice as if we were a couple, and I would hang out in her

office for prolonged periods of time for no reason other than to be close to her. Whatever chip in my brain, that had been defective since childhood, was still out of whack and was about to go into overdrive. All the energy I had put into my musical ambitions were now pointed at my Becca fantasy. I wrote a few songs about her and my situation during the early stages of my attraction to her, but my creativity was no longer a catharsis for me. Some of the best and most popular songs ever written were inspired by unrequited love, but for me, I could no longer pick up my guitar and compose songs about never getting the girl. I also decided that my guitar was not going to be the only thing I held close to my body at night. My guitar was not my girlfriend, and I was determined to change that.

A guy who worked at the store named Keith was also a musician. He was also a bit of an ageing stud – in his late 30's and still chasing after 21-year-olds. He had that California surfer boy look and was often compared to Don Johnson of *Miami Vice* fame as a result of his shoulder-length blond locks. He was a bit cocky and didn't have a hell of a lot of respect for women. He was going through a divorce when I worked with him, but he never had a shortage of women at his disposal. In another life, this guy would have been a porn star. He was always asking me about my dating life and if I was getting laid. He knew I was a musician, too, so I guess he assumed that I was living that lifestyle. I told him that there were no women in my life, and he didn't really seem that surprised. But, I guess he felt the need to mentor me, so he started talking to me about ways I could improve myself as well as my self-image. He suggested that I do several things. First, start going to a gym. I told him I had worked out occasionally back in my hometown, but didn't really stick with it. He said that "*women like muscles*", and that would be my first step at attracting hot babes. Second, since summer was on its way, make sure to get a nice tan. That, in addition to becoming a bodybuilder, would enhance my physique and give me a masculine glow. Finally, he said I had to lose the glasses. It was time to get contact lenses. I agreed with all of his suggestions, but the contact lens thing was already an issue. I had attempted to wear contacts when I was in my early 20's, but I was just too squeamish to put them in. Also, that was before they had come out with sensitive-eye saline solution, so the lenses burned my eyes too much to try and get use to them. But since I was determined to have a whole body makeover, I would give the contacts another shot.

It's important to point out that Keith had no idea that I was longing after Becca. He assumed I just wanted to attract women in general, and he was right, but everything I did from that point forward was only attempts to increase my chances with her. So I went to an ophthalmologist who told me that wearing extended-wear contact lenses was more comfortable than it used to be. With his help, I was able to easily insert the contacts in my eyes without any discomfort. To this day, I still wear them and have never had any problems. So now that I had conquered one of my fears and insecurities, it was time to get into shape. I joined a gym that I went to religiously. I began reading men's fitness magazines and changing my diet from junk food to more healthy options. I also started taking supplements that were supposed to help put on muscle – products like Gainer's Fuel and a weird concoction called Hot Stuff. The latter was a powdered form of animal glands, protein, and some questionable ingredients. It was supposedly a legal form of steroids and at the time was the hottest thing on the bodybuilder scene. (The current formula is a different mixture with the "steroids" removed). Within a few months, I had put on some muscle and was starting to get bigger. My friends noticed my transformation, and along with my artificial tan (I had been stupid enough to immerse myself in a tanning bed at a salon for a few months), I was on my way to becoming a new man. Or so I thought. My outside was changing, but my confidence and self-esteem were still dependent on one girl. Instead of taking my newly found image and running with it, I kept looking to Becca for approval. Other people at work were noticing my changes, so why not her? Actually, she did notice. She just didn't care. Maybe she even admired the fact that I was making efforts to improve myself, but that didn't make her want me. And since I was still acting like a subservient around her, I hadn't really changed at all. I was still the same geek from high school who couldn't get a

girlfriend to save his life. But I wasn't going to give up. I continued to go to the gym, buy clothes that didn't have a K-Mart tag on the label, and read as much as I could about self-improvement. The problem here was I was expecting to be rewarded for my efforts. Since I had put all this time, energy, and money into becoming a sex-eligible being, I should get something in return. Why else do people go to the gym? They want to look good so they can get laid. Yeah, lowering their cholesterol, keeping their heart healthy, and losing weight are important, but the main reason is to look good for the opposite sex so they can get some action. I was no different, but I expected Becca to be the girl to reward me. When she didn't so much as pat me on the back, I began to get more desperate.

Since Becca wasn't fantasizing about my new quads, I decided to resort to an old stand-by that had always failed in the past with other women but I hoped would win Becca over. It was yet another attempt to prove to her that I was worthy of her attention and affections. She knew I had been a musician and songwriter even before I had fallen for her, so this was a topic I could raise while we were still barely on speaking terms. One day I was standing in the doorway of her office talking her ear off about anything as an excuse to just be in the same room with her, and I confessed to her that I had been writing some songs about her. For the first (and only) time in my pursuit of her, she actually seemed interested in hearing more about this. I told her that she inspired my most recent lyrics, and I had written the music for them, too. She told me that she was interested in reading them. Like a little kid in elementary school who had been given a special assignment by a teacher he had a crush on, I told Becca I would write them out and give them to her in a few days. The prospect of pouring my heart out on paper and delivering the writings to her only got my hopes up more. I now had a specific goal and I was damned determined to get it right.

Since this had been a Friday when Becca asked me about my lyrics, I knew what I would be doing all weekend. Any plans I had (and I doubt there were that many) immediately went out the window. Nothing would be more important than this. I could have easily sat down at my electric typewriter and neatly typed all the lyrics in a matter of minutes. But I wanted to add a personal touch. I decided to handwrite each lyric, about four songs total. I chose the songs I thought might win her over and proceeded to carefully print each line. Since I have some of the worst handwriting in history, this was going to be a challenge. But I considered this task to be as important to me as any graduate student considers his final thesis paper to be. I fastidiously printed each line of my songs with the utmost attention to detail, literally making sure to dot every "i" and cross every "t". If I made a mistake or thought my chicken scratch looked illegible, I would start over. When I finally completed my task, I put the finished papers into a manila envelope and wrote Becca's name on the outside. I went back to work on Monday and waited for the perfect moment to walk into her office and present her my "homework." It was later in the evening when most of the daytime employees had left that I finally gave her the envelope. I was surprisingly low-key about it. I didn't make that big a deal about what I had done over the weekend; I just handed her the envelope and said, "*Here are the lyrics I was telling you about.*" To keep it light, I added, "*Hey, who knows? Maybe they'll be worth something someday.*" She gave me a slight smile and chuckled. She probably knew how anxious I was to get a response from her, and I'm sure it was written all over my face. I left her office and got on with my work, feeling a bit proud of myself for having followed through with what I said I'd do for her.

After a few days went by, I still had not gotten any feedback from Becca. I gave her a few more days to read what I had written as I figured she had been too busy with work to get the chance. By the end of the week, I was beginning to wonder if she had even read the lyrics. One afternoon she walked over to me while I was putting away CD's and handed the lyrics back to me. She didn't say a word as I took them from her, but I told her 'thanks'. Then she just turned and walked back into her office. I was a bit confused by this. Did she even read

them? Had she changed her mind about it? Since they were out of the envelope, I had to assume she did give them a look-over. I stood there not knowing quite what to do. I felt that something was incomplete and unresolved. Well, of course it was. She had given me nothing in return for my efforts, not even an acknowledgement that she even liked or disliked my work. I continued on with my duties, but I had to find out what was going through her mind. So I decided to try and casually bring it up later that night. I walked back to where she was working and stood in the doorway of her office (a doorway that practically became an extra limb on me during this time) and got right to it.

*“You never said anything about my lyrics. Did you get a chance to read them?”*

*“Yes I did”,* she said without any emotion.

*“Any thoughts...?”*

*“I thought they were very sad”,* she admitted. This was not the response I was hoping for.

*“Sad?”*

*“Yeah, they were very depressing and told me a lot about you.”*

*“Well, I wrote what I was feeling. I thought that maybe you’d see that.”*

But she didn’t. It was clear that my lyrics weren’t so much about her but rather about my misery over her. Maybe she had been expecting some odes to her long hair, perfect ass, or pack-a-day habit. I don’t know. What she did reveal to me is that there had been another guy who used to work at this store who had also fallen in love with her. Our stories were similar. They were co-workers who had gotten along fine. They even shared a couple of beers together outside the store on a few occasions. But then he started to develop feelings for her, and eventually the entire staff knew about it. He would come in to work every day, sometimes after tipping back a few, and profess his love for her in the store. He had also written her poetry that expressed how he felt about her. These weren’t morose song lyrics; they were genuine poetic verses. Whether or not they were any good I’ll never know, but this guy was more educated and well traveled than me, so I can imagine that his writings had a more sophisticated bent to them. But Becca told me about his behavior to let me know that all his whining and confessions of love never did change her feelings about him. And it finally got to the point where she couldn’t even have a normal conversation with him anymore. She was hoping it wouldn’t come to that point with me, because she didn’t want to go through it again. At the time, I didn’t think I would ever push her to that breaking point, but where else could it go?

I foolishly approached Becca a couple of more times for a date over the next few months, and each time it drove a bigger wedge between us. I tried to reason with her, to figure out why she wouldn’t just give me a chance, just one date to see how it would go. But logic was not the issue here. She simply wasn’t interested in going out with me - period - end of story. But instead of respecting her wishes and moving on, old patterns reared their ugly heads. I can’t imagine what possessed me to think that Becca would ever consider going out with me at this point, much less sleeping with me. She had told me NO without hesitation, so did I actually think she and I were going to get naked together? My tunnel vision had taken over my senses. I continued to suffer, hoping that there would be a magic turning point, and I would have my sexual wishes fulfilled with her. It’s as if I thought an alternate universe was going to open up where Becca and I became lovers. Going to work

every day created so much anxiety and anticipation that, on days where she didn't come in due to illness or some family commitment, I was actually relieved. Why? Because not seeing her kept the fantasy alive. By not approaching her, there would be no rejection. I could do my job and mingle with other employees without having to look over my shoulder to see what jeans Becca had on that day. But any such protection from reality would soon be shattered. My worst fears would come true in the summer of 1989. And I would be subjected to witnessing them on an almost daily basis.

There are those who believe that some people have a sixth sense, an ability to see or hear something that might be of another realm. I doubt I possess this gift, but one night in July of 1989, I felt something creeping up on me. I was in the back part of the record store behind the customer service counter. I would help customers locate CD's on the computer to see if they were in stock at any of our other stores. Since my store was also the central warehouse, all the stock came to our location before being shipped out to the other stores. We didn't get that many walk-ins, but we did have a few loyal patrons who stopped in every week to discuss music, art, and life. Because this chain was well known for its classical music selection, it appealed to many of Washington, DC's upper crust. So I got to know a lot of our customers and greet them when they came in. On this particular weeknight, I was going about my business when I suddenly felt a presence. I looked up and saw a tall, young man of about 30, blond, wearing shorts and a nice collared shirt, standing before me. He had piercing blue eyes and a self-assured stance. Something told me he wasn't going to ask me where the Mozart section was.

*"Can I help you?"* I calmly asked.

*"Yeah",* he replied, *"I'm here to see Becca Jennings."*

*"Okay, I'll go get her."*

I thought to myself, *Oh, this guy is probably a record company rep or a family member or a gay friend of a gay friend. I'm sure he's nothing to be concerned with.* I walked into Becca's office, holding my breath, and told her she had a visitor.

*"Send him on back"* she said with some excitement in her voice.

I walked back out front and told the gentleman to follow me. I guided him to Becca's office, and once he stepped inside, I turned around and walked back out front. I felt like I was going to have a nervous breakdown. But I tried to convince myself that he could still be a cousin or other relative. A few minutes later, the two of them came out of her office.

*"What time does the movie start?"* she asked her new friend as they walked past me. Before he could answer, she noticed me and said good night. We were still on speaking terms, and she was trying hard to continue to be my co-worker without any problems. I watched them walk to the front of the store and exit. It was about 8pm, and I felt as if I had just been thrown overboard in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. I walked back to Becca's office where Keith was still working (they shared this office), looking for any clues that might tell me who this mystery date was. I asked Keith if Becca was gone for the night. Without looking up from his computer, he told me yes. He still had no idea that I was in love with her.

As July became August, I would see this fellow - we'll call him Joe - come into the store several times a week. He would now just walk on back to her office as if he worked there. It was blatantly obvious that the two of

them were going out. Every time they left the store, I would discreetly walk into the unlit front office, which had a window that looked out into the parking lot, and watch them through the blinds. I wanted to see whose car they took to get to wherever they were going. If they took her car, she would have to bring him back. Same thing with his car. But if they took both cars, I knew neither one of them would be coming back. If curiosity did indeed kill the proverbial cat, then my curiosity nearly put me in an institution. It had certainly put me into therapy (more on that coming up), but one night I thought it was all over. I know I'm being melodramatic here; most people would say, "*Forget her, dude! She has a boyfriend. Get out there and find someone else!*" But my mind was made up. I could no more let go of this fantasy than I could all the girls before, going all the way back to seventh grade. I had a sickness, maybe even a psychosis in this instance. So, on this fateful evening, Becca and Joe had left earlier in the evening and taken his car. I knew he would be bringing her back to her vehicle, and I was determined to be around when it happened. I waited in the front office, lights off, and stared out into the night. I had already clocked out, and there was one other guy working in the stockroom, with whom I would usually work late nights. He knew nothing about this, so I was safe sitting in my little spy room. Finally, I looked up and saw the two of them standing together in the parking lot across the street, leaning up against her car. They had pulled into the lot when I was momentarily out of the room, so I had come back just in time to see them standing there. They were laughing and touching each other, and even though I couldn't hear anything they were saying, it was quite clear that they were enjoying themselves. This went on for about 15 minutes, but I was willing to sit there all night if necessary to see how it concluded. Finally, I got my answer. I saw her reach up and put her arms around Joe's neck as he put his arms around her waist. He pulled her close and began kissing her passionately. Their heads were moving back and forth as they kissed, and then he did something I could only dream about. He reached down with both hands and grabbed her ass and started pulling and squeezing it with all his might. She responded by jumping up and wrapping her long, toned legs around his torso while their kissing became even more intense.

*"Oh no! Oh no!"* I screamed as loudly as I could without being heard by my colleague in the stockroom. I put my face in my hands and began to sob. I looked up again, and they had let go of each other. She got into her car and he continued to talk to her through her window. She then drove away and he went and got in his car. I slumped down into the chair in which I was sitting. My head leaned against the blinds as I tried to comprehend what I had just seen. This confirmed what I already knew but did not want to accept. Becca and Joe were sleeping together, and I had just witnessed their residual actions. All I could think about while I sat there was how pleasurable it must have been for him. My mind created all sorts of scenarios of the two of them fucking, sucking, fondling, and cumming. Every fantasy I'd ever had about her was a reality for this guy. And there was absolutely nothing I could do about it.

At 28 years of age, I knew that people did all these things. Seeing Becca's actions in the parking lot didn't surprise me one bit. I knew she wasn't a virgin. But my possessiveness and obsession with her had led me to believe that I would be the next guy she slept with. My "love" for her would win out over all the other jocks and pretty boys that would be chasing after her. It was my reasoning that, after all the workouts in the gym, the contact lenses, the hipper wardrobe, and the tanning salon visits, I should be the one standing there in the parking lot with Becca. Not some guy she just met a few weeks before. But the hard truth about Becca's life behind bedroom doors would be accidentally revealed to me one late evening in the store.

In the fall of 1990, a separate office was built for Becca in the front part of the store where the cash registers used to be. Another supervisor was now using her old office. Being up front allowed her to communicate with the other buyers a little easier, but it was just another office doorway for me to stand in so I could talk to her. It also allowed me to overhear phone conversations she would have with various people. Since she never closed

her office door, it was always tempting (I'm ashamed to admit) to listen in on her phone calls to see if I could pick up any clues to her personal life. It was all about staying in control for me, and it consumed me in very unhealthy ways. I don't know what I thought I could overhear that would make me think that I might still possibly have a chance with her. But it wasn't about that at all. By keeping tabs on her, it also kept my fantasy alive. As long as I didn't hear her talk about a boyfriend, then she must be celibate, so I hoped. Just the thought of her sleeping with someone else made me crazy, so I wanted to "know" that no other guy was enjoying her sexual pleasures. Despite what I had seen in the parking lot a few months earlier, I was still determined to retain some kind of grasp on my self-created illusion of her availability. But on this particular night, I found out some things that, again, should not have surprised me.

Becca and I were the only ones in the store, she in her office and I packing up stock to send to other stores in the chain. As I approached the front of the store to take care of something, I overheard Becca talking on her phone. She was talking to her younger sister, and this was what Becca said as she gave her sibling advice:

*"Listen to me, Ally. I want you to stop having sex with him. (pause) Because you're only sixteen! (pause) Well, you're too young to be having sex with him. Where have you been doing it? (pause) What if Mom and Dad found out? You can't be having sex in your bedroom! (pause) No, I don't mind you talking to me about it. Who else can you talk to? I mean I have had sex, so I know what I'm talking about. (pause) I had a one-night stand, but I want to talk about what you're doing."*

She then went from chastising her to getting more details.

*"How have you been doing it? Was he on top or were you on top? (pause) Have you ever tried it doggie-style? (pause) Not up the ass! - From behind. That works really good. Well, anyway, I want you to stop it..."*

And then she moved on to another subject.

Hearing her talk about sex (something I had never heard her do) as well as describe positions she liked turned me into a blubbing, shaking invalid on the floor. None of what she said would have surprised any other rationally thinking human, but it rattled me down to the bone. It completely upset the balance of sanity that I had barely been able to maintain throughout this whole ordeal. It also confirmed that she was sexually active while I had been pursuing her. I felt betrayed and cheated on even though I had no right to feel that way. I couldn't stop trying to understand why she would sleep with someone else but not me. What did those guys have that I didn't? I did all the "right" things to put myself on par with them, so why wasn't I good enough? These were questions that needed professional attention, and I was already in the process of getting it.

I managed to pick myself up and leave the store. Becca had no idea that I overheard her conversation, so I played it cool and told her good night. When I got home I immediately called Andy in New York. It was about 11pm so I knew he'd still be up. I told him what had happened, and after sympathizing with me for a few minutes, he asked me without sugarcoating it if I actually thought Becca was a virgin. I told him of course not, but knowing that she had fucked some guy in the past year was tearing me apart. Andy said that as hard as it was to accept, that's what hot women do, and Becca was no exception. He bluntly stated that it was clear that Becca was never going to go out or sleep with me, so it was time to move on. Of course, Andy and I had this conversation many times before, but I always held out for hope that things would change. After I hung up, I tried to go about my normal business – watch some TV, eat a late-night meal, and go to bed. But all I could do was obsess over what I had heard Becca say on the phone. Everything changed for me that night. But despite

feeling hopeless and defeated by this newly overheard information, I still managed to get through each day like a civilized person. That is, I never ever considered doing anything of a criminal nature such as send threatening letters, stalk her, follow her home, or sexually assault her. I may have been obsessed with Becca, but I knew my limits. I knew what lines could never be crossed, and I never crossed them.

### **PART THREE**

#### **We Have To Stop Now**

*“Maybe I’ve been lying on your couch too long. I’ll stay if you can see me through.”*

-“Please Read Me” by the Bee Gees

There was no way I was going to get through my young life without getting into some kind of therapy for my obsessions, depression, and other maladies ending in “-sion.” It was necessary for me to have an outlet for my ramblings, and even though Andy was always on the other end of the phone to listen to me, I needed a professional, objective point of view. When I first moved to Washington, DC, I was suffering from anxiety attacks, not because of any girl, but just a major life change. They started in January 1988 before I had made my final decision to move out of my parents’ home. Once I got to DC, I continued experiencing all the typical symptoms of panic attacks – sudden rushes of fear, feeling like I was literally about to die, rapid heartbeat, bizarre pains in my chest, and feelings of disassociations from reality. I began seeing a young therapist – probably not much older than me – who I found through a referral listing. She was very green, and frankly, not much help in the anxiety department. We never really delved into my deeper psychological issues but talked about more immediate concerns. I told her about my virginity and how much of a loser I felt like at my age because of it. I spoke of my history of rejections and how eager and anxious I was to make love to a woman. *“You’re getting ready,”* she would tell me. *“I’m ready now, and I’ve been ready!”* I proclaimed. I don’t know what the hell else I could have done to ‘get ready’ other than go buy a condom. When my feelings for Becca entered the picture, my therapist tried her best to steer me away from pursuing her any further. When I told her about Becca’s new boyfriend Joe and the behavior they exhibited, she broke the news to me that they were indeed sleeping together. She didn’t tell me this to be cruel, of course, but to bring me back to reality and move on. After a few months seeing this young therapist once a week, she informed me that she had taken another position out of town and would not be able to treat me anymore. She encouraged me to continue therapy, and she told me that an older, more experienced woman was coming in to replace her. She couldn’t stop praising this woman’s wisdom and comprehension of the human mind, and how good she was with patients. I decided to stick with it and meet this so-called gifted individual to see if she could help me break out of my patterns of self-destruction.

The following week I met the replacement therapist in the same office where I’d been seeing the younger one, and she turned out to be an older, German woman named Fran with lots of Freudian training. She was a bit familiar with my case, and by the time she took over my sessions, Becca was the center of my troubles (the

anxiety attacks had temporarily subsided with the help of medication.) Because I wound up seeing Fran for the next six years, we got out shovels and exhumed nearly every buried secret, concern, unresolved issues with my mother, and more fun stuff. She tried her best to make connections between my inability to form relationships with women and my mother's criticisms of my acne and looks when I was a teenager. Fran was convinced that most if not all of my problems with women stemmed from mommy issues and the fact that I grew up in a house with mostly critical females (including my sisters) and a passive father. Since there was no real male role model for me to learn from to deal with women, I was always the victim of their pugnacity. I argued that even if all this were true, none of the women I'd ever approached for a date were aware of my teen years and the way I was raised. Perhaps not, she told me, but the way I dealt with rejection and the belief that I wasn't good enough for any girl was written all over my face. I'll give her that. My lack of confidence has definitely been a determining factor in why I've never gotten laid, but I still argue that if a woman is attracted to you, your confidence will be boosted as a result anyway.

Fran was certainly an asset in helping me with other areas of my life. Down the road, I made the decision to end our sessions for good, but I don't regret the time I spent with her. I did learn a lot about myself from our talks and was also able to get a lot of things off my chest and conscience. I also continued to read self-help and dating books to supplement my therapy. As I'll get to later on, the dating books became my bible in certain cases, and I combed over each one with hi-lighter in hand.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Before Match.com**

By the end of the summer of '89, everyone at the store knew about my obsession with Becca. Just like my high school days, I managed to take almost every employee into my "confidence" and discuss my romantic dilemma. Since they weren't wizards, they had no answers for me but to move on. My whole life consisted of going to work, going to the gym, and going home. The gym was another outlet for me to talk about Becca, but the big boys there only wanted to talk about quads and lats. I was also calling Andy in New York almost every night to discuss the latest developments. I even wrote a letter to Playboy Magazine's *Advisor* column, hoping their team of sexperts would reveal the secrets of changing a woman's mind. And one night, I even caught up with Peter, Becca's old boyfriend, to speak to him about it. I thought I could get some insight from him since he'd actually been between the sheets with her. He could only sympathize with me but couldn't give me any magic formula to win her heart.

But oddly enough, the one person who tried to help me forget about her the most was Becca herself. One afternoon during a typical workday, she came out of her office and handed me a clipping from a publication called *The Learning Annex*. Most large cities have (or used to have) this small advertising paper that lists local classes for adults, usually one-night affairs. The page she had ripped out was for a singles mixer called The Meeting Group Party. She told me a girlfriend of hers had attended one of these events and got several dates out of it. This event had been started in St. Louis, Missouri by a guy who was having trouble meeting women and who was tired of the bar scene. As a result of his creation, he eventually met the woman who would become his wife, and the two of them started hosting these groups in many major U.S. cities. I looked it over and made the decision to at least give it a shot. It only cost \$24 to go, and maybe I could meet a nice, attractive girl who would want to go out with me.

This is how the group worked: When you arrived at the door of the location hosting the party (usually a hotel banquet room), you were given a nametag to stick on your breast pocket so people would know what to call you. You were then given a stack of “calling cards” – small business cards that had a space on the front for your name and phone number. On the back of each card were five categories, one of which you could check off later in the evening before you handed it to someone. Those categories, as best I can remember them, were the following:

- You seem like someone I'd like to get to know.
- Maybe we can meet again where it's a little quieter.
- I'd like to take you out to dinner.
- I hope I can see you again soon.
- I'll just die if you don't call.

(That last one was meant to be all in fun, but I'm sure it got checked off more than you'd think).

Throughout the evening, everyone is divided into different groups, based on likes and dislikes, by the host. Everyone has a booklet with miscellaneous topics ranging from “What's one thing you've never done, but would like to do?” to “If you could have dinner with anyone, living or dead, who would it be?” As everyone reveals their responses to these and other mind-blowing questions, you are gradually introduced to different people, personalities, and tastes through discussions. Then, you go to another group based on another set of criteria and repeat the process. At any time during the night, you are allowed, in fact encouraged, to hand out your calling card to someone you'd like to get to know better. You're not actually required to check off one of the five categories on the back of the card, but it will give the recipient a better idea of what you might have in mind. The rule here is, when you hand your card to someone, they *have* to accept it and say thank-you, even if they have no intention of calling you or making contact with you again. This prevents any immediate rejection from taking place. Since you *know* your card will be accepted, you can freely hand it out without any fear. Also, no matter how much the receiver of your card may want to give you one of their cards too, they are not allowed to at that moment. This is so you will not be expecting a card in return for yours. No expectations, no disappointment. They can, however, give you a card later in the evening if they so desire. All these rules apply to the giver as well. He has to accept whatever cards are given to him, say thank-you, and move on. This protocol allows you to meet as many different women as you can during the party without fear of rejection. The host quickly pointed out “*The success of the evening is measured not by how many cards you receive, but by how many cards you hand out.*” Another way to not feel like a loser at the end of the party.

So I put on my Sunday best and went to the first of what would be several of these mixers. The first one was a rather large and crowded affair at a posh hotel in DC. There were many attractive women and men of all shapes, sizes, and ages in attendance. Surely I would be able to find my soul mate (or at least a sex mate) among the crowd. I probably handed out three or four cards that night but received none. Over the next several months, I went to more of these parties. Some were much smaller than the first one, while others were somewhere in between. I really made an effort to connect with women. I met one girl who was also a singer/songwriter, and we had a nice chat. She handed me her card and I said thank-you. I was excited that she might want to see me again. When I called her a few days later to ask her if she'd like to get together for coffee or lunch, she made it plainly clear to me that she went to that party, not to find a boyfriend or lover, but to meet other musicians so she could put a band together. Huh? Was she serious? This was a fucking singles mixer, not a music convention. Of course, she was just blowing me off. She never had any intention of going out with me. Why did

she hand me her card? Who knows...probably just to be able to tell her friends that her \$24 wasn't completely wasted. There were one or two other women who handed me their cards, but mostly I was the one doing the giving. I never heard from any of them. But there was one attendee who handed me her card one night, and I thought I'd won the lottery.

Anne was a beautiful, tall blonde woman of about 27 who caused me to melt the moment I saw her. She was receiving cards left and right from men during this particular mixer but wasn't handing any out herself. She was wearing an elegant white dress and had a face to die for. While mingling with other folks this night, I turned around and found myself standing face to face with her. I said hello, as did she. We had a surprisingly easy chemistry, and she told me about her job (a paralegal) as well as the two funny birds she had as pets in her apartment. She was charming and delightful. I told her I was a musician currently working for a music distributor (my fancy way of saying I worked in a record store). After a few minutes, I handed her my card and told her to enjoy the rest of the evening. She drifted into the crowd, and that was that. I continued to meet a few other women and hand out cards. I was a pro at this by now. And then something happened that I never expected. The night was coming to a close as the host announced that time was running out to *"give your card to that one person you've been staring at all night, but haven't had the courage to approach."* I was chatting with a couple of guys about their efforts, when all of a sudden Anne reappeared and shoved one of her cards into my hand. *"I don't like to call guys, so here's my number"* she said nervously. I said thank-you without really knowing what had just happened. She walked away, and I just stared straight ahead. *Who does she want me to give this to?* I thought. *Surely she didn't mean to give her card to me.* One of the guys standing around me who witnessed this improbable occurrence said to me, *"Way to go, guy! You got her card!"* I looked at the card. *"Really?!"* I said incredulously. It was true. Even though she hadn't checked off one of the soul-bearing boxes on the back of the card, I still had her name and number in my possession. Holy shit. This girl was gorgeous, sweet, and easy to talk to. And she just gave me her number.

A few days later I called Anne. We had a nice catching-up chat, and I thought I was in like Flynn.

*"Did you have a good time at the Meeting Group Party the other night? What did you think of it,"* I asked.

*"Well, I wasn't really that comfortable. I don't really like those kinds of events where you go just to meet people,"* she explained.

*"Yeah, I know. I've been to a couple of others, and they can be a weird experience. But I'm glad we got to meet each other"*. She then revealed to me that I was the only guy she gave a card to that night. I had never been so flattered by anything in my life before she told me this.

*"So, would you like to get together one night this week for dinner or drinks?"* I asked.

*"You know, this week is not going to work for me. I have volleyball practice every night after work, but maybe we can get together next week,"* she said with some encouragement.

*"Oh, you're on a volleyball team! That sounds like fun!"*

*"Yeah, so call me next week, and we'll see if we can meet up."*

I hung up the phone, and for the first time in nearly eight months, I was thinking about someone other than Becca.

The next week came. I called Anne back. She couldn't get together that week because of work. She said she was just too busy. I decided to let her off the hook.

*"Hey, listen. I know you said you didn't really feel comfortable at the party, so if you're having second thoughts about us getting together, I understand."*

*"Oh, no"* she assured me. *"I still want to get together, but I'm just really busy this week."*

*"Okay. I'll try you again next week."*

The promising light that shone on me at the mixer was fading fast. I knew where this was headed. The following week, I called her again. She didn't have time to get together that week either. I gave her another chance to just drop the idea, but she kept telling me that she wanted to see me. I told her I was going to San Francisco for seven days, but I'd call her when I got back. She said that would be fine. When I returned from the city by the Bay, I gave it one last shot. I called her, and she seemed happy to hear from me. I told her about my trip, and she told me about her volleyball tournaments. I still wanted to see her again, so I told her this and asked her to dinner. She said she wasn't available. I finally got the good sense to put the ball in her court. I politely told her that if she wanted to get together, she should call me next time. I would not be calling her again. I hung up, and that was the last time I ever spoke to Anne.

I think what happened here is that she had not given away any of her cards at the mixer the night I met her, so by the time it was almost over, she wanted to give at least one card away so it wouldn't be a total loss for her. I just happened to be the guy that was standing near her at that moment, and since we had had a pleasant enough conversation earlier, she spontaneously gave me her card. The fact is it could have been any other guy who was standing there. She didn't seek me out. She wasn't really attracted to me. It was pure chance, not sexual desire on her part. And after she left that night, she couldn't figure out how to handle the situation if I did indeed call her. Maybe she wasn't good at relationships in the first place. Maybe she had recently been dumped and was looking for solace by going to the mixer and being around other women. Maybe \_\_\_\_\_ (You fill in the blank).

I went to a few more mixers, but none were successful. I also tried running ads in the personals section of the Washington City Paper. Since this was before internet dating, all one had to go on was a description with no pictures. I also answered a few ads from women by leaving a voicemail on an answering service that I would access by punching in a code on my phone's keypad that was printed next to the ad. I never got any response going down this avenue, but one of my roommates met his future wife this way. A blind date for the two of them turned into marriage, which is still going strong as of this writing.

In the meantime, with Anne no longer a prospect, I once again found myself focusing on Becca. I had not gotten over her, so my pathetic longing and chasing after her picked up where I had briefly left off. She and Joe had called it quits by September 1989, so I thought I was back in the running. I used Christmas and her birthday as excuses to give her gifts – one of which was a card that I found ripped to shreds at my feet about a week after I had left it on her desk. She was sending me a message, and frankly, looking back, I don't blame her. My silly behavior had gone on now for almost two years, and she was sick of it. I stopped actively pursuing her around

the end of 1990, but it was too late to salvage any kind of civil working relationship. The irreparable damage was done. My very presence was enough to repel her. She was no longer speaking to me, and anytime I happened to walk into a part of the store where she was, she would immediately turn and walk away. She would give me work-related assignments through other employees so she wouldn't have to look at my face. I had turned this girl into a mortal enemy, and she was going to do whatever it took to get rid of me. Earlier that year, this store had closed its doors to the public and was only operating as the chain's main hub and warehouse. So I was now working as a shipper and receiver of CD's and tapes. I was glad to be rid of working with customers, but it meant working with Becca a little more often than before, and she would have none of it.

In June 1991, I was called into one of the managers' offices – the same one I had used for my parking lot spying – and given an offer. The main store manager was sitting with the classical music buyer, and they told me that my position at the warehouse was ending and that I would no longer be needed as of the following week. But a position was opening at one of the other stores, and the manager there wanted me to fill it. He thought I was good with customers and enjoyed interacting with them, so he wanted me to be a part of his team of employees. They also offered me a dollar per hour raise and said they thought a change of scenery would do me good. Without me bringing it up, they added that their decision to transfer me had nothing to do with the Becca situation, but I knew better. She was on vacation that week, and I'll bet everything I own that she had given them an ultimatum – *“Either Tim goes or I will. When I get back from vacation, if he's still here, I'm quitting,”* I imagined her saying. I resisted their offer at first, mainly because I didn't want to change my routine. The warehouse was closer to where I lived, and I just didn't want to have to deal with the public again. But they told me it was the other store or nothing. Since I had nothing else going on in my life other than the gym and fitness magazines, I accepted. The extra dollar an hour would help with the additional cost of gasoline, and maybe getting away from Becca would be the best thing for me. It was like yanking an alcoholic away from every bottle of booze he was used to consuming, but it's what was necessary for me to get my life back. Plus, I already knew several of the employees at the other store, so I wasn't going to be entering totally strange waters. I met with the manager of the other store, and he told me that he would like for me to come on down and work there. I don't think he knew anything about my indiscretions with Becca, but he may have been made aware of the situation by the powers that be. Either way, he never mentioned it, and it wasn't cause for concern on his part. So, on a Friday afternoon in June 1991, I bid adieu to my partners in crime at the warehouse, and they wished me well. Becca was still out of town, so I didn't have to put myself through what would have no doubt been a humiliating attempt at saying goodbye to her. We were strangers at that point, anyway, so the fact that she was gone didn't matter. I left the building, and the following Monday I began work at another store, and also began another chapter in my life that would lead to me being reminded almost every day, at the age of 30, that my sexual experience was still untapped and dying to escape.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **PART ONE**

### **Back On the Boards**

Having not worked with the public since the warehouse closed in 1990, it was a trying experience for me to be thrown back to the wolves. I didn't mind answering questions and locating products for customers, but the store where I was now working was a hotbed of stuffy, elitist, erudite complainers who felt the world owed them something. Because this was also an affluent area, we got our share of rich, privileged white kids who thought they were street-hip because they were buying CD's by black rappers such as Geto Boys, Ice Cube, and 2 Live Crew. I have nothing against anyone buying whatever music floats their boat, but these kids were just a bunch of posers who were attempting to be cool without really understanding the messages behind hip-hop.

But I digress. I adjusted to my new place of employment pretty easily even if the parking did suck. The employees were friendly, and there was one guy there who used to work at the warehouse with me. My new tasks included putting out stock, transferring product to other stores, and dealing with customers. Since I was no longer actively pursuing music, I was at an in-between state. I was trying to come down from my Becca obsession and decide what would be next for me. I still went to the gym, and in 1991 I was continuing therapy with Fran. For the first six months or so at the new store, whenever Becca called to see if we had a product in stock and I happened to answer the phone, she would immediately ask for another employee. She didn't even want to speak with me on the phone. Once in a while she would stop by my store to inspect various displays, and would ignore me like it was nobody's business. I remember her showing up one day and by chance I passed her in an aisle. I said 'Hey' to her, and she gave me a glare that may as well have been two knives in my gut. How dare I even speak to her. She was still convinced that any attempt on my part to communicate with her was going to lead to another request for a date (it wasn't). Even I was sick of it at that point, so she had nothing more to worry about. I was still physically attracted to her, but a major impenetrable wall had been put up between us. That wall, however, did slowly start to come down over the next year. She eventually allowed me to remain on the phone with her if I answered it. I think she realized that as long as I worked for the company, she would have to be professional about it (as long as I was). I never tried to engage her in conversation on the phone; I just answered her questions and hung up. When she became comfortable with this, she even lowered herself enough to talk to me in person whenever I would see her in the store or at an after-hours inventory. These inventories were on Sunday nights a few times a year and usually lasted anywhere from 12 - 15 hours overnight. Everyone who signed up to work these got double-time pay and free pizza. The work was tiring, but the pay was nice. It was still hard for me to see Becca at these overnights; she looked incredible in her tight jeans, and I was still pining for her. My common sense had put up a roadblock to me ever asking her out again, and I never did. I just fantasized about her and continued trying to meet other women.

Because of the location of the store where I was now working, it wasn't unusual to see beautiful, sexy, cute, classy, and even trashy girls come in every day to browse. There were no rules imposed upon us saying that employees couldn't date customers (one of our employees even married a customer a few years after I quit), so

the field was wide open. But I still felt too inadequate, especially working retail, to even think about asking out a female customer who appeared single and available. Making little more than minimum wage was not a babe magnet, but the fact is that women don't go into retail stores hoping to find potential mates who wear nametags and use a price gun. As Michelle Pfeiffer's character Elvira Hancock said in the 1983 film *Scarface* – "*I don't fuck the help.*" Had I been a young, hip 21-year-old with tattoos, leather, and a nose ring working there, maybe I could have bedded some cute goth chick who was just looking for some drugs, booze, and liked the Velvet Underground. Since I was, in reality, a 30-year-old, white-bread, directionless sap who once thought the band Air Supply was one of Australia's best musical exports, my chances at scoring on any level with a woman were still less than zero.

In August of 1991, I went on vacation with my family to the beach. This was an annual trip we had taken every year since my sisters and I were children, and the tradition continued which now included their husbands and kids in tow. As I got older, I didn't make the trip every year, but when I made the effort to go, Andy would sometimes come along to keep me company and to meet chicks at the local arcades and bars. He did make the trip with me this year, and one afternoon he and I were sitting on the deck that led from our beach cottage to the warm sand and ocean, just discussing life and what in the world we were going to do now that we were old men of 30. Andy had moved back to my hometown the year before, having gotten sick of New York. He was an actor and was rapidly building a very impressive resume of theater, TV, and film credits. I was working in a record store and doing little else. Since my musical ambitions were history, Andy and I were trying to figure out what I could do to get out of my rut. Since I had finally given up the hope of winning Becca, I told Andy that I was still dying to meet an attractive woman and get laid for the first time. Andy asked me if I had considered taking an acting class in Washington, DC just to get back into a group of people outside of work. He knew about my childhood community theater days and thought I might enjoy trying it again. He was also a professional actor who was a member of the Screen Actors Guild and had a very good agent. Even though he still waited tables to help pay the rent, he booked a lot of paid acting jobs to keep him in the game. He suggested that if I still had the acting bug, maybe I could break into the DC acting scene and start a new life. I got excited by his suggestion and decided to look into it when I got back to DC the next week.

Upon returning home to the beltway, I started going through the local entertainment paper that came out every week – the same one that ran those personals I had attempted to answer. I found a couple of ads for adult acting classes, so I made a few phone calls to get some information. There was one group located in Northern Virginia that had several different levels of training, from beginners to scene study to on-camera techniques. After talking with the proprietor, who seemed pretty well informed about the DC acting community, I decided to go ahead and sign up for a basic acting course. It was one night a week and I would easily be able to take that night off from the record store. I was looking forward to being a part of a weekly group setting and getting to meet new people, especially any new women. I knew that a lot of young guys went into acting to meet girls, and based on Andy's experiences in New York, getting laid was a distinct possibility.

The first class I took lasted eight weeks and was taught by a guy who was also a DC actor. He had done his share of theater, TV, and film, but he wasn't quite where he wanted to be. He did a lot of background work in films that would come through town, and he had a real job in addition to having a wife and kids. But he was a very cheerful dude, and he made everyone in the class feel welcome. Unlike a lot of acting teachers I would encounter down the road, he never bashed anyone's efforts just to inflate his own ego. He certainly gave notes and constructive criticism, but he never made anyone feel small. There were a few girls in this class, but all either had boyfriends or were married. I was more interested in developing my acting chops to see if I could possibly carve out a little career doing this professionally, so I didn't get any dates out of this class. And that

was fine by me. I was just happy to have a nice departure from my gym and record store life for the first time since my band fell apart.

Once this class ended, I had the option to continue with the curriculum and move on to the next level, which turned out to be an on-camera workshop. I was very eager to keep going, and being put on videotape each week made the potential even more exciting. Some of the students from my first class also signed up, and there were new folks, too. The teacher was another actor who was really just a professional extra. He showed us his resume one night, and it consisted of nothing but background work in movies that were shot in DC. (Any professional actor knows that you never put extra work on your resume. But I'm getting ahead of myself here). He did have a few theater credits and had studied with a few notable acting teachers in New York, but his personality reflected his lack of success. He was a bit dour and stiff in his teaching methods, but at least he knew how to run the camera. I did enjoy the class, however, and made a few new friends who I'm still in touch with today. But like the previous class, there were no available or interested women here. I wasn't bothered by this fact; I was still trying to become a better actor and discover if I had any potential to continue in this difficult medium.

A couple of weeks after the on-camera class ended, I got a call from the proprietor of the acting school who wanted to know if I was interested in playing a small role in a training film that was going to be shot for a local furniture store. It was a non-union job, and I would be paid \$100 for the day and would have a few lines as an angry customer. I accepted his offer without hesitation. He told me when and where to show up, and everything else would be taken care of when I got there. I was very excited to have booked my first real, paid acting gig without even having to audition. It was an early morning call, and I had to drive to south of the beltway in rush hour traffic to get to the location. But I didn't care. I was going to be on camera and not behind a record counter that day. When I arrived on set, I met the director who turned out to be my on-camera acting teacher. Apparently, he thought I did passable work in his class and recommended me for the role of 'angry customer.' There were other actors there, too, playing shoppers and employees. Some had lines while others were background. Everyone was friendly and happy to be a part of the film (actually, it was shot on videotape as all these types of instructional videos were in the early nineties). This was my very first industrial – the official term used for any kind of non-broadcast shoot that was used for training purposes. The only audience who would see the finished product would be the employees of the furniture store, but that didn't matter. Washington, DC shoots more industrials a year than just about any other major U.S. city, and so the potential for work in this field was tremendous. It could also be very lucrative. A SAG (union) industrial paid big bucks, especially if you got several days on it with lines. But this was the first of many industrials I would do over the next 15 years, and I was going to give it my best.

It was probably inevitable that the longer I stayed in the acting community, the more my chances of meeting an available, attractive woman would increase. When I say 'available,' I simply mean that she wouldn't be married or in a relationship. It does *not* mean that she would necessarily be interested, but it would take me a few years to make that distinction. During my debut performance on this day in a furniture store, I met such a woman.

## PART TWO

### Keeping the Florists in Business

I wasn't the least bit surprised to discover several attractive women on the set of the furniture store video. I was surprised, however, how quickly I attained chemistry with a 27-year-old blond, brown-eyed girl named Beth. When I sat down with the other actors waiting for instructions from the director, I managed to blend in with the "beautiful people" as well as the average Joes. Beth fell somewhere in between but definitely leaned toward the former. With her slim body, enchanting smile, and hazelnut peepers, Beth had a very inviting presence. I introduced myself and began a typical conversation about why we were both there. She was going to be background talent that day, playing a customer browsing through the store. After a while, the director had us all take our places, and we rehearsed the first of what would be several scenes. It was a fun day, and when it was all over, I wound up having dinner with another actor who had played a store employee who was the object of my angry customer rant. Beth had since left earlier, and I didn't really give her another thought.

A few months later, I signed up for another acting class through the same company with whom I'd studied during the past year. This was to be a scene study class, the real nuts and bolts (supposedly) about the craft of acting. The teacher was a local theater director who was fairly well regarded in the Washington, DC theater community, but as a teacher, she was about as inspiring as watching paint dry. She put us through some of the silliest exercises I've ever experienced as an actor, some of which would have fit right in with any sketch comedy group doing a parody of acting exercises (David Cross of *Mr. Show With Bob and Dave* and *Arrested Development* fame would have had a field day with it). But the first night here re-introduced me to Beth, who had coincidentally signed up for the same class. I reminded her of who I was, and she remembered our day making cinematic history in the furniture store. Over the next eight weeks, I became more acquainted with her and discovered we had similar tastes in music and television (She lit up one night when I mentioned how much I loved *Seinfeld*). I was gradually convincing myself to ask Beth out, but I wanted to wait until the class semester was over. After our final scene night, I told her that it would be great to get together with her at some point, and she readily agreed. My first mistake with this little exchange was using the disastrous words "get together" to communicate my intentions with her. "Getting together" with a woman is a whole other ballgame from "going out" with a woman. Once again, I used the safer alternative, because I figured it would protect me from rejection. I also made the completely asinine (but safer) suggestion that the two of us could discuss headshots, auditions, and other acting-biz topics as a reason for our get-together. I naively believed that if I coaxed her into seeing me socially under the guise of playing career councilor to her, I could get a real date out of it. But the truth is I was simply afraid of another woman turning me down if I asked her for an actual date. So I attempted to disguise my wants with non-sexual overtures. As I learned much later, once you're in the Friend Zone, there's no turning back.

As a clueless, 32-year-old virgin who had never actually been on an official date, I was hoping against hope that Beth would be my turning point. She never talked about having a boyfriend in class, so I figured the door was open to my inviting her out. It was February of 1993, and I was dreaming of a romantic spring. I called her up one night, and we had a very lively discussion about the class, the mannequin of an acting teacher who had us act out the word 'pink', and life with roommates. I finally got around to asking her if she'd like to join me one evening to check out a local establishment called the Mystery Café. This was one of those dinner theater joints where the actors would perform some lame whodunit onstage and then take turns serving food and drinks to customers. I had auditioned for this group earlier that week, so I wanted to see one of their shows to get an

idea of what might be in store for me if I were cast. Beth said it sounded like fun, so I drove to her apartment one Saturday night after making reservations. She lived on the second floor of a modest 2-bedroom with her sister whom I never met. I nervously knocked on her door, and when she opened it, she looked beautiful, even more so than I remembered from class. She was ready for a fun night out and had taken the time to prepare. Her blond hair was brushed back and flowing down her shoulders, and she had very little makeup on (she didn't need it). I felt flattered that a girl this cute would want to spend a Saturday night with me, so I was going to do my best to keep her entertained. We walked to my car, and I opened the door for her like a gentleman. She quietly thanked me for my chivalry, and I got in on my side. I remembered that she had mentioned one night in class how much she enjoyed the music of Sting, and so I cleverly had his "Ten Summoner's Tales" CD cued up in my car's CD player. When I started the car, the song "Fields of Gold" started to play, and Beth remarked, "*I love Sting!*" with great enthusiasm. *Mission accomplished!*, I thought (or at least the first part of a long mission).

We drove to the restaurant and were greeted at the door by a couple of actors in character making disparaging (but all in fun) remarks about the customers who were about to be seated. One of the actors commented on Beth's beautiful brown eyes, and I thought I had hit the jackpot being with a woman who was that noticeable. Once our food came, we generally had a good time, although the entertainment was pretty much what I expected. The actors were singing for their supper, literally, and Beth and I debated whether or not this would be the ideal gig to have. After we left, I drove her back home. I walked her to her door, and we stepped inside. She gave me a brief tour of her apartment and when I asked her whose voice I had heard on her answering machine, she told me that the outgoing message was recorded by her father. She explained that since she lived with her sister, she wanted a male voice to be heard by potential ne'er-do-wells who might call to see who resided there before attempting to break in. I actually admired her prudence here; it let me know that she had a responsible and protective nature. After the tour ended, I decided not to push my luck. Since this was our first date (or was it a get-together?), I wanted to leave gracefully without appearing needy. I told her I had to go, and she thanked me for a wonderful and funny evening. She opened the door for me, and I said good night without so much as attempting to get a handshake. Again, I was foolishly playing it safe. I don't think we had even one second of physical contact the entire night. I just couldn't believe that she would be sexually attracted to me on any level. And since we spent the majority of our time together discussing career options, there was nary a single moment of flirting or playful touching. It was almost like a business meeting. Just before I stepped outside her apartment door, I noticed that she was holding it open for me, as it was one of those doors that closed on its own once let go. So there were no lingering looks or anticipation of a kiss emanating from her. Why would there be? I had given her absolutely no signals whatsoever that I was physically attracted to her. But to be fair, I had gotten no signals from her either. For all I knew, she thought I was gay. But I kept convincing myself that since this was our first date, the fun stuff would naturally come later.

Since this was February, it was inevitable that I was once again going to make use of the manufactured holiday Valentine's Day. I thought that I had every right to send Beth a nice bouquet of flowers since we had spent a very nice evening together. Looking back, I still think this was an appropriate thing to do. But rather than repeat the same mistake I had made with Carrie in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and send ultra-romantic long-stemmed roses, I would tone it down this time. I went to a local florist and explained to the woman behind the counter that I wanted to send something that expressed my feelings in a discreet way yet would still get my point across. She suggested a mix of daisies, carnations, yellow roses with a red one tossed in, and a various assortment of greenery. This sounded perfect. I wrote Beth a fairly simple sentiment on the card that accompanied the flowers and let her know that I wanted to see her again. So far, so good. I scheduled them to be delivered on February 14. I knew she worked during the day, so I was hoping that they would be delivered after she got home. If I recall, I don't

think I had the option of determining the exact time of delivery. But I wasn't really worried about it. Florists are professionals (I guess), and they know what they're doing, especially on this big day.

On February 15, I was lying in bed before getting up to go work at the CD store. Since I worked the afternoon-evening shift, I usually didn't get up before the crack of noon. But about 11:00 that morning, the phone rang. I still had two roommates (who had already left for work), and we all shared a land line as cell phones were still a luxury in those days. I rarely answered the phone in the mornings since telemarketers were usually on the prowl at that time. So I let the answering machine pick up. I heard the following message from the upstairs speaker in the kitchen:

*Hey Tim, this is Beth. Thank you for the flowers. Yes, I did get them. I really appreciate you sending them...*

And then she went on about something unrelated. I don't remember what. But it was very sincere message, and it elevated my hopes about entering into a relationship with this girl. Unlike Carrie, who would have never acknowledged the flowers she received from me until I practically accosted her on her front door step after a Young Life meeting, Beth seemed genuinely touched by my thoughtfulness.

I decided to wait until I got to work to phone her to let her know I got her message. I guess I didn't want to appear too anxious and call her back right away from home. When it was slow at work, I called her. She was still at her place of employment so I knew our conversation would be brief. She picked up after a couple of rings, and I said hello. She thanked me again for the flowers and even started describing how beautiful they were. She told me what was in the arrangement and sounded like it had made her day. She also let me know that they had been delivered while she was at work, but a neighbor had been kind enough to receive them for her. And then I followed up with what I thought would be the next logical step. I invited her out for the upcoming weekend, either Friday or Saturday night. We hadn't seen each other in a couple of weeks, and I thought that she would want to go out again. I probably suggested dinner or simply getting together again. I wasn't really that specific. I just wanted to see her, and I hoped that she wanted to see me. For the first time in my life I felt like I was headed in the right direction with a woman, and that Valentine's Day had been perfect timing for me. The fact that she took the time to call me and thank me for them made me feel like I had done the smart thing. But after I extended my invitation for a second date, she quickly informed me that she already had plans for the weekend. She didn't go into detail, and I didn't inquire further. To say I was disappointed is an understatement. I wasn't crushed, but my momentum was definitely interrupted.

When I inevitably spoke to my close buddies about Beth - and they were very familiar with my non-sexual past - they began giving me what advice they could. A guy I had met in one of the acting classes in 1992 had become my biggest and latest supporter in all things relating to the fairer sex. "*Faint heart ne'er won fair lady*" he used to quote to me. His name was Walt, and he's still a good friend to this day. Even in my darkest moments, he would encourage me to keep the faith, and if one woman said 'no', go find another one. In this particular case, he suggested Beth's unavailability could be her possibly playing hard to get. While I appreciated his optimism, I never believed that Beth would play games. She did have a social life, so the fact that she already had weekend plans didn't really surprise me. But Walt told me to stick with it and call her again.

It was about this time that I auditioned for another play at a local community theater (I passed on the Mystery Café gig) and wound up landing the lead. It was a bedroom farce, the kind typically performed by community theaters, but I was excited to have something else to do outside of my job at the CD store. Plus, this was my first play, albeit non-paying, that I had been cast in since moving to DC. I was able to arrange my work schedule

around rehearsals without any problems. The theater was very close to the townhouse in which I was living, so it was very convenient to get to rehearsals without having to endure beltway traffic. I stayed in touch with Beth and told her about my latest star-making turn in a community theater show, and she was happy for me. She also assured me she would come to see it, so I was thrilled with the prospect of having a girlfriend and being the lead in a play at the same time. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Beth and I did go out a second time a few weeks after Valentine's Day, and once again I thought it was leading up to the ultimate pleasure. Statistically, couples generally have sex by the third date (sometimes sooner), so I assumed that those stats would apply to Beth and me. We had dinner at this restaurant in Old Towne Alexandria, VA. called Bilbo Baggins. I had no idea that the name of this eatery was named after a *Lord of the Rings* character. I just knew it was a very nice place with wooden floors, a spacious dining area, and right near the Potomac River. The hostess seated us and soon after, we were handed menus. I knew that my hopes for a sexual relationship with Beth were in the beginning stages of descent a few seconds after we opened the menus to look at the selection. The first words out of her mouth were "*Tim, let's split this.*" She was of course referring to the bill. I told her 'nonsense', that I had invited her out and it was my pleasure to treat her. She politely suggested again that we split the bill, but I insisted that I would take care of it. This was not a particularly expensive restaurant, so it wasn't as if I was dumping a ton of money on her. Maybe because I had sent her flowers, she felt obligated to "pay me back" by offering to go dutch. It may have been nothing more than a kind gesture on her part, but I saw it as a rejection, another message being sent to me by a woman who did NOT want to feel like she owed me anything beyond a pat on the back at the end of the night. She finally accepted my offer, and once we settled the matter of the check, we had a nice meal and resumed the conversation about our acting careers. Like the fool that I was (and still am), I played it safe. No flirting, no harmless sexual innuendos, nothing that would give Beth the impression that I even had a pair of balls between my legs. I treated her like a sister and then expected her to throw herself at me once we got back to her apartment. I was being the Nice Guy, a term that would come to haunt me for the rest of my life.

After we finished our dinner/business meeting, we took a nice walk on the boardwalk that ran alongside the Potomac River. This was an historic area that featured public boat rides, picnic areas, jogging trails, and plenty of great views of the DC skyline. It was one of my favorite places to visit when I lived in DC. We sat down on a bench and watched the people walk by and listened to the gulls sing their songs to each other. There were lots of couples on this warm spring night, and as I sat next to lovely Beth, I wanted to put my arm around her and tell her how I felt. I suppose I could have just put my arm around the back of the bench to make her feel protected, but I just sat there with both hands in my lap, staring straight ahead, doing and saying anything that would prevent me from taking even the slightest risk of getting romantic for fear of rejection. I guess I was waiting for her to make the first move, or I thought that an unlikely chain of events would occur that would land us in bed together. Either way, I had no clue how to proceed, and my fear and trepidation would eventually cost me.

I drove us back to her apartment and walked her to the door. She invited me in for a few minutes, but it was basically just to say good night. It was at this moment that I did something so amateurish, so unbelievably clumsy and unintentionally comical that I'm surprised she ever spoke to me again. She was holding the door open for me while I stood there fumbling for a way to touch her, kiss her – anything to get past the formalities of what was now our second date. I started rambling about the exit on the beltway that I used to take to get to the classes where we met and how seeing it reminded me of those days in class. It was clear that we were running out of any more topics to discuss, and I could also tell that she wanted to close the door. I finally concluded whatever fascinating point I was making to her and muttered 'okay' as if I was preparing to bungee

jump for the first time. What happened next nearly trumped my near-death attempt at getting a date with Maggie in the summer of 1984.

This is so embarrassing it deserves a separate paragraph. So I said ‘okay’ to myself and then leaned in to kiss Beth. I suddenly moved my head toward her like a wrecking ball about to demolish a building. It literally came out of nowhere since I didn’t initiate it with any words or expressions of romance like “Thank you for a wonderful evening.” I just lunged my face toward her and smashed my lips against the side of her cheek. I practically banged my head into hers. She didn’t move a muscle and was obviously quite confused by my actions. She just stood there and had no reaction whatsoever. But why should she? Rather than act like a man and take her in my arms and plant one right on her beautiful red lips, I acted like a little boy trying to steal a cookie without getting caught. I never even made eye contact with her before I assaulted her with my Bilbo Baggins breath. I think I heard her moan a little bit as my face approached hers, but the moaning was more like a ‘what are you doing?’ sound. To say it was awkward is the understatement of the century. Once I pulled back I said something brilliant like ‘see you later’ and left. I heard the door close behind me, and as I walked to my car, I actually thought I had moved up a notch. *I kissed her!* I blathered to myself. I got in my car and drove home continuing to live in a fantasy world that was about to come to an end.

The community theater play was in its final stages of rehearsals at this point. We were to open in April and run for 5 weekends. I was excited about being in a play for the first time since high school. We did performances Friday – through Sunday, and I worked at the CD store during the week. Since this was before the age of email, I could only stay in touch with Beth via the telephone. I did mail her a flier for the play complete with directions and show times. She promised me she would try and get to one of the shows, so every night after we did our curtain call, I would walk out into the lobby in hopes of seeing her (or anyone else I had invited). As the final weekend approached, I was beginning to get the sinking feeling that Beth just wasn’t going to make the effort to come. So I called her one day during the week just to say hello. There was a long pause before she finally said “*Um, I’m going to try and come see your play this weekend.*” It was clear that she was tiring of me, considering what a dork I had been on our last couple of dates. We chatted for a few more minutes, and I made sure she knew how to get to the theater. The conversation ended rather unspectacularly, and that was that.

The final weekend of the play came, and we got packed houses our last three shows. On Saturday night when I thought all hope of seeing Beth was lost, I walked into the lobby with other cast members to greet audience members. I looked around the crowded room, and then I saw Beth making her way through the crowd accompanied by another young girl. She walked over to me and said ‘Hey!’ and then introduced me to her friend. She paid me some slight compliments, and I introduced her to a couple of my cast mates. One of these actors was a guy about nine years younger than me with whom I had struck up a friendship during the run. We had a similar sense of humor, and both of us were in the early stages of pursuing an acting career. His name was Alan, and he was definitely a player in the world of women. He went to clubs, bars, hung out and got drunk with his college buddies, loved sports, went to the gym, banged a lot of young babes – pretty much the opposite of everything I had ever done (well, except for the gym part). But our personalities melded, and he and I are still friends nearly twenty years later. When Beth came over to me, I introduced her to Alan. I had been telling him about her for months, and now he was finally meeting her. I noticed that Beth had a 9x12 envelope in her hands, and I knew what it was. She had recently returned from a trip to New York to get headshots done by a photographer that was all the rage at the time among DC actors. She had brought her proofs and a couple of 8x10’s to the play to show me the results of her session. We sat down on one of the lobby couches, and she pulled out the photos. To say they were stunning would be accurate. They were black and white, glossy images that revealed Beth in all her cuteness and beauty. She was an ingénue, and the photographer had captured all her

best features. As I sat there gawking at the pictures, telling her how wonderful they were, Alan walked over and took a look for himself. He was familiar with the New York photographer, and he told Beth he thought they looked good. After our critique of her photos ended, she told me that she and her friend had to go. I thanked her for making the trip out to the boonies to see my play, and I told her I would call her the next week.

After the show closed, Alan gave me his thoughts on Beth. He told me he thought she was quite a looker, but he was surprised that she had ever agreed to go out with me. I thought he was just busting my balls at first, but I would come to find out later that he was quite serious. This would be the beginning of Alan educating me on all topics relating to getting laid but not entering into a full-time monogamous relationship with a woman. Alan had been with lots of women in his short time on the planet, but he had never really been in a long-term relationship. For him, it was all about getting laid. It didn't matter if it was a woman he picked up in a bar, a friend of a friend, or even a prostitute. He had no idea that I was still a virgin at 32, but he may have suspected it. His advice to me was all about moving in for the kill with a woman as soon as possible.

A couple of weeks after my play had ended, one of my fellow actors who had played my roommate got cast in another play being performed at a community theater much closer to where Beth lived. It was a Neil Simon piece that had been done to death, but I had enjoyed working with this actor and told him to let me know when the show opened. I mentioned this to Beth during one of our phone conversations, and she said she'd be happy to go see it with me. It was June 1993. The weather was warm and gorgeous, and my hopes for hooking up with Beth were still alive if not a little deflated. But this was to be the last night I would ever see her.

We decided to go see the Neil Simon play on a Saturday night. When I arrived at her apartment this particular night, I was practically knocked off my feet when she opened the door. In addition to her wonderful smile, she had on an outfit that stirred up so many fantasies in my brain that I didn't even know if I would get through the night. She was wearing a sleeveless, 3-button top that showed off her ample breasts and silky smooth arms and sexy shoulders. She also had on a pair of green shorts that showed off her wonderfully toned legs. Lest you think my description makes her sound like she was dressed in a trashy manner, I can assure you this was not the case at all. Her choice of wardrobe for the evening was quite appropriate considering the weather, and she wore it with class and style. She invited me into her apartment, and as I stood there trying to relax, she began giving me some information about her brother in a way that indirectly revealed how she felt about the time she had been spending with me. She pointed out that her apartment looked a little different than it had the past few times I had been over because her brother was on a "date" that night and had invited his girlfriend over to meet him there. She kept emphasizing the word "date" when referring to her brother's activities that night as if a "date" was something different than what she and I were doing. She gave it a lot more importance than someone would if they were *also* on a date. It was as if she was trying to distinguish between the outcome of our evening and her brother's. Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but Beth was a very savvy and alert woman, and like most women who know what they're doing when it comes to men, she was sending me a message, even if it was subliminal. I just nodded and feigned interest in her brother's romantic pursuits, as I was only interested in my own.

Unlike previous evenings spent with Beth, I brought something with me this night that had always been a last-ditch effort on my part to win a woman's affections. But, of course it never worked. It didn't work with Maggie or Becca, and it wasn't going to work with Beth. I'm referring, of course, to another demo tape of my music. Yes, even though I was focused on my burgeoning acting career, I still wrote songs every now and then and would occasionally peddle my older recordings to various musicians and other songwriters. I had stuck a demo tape in my pocket before driving to Beth's apartment, because just as I had in the past, I didn't feel that I was

enough. I felt I had to prove myself to Beth, prove to her that I had worth and value as a man, an artist, and as a human being. Since I had no idea how to romance or seduce her, I was hoping that my music would melt her heart and drive her into my arms. She was my Roxanne, but I had no Cyrano to assist me. So I let my music do the talking. It's not the first time a hopeless romantic has tried pitching woo to a woman with a melody, but my problem is, I felt that was all I had. Despite having a few nice (if intermittently awkward) evenings with Beth, I never felt I measured up to her expectations. This was a recurring theme in my life; I always felt like I had to present myself as a commodity rather than as a potential mate or lover in order to win a girl's affections. Even though Beth had seen me play the lead character in a play a few months earlier and seen my work in class, I never felt I had much to offer her. And even if I didn't, in her eyes, I should have had the good sense to walk away or make a definitive move to let my romantic intentions be known instead of cowering away from it.

We went to see the play, and after it was over, I said hello to my friend who was the lead. I introduced him to Beth and told him she had come to see our play. She seemed to enjoy herself, and once we were done with the niceties, we left. Driving back to her apartment, Beth informed me that she had been accepted at a prestigious acting school in New York. She had auditioned for the school a few months earlier and would be shipping out in September. I was happy for her, but I wondered where I fit into all of this. Would we still be seeing each other? We finally arrived at her apartment. It was about 11:30pm, and usually I would drop Beth off and that would be the end of our evening. But tonight she said, *"Would you like to come up for some coffee?"* I was stunned. This lovely girl was inviting me up at 11:30 on a Saturday night when she could have easily said good night in the car and gone inside by herself. I told her yes, I would love to come up.

When we got inside, she turned on the TV and then went into the kitchen. She was, indeed, going to make coffee. Since I'm not a coffee drinker, I asked her if she had any tea, and she was happy to oblige. *Saturday Night Live* was on, and I made myself at home by sitting on the couch at one end. I wanted to save enough room for her to sit next to me when she came back into the living room. I asked her about a photo she had on a bookcase, a photo of her and a young woman that I had noticed before. She picked it up and handed it to me and said that was a friend of hers in the photo. I always noticed it because Beth looked so wonderful in it; she had her arm around her friend, and her smile lit up the picture. I put it back on the table, and Beth went back into the kitchen to fetch our beverages. I was nervous, but I was excited by the prospect of her sitting next to me on the couch while we watched TV and getting to know each other even better. But my prospects disappeared when she returned. She handed me my drink, and then she sat down *on the floor* on the opposite end of the couch. So not only was she not sitting on the couch at all, but she was on the opposite side of it. She began to sip her drink, and I just stared at her. I thought this was some kind of cruel joke. I'm not implying that if a woman invites you into her apartment for any reason that it automatically means she wants sex. But considering that we had been out five times at this point, I thought we would at least sit together and cuddle. And every male friend I had ever had up to that point (well, except for one) had had sex with his partner by the third date. Why couldn't I be a part of that ritual? Finally, I spoke. Instead of saying what MOST men would say, like, *"Hey come up here and sit next to me! I won't bite. Not unless you want me to!"* I started rambling on about a safe topic again – my fucking demo tape. And the next exchange made me realize what a fool I'd been with Beth for many reasons.

*"Hey, Beth, I brought a tape of my songs that I told you about. I've put five on here that I think you might like."*

*"Okay, thanks. I'll listen to it as soon as I can."*

I handed her the cassette tape and she put it on the coffee table. I continued to dig my grave:

*“You know, I just wanted to say that I’ve really enjoyed the time we’ve spent together, and I think you’re a really fun person. I wanted to talk to you about taking our relationship to the next level, because I really like you a lot and would love to get to know you better.”*

Her response to my heartfelt expression could not have been a bigger slap in the face or disappointment.

*“Oh, Tim, that is so sweet for you to say all that. But I’m seeing somebody.”*

*“You are?”* I said with my jaw nearly touching the carpet in her living room.

*“Yeah, I’ve been seeing a guy for a couple of months now, and it’s pretty serious.”*

*“I had no idea. I thought you and I were seeing each other.”*

*“No, Tim. I think you’re a great guy and fun to be with, but I’ve always considered you to be just a friend.”*

So then I tried to inject some common sense into what she was telling me.

*“Well, let me ask you this. How do you think your boyfriend would feel if he knew that you were spending a Saturday night with another guy – a guy you’ve gone out to dinner with and seen plays?”*

There had to be a reason for her duplicity.

*“Oh, he knows. I just tell him that I’m having dinner with an acting colleague.”*

Of course! What else could it be?! Was she that naïve? Or maybe her boyfriend was. So then I attempted to “fix” it. Fixing something that was irreparably damaged was one of my specialties in failure.

*“Did I do something wrong? Maybe I waited too long to tell you.”*

She tried to assuage my fears.

*“No, no, you didn’t do anything wrong. Don’t go home tonight and think that if you’d done something differently that things would be different.”*

The more I tried to “fix” it, the more broken it became.

*“Well, I understand. I do live pretty far away. Maybe the long driving distance has something to do with it.”*

*“Where you live has nothing to do with it,”* she said. *I don’t care how far away Paul lived* (I assume she was referring to her very understanding boyfriend,) *we would still see each other.”*

And she was right. And as I would come to learn, if two people want to be with each other, no space is too wide to keep them apart. This was common sense. Why would I even offer my driving distance as an explanation for her not wanting to fuck me? Once we got all our little secrets out in the open, I decided it was time to go. I

basically left without incident, but I did ask her to stay in touch. I walked to my car feeling like I had wasted nearly six months of my life trying to build a house only to have it knocked into little pieces in a matter of seconds. But as I got in the car, my foolish mind began to conjure up a plan to stretch out this hopeless cause even further.

I had always felt that I needed to leave things tied up in a neat little bow before completely letting go of them. Since a lot of real relationships end on a very unhappy and even sloppy note, there's no way that every loose end will be accounted for. Life just isn't that convenient. Considering that I had never even had a real romantic or sexual relationship with Beth, there was nothing to tie up. But I still felt I needed to do something else before I could put her name on my list of rejections. It was as if I needed to leave my signature - literally - on the tail end of what had happened. I also still had a lot of emotion and desire inside me that I wanted to express to Beth. I had fallen in love with her before this night, but I had also wanted to take it slow and not scare her off. Having failed on both counts, I was now left with the decision of whether or not to go home and try to forget her or make one last attempt to let her know how I felt about her. Since I wasn't on any medication that would certainly be on my regimen in the future, I decided to keep on chasing the fantasy. While entering onto the beltway with tears in my eyes, I made the proclamation to myself that I would mail her a card that week. It would be some kind of card with a sentiment expressing to her how deeply I felt about her, and that my door would always be open.

The next day I went to one of the big card stores and began my search. I read all types of romantic offerings and even found one that might have been appropriate after our second date (something about "I'm so glad I found you" nonsense). After scouring through the bins, I finally found a card that captured exactly what I wanted to say. It was a light message about meeting the right person and enjoying their company. But it wasn't quite enough. I wanted to write a separate inscription on the opposite side of the card addressed directly to Beth. So, just as I did when writing out my song lyrics for Becca four years earlier, I was going to spend all day Sunday making sure this card hit the right chords. I even bought two copies of the same card - one to "practice" on (remember my handwriting debilitation) and the other to be the real thing.

I got home and set up a makeshift desk - a piece of board resting on the back of my couch and the foot of my bed - and slid a chair underneath. I started writing out thoughts and feelings on scratch paper until I found the perfect words to put on the card. I don't remember exactly what I wrote, but I do remember that it ended with something like this:

*You will always be in my heart, Beth, and I hope one day you will show me how to find the way into yours.*

I didn't really think that mailing her this card would awaken her to my charms and cause her to rush to the phone, call me up, and tell me she was wrong about me. I did it more for myself. It's like when they say to write a letter to someone who hurt you, left you, or even died, but don't mail it. It's really a catharsis, a way purge yourself of what's still inside your gut. By putting it down on paper, you feel a little lighter. But doing that wasn't enough for me. No, I just *had* to mail it. Because I actually hoped I would get a response of some sort. I still craved her attention, and I had to let her know it. I sealed up the finished card and put a stamp on it. I walked out to our mailbox, which was a cluster box (a group of mailboxes with individual numbers on them that are locked) and placed it in, making sure that the stamp faced the end where the mail carrier would see it. I must have moved and adjusted that damn envelope half a dozen times before I finally closed the box and went back inside. But I still had to know the fate of the card. On Monday I actually took time out of my day to call the post office and ask an employee, who I'm sure had better things to do, approximately how long it would take a first

class letter to get from my zip code to Beth's. I tried to picture Beth coming home from work and opening her mailbox to discover my card waiting for her. But I wanted to know what day I could expect this to happen. The postal employee could only hazard a guess, he was very nice, and I explained the importance of my mailing in very few words. He finally told me that if went out that day, it should be there no later than Wednesday, maybe even Tuesday. Of course, I already knew all this. Remember, I used to have pen pals all over the world, so I practically knew every delivery date on the post office's schedule. I guess I just wanted some kind of confirmation so I could sleep.

Wednesday came, and I was at work. I kept playing over and over in my mind the image of Beth coming home and finding my card. I then pictured her opening and reading it, and then...well, I hoped that I would be receiving a phone call that night or that weekend. But no such call ever came. A month went by, and no peep from Beth. With every passing day, I was gradually accepting the fact that Beth was out of my life. Hope was fading, but I still had a very tiny shred of it burning in my heart like a dying ember in a fireplace. I wasn't sure what I thought might happen, but I suppose it had something to do with the fact that Beth was moving to NY by the end of the summer.

When August rolled around, I wound up getting an audition at another big time DC theater. This one was actually on the outskirts of the city in Olney, MD., but it was an Equity theater, and to get the chance to perform there would have been a great honor. For some fantastical reason, I thought getting this audition gave me a pass to call up Beth again. It had been nearly three months since I had spoken to her, and some kind of false security had arisen in me. My audition had absolutely nothing to do with Beth, of course, but it gave me a heightened sense of self-worth that I thought would be transmitted to Beth if I spoke to her again. To feel even more important, I decided to call her from the theater after my audition. It would be an excuse to let her know that I had moved on and even gotten an audition at a very prominent theater. I suppose my goal was to see her one last time before she headed to NY and maybe even see if she would consider having a long-distance relationship. This was completely absurd, of course. If she had been interested in the first place, she would have gotten in touch with me after receiving my card back in June. But like the idiot that I was, I just kept chasing a ghost.

I did my audition, and it went about as well as I could have expected. Since there were public phones available in the lobby, I went ahead and phoned Beth. She answered, and I nervously identified myself. Her first real acting job was to pretend to be happy to hear from me, so she said in an upbeat tone, "*Hey!*" And then I said something that dispelled any notion of self-worth on my part, something so cringe inducing, that if you were watching it happen in a movie, you'd put your head in your hands. I said to her:

*"Sorry I haven't called you in a while. I've been really busy."* As if she had been waiting by the phone for me to make contact with her again. What the hell was I doing? I actually apologized for not doing something that she didn't want me to do in the first place. Nervous chatter, to be sure, but it sent her another message about my lack of self-esteem. I then told her where I was calling from to make it sound like things were really happening for me on the acting front. I continued trying to weave straw into gold by asking her if she was excited about moving to New York. I then suggested we get together before she left. "*Definitely!*" she said, but she didn't mean it. Despite her best efforts, I could tell I had put her on the spot, and she said the first thing that popped in her mind. I told her I would call her in a few days, and she said that would be fine. I actually thought that maybe she had read my card and was perhaps too shy to say anything about it on the phone. Or maybe she had forgotten all about it. In either case, I never asked her about it. It was probably the only smart thing I did during our brief phone conversation. It really hurt, because I remembered when I sent her flowers back in February,

she called me up and thanked me very sincerely. She was moved and flattered by my gesture, as unoriginal as it may have been, but at least she didn't ignore them. That had all changed in a few months.

A few days later I called her from my house to see if she really did want to get together one last time (at least for the time being). She answered the phone and sounded like she was in a hurry. "Oh, hey Tim", she said nonchalantly, as if she was waving to a next-door neighbor that she saw every day. I decided not to waste any time, so I asked her if she wanted to have lunch or dinner and get caught up. She told me that she was going to be moving to New York a little earlier than expected and would have to leave the next day. Once again, I started letting my desperation seep out all over the place. Do the math here:

*"I'm leaving for New York tomorrow, so I'm afraid I won't have time to get together."*

*"Oh, okay. Well, you know, I visit New York quite often because my best friend used to live up there, so I know the city very well. Why don't you give me your new address, and I'll look you up the next time I visit. Then maybe we can meet up and have lunch."*

*"Um, well...the thing is...I don't have my new address yet."*

*"You don't?"*

*"No, I don't have it with me, so I can't give it to you right now."*

*"Well, do you think you could get it and call me back?"*

*"Yeah...why don't I do that...I'll get it for you when I get up there, and I'll call and give it to you next week."*

*"Okay! That sounds good! Well, have a great trip, and I'll talk to you next week!"*

There's no point in telling you what never happened.

### **PART THREE**

#### **Nice Guys and a Sense of Humor**

*"Single women always claim that the main thing they want in a guy is a sense of humor. Yeah, right. I see beautiful girls every day crawling over Tom Selleck to get to Buddy Hackett!"*

-Gilbert Gottfried

Now that it was clear that Beth was history, I accepted this irrefutable fact and proceeded to move on with my life. At 32, I was about to start training at an acting conservatory in Washington, DC that was on a whole other level from the training I'd gotten from the previous institution. This was primarily theater training; no film or TV were involved. My friend Alan had taken a class here and suggested I give it a whirl. While he stopped after

one year and moved on to a non-performing career, I stayed with this program for the next 4 years. In the fall of 1993 I began my once-a week class that would rid me of a lot of the bad habits that I'd picked up doing terrible community theater shows. Despite only having an official class one day a week, I was down there rehearsing almost every night with a scene partner. This was the real deal – my teacher was also the founder of the conservatory, and she let nothing slide. Some of the more timid and squeamish students found her methods to be cruel and hard to handle, but I devoured her criticisms, because it's what I needed to become a better actor. She would also lavish praise upon students who did well, and once in a while she would pass some of that my way, too. Even though I never went to college, I feel that studying here was about as close as I could get without receiving some sort of degree.

Even though there were many single and available women who studied at this school, I tried to focus on my acting progress. It was a very intense semester, and other than go to my job at the CD store, it didn't leave me room for much else. I was still going to the gym, but my social life was just as uneventful as it had ever been. But I was transfixed by the process of learning to build a character in class and interacting with other students. And I was actually relieved to be able to concentrate on my studies without being distracted by an unavailable woman who I might have been dying to sleep with. Don't get me wrong. There were plenty of girls that I would have loved to ask out for coffee, but I think my recent experience and disappointment with Beth turned me off to chasing another fantasy. Also, I kept telling myself that I still had time. Being a virgin at 32 was unusual to say the least, but it would be another 8 years before I turned 40, so I fooled myself into believing that time was on my side.

One of the biggest mistakes that I had been making with women all the way back to high school was being the Nice Guy. There have been many books, magazine articles, blogs, and other writings concerning this well-known affliction. When I was in my twenties, I was confused as to why a seemingly nice, attractive woman would always be dating a guy who treated her like shit. I was quickly told, by those who knew much more than me, that girls like bad boys. Bad boys are more of a challenge, more aloof, more unavailable. If they're good-looking and rugged, that makes them even more desirable. I witnessed this happen on an almost daily basis. It didn't matter if the woman in question was a girl-next-door, churchgoing type or a slutty, barhopping whore. These women were always (with rare exceptions) seen with guys that never paid them any attention (unless they wanted sex), never remembered their birthdays or anniversaries, and would rather watch football on TV every weekend instead of taking a nice walk with them. And in most cases, these bad boys would be screwing around on the girl only to plead for forgiveness (which they usually received) when they got caught. In the most extreme, unfortunate situations, there would be physical and mental abuse inflicted upon these poor women, and yet, these women would still inexplicably accept this kind of behavior and continue to "love" the guy. Obviously, these latter cases were of a more serious nature, and I rarely saw this take place in my world. But knowing about these terrible conditions opened my eyes to what some women will tolerate all in the name of love.

I was raised to treat women with respect – hold doors open for them, never swear or discuss taboo subjects in mixed company, and always offer my seat to them if they're standing on the bus or subway. My reticence to be a little naughty every now and then is probably what led me to my long-term virginity in the first place. But I learned too late that there is a difference between respecting a woman and being a doormat. Times have changed since I was a pre-teen, and while women still appreciate chivalry, they appreciate a man with a backbone even more. I still hold doors open for women, but not so I can get laid. It's just plain courtesy. But even in these situations, there are some women who consider even this simple gesture a form of sexual

harassment or chauvinist behavior. I can't be responsible for every interpretation that my good intentions bring out in a woman, so those who appreciate it will let me know, and all others will just give me a feminist scowl.

One day when I was working at the CD store, I discovered a book on the shelf called *Nice Guys Don't Get Laid* by Marcus P. Meleton, Jr. The title summed up my entire history with women in a single sentence, so I picked it up and started browsing through it. There was so much truth in these pages that I went ahead and bought it to see if it would illuminate any of my mistakes and possibly remedy them. The author presented so many familiar situations that I had encountered with women that it was like reading my own diary. He also laid bare the real meanings behind what women will say to a lovesick pursuer in order to not hurt the guy's feelings yet leave them with a trace of hope. My heart sank as I read these passages, but I laughed a lot, too. This book was in the humor section, but it could have just as easily been on the self-help shelves. (This book is still in print, and I highly recommend it if you can laugh at yourself). I guess I didn't realize at the time that Nice Guy Syndrome was a real problem, at least for me, and I soon learned that many other lonely guys suffered from it as well. I studied the book and even highlighted certain paragraphs that made important points about my actions. But simply reading these words of wisdom was not enough. Unless I was willing to make some changes and not be so needy and desperate around women, my life would remain the same. Unfortunately, my nice-ness was ingrained in me like a plague, and it would be a tough battle ahead.

I thought that "being nice" was the way to a woman's heart and bed. Since a lot of the girls I had approached had only been with guys who weren't very nice, I figured they would appreciate my sincere offerings of affection. And as I got older, I was told by both sexes that women over 30 eventually tire of selfish assholes and would rather be with a considerate, caring fellow. Hearing this gave me hope as I approached my mid-thirties. I was sure that the girl of my dreams was just around the corner. And if she had had a history of being with too many bad boys, maybe she would be ready for a change.

I also started to believe the myth of women who claimed their #1 desirable trait in a man was a sense of humor. I used to read this lie on numerous lists that would be published in magazines, dating articles, and later, online surveys. Even today in 2011 I still read this crock. Gibert Gottfried's quote at the beginning of this part of the book was from a routine I saw him do on the NBC show *Late Night With David Letterman*. Although his references to Misters Selleck and Hackett are a bit dated, his point is still valid. I can't even begin to tell you how many women I've met, dated, hung out with, acted with, etc. who have told me what a great sense of humor I have. I've made more women laugh than I can remember (and yes, they were laughing with me – not at me). If a sense of humor is really #1 on a woman's list of mate qualities, then I should have gotten more tail than a toilet seat by now. However, laughter usually leads to flirtation and naughty talk, but I thought my clever jokes were enough. Just like I did when I would give career "advice" to women I went out with, I kept it safe and G-rated. My jokes were never of a sexual nature. They were harmless observations about life and the plight of mankind. I'm not suggesting that I should have been spouting off Andrew Dice Clay obscenities on a first date, but injecting a little innuendo into the laughter might have put me in a different light. Even the most religious men of the cloth occasionally tell a joke from the pulpit – it doesn't mean they're trying to get lucky. But once again, my fear of rejection took over any remote chance I might have had to score with a woman.

The timing couldn't have been better for me one night as I was driving home from work. I was listening to the *Jim Bohannon Show* on my car's AM radio station. Jim had his own national talk show and would occasionally sit in for Larry King back in the days before Larry was on CNN. On this particular evening, Jim had an author on by the name of Susan Nash who had written a book called *Dating, Mating, and Relating*. As I listened to them discuss finding a mate, lover, or what have you, I thought about my own situation and history with *not*

being able to find a mate. Since this was a live, call-in show, I decided to make a fool of myself and try to get in on the fun by asking Ms. Nash for some advice on my virginity dilemma. Other callers were asking typical questions about the dating scene, but my situation had not been brought up. I managed to get through, and the screener asked me for my first name. I gave him a fake name for obvious reasons although I didn't disguise my voice once I was on the air. Finally, my turn came and I briefly told Jim and his guest why I was calling.

*"You're next, caller. What is your question for Susan?"*

*"Well, you may find this one hard to believe, but it's not a joke. I am 32 years old, and I am still a virgin. And this is not by choice. I haven't been on too many dates, but the girls I have been out with have always been quick to tell me what a great guy I am, but they've never wanted to go beyond the friendship stage. I guess you could say that I have Nice Guy Syndrome, but I am who I am. I just want to know what I can do to get beyond this and experience sex for the first time without going to a prostitute."*

Susan responds,

*"Well first of all, you shouldn't feel like there is something wrong with you because you haven't had your first sexual experience yet. You are not defined by your virginity. We all have different paths. Some people are sexually active at a very young age, and others take a little more time. I know you're frustrated because you think that it's too late or you're running out of time. But just keep on getting out there and meeting people and you'll meet someone who will appreciate you for who you are."*

And then Jim added his two cents.

*"Yeah, caller, I agree. Just keep putting yourself out there and don't give up."*

I thanked them for their time and hung up. And then they moved on to the next caller who prefaced her question by commenting on my call - *"Not my problem - that last caller,"* she said before getting to her own problem. She was indicating, of course, that being a virgin was so far in her past that she could hardly believe that anyone over 18 was still in that category (well, that's the way I interpreted it).

The free advice given to me that night didn't really change anything. I guess I just wanted to get another objective opinion from someone other than my therapist. They say misery loves company, and maybe I was feeling lonely for some sympathy, too. I also just wanted the mystery solved. Why did I seem to be the only healthy, heterosexual male I'd ever met who just couldn't get past the friendship stage with women? It was my cross to bear, and at the ripe old age of 32, I felt like it was hopeless to even try anymore. But my sex drive was in full gear, and there was no denying my natural urges. Masturbation was my only outlet, but I was simply tired of the fantasizing. I wanted the real thing, to be able to touch a woman's skin and kiss her from head to toe. Whenever I saw it on TV, in films, and yes, the all too frequent porn movies on VHS tape, I kept longing for it to happen to me. Even a simple make-out session or blowjob would have been a great initiation. But the reactions I continued to get from women, even those I had no interest in, were a painful reminder of how unlikely and unrealistic those possibilities were.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

## **PART ONE**

### **Someone Asks Me First**

When I began studying at the acting conservatory in September 1993, my entire focus changed. As previously mentioned, this type of acting training was more intense, and the time required to be as good as I could be was enormous. Now that the whole Beth debacle was behind me, I put 100% of my concentration into this newly found academic endeavor. I still had my job at the CD store, but from that fall until January 1994, the school was my second home. It was an exhaustive, exciting, challenging excursion into some dark places that I'd never gone to as an actor, and I loved every minute of it. This is not to say that the whole virginity thing was any less important, but it had gotten pushed into the background for the time being. Yes, whenever I saw an attractive woman walking around the school (and there were more than enough), I silently yearned for the chance to strike up a conversation and see where it went. I did chat with fellow female students in the lobby every once in a while. One girl even told me that she had seen me in a commercial that had been running for several months. For one second, I felt like a celebrity. But this kind of thing was not uncommon. If you were living amongst the acting community, seeing a colleague on TV or stage was part of it. But my casual conversations never went beyond the typical discussions about classes, teachers, and career goals. Plus, even at the age of 32, I was still about ten years older than many of the single women. And the women who were my age or even older were married or in long-term relationships. Of course, there were a select few who were spinsters over the age of 40, still pursuing the dream while going home alone to a one-bedroom apartment every night. Some of these women moved in slow motion. True love had apparently passed them by, and seeing them on a weekly basis reminded me how precarious a career in the arts can be. Sacrifices are made, and no rewards are guaranteed. On the other hand, there were plenty of young, hip, and happening kids at the school who were taking advantage of their youth and good looks by jumping from lover to lover. As usual, I only heard about these exploits but was never a participant.

The semester concluded in January 1994 with a final scene night performed by the students for all the teachers and a few invited guests. It was a very important night, and the anticipation on these evenings could be greater than opening night in an actual show. But, as our teacher made clear to the small audience, it was still a class. The scene I did was, oddly enough, an attempted rape scene from the play *Extremities*, later turned into a film starring Farrah Fawcett and James Russo. My scene partner was a young woman named Kellie who I had an instant chemistry with, and we worked very well together. Since the subject matter was so delicate, we discussed how we would proceed to put the scene together by working each moment. Kellie and I became

friends over the course of the semester, and the wonderful thing about it is I never entertained the idea of trying to date her. She had a boyfriend anyway, but I just didn't feel any sexual or romantic desire for her, nor her for me. This freed me up to be myself and not worry about impressing her. She appreciated my sense of humor as well as the hard work I put into our scene and the class in general. She was not an unattractive woman, in fact, some of the other guys at the school would occasionally comment on her fine butt and ample bosom. I didn't disagree with them, but this was one girl that I was able to see several times a week in rehearsals and not lose myself over. I mention all this because I've been accused of falling for every attractive woman that pays me attention, and that's simply not true. In fact, Kellie and I became good friends over the next few years, and she even helped coach (and nurse) me through some future heartbreaks I would inevitably encounter.

One such encounter began its evolution in February 1994. I had begun the follow-up class to the one I had just finished, and there were a few students in it that I had not met. Since there were multiple classes going on during each semester, and ones at different levels in the program, students would cross over, take a semester off, or continue right on through with some of the same familiar faces in each of their classes. One of the new faces I met in this second class was a very interesting woman named Fiona. She was interesting in the sense that she seemed to move to a different rhythm than most of the girls I had met before. Very quiet and introspective, Fiona gave off an enigmatic energy that was hard to pinpoint. She was very pleasant in a mysterious way, and she had a bit of a European vibe going on. Her accent was somewhat indiscernible at times, but that may have been the result of her shyness. When she spoke up in class and opened up as an actress, she would reveal sides of her that I didn't normally see. During the class, I always found her to be an unconventionally attractive girl, but the thought of asking her out never entered my mind. So I just got on with things and began rehearsing my next final scene with my new partner. Everything was status quo, and that was fine with me. My new partner was a guy this time, and we did our share of discussing women in between rehearsals.

After another 15 weeks of class, I prepared for my second final scene night. This time, I did several scenes from the play *Orphans*, and after all the other scenes were performed for another small audience and the other teachers, we all gathered with our instructor for individual evaluations of our progress. This was a tradition at the school. Since the final scene nights usually ended around 11pm, the evaluations that followed would be a bit of an after-party complete with lots of food and alcohol. This would usually go on into the wee hours of the morning, sometimes as late as 5am. Our instructor would go around the room and address each student at length about how he or she did over the course of the semester. The other students would chime in with their observations, and the evening was a great learning experience for everyone.

At the conclusion of this particular night (now morning), we all said our goodbyes to each other and talked about moving on to the next level, which would start in the fall. (I was actually "held back" for various reasons ranging from not being emotionally available to being too much in my head). While I was gathering all my belongings and getting ready to head home, I was approached by Fiona who started talking to me about what I might be up to next. She complimented me on my work in class and even said she thought it was unfair that I didn't get moved forward to the next level. I told her I appreciated her comments and started to leave. Before I could, however, she asked me if I'd like to get together with her sometime and go see a movie. I told her I thought that would be great, but I was so tired from being up all night that I didn't really process it. I went home and forgot all about it.

The following Monday I went into work having taken it easy over the weekend after our very long scene night. It was back to my ordinary life with spring finally arriving. While enjoying the exciting activity of putting out new CD's in the bins, I received a phone call. It was Fiona. She had gotten my number off the contact sheet that

all our classmates filled out. She presumably called to chat, even though she knew I was at work. Since personal phone calls were unofficially discouraged while on the clock, I told her that I was working but it was nice to hear from her. She told me again that she thought I should have been advanced to the next level, and I once again thanked her for her kind words. She then made the suggestion that we should get together and go see a movie. I told her I'd like to do that, and I would call her during the week.

The reason I didn't immediately jump on her offer is because I didn't want to go down the same road that I did with Beth a year earlier. I was definitely attracted to Fiona, but I didn't trust the idea that she could possibly be asking me out. This would be a first if it were true. It's like the old saying, "I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me as a member." If she was interested in me, there must be something wrong with her, I thought. This, of course, creates the paradox that asks, *'well then, what girl would you expect to go out with you?'* But I didn't rule out the possibility of seeing Fiona, so I put it away and tried to appreciate her offer. I remember talking to my friend Alan about her one night while playing hoops in his driveway. He told me that I should at least go out with her but not to get hooked on her if she only wants to be friends. I should have heeded his advice.

Considering that I had no other options before me with regard to dating, and the fact that Fiona was a pretty 32-year-old woman, I went ahead and called her the following weekend. We had a nice chat (yes, another 'nice chat'), and I told her that I could get free movie passes to this art house movie theater in Georgetown. The film *Red Rock West* was playing there and the reviews had been good. She said she would love to go, so I made arrangements to get the tickets. Fiona was living in a group house at the time but was looking to get her own place. She was gainfully employed, owned a car, and planned to continue studying at the acting conservatory. So we made plans to go see the flick, and I picked her up on a Saturday afternoon. She was very pleasant and easy to talk to. She was probably about a half-inch taller than me with sandy blond hair down just past her shoulders. She also had a wonderful pair of legs and a marvelous derriere that filled out her tight jeans very nicely. She had been a dancer a few years earlier, and the training had paid off. Her rich, full lips sealed the deal for me the moment she got in my car, but I was determined to maintain control over my familiar desperation. She was also a very intelligent girl and, while not that well-versed in world affairs (neither was I), she could converse on a number of topics. Unlike my overly cautious demeanor around Beth, I didn't limit our conversations to only shop talk.

So, we arrived in Georgetown, a beautiful and historical part of Washington, DC, but one of the worst places on earth to find a parking space. I don't remember how, but I did find a spot on one of the many side streets, and we walked to the theater. While waiting in line, I looked up and saw my buddy Walt standing there. Since he had been all too aware of my previous disappointments with women including Beth, to see me with a new woman on an actual date made him giddy with delight. I introduced him to Fiona and made small talk with him about the movie, the acting biz, and whatever else I could think of to avoid looking him in the eye. You see, Walt was staring at me with a grin on his face like that of a proud father whose son had just gotten laid for the first time. I could practically hear him yelling *"You dog, you!"* in my ear. Had I stared back at him, I would have either burst out laughing or would have told him not to get too excited just yet. After all, this was my first date with Fiona, so I didn't want to jump to any conclusions about where it might lead.

I don't remember if Walt was in line to see the film or just hanging out in Georgetown, but after the movie I didn't see him. Fiona and I walked around looking at the beautiful Victorian homes that lined the streets of the city, which never failed to harken me back to a bygone era. You surely could go back in time whenever you wandered the streets here, and it remains one of my favorite places from my DC days. After our walk, I drove

Fiona home. We may have stopped for a snack along the way, but those details have eluded me. I just remember telling her I had a great time and that we should do it again soon. She readily agreed and got out of the car. I watched her go inside and she looked back and waved - another first for me.

## **PART TWO**

### **Fourth of July – Fireworks, But No Explosions**

Despite my apparent success at not making a fool of myself on my first outing with Fiona, I postponed any celebrating. Walt wasted no time calling to congratulate me on asking out another woman. When I told him that Fiona had done the asking, he told me he thought my lack of sexual experience would be coming to an end very soon. I brushed this off but appreciated his optimism. Over the next several days, Fiona and I talked on the phone, and it was clear that she liked me and was interested in seeing me again. I was starting to share Walt's enthusiasm about her, so I asked her if she'd like to check out a new restaurant I had heard about called The Cheesecake Factory. Although it had been around since 1971, in 1994 this ultra-chain eatery was now the rage in many major US cities, and the atmosphere and vast selection (and quantity) of food available was becoming legendary. Since I had never dined there, Fiona said she would like to check it out. There were a few locations in the DC metro area, but we went to the one closest to her house, which was in Chevy Chase, MD just above the DC line. I remember ordering the meatloaf with potatoes and some vegetable and expecting to be served a modest slice of meat with my sides. What I got was half a cow – 4 huge slices bathed in a gravy sauce and enough mashed potatoes to fill a swimming pool. Fiona ordered a chicken salad that looked like a small island on a plate. We weren't disappointed in the food, in fact, I thought it was quite delicious, and I had plenty left over to take home for a few more meals. Fiona loved her salad, and told me she felt good after eating something healthy for dinner instead of her usual fare. After I paid the bill (there was no "Let's split this" discussion), we walked around the mall in which the restaurant was located. This was a very upscale area that didn't cater to Wal-Mart customers, as it was located in a very opulent location where the rich folks lived and played. But Fiona and I enjoyed just walking around and looking at the architecture. She was very thoughtful and interested in many cultural exhibitions (Did I mention she also spoke fluent Mandarin Chinese?). As we browsed through the interior of the mall, she commented that she liked 'exploring'. She had lived in Colorado for many years and did a lot of outdoor activities. She could also take apart and reassemble a semi-automatic rifle – blindfolded. This girl was full of surprises.

After we finished exploring, I took her back home as this was a Sunday night, and she had to be up early for work. I suppose because she lived in a house with four other people, inviting me in would have made things a little crowded. But it was only our second date and I still wasn't sure where she stood on sex or fooling around. I pulled into her driveway, and we talked for a few minutes. Just before she got out of the car, I said "Hey" in a very quiet voice. I took her hands and gave her a gentle kiss on the lips. I have to admit that it was me wanting the kiss more than her, but I guess I'd gotten used to that one-sidedness by now. When she got out, I sensed a little hesitation on her part. It was as if my kissing her had crossed a line that she wasn't expecting me to cross. I

didn't really stress over it, but I had gotten pretty good at reading signals (or lack of them). But after this night, Fiona would soon move into her own place – a quaint little house that was only four miles from me.

Fiona and I continued to see each other pretty regularly. Movies, plays, dinner, and walks around our neighborhoods were typical of the things we'd do. She still had her day job and continued to study at the acting conservatory, as did I. We even did background work together on a few films that shot in town including an awful movie called *Shadow Conspiracy* starring Charlie Sheen. In the summer of 1994, she moved out of the group house and into her own little cottage-like home out in the country, which sat at the end of a gravel country road. It was an odd, but cozy little place that wouldn't have been out of place in some small Irish community. Cobblestone walls, a nice fireplace, wood floors, and only one room upstairs made this house unique. She was thrilled to find it, and I was happy to have her living closer to me. About a month after she moved in, she went to Europe to study at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. While she was gone, she asked me to look after her house, water her plants, and make sure no one broke in. I obliged, of course, as I thought it might bring us closer together. If she trusted me enough to give me the keys to her home while she was away for a month, then I must be important to her. In fact, I *was* important, but as I came to learn, not in the way that I hoped.

On July 4, 1995, I called Fiona to ask her about going out the following weekend. That year, the Fourth fell on a Tuesday, and I assumed she had plans. After a brief conversation, she agreed to see me that Saturday. When I hung up, I realized that once again I had played it safe. Rather than be spontaneous and ask her about getting together in a few hours to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, I felt I needed to plan everything in advance. It was safer for me to fantasize about our Saturday date instead of just asking her if she wanted to get together that evening.

So I called her back.

*“Hey, what are you doing tonight? It's the 4<sup>th</sup> of July!”*

*“Nothing. You want to come over?”* she asked.

*“Yeah, why don't I see you in about an hour?”*

*“OK, see you then!”*

For the first time in my life, I felt like I had taken a big step by taking a chance. If she had plans for the 4<sup>th</sup>, it would have made me look like a loser because I had no plans. I figured she would be out on the town with friends. But as I eventually discovered, Fiona had about as much of a social life as I did.

Because this was to be the fifth time (give or take) that we were getting together, my mind started to wander into fantasyland. I was excited at the prospect of going over to her house. It was a beautiful evening, not too warm, and I was getting a vibe that perhaps Fiona wanted me to come over to do more than just talk. At that point in my life, virtually every couple I had ever known had consummated their relationship within the first few dates. Even having sex or at least fooling around on the first date was not that uncommon. Why should it be any different for me? Despite my failure and “misread signals” from Beth, things just had to be different this time. I was 34 years old, and my chance to make love to a woman for the first time was way overdue.

I showered, got dressed, and decided to be prepared for what I prayed would happen. I drove to the grocery store, and for the first time in my life, I went shopping for condoms. Once I found the section of the store where they were displayed (surprisingly, not behind the checkout), I was presented with a variety of choices. There they were – all hanging from various racks. Different brands, different sizes, different material (latex, sheepskin), different sensations (ribbed, unribbed), and different quantities (anywhere from 3 in a box for a short term fling to 24 in a bigger box for those who were in it for the long run). I chose a box of 12 Trojans in a red box figuring that would be sufficient enough to get the job done. It was the only thing I bought from the store that night, and I remember there were customers both in front of me and directly behind me while I was checking out. I know I'm not the first caveman to purchase rubbers, but I still felt like Hermie in *Summer of '42* even though I didn't have to ask the cashier to hand them to me.

Once I got out of the store, I headed over to Fiona's. I remember taking two condoms out of the box and putting them in my jeans pocket. (Two – Wow! Talk about ambitious). I put the remaining ones in the glove compartment. In addition to my 'protection', I also brought some fireworks with me that had been in my closet for several years. There were firecrackers, bottle rockets, sparklers, and a spectacular little device called a Blooming Flower (my personal favorite). When I arrived at Fiona's, my heart was pounding in the hopes that tonight would be The Night. I walked to the back of her house where she always had guests enter (her front door rarely got opened). She had a nice deck, and her kitchen was directly on the other side. She seemed very happy to see me, and I showed her the fireworks. She lit up (no pun intended) when I showed her what explosive goodies I had brought to celebrate Independence Day. But since the sun was still floating high in the sky, we decided to hold off on lighting any fuses. Instead, we went for a walk - an activity that both of us enjoyed doing. Because Fiona lived out in what was nearly farm territory, there were plenty of country roads and fields in which to wander. An occasional car would drive by, but this was hardly a busy traffic area. It was quiet and serene and the perfect setting for someone looking to get outside the city. She had found her dream house.

As we walked, we talked and laughed about many things. I felt my whole life had been leading up to this night; the possibility that I was finally going to experience sleeping with a woman. And since Fiona and I had gotten to know each other well, I felt it would be an even more special event. As we continued to walk along the side of the road, Fiona accidentally slipped and fell into a ditch, one of those open, dirt drainage ditches that are very common in the country. She wasn't hurt; in fact, she thought it was quite funny how clumsy she was. Her ability to poke fun at herself was just one of the things that endeared her to me. As she slipped down into the ditch, I grabbed her hand and pulled her out. We laughed and continued to hold hands. We kept walking and continued to hold hands. This was another first for me. Like two school kids falling in love, we walked down the road and held each other's hands as if we'd been doing it for months. Occasionally we would let go to cross the street or just stop to hang out and catch a breather. As the sun started to go down, we headed back to her house.

By the time we got back, it was nearly dark, so we sat out on her back deck and listened to the crickets start their chorus. To me, it was like every movie I had seen that involved two people coming together for the inevitable. And since it was a holiday, it added a celebratory flavor to the evening. I grabbed my bag of fireworks and poured them out onto her wooden deck. I had several Blooming Flowers, and I thought that would be an excellent way to start lighting up the night. I lit the thing, and it started to spin so rapidly that the human eye could no longer detect its original, cylindrical shape. A massive array of fiery colors coupled with the sound of a thousand hummingbirds spun around and bounced up in the air for about 60 seconds. We both loved it (even though it did leave a small ash mark on her deck which I wiped up). I then shot off a few bottle

rockets, and we lit sparklers and waved them around like two kids at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic. This was what being with someone was all about – the joy, frivolity, and total abandon of life’s worries. Meeting Fiona in class earlier that year seemed to be the best thing that had happened to me in a long time, maybe ever. Was I actually going to be able to say that I, Timothy Draper, had a girlfriend? Would I finally be able to discuss sex with my male friends and speak from real experiences? After we finished shooting off fireworks, I was about to find out.

We were both tired, but in a seemingly good way. We stepped inside her kitchen and made our way into the living room. Her kitchen and living room were furnished for the most part. However, she didn’t own a TV, and that didn’t seem to bother her. There was another room off to the side that Fiona had turned into a makeshift bedroom – it only had a mattress on the floor. She led me into this room and showed me how bare and stark it was, and she even joked about it. I asked her if this was where she was sleeping, and she said that for the time being, it was. She planned to eventually move into the one room upstairs, which was more like a larger attic. But for now, it was just a mattress without a box spring downstairs. While we were talking, she laid on the mattress face down. My heart started pounding as I stared at her tight jeans that showed off her finely toned derriere and legs. She was also wearing a t-shirt on this summer evening. I put my left hand against my left jeans front pocket to make sure my two condoms were still there – just in case. I kneeled down next to Fiona and then lied next to her, also face down. I started talking to her about how my friend Andy in New York had a similar set-up in his Brooklyn apartment – one mattress on the floor – when he was living there in 1985. Because of my nervousness and anticipation of touching Fiona and making love to her, I started to rattle off a bunch of nonsense that turned the otherwise normal conversation into a cartoon. As I finished telling her about Andy’s boudoir, this is where my stupid brain decided to go:

*“Yeah, Andy just had a mattress and a bureau. But there was one thing he didn’t have in his room.”*

*“What’s that?”* Fiona asked.

*“He didn’t have you,”* I said, like a bad poet attempting to entertain a bunch of old ladies at a retirement home.

*“What song did that line come from?”* she asked incredulously.

*“Song? No song, I was just telling you how lucky I feel to be here with you.”*

My attempt to seduce her and make her feel special had turned into a farce. I put my left arm around her and began kissing her neck. She remained motionless as I kissed my way down her back hoping to get to her beautiful ass and then turn her over and come back up to begin kissing her lips. Before I could even get halfway down her back, she suddenly and very quickly sat up.

*“I think we should get out of this room,”* she said without the slightest bit of hesitation.

*“I like this room!”* I replied, trying desperately to salvage what little dignity I still had and convince her that rolling around naked was a good idea.

*“What’s wrong?”* I asked.

*“I just don’t think we should go there,”* she said.

The tone of her voice reflected disappointment in me, as if she never expected me to cross that line. She also obviously didn't want to talk about it – her silence and reluctance spoke volumes. I didn't push her; I just tried to respect her feelings (whatever they were) and wishes. I also foolishly tried to convince myself that maybe it was still too soon for her and that we would have sex when the time was right. But if this seemingly perfect set of circumstances that led us up to this point wasn't the "right" time, what would be? I guess I hadn't considered the possibility that maybe she was on her period or she was still getting over a previous relationship. All I knew is that I wanted to sleep with her right then and there. But it wasn't going to happen tonight. She then told me she was tired and needed to go to sleep. We stood up and she walked me to the kitchen door. She thanked me for coming over and told me she would see me over the weekend. I left with a pair of balls so blue that I didn't think I would make it home without having to pull over to the side of the road to wank. When I did get home, I did the inevitable and then sat down to watch the Robert Altman film *The Long Goodbye* starring Elliot Gould, which I had rented earlier that day. Who could have predicted that a night which started out with me buying condoms that would never get used would end with me watching a 1973 film with the tagline "*Nothing says goodbye like a bullet.*"?

### **PART THREE**

#### **From Nice Guy to Buddy**

Having recovered from the disappointment of the previous evening's ending, I continued to get on with things. As the fall of '95 approached, I was still auditioning for various film and theater projects, and I was about to begin another class at the acting conservatory. Fiona was a couple of classes ahead of me, but I would see her at the school fairly often. My feelings for her were steadily growing, and I was hoping she was feeling the same. We continued our rituals of getting together, and she would even call me on the spur of the moment from her home to ask me to bring my television over so she could have some entertainment for the evening (She still didn't own one). Like the insane idiot that I am, I would unplug my 20-inch TV from the wall as well as all the cable and VCR hook-ups, haul the bulky thing out to my car, and drive it over to Fiona's house. Naturally, I thought I would be rewarded for my efforts, but sex was the furthest thing from her mind. I suppose I had no right whatsoever to expect to get laid on any of these occasions, but I had to wonder - on what occasions DO people get laid? And why wasn't I ever a part of those occasions? If going out with a woman over and over never leads to romance, she's obviously not interested, or she's gay. Fiona wasn't gay, so it went without saying that she had no interest in me beyond friendship. Despite all the obvious signs, I continued to plod on into more misery by planning one 'next move' after another.

One night, however, I thought everything was turning in my favor. Fiona and I went to a movie, came back to my townhouse (both my roommates were out of town), ordered a pizza, and started to watch TV. It was getting close to 10pm, and we had had a great evening laughing and generally being our silly selves with each other. As we finished the pizza, we were both sitting on the couch watching the tube, Fiona to my right. From out of nowhere, she swung her entire body around and threw her legs across my lap with the back of her knees landing directly on my crotch. I looked directly at her and we both giggled. Was she finally getting in the mood? I placed my hands on her thighs and sank a little bit down into the couch. I didn't say anything, nor did she, but I was determined to see where this was headed. I made some ridiculous joke about what was on the TV, and continued to slink down closer to Fiona's legs. I leaned over near her chest and made a vain attempt to kiss her.

I then started kissing down the side of her legs while stroking her, when I heard her say the following words from just above my head:

*“I’m not sleeping with you, Tim!”*

*“Who said anything about sleeping?”* I replied seductively, attempting to keep from screaming out in frustration.

But it was over. I sat back up, and asked her what was going on. She explained (barely) that she had no interest in being sexual with me, and that we should just keep things the way they are. I stared straight ahead and felt almost nothing at that point. She then said that maybe I should take her home since it was already past her bedtime anyway. But I was also tired, and it was freezing outside. I told her she could sleep on the couch, and I would take her home in the morning. I stood up, and she fell asleep almost immediately. She was not a late-night person, and most of our evenings together ended before 9pm. I went downstairs to my room and did everything in my power to keep from bursting into tears or putting my head through the wall. I probably watched a little TV just to unwind, but eventually I turned out the lights and proceeded to relieve my sexual tension the only way guys like me can. Since Fiona was right upstairs and there was no door between the den and the downstairs where I was, I couldn’t moan at the top of my lungs. I had to have a silent orgasm, but it didn’t take too much effort to cum. I was on the verge of it anyway when she put her legs in my lap, so I probably could have done it without even touching myself. I do remember, however, that when I ejaculated, I shot a load as powerful as the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland. It literally landed on my face. I’m surprised I didn’t have to go to the emergency room after it was all over.

The next morning, Fiona woke me up earlier than I usually rose out of my slumber. I offered her breakfast, but she just asked me to take her home. I did, and when I dropped her off, we didn’t have that much to say to each other. When I got back home, I returned to my single bed and slept until noon.

Believe it or not, this same scenario would replay a few weeks later over at Fiona’s house. We were sitting watching her TV one evening (she finally bought one), and once again she threw her legs into my lap. Had she forgotten about the previous time she surprised me with this? Instinctively, I placed my hands on her thighs, and she gave me a look as if she had become possessed by a demon.

*“That’s okay!”* she blurted out. *“You don’t have to touch my legs!”*

I started laughing at the incongruity of what was happening. She wasn’t laughing.

*“Why, Fiona? Do you think you’re fat or something?”*

I was trying to deny the reality of the situation. My ego and pride couldn’t accept the fact that this girl did not want me to touch her in a sexual manner. I didn’t want to have to admit yet another defeat with a woman. So I continued to smile like a moron and look at her as if nothing was wrong. She went silent and stared back at the TV.

I got up to go to the bathroom. When I returned, I decided to sit on the floor in front of the couch. If Fiona didn’t want me to touch her after she put her legs on my dick, then I wasn’t going to tempt her any further. I plopped down in front of my side of the couch and said nothing.

*“You can sit up here next to me if you want”,* she said.

*“No, I’m okay down here”,* I said nonchalantly. I wasn’t going to put myself through another “no touching” experience. We continued to watch TV until she fell asleep.

Although Fiona’s legs would never again cross paths with my genitalia, we did continue to hang out while my hopes continued to be dashed over and over again. Every time I drove Fiona back to her house after we had gone out, the fantasies in my mind would start toying with me as we approached her neighborhood. Some nights, she would invite me in. Other times, I would just drop her off. There were more awkward moments to come - nights when I would attempt to give her backrubs or put my arm around her when we were watching TV, conversations about why we were only friends and not lovers. I can remember trying to kiss her good night after one of our early dates only to have her abruptly turn her head away before my lips made contact. The mixed signals I got in those early days didn’t help when she kept calling and asking me to come over to her house so we could go for a walk, but when she finally made it clear that romance and sex were out of the question, I had to decide whether or not to continue to pursue this futile dream or just break off contact altogether.

The final kicker came as another Valentine’s Day approached. Since I was still pining for Fiona nearly nine months after we had gone out on our first date, I decided to try and use the V-Day to my advantage again. As cliché as it was, I decided to have four long-stem roses delivered to Fiona to proclaim my love for her. I went through all the typical planning for this momentous occasion not unlike I had done with Carrie in the tenth grade. Because Fiona worked during the day, I knew the roses would be delivered while she wasn’t at home. But this year, there was another knot thrown into the mix that made things even more complicated. The week of February 14, 1996, it snowed several feet, shutting down schools, businesses, and just about all deliveries. As a result, the company whom I had hired to do my romantic bidding was unable to get down Fiona’s street that day. Only the main roads had been plowed, and her road was just too treacherous. I got a call from the florist telling me the bad news, but they said they would attempt to deliver them the next day. This is exactly what happened, but that didn’t solve the problem entirely. The driver left a delivery note on Fiona’s front door – the door she never entered. She always entered her home from the back deck, so she didn’t even see the note after it had been left. Since she was at work, the driver didn’t leave the roses there (probably a good policy). And I guess the neighbors – of which there weren’t many – were not home either. It took several days before Fiona realized that a delivery had been attempted while she was at work. But finally, she called the phone number on the delivery card, and they brought them back out to her. She probably didn’t have them in her possession until the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>, but it didn’t matter in the long run.

After I confirmed with the florist that the roses had indeed been delivered, I waited to hear from Fiona. I was speaking to my buddy Walt during this time, and he told me that although my efforts with Fiona had been quite valiant, it was now time to let go. Walt had been one of my go-to guys for all things relating to the fairer sex, and between him and Andy in New York, I had a great support network.

A week went by, and I had not heard from Fiona. Another week and still no word from her. Every day I didn’t hear from her, I sank deeper into depression. Was it a mistake to send her the roses? Was I too forward? Of course, she already knew how I felt, so I doubt she was surprised at my expression of affection. But something was wrong. Other than her trip to England the previous summer, this was the longest I had gone without hearing from her. This was also in the days before email, so a phone call was still an actual form of communication. I

started to think about the possibility of never seeing her again, except maybe by accident at the school, and wondered if I had the strength to let go of my 9-month old fantasy. It was so hard to meet women anyway, much less a woman as pretty, funny, smart, and easy to talk to as Fiona, so how could I even begin to try and find someone else? I also thought about calling her to ask her if she got the roses, but of course I already knew the answer. I was looking for any excuse to hold on. Another two weeks went by, and Fiona was still MIA.

I had all but given up the hope of even being friends with her again, when one night I came home, and my roommate had left a note for me:

*Tim – Fiona called.*

I had to look at the post-it note several times to make sure I hadn't misread it. But it was true. She had initiated contact with me again.

I went downstairs and put all my things on my dresser – keys, change, lint, and whatever else was in my pockets. I was stalling for time, as I was unsure of what to do. The note didn't say for me to call her back, so should I just let it lay? Well, there was no way I was going to sleep that night unless I heard her voice, so I picked up the phone and dialed her number. She answered, and I told her it was me. She sounded like a little girl as she said "Hey!" back to me, as if everything was business as usual. I asked her how things were, and she got right to the point.

*"I was wondering if you would like to help me rehearse for an audition I'm going to be doing next week. I'm going to audition for the Actors Studio in New York, and I have to prepare a scene. I'd like for you to help me with the scene and read the other part."*

Honestly, her innocent request didn't really surprise me. Why would she want to bring up an awkward subject like romantic roses that I sent to her on Valentine's Day to which she never responded? Let's just pretend like it never happened and talk about a safe topic like auditioning and rehearsing.

*"I suppose I could take a look at it,"* I told her, trying not to rock the boat too much. I was letting her steer to see where we were going at that point. For the next several minutes, she told me about the scene, her appointment in New York, and she also asked me if I'd like to go with her to NY to be her scene partner for the actual audition for the school's dean, James Lipton of *Inside the Actors Studio* fame. I told her I wouldn't be able to make the trip, but I would see about helping her with the scene. This conversation went on until she threw in:

*"So, how's it been going?"*

*"Well, Fiona, I haven't heard from you in a month, and tonight we've been talking about a lot of things, but you haven't even mentioned the roses I sent you."*

There was a long silence.

*"I know,"* she managed to let drain out of her mouth. *"But I didn't say anything, because I didn't know what to say."*

*“What do you mean? Why not?”* I asked.

*“I just can’t give back to you what you want me to. I love you, Tim, but not in the way you want. I’m not in love with you. So if you don’t think we can be friends anymore, I’ll understand.”*

I thought it over, knowing what the smart thing to do would be. But I was still at a point in my life where I still didn’t have the strength to say goodbye, even to a fantasy. Plus, I didn’t allow my anger at the situation – and Fiona – to seep into my thoughts like it should have a long time ago. She had done nothing evil, mind you, but she had made it clear many months earlier that a romance between the two of us was never going to happen. I should have let go long before this point. But I was too romantically, blindly, stupidly stubborn. I attempted to reason with her.

*“Well, listen, Fiona, when we started going out last year-”*

*“We were never ‘going out’, Tim”,* she interrupted. *“We were just friends spending time together.”*

She made this very clear. I couldn’t help but wonder once again, what constituted ‘going out’ with someone vs. hanging out as friends? That distinction had never been made clear to me except for the fact that we weren’t having sex or even fooling around. And even though that was the obvious answer, I was more mystified by why she drew that line between ‘dating’ and just ‘getting together’. It was simply because, like all the other girls before her, she just didn’t see me in that light. She wasn’t physically or romantically attracted to me. She only wanted to be friends. Another bitter pill to swallow on my part.

But I agreed anyway to remain in her life and even help her with her big audition. Our first get-together at her house a few days later was just as awkward as I expected. Even though we had discussed the boundaries of our relationship over the phone, it was still like tiptoeing on broken glass when we saw each other in person. I couldn’t help but ask Fiona how long the roses lasted before they died and what she eventually did with them. She told me it didn’t matter. She was right, of course, but I was still looking for answers to why she didn’t want me as a lover. I never got them. Over the next several months, everything was status quo. We continued to do activities together while I fantasized about the two of us hooking up. I felt ‘safe’ as long as I knew that Fiona was not involved with anyone romantically. Because she wasn’t a social butterfly nor was she a drinker, she didn’t go to bars and make attempts to meet eligible men. But that didn’t mean, by any stretch, that she wasn’t in the market for a boyfriend or lover. I was living with the constant hope that Fiona would eventually see the light and realize that I was the ‘only one’ for her just like she was the ‘only one’ for me. But despite her seemingly cloistered existence, she did get out now and again, and one night while driving the two of us back from a scene night at the acting conservatory, I found out about one such outing.

As we were driving into her neighborhood, the conversation we had been having had quieted down, and it was silent in the car for a few minutes. Finally, she broke the silence by asking me a question that let me know exactly what had been going on in her other life.

*“I need to ask your advice about something”,* she said very cautiously as if she wasn’t sure how to phrase her inquiry. But her use of the word ‘advice’ was enough to make my heart sink. I knew what was coming next. Her tone of voice was that of a giddy, young girl who had been very naughty.

*“Okay”* I replied, preparing for the worst.

*“If a guy says he’s going to call you after you’ve been with him, how long do you think it will take him to do so?”*

I was simply frozen with incredulity. She had actually done it.

*“Well,”* I struggled to keep it together, *“What happened? Who is this guy...what did you do? Did you sleep with someone?”*

*“Hmmm, kind of,”* she confessed. *“But I don’t know if he’s really into me or just looking for a good time.”*

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. After over a year of trying to court this woman, sending her flowers, spending many, many hours with her and telling her how special she was to me, she had gone and hopped into bed with some guy that did none of those things for her. The anger, heartbreak, disappointment, and panic I felt while gripping the steering wheel cannot be described. My ‘safe’ little world of fantasy had been busted wide open. Fiona had made love with another man, and I felt betrayed. Even though my intellectual mind knew that she had every right to date or fuck whomever she wanted, my heart, pride, and ego couldn’t accept it. It ripped me open to learn that once again, a girl I loved was giving her love to someone else. I had witnessed it with Becca through a window, heard about it from the lips of Beth, and suspected it with all the girls in high school. And now I was being asked to give the object of my current desire advice on how to attract and keep another man. How could I have been such a fool?

As we approached her driveway, I told Fiona that I couldn’t really give her advice on what she should do next. I admitted to her that I still had feelings for her, and that her revelation was tearing me up. She was surprised to learn that I hadn’t moved on, and at this point, she had no answer for me. We went inside and discussed it further – me trying to imagine what it must have been like for this guy to roll around naked with her, and understand what I had done wrong or what I hadn’t done. Fiona told me that her relationship with this other guy was totally different than hers and mine – a completely different chemistry. This only made me feel even more inadequate. It was as if their connection was what two adults do, while my connection with her was what children do. At 35 years of age, I was still stuck in the role of Guy Who Girls Only Want To Be Friends With. After talking and going around in circles for nearly an hour, Fiona told me that she had to go to bed. Like a beast of burden, I dragged myself to her door and told her I’d talk to her later. When I left, I felt like I just been on the losing end of a boxing match. I went home and called Andy. He was very sorry to hear my latest report, but he said it was just further evidence that I needed to forget her and move on. He was right, but it wasn’t going to happen that evening.

Not surprisingly, this mystery man would not be the only lover/boyfriend that would enter Fiona’s life over the next year. Even though I was trying to let go of the hope that she and I were ever going to have sex or become involved romantically, being with her as often as I was didn’t really allow me that luxury. I knew the more I hung out with her, the more likely I was to have revealed to me news about other men in her life. In fact, she eventually met the man who would become her husband (albeit long after I had gotten over her). We continued to be friends throughout all this, and I made desperate attempts to get dates with other women to take my mind off her. But these women were always “too busy” or already had boyfriends. The Meeting Group Parties that I had attended five years earlier had disappeared from sight, or at least they were no longer holding meetings in the DC area. I remember helping Fiona out with a project at her house that summer, and as she walked me out

to my car as I was about to leave, we gave each other a hug, and she said to me, “*You’re my buddy.*” That’s all I was, and that’s all I had ever been.

I was still very much involved in the acting community as was she. She did a few plays, and so did I. By this time, I had quit the CD store and was making my living from what acting work I could dig up. I was still doing industrials and background work in movies. In June 1996, I joined the Screen Actors Guild after being cast in a principle role in an industrial. This role made me eligible to join the coveted actors’ union, which is what every aspiring actor ultimately wants to do in order to move into the professional arena. It also meant that I was no longer able to do any non-union film or video work. But it was important that I make that transition. It was tough going for a while, but I had found another source of income, which I still rely upon to this day. I started to DJ weddings and host karaoke shows after seeing another DJ do this in a bar. Through a series of phone calls, contacts, and networking, I managed to get involved with a group of other DJ’s as well as DJ companies who taught me the ropes of being a good DJ and master of ceremonies at parties, weddings, and corporate events. In the early days, I would use equipment that was owned by the company that sent me out on a particular job. I eventually bought my own equipment, which freed me up to start booking jobs on my own.

But Fiona was always in the back of my mind, even though I had become better at not obsessing over her as much as I used to. I was still trying to approach and get to know other women, and little did I know that a woman I had met back in 1995 (right in the middle of the Fiona crisis) would re-enter my life a few years later and become the most life-consuming object of desire that I had ever encountered. But before this new hell took over, I had to deal with another kind of hell altogether.

## **PART FOUR**

### **What’s That Sound?**

As I approached writing this chapter, I debated on whether or not to get into a subject that was a major occurrence in my life in 1996. The reason being, I want to preserve my anonymity as best as I can with regard to my virginity, and so to talk about this occurrence could possibly reveal my true identity to some readers who may know me. But I then decided it was too important to leave this part of my life out, because the onset of the affliction about which I’ll briefly discuss definitely had a major impact on what was going on with Fiona as well as my attitude toward dating and sex.

On April 28, 1996, my seemingly healthy life took a downturn that sent me into a deep depression so black that, at one point, I thought about taking the easy way out. I was sitting in my townhouse on this late Saturday night watching TV, when I started to hear what sounded like a high-pitched squeal coming from the TV’s speaker. It sounded like the kind of noise that older TV’s emit when they’re about to kick the bucket, like a hissing combined with an electric power line. I picked up the remote and muted the sound only to discover that I could still hear the noise. After a few seconds, I put my hands over my ears and realized to my horror that the noise was coming from inside my head. I immediately knew what it was: tinnitus. I had had ringing in my ears in the past especially after I had attended a loud rock concert without wearing earplugs. The ringing had always gone away after a few days. But on this night, I had not been to any concert, but I had DJ’d a high school dance the night before. (Like most of my DJ gigs, it was loud because that’s the way people wanted it). I continued to watch TV, and around 3am, I went to bed. Lying there listening to this intrusive noise in my head kept me

awake for most of the night. I was scared that something bad had happened in my brain, and the noise would be permanent. When I got up the next day after sleeping for only a few hours, I went upstairs and sat at the dining room table and tried to eat something. As I sat there, a rush of panic and dread started to wash over my entire body. I was having a panic attack. I immediately got up, went downstairs, and took a Valium. Since I still suffered from these attacks off and on, I always had a supply of this mild sedative on hand. But it was only a temporary solution, and I decided to make an appointment with a doctor the next day to see if the tinnitus was anything to worry about. (I found out later that most people who have tinnitus have also suffered from panic attacks at one time in their lives).

According to the American Tinnitus Association, 50 million Americans experience tinnitus to some degree. Of these, about 16 million have severe enough tinnitus to seek medical attention and about two million patients are so seriously debilitated that they cannot function on a "normal" day-to-day basis. For nearly ten years, I fell into the latter category. I had more medical exams in a year than I had ever had up to that point in my life. Hearing tests, three MRI's, and blood work all came back normal with no discernable cause of my tinnitus found. I was told that tinnitus is a symptom of something else, not a cause of anything. I began doing research on this topic to see what I could discover to give me some kind of relief. Because I didn't own a computer at the time, I made trips to the local libraries and universities several times a week to access the internet. I made contact with other tinnitus sufferers on forums and shared my story. I came into contact with a man on the web that had created a self-hypnosis program for people to help them learn how to habituate to the noise in their head and relieve the stress associated with it. I considered alternative therapies like acupuncture, homeopathy, and herbal remedies such as ginko biloba, the only herb that had been clinically studied for the relief of tinnitus (I tried it for a month). I went to a few support groups that were held periodically in the DC area and found that many of the participants had lived with this noise for many years. In most cases, these folks knew why and how their tinnitus started. Some were war veterans who endured explosions, while others acquired it as an unfortunate side effect of a medication. I never knew why mine started; maybe it was from all those years playing drums in loud rock and roll bands, maybe my recent vocation as a DJ damaged the tiny hair cells inside my ear canals. I don't know. A few friends suggested it was simply stress, and that if I learned how to relax, the noise would go away. My friend Walt said I just needed to get laid. I wish it could have been that simple.

I continued to see my therapist, but I now had another subject to discuss other than Fiona. I was becoming more and more depressed as the tinnitus took on another form in the sound of a low-pitched hum in addition to the high-pitched squeal. This humming noise was ten times worse as I could feel the vibration in my head as well as hear it. It was very painful, and I rarely got a good night's sleep. It was in the fall of 1996 when I hit rock bottom and thought about ending it all. The noise in my head was so severe one night that I considered taking a handful of pills and going into a permanent slumber. I didn't want to die, but I wasn't really living in the first place. I literally had to look in the mirror that night and tell myself not to do it, that life was still worth living, and that tomorrow was another day. My whole life was now focused on the noise in my head and finding a cure or a treatment. Since there was no cure for tinnitus (and still isn't), I was at the mercy of whatever remedies I could find, be they Eastern- or Western-based medicines. Some days were better than others, but I never had a day where it didn't interfere with my life. Ironically, I did continue to study at the acting conservatory, audition for plays, and do background work in movies. It was a struggle to make myself get out of bed and go to class, but I was determined to try and keep my acting pursuits alive.

The tinnitus took its toll on me in more ways than just depriving me of sleep. It completely changed my set of values. For the first time since I had been a teenager, I didn't even think about sex or dating. I couldn't have cared less who Fiona was with or if I would ever meet a woman who wanted to sleep with me. All I cared about

was my health. Even though I knew I didn't have a tumor in my brain or on my auditory nerve, my quality of life was as low as it could be. How could I even think about asking a woman out when I had this noise in my head? How could I feel like I was at the top of my game when I couldn't even get a decent night's sleep because there was a lawnmower in my ears every time my head hit the pillow? I so envied "normal" people who could get a good night's sleep, blast their stereos, and enjoy a quiet walk in the park. I felt like a freak who, despite all my healthy life practices – exercising, not smoking or doing drugs, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables - was being punished by my body for no reason. Even when I reminded myself that there were people in the world with far worse ailments (cancer, paralysis, etc.), it didn't bring me any kind of solace.

It was suggested by a few doctors as well as my therapist that I might want to consider getting on an antidepressant. I defiantly refused, stating that if the tinnitus would go away, I wouldn't be depressed. I suppose there was a stigma associated with antidepressants; Prozac was the big drug of choice for high-powered executives and soccer moms who needed a happiness boost in their daily, hectic lives. I didn't want to take a drug that would, in my thoughts, artificially induce a false sense of security. Plus, what if it didn't work, anyway? Another hope for some kind of deliverance would be struck down. So I continued to read as much as I could on the web about the latest medical research and therapies. I joined the American Tinnitus Association, which allowed me members-only benefits such as receiving their magazine *Tinnitus Today*, published four times a year. I also found out that many celebrities such as David Letterman, Pete Townshend, and William Shatner also have this affliction. In 1996, Mr. Shatner even went before congress to plead for funds to help find a cure for tinnitus. It wasn't until I tried an herb called St. John's Wort that I began to feel some kind of relief for the first time in two years. This herb had been prescribed for depression in Europe for decades but had not been recognized by the Food & Drug Administration as a viable treatment here in the United States. Because it was available in the United States over the counter at any drug store, I decided to give it a try. There were virtually no side effects like those of synthetic antidepressants, and the cost was reasonable. So I began a regimen of the herb to see what would happen. Within three weeks, I noticed that the horrible humming sound in my head and ears had quieted down. Within a month, the noise had ceased altogether. I still heard that high-pitched whine, but that was nothing compared to the humming hell. I was overjoyed to have my silence back again. I could once again listen to music without fear of the humming volume escalating (something that happened whenever I played my stereo at even a low volume or played my acoustic guitar). I could SLEEP again – the best benefit of all. I stayed on the St. John's Wort for a year, gladly spending the extra money to supplement my daily diet. Whatever it took to keep that humming sound away would not be too expensive.

I felt like I had been released from a kind of aural prison once the St John's Wort began to work. I started to feel like my old self again, and I made a point to tell everyone I knew about my good fortune. All my friends and colleagues had been made aware of my condition during the previous two years, and they were always sympathetic to my pain. Some even mailed me articles about the latest research being done. However, all my days of peaceful bliss dried up in the fall of 2000. I woke up one morning to discover that the magic herb that had been my savior had stopped working. The noise in my head was back. No reason, no explanation. I continued taking the St. John's Wort, hoping that this was only a temporary relapse. But after another month, I had to accept the fact that the tinnitus had returned. I was devastated. I decided it was finally time to give in and try the real thing – get on one of the many FDA-approved antidepressants and see what would happen. I met with a psychiatrist who listened to my story, and although he knew far less about tinnitus than I did, he did suggest that an antidepressant would be a wise next move. We discussed all the popular ones – Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil – but he thought I might benefit from a slightly different kind of med called Effexor. Unlike the other three, Effexor affected the brain chemistry in different ways. I'm not sure why he thought this particular drug would be more to my advantage, but he was the shrink, and I had to trust him. I'm glad I did. The Effexor

essentially did the same thing as the St. John's Wort, gradually eliminating the noise in my head over a period of a few weeks. The only drawback was the side effects – constant fatigue and drowsiness, low libido (complete with ejaculatory problems), and lethargy. But if this drug kept the noise away, I would learn to tolerate them.

For the next year, I was tinnitus-free again. I did two more plays and took a final class at the acting conservatory. I started going out with a girl (whom I'll get to in the next part), and even began writing and recording music again. Since strumming my guitar no longer exacerbated the noise in my head, it was a joy to be able to play without fear of reprisal. Of course, all good things come to an end, and the Effexor was no exception. After another 365 days or so of near-silence, I awoke one morning to discover that my old friend had taken up residence again in my head. The Humming Monster had returned to torment me further. I increased the dosage of the Effexor thinking that perhaps my system had built up a tolerance for it. Unfortunately, all this did was turn me into a zombie. I had no feeling at all about anything, and I could have slept for days and taken a nap afterward. Since the noise in my head was still there, I asked my doctor if I could try something else. Over the next couple of years, I tried Wellbutrin, Paxil, Zoloft, and even drugs that were normally prescribed for people with migraines and/or epilepsy (a terrific neurologist I went to suggested that I could be having some kind of seizure). I had varying results, but mostly it was good days and bad days. This cycle was now my life. I appreciated the days that were quiet and tried to get through the noisy ones as best I could. I continued to do my own research and stay in contact with fellow tinnitus sufferers. The support group I had attended a few years earlier no longer had a moderator, so the meetings stopped. I inquired about putting another group together, but the woman who ran the original group said that everyone was now going to another facility much further away, or had just stopped going altogether. It was time to stop focusing on finding a cure or magic pill and just try to live my life.

In the next part, I'm going to jump back to 1995 and then 1998 to talk about a woman who made all my previous infatuations look like amateur hour.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **PART ONE**

### **Girl of My Dreams**

Before I joined the Screen Actors Guild in 1996, I had performed in many non-union projects. These included training films for corporations, known as industrials, as well as television commercials. These commercials were usually for local merchants who couldn't – or wouldn't – pay the union wage to the talent involved. As a result, there were no residuals to be earned; the commercial could run for all eternity, and the actors who appeared in them would only get a flat fee. But when I was beginning my career in front of the camera, it was good experience to acquire before I moved into the big leagues. Even though these commercials were shot on videotape (as opposed to better-looking film) and had a cheap quality about them, they were still fun to do.

One afternoon in April 1995, I received a call from one of the non-union agencies that represented me. Unlike New York or Los Angeles, the agencies in Washington, DC would usually double as casting facilities. As a result, no actor was exclusive to any one agency. It was a free market. This particular agency was north of Baltimore in a little town called Cockeysville Hunt Valley. It was a one-man operation run by a guy named Stu who worked hard for his actors. All auditions were held at his office, and most of them paid very little. (I can remember driving nearly 90 minutes to his office one day to audition for a voiceover that paid all of \$50 if I landed the gig. I stood in front of a boombox while reading copy into a built-in microphone for the audition. This was really the Big Time. I made the trip up there because Stu said “it would be good for me.” I didn't get the job). But on this day, Stu asked me if I'd like to come up and read for an on-camera commercial for a local window pane company. I would be reading for the role of a salesman who turns into a wolfman while pitching a rogue product to an unsuspecting couple in their kitchen. There weren't any lines; I just had to stand there and pretend I was demonstrating a product and then gradually morph into a monster. I mimed some kind of dialogue and then began to contort my face and growl. After a couple of takes, I was good to go. A few days later, Stu called to tell me that the client wanted to use me as the husband in the commercial. “*They loved your face*” he told me. This was probably the only time in my life I had been told that by anyone. I asked about the wolfman role, and he said that another actor had been cast. There was also a young woman who was cast as my wife, so I asked Stu who that was. He told me her name, but I had never met her. He gave me the shoot date and location, and I prepared for a fun day of getting in front of the camera and getting paid for it.

I arrived at the location which was a suburban neighborhood somewhere outside of Baltimore. We would be shooting inside the kitchen of a 1960's-era house and then later in the driveway. When I walked into the living room I met the other actors who played the roles of wolfman, another salesman, a truck driver, and my wife. These four actors already knew each other from previous gigs as they were Baltimore-based and had been doing this a little longer than me. The three other guys were happy to be there and very friendly, and the girl who played my wife was charming, pretty, and unbeknownst to me at the time, my future heartache. Her name was Amy, and although she was about my age, she easily looked ten years younger. A slender, fair-skinned beauty with wavy golden brown hair, she shook my hand with a very firm grip and smiled in a way that reminded me that Spring was in the air. She wore no make-up, but her face was as fresh and lovely as any woman I had ever met. I was struck by her sparkle, but it wasn't love at first sight. As this was 1995, my heart still belonged to Fiona; in fact, that chapter was fairly new at this point. But Amy was a nice distraction for the day, and I intended to enjoy her company.

If you've ever worked on the set on a movie, TV show, or commercial, you probably know that there is a lot of down time between takes. This day was no exception, and the periods of waiting allowed Amy and me to get to know each other. I discovered that she was also a singer and songwriter and had played in numerous bands over the years. This subject alone gave us hours of conversation, recounting stories from our experiences in recording studios to performing live on stage. We had a lot in common including a love for contemporary music of all genres. It was refreshing to talk to a woman who had a passion for something other than a sale at Macy's. Amy struck me as 'one of the guys', but she was by no means a tomboy. She laughed easily and her sense of humor was anything but PC. This is not to say that she was crude, but she seemed very uninhibited when speaking her mind.

As the day rolled on, the shoot went very smoothly, and the crew was very laid back. When it came time for lunch, someone went out and brought back food – I think it was from Kentucky Fried Chicken (there was certainly no catering on this shoot) – and we all sat down in the driveway of the house to eat. This is when I learned that Amy was a vegetarian. For about two seconds, I worried that my consumption of meat might offend her, but I quickly discovered that she couldn't have cared less. She understood that not everyone's diet was the same as hers, and she was okay with that. Without delving too far into her personal life, I discreetly inquired about her choice not to eat meat, and she told me that she thought it was healthier, plus she loved animals too much. I respected her choice and even admired her for it. We didn't discuss it much further, but it did open another topic close to my heart – dogs, cats, and other members of the animal kingdom. Amy was an animal lover and even did rescues. Not just for our four-legged friends, but birds as well. This revelation endeared her to me even more, and I felt I had connected with another woman. But because of my infatuation with Fiona, the idea of asking Amy out after the commercial shoot concluded seemed wrong to me. In fact, it might have been the best thing I could have ever done at the time, and it might have saved me a lot of heartbreak I was to endure over Fiona. But we make decisions based on what we know and feel at the time, and I decided my pursuit of Fiona was more important than trying to get a date with someone else. But for all I knew, Amy might have had a boyfriend, so I didn't even consider it on this day. However, I did think it would be a good idea to stay in touch with her if for no other reason than she was a new acting contact and possible music aficionado. So, as we were wrapping up the day's work and everyone was getting their personal belongings together, I asked Amy for her phone number. A couple of the other actors standing near us chuckled a bit when they heard my audacious request, as if they knew that Amy probably got asked for her phone number on a daily basis. They could have also been thinking, *“Be careful, dude. She'll break your heart!”* But my desire for her digits was noble, and because I was asking her as a fellow actor and not a potential suitor, I wasn't wracked with nervousness and panic. In other words, I didn't put that much stake in it. (This was a far cry from me rolling a desk chair over to

Becca's desk at the CD store and practically vomiting on her while asking her to have dinner with me). I left the set that afternoon and headed back home to pick up where I left off planning my next move with Fiona.

A few weeks later, I was asleep one morning, still living in the townhouse where I shared a land line phone with two other housemates. The phone rang and awoke me, and as mentioned earlier, this was before we had Caller ID, so I would rarely answer for fear it was a telemarketer. I could hear the answering machine upstairs, and the voice on it this particular morning was Amy's. She was calling to ask me if I had gotten paid for the commercial we shot. I rolled over and went back to sleep and planned to call her back later.

When I called her later that afternoon, I found her to be just as pleasant and charming as she was when I met her on the set. We talked about our tardy paychecks (we eventually did get paid) as well as music and our acting histories. This scenario was all too familiar to me. Here was another attractive woman whom I had met through the acting community, who had a lot in common with me, and seemed more than agreeable to talking at length with me on the phone. It was Beth and Fiona all over again, but unlike those two disastrous situations, I was not invested in any particular outcome with Amy. She was just someone I had met on a job, and now we were discussing our careers. But as big a fool as I am, I knew I couldn't resist asking Amy if she'd like to get together and hang out. I told her I'd love to hear some of her music, and she said she wanted to hear some of my compositions as well. This was one area that Fiona and I could not discuss; Fiona was completely in the dark when it came to music. So Amy and I decided to meet for lunch near Baltimore.

As it turned out, Amy was house sitting for a friend who was out of the country, so she said I should meet her there and we would take one car to go grab lunch. I arrived at the house, actually an apartment that had certainly seen its share of previous tenants over the years, a few minutes before she did. I stood outside my car looking around at the neighborhood which could have been plucked from any urban landscape, but I doubt I would have strolled down these particular streets after dark. I looked up the sidewalk and saw Amy walking toward me. At first, I was a bit taken aback by her approach – she was wearing dark sunglasses, her hair was flowing a bit more freely than I remembered, and she walked with a bit of a swagger I had not noticed before. There was a sexiness and even a bit of danger about her that wasn't so apparent on the set of our commercial. But when she shouted “Hey!” at me, I knew it was the Amy I remembered. She smiled and asked me how I was doing. I told her I was good. I asked her if she had any suggestions as to where we might eat, and she said she knew of a place that was a favorite of hers.

Charm City (Baltimore's unofficial nickname) has many wonderful restaurants, both big chain establishments as well as small, out of the way places. Amy took me to a quaint little diner on the outskirts that she said had good food at reasonable prices. It was vegetarian-friendly, but they did have meat selections, too. It was nice to go somewhere new and different, and with a new and very attractive girl, too. Like on the set of the commercial, Amy and I never ran out of conversation. She told me all about her musical pursuits, her acting experiences, and even about some old boyfriends. She also revealed to me that she still lived with her parents and younger sister. At 33 years old, she had moved back in with them after living with a boyfriend for a couple of years. She said that she was living in their basement and paying rent, but she would like to move out and get her own place eventually. She was born in Pittsburgh, PA. and had moved to Baltimore as a child. I told her about my southern roots and about the many bands in which I'd performed and how it led me back into acting and relocating to the DC metro area. I also told her about my DJ work and how I had quit my job earlier that year at the CD store. All in all, we had a very nice lunch.

We drove back to the apartment where she was house sitting and went inside. It was a tiny little place, barely big enough for one person; with a bathroom that didn't even have a door (it had a sliding room divider). The first thing I noticed was a plentiful supply of pornographic VHS tapes stacked in various places in the living room. Amy laughed it off when I spotted the videos, and then she told me her friend was a guy who was a bit of a pig. I was more fascinated by Amy's complete disregard for the material and the boxes that adorned this guy's lair. But once we had our little laugh over it, we proceeded to sit down and talk some more. At some point, I asked Amy to play me the tapes of her music, so she flipped on the stereo console. She had explained that her music was "Kate Bush on acid." She inserted a cassette and pushed play. Her description was quite accurate. The voice I heard on the tape was that of a caterwauling wail that I would have never guessed was Amy's. She was actually quite a good singer, but this particular selection of tunes didn't aptly demonstrate that fact (I would later hear Amy sing some famous standards which revealed a voice so pitch perfect, I don't know how she never became an American Idol of the day). As I listened to her music, she admitted that it wasn't for everyone's tastes. I told her I thought it was unique and her own sound. And that was all that mattered. Then it came time for me to play Amy some of my dreck. These were the saccharine-infused tunes that I had recorded with my band 15 years earlier as well as some of my solo material. Although Amy wasn't really into my brand of 60's-inspired power pop, she did appreciate the effort and craftsmanship that went into it.

As I sat there talking to her, I felt a real connection that I had never felt with any of the girls from my past. Like me, Amy seemed to be a rather isolated soul - not a shut-in, of course, but rather a young woman who did her own thing and didn't gravitate toward crowds. She explained that she was happier alone or with one other person as opposed to going to parties and trying to fit in. The more we talked, the more in common I discovered we had. And even though my heart belonged to Fiona, I was definitely drawn to this free-spirited woman who I had met because a commercial producer "loved my face". I don't really believe in fate, but had I turned down that original audition for whatever reason, I may have never met the woman who, a few years later, would become the unmistakable girl of my dreams. Finally, as the afternoon waned, I told her I needed to get back home, but it would be great to do this again sometime. She readily agreed, but it would be over three years before we would see each other socially again. My feelings for Fiona were only in their beginning stages, and the tinnitus that hit me was still to come, bringing everything resembling my life to a halt.

## **PART TWO**

### **From A 'Runaway Bride' To a Runaway Heart**

One dubious aspect of my acting career that I haven't mentioned up to this point is the amount of time I spent doing background work in movies and TV shows that were shot in and around the DC metro area. I had started doing 'extra' work as a way to familiarize myself with a real movie shoot and to learn the protocols of being on set. My first jobs in this area were non-union and came from various agencies with whom I was signed. Whenever a movie needed hundreds of extras to fill space, any one of these agencies would submit their actors for consideration. Depending on the type of movie, the period in which the film was set, and many other variables, it would sometimes be possible to acquire many days', even weeks', worth of work. For non-union folks, it was little more than minimum wage. But for Screen Actors Guild members, the paychecks could add up quite nicely, especially when overtime was incurred. It was commonly known as the "Golden Handcuffs"

among seasoned extras, as doing this kind of work could be lucrative, but it could also pigeonhole the actor into being seen only as a background actor by casting directors and thus prevent them from getting more substantial acting jobs. Some people would do extra work for no other reason than to earn enough to make their SAG health insurance. I even managed to do it one year myself. I can't blame anyone for wanting to have that security in their lives, but personally, I wanted more for my career. But anytime I was offered several days of background work, I usually accepted it because I needed the money. Also, the food was always great. And it was always a kick to see famous actors I had grown up admiring standing two feet away from me. I could write a whole other book about my experiences as a background performer, but that's for another day.

In the fall of 1998, I found myself on the set of a motion picture being shot in the bowels of Maryland in a little town called Berlin. The movie was *Runaway Bride* starring Julia Roberts and Richard Gere. I was an extra again, this time playing a cameraman (along with many other extras playing reporters and members of the press) who pursues our beloved couple outside a church. Also earning a day's pay was Amy, who I had seen on many other movie sets not long after we had done our commercial together. Whenever Amy and I spotted each other while signing in at the beginning of these very long days, we always wound up sitting together in the extras holding area. Our conversations never lagged, and even when there were quiet times, I always felt right at home with her. This particular shoot was significant for me as it was the beginning of what would become my most hopeless romantic descent into heartache ever.

By this time, my quest to win Fiona's heart had been over for 2 years. Other than a brief attempt to get a date with a cute little southern belle that was a student at the acting conservatory in 1997 (she, uh, never got back to me to let me know what her schedule was), there were no other women who I considered asking out during this period. The tinnitus that plagued me at that time was the center of my life, and finding a way to overcome it was all I cared about. But by the time my stint on *Runaway Bride* ended, I found myself deciding to take a chance on Amy. I thought maybe this time would be different. Amy and I were roughly the same age, never married, no kids, and still searching for happiness in the world of the arts. I believed that if all my previous heartaches were dues to be paid before meeting The One, then it would have all been worth it. But I had to get a date with her first.

On the last day of shooting when everyone was being released (sort of like farmers do with cattle), I awkwardly attempted to ask Amy if she wanted to get together and go see a flick (yes, I actually used the antiquated word "flick"). She said sure and for me to give her a call. After we parted ways that afternoon, I was gathering my belongings and saying goodbye to some fellow actors. One of them who had overheard me invite Amy to the cinema said, "*Good luck on your date!*" I thanked him for his well-wishes and went to my car. Maybe I should have asked Richard Gere for his advice on how to woo a woman.

I did speak with Amy on the phone a few weeks later. It was during the holidays, and she was busy with catering (her other job), so we didn't make any definite plans to get together until after the first of the year. I was okay with that as I wasn't ready to rush into anything. I was planning to head home for the holidays, so I would be out of town anyway. Maybe I was reluctant to try and meet up with her because I didn't want to spoil the fantasy of what dating her might be like. I was also scared of getting hurt again. So the holidays passed, and I prepared to party like it was 1999 (which it was).

## **PART THREE**

### **Condemned To Repeat History**

*“Am I foolin' myself once again...cause I just couldn't stand the pain of finding out it really wasn't true, and I was foolin' myself into loving you.”*

- “Foolin' Myself” by Eric Carmen

Going as far back as the tenth grade when I was infatuated with Carrie, one of the worst habits I practiced when it came to approaching girls was to get as many opinions as I could about my situation. This was usually because I didn't trust myself to make the right decisions about anything related to the fairer sex, so I felt compelled to ask everyone in sight – sometimes even virtual strangers – what they would do in my shoes. I was looking for that magic solution to a problem that was already unsolvable. Even after it was made clear to me that the object of my affection was never going to be interested in me romantically or sexually, I continued to probe men and women, single and married, gay and straight about the complexities of the human heart. I was searching for a guru who could tell me the secrets of making a girl fall in love with me. Of course, after hearing about my hopeless romantic endeavors, the advice I usually got was to “forget her and try to meet someone else.” I would always thank them for their time and then go searching for another wise sage. These investigative practices continued well into my late 30's (and still do so today), so my feelings for Amy naturally invited all sorts of scrutiny.

A few years earlier, I had met a guy at the acting conservatory who would become the latest member of my insane group of friends who shared an interest in the arts with a slightly bent twist. His name was Peter, and even though he was eight years my junior, he still appreciated some of the same types of movies, Hollywood lore, and late night talk show trivia, specifically from the Johnny Carson days. We would spend hours on the phone discussing some obscure incident from a *Jerry Lewis Telethon* that no one remembered except us, and we would talk about a particular glance or comment some performer made at 2 in the morning on the telethon that created some kind of awkward moment for Jerry and his kids. (Thanks to Youtube, a lot of these golden moments from television's vaults have started to surface courtesy of some basement dweller's old VHS tapes). In addition to discussing the world of entertainment, we would also share our tales of woe with women. Peter was not a virgin, but he had had his share of heartbreak. Once I started telling him about my days on movie sets spent with Amy, he began giving me his thoughts about my next move. He thought it was great that she had agreed to go out with me, but he seemed to believe that Amy and I had already discussed a “relationship”. We hadn't, of course, but considering how much obsessing and talking about her I had done, one would think that we'd been going out for months.

I called Amy after the first of the year and invited her to go to a movie and maybe grab a late snack afterward. *Shakespeare In Love* was the flick...er...movie everyone was talking about, and I wanted to see it anyway. Also, I mistakenly assumed that Amy was, like a lot of women, into 'chick flicks', and that my choice of this particular film would romance her. Wrong (but I'll get to that in time). She said she wanted to see the movie, too, so we agreed to meet at a theater in the Baltimore area. I arrived there about half an hour before the movie started and waited in the lobby for Amy. And waited some more. Finally, I figured I had been stood up and was about to make my way into the theater to find a seat, when I looked up and saw Amy rushing over to me, apologizing for her tardiness. I was just happy to see her at that point, and we laughed about it and went into the theater. We both enjoyed the film very much, and of course, it went on to win the Oscar for Best Picture of 1998.

There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to see Amy again. She was an absolute delight, and the fact that we had known each other for 4 years prior to our first official date was a plus. There were no awkward first-date, nice-to-meet-you rituals. We were already very comfortable being with each other, and I felt like maybe this would be the girl I'd waited for all my life. Over the next week we talked on the phone and discussed our next get-together (yes, I'm afraid that phrase was still alive and well). Since I had driven to Baltimore the week before, we decided she would come down to my part of the world the following weekend. Instead of a movie, we would just have a nice dinner, so I started to pour through the famous Zagat restaurant guide in an attempt to find the perfect spot. After wracking my brain, I found a wonderful little Thai restaurant located in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Northwest Washington, DC.

This is where my chronic habit of asking for others' opinions would once again bite me in the ass. I had kept Peter up to speed on all my conversations and meetings with Amy, and he seemed to be more anxious about it than me. For whatever reason, Peter thought I needed to find out where Amy stood at this point in our "relationship". He felt that I was headed for the dreaded Friend Zone with her, so he strongly urged me to step up my game and ask her how she felt. As much as I appreciated his concern, I should have ignored his advice. You see, even though Amy and I had known each other for a few years, we had only been out on one date, and that was way too soon to determine if a romance was in the air. But, being the insecure fool that I was, I listened to his suggestion, and proceeded to put my First Big Mistake With Amy into gestation.

On a lovely Sunday evening in February 1999, Amy drove down to DC and met me near the Adams Morgan area. She parked her car in a safe area, and we walked to the restaurant. It was a perfect little eatery for two people on a second date – quiet, small, and located in a renovated house that was probably built at the turn of the century. The food was tasty, the wait staff unfussy, and Amy and I went together like two old souls. The conversation rarely wavered, and the time flew by. Little did I know I was about to spoil it all.

As we walked back to our cars, we laughed and talked about the absurdities of what our lives were like at our age, and at one point, we thought we were being followed by a gang of thugs (we weren't). But we even laughed about that. Because we were still engaged in conversation, I wound up sitting in the passenger side of her car to continue talking. But all good things must come to an end, and I found a doozy of a way to make sure that happened. Taking Peter's advice about attempting to find out where Amy and I were headed, I spoke the following words:

*"Well, Amy, I had a really good time tonight. But I wanted to talk to you about something. I know we've known each other for a while, so I need to find out where you stand with what we've been doing. I don't want to waste your time, and I know you don't want to waste my time, so let's figure out what we're going to do with regard to seeing each other."*

(Now, those words may not be exactly verbatim, but it's close enough).

Amy looked disappointed. I had spoiled a perfectly good evening with an ultimatum. What the hell was I thinking? It was 38 years of virginity, desperation, and neediness rearing its very ugly head again in an attempt to gain something. It was so unfair to her that even as I write this thirteen years later, I still cringe. I could have thanked her for a wonderful evening and tell her I looked forward to seeing her again, but no... So Amy very calmly told me that she was still in the process of figuring out what was going on with an almost-ex-boyfriend who lived in New York. I was aware of this guy as she had mentioned him to me on several occasions in the past. But since it sounded like they were nearly done as a couple, I figured I had a shot with her. But my method of finding out was despicable and selfish. I put her on the spot – and on our second date at that – asking her to predict the future. But at the time, I thought I was perfectly within my rights to do so. Peter may have misjudged the situation, but I should have had a little more common sense than to follow through with it. Before I got out of the car, I asked her if she'd like to come back down to DC a few nights later to go see a group of scenes that were being performed at the acting conservatory. She politely asked me to call her on Monday, but I already knew that she was too justifiably rattled by my stupid mouth to want to drive back down again anytime soon. I bid her goodnight and exited her vehicle.

The next day, I called Andy and told him of my blunder. I did tell him that Amy and I had a wonderful evening up to that point, but he assured me that the demands I'd made of her made more of an impact on her than I thought. *“Women are very sensitive to those kinds of words”* he told me. And he was right. He told me that I probably didn't do irreparable damage, but I had damn well better call her and apologize as soon as possible.

I called Amy on Monday from a new part-time job I had at a publishing company. (The DJ work had been slow, and I wasn't booking much acting work during this time, so I was forced to take this job which gave me the glorious task of calling up medical facilities and asking them to renew their subscriptions to various trade publications). I wanted to remind Amy about the scene night at the acting conservatory and see if she was interested in attending. Not surprisingly, she said she had other plans, but she did ask me to call her later in the week. I could hear her waning enthusiasm about seeing me again, and I really couldn't blame her. But I wasn't giving up yet.

I knew I had to make amends somehow for my thoughtless, nearly callous remarks I had made to Amy the last time we had gotten together. I remember calling her one evening during the middle of the week in February – a few days before Valentine's Day. I just had to get past this bump in the road and try to move on. Amy answered the phone and sounded happy to hear from me. A promising beginning so far. We chatted for a few minutes; she asked me about the conservatory's final scene night, and I told her there was some good work performed. But I wasn't going to put off the point of my call any longer.

*“Amy, I want to bring up something...I owe you an apology.”*

*“For what?”*

*“The other night when we went out to the Thai restaurant, I said something to you that I shouldn't have. I made a very insensitive remark to you.”*

She chuckled and said she had no idea what I was talking about.

*“When we were sitting in your car at the end of the evening, I made the comment that 'I didn't want to waste your time, and I knew you didn't want to waste my time' in a foolish attempt to figure out what we were doing. I would never consider being with you a waste of time. I was just a little nervous because I like you, so I said something stupid. I'm really sorry.”*

*“Tim, I didn't think it was that big a deal, so don't worry about it. You don't need to apologize.”*

Hearing her speak those words lifted a burden off my shoulders that I had been carrying around with me for days. I wanted to believe she was sincere. I *had* to believe she was sincere. We managed to get past it and talk about other things. And knowing that the following Sunday was Valentine's Day, I asked her if she'd like to get together again. She said yes.

I'd like to think I learned from past experiences that dumping a shitload of presents, flowers, candy, and other treats in a woman's lap on Valentine's Day, especially when I wasn't involved with them romantically, never won their hearts. So this time I decided that, while I wanted to acknowledge Cupid's holiday in the case of Amy, I was going to keep it simple. On several occasions when Amy and I were together, she had told me how much she was a fan of writer Edgar Allan Poe. She had read most of his work and was fascinated by his dark and macabre prose and poetry. Somehow or another (I don't exactly remember), I managed to locate a little gift shop in Tacoma Park, Maryland that sold little trinkets including literary key chains. I discovered one such chain that had a darkly humorous quote by Poe on one side and a sketched engraving of his image on the other. It cost all of \$5. Perfect, I thought. I would not be bringing roses, daisies, or any other floral arrangement this time.

I drove to the Baltimore neighborhood of Fell's Point, home to a variety of shops, restaurants, coffee bars, music stores, and over 120 pubs. Amy and I had agreed to meet there and have dinner. I parked my car in a nearby parking lot, and we took Amy's car and drove into the cobblestone-lined streets of this historic area. As we were driving, I happened to mention that it was Valentine's Day, and Amy said she wasn't even aware of it. We eventually arrived at our destination, and after walking for quite some time and exploring various side streets, we finally found a small cafe and sat down. Amy had brought along a book of sketches and drawings that she had done in her younger days that she wanted to share with me. These were actually comic strips that she had written and which had been published by the Baltimore City Paper. She was quite modest about her work, and the fact is, they were outstanding – funny, clever, and drawn in a graphic novel-type style that would have made most comic book geeks swoon. I asked her why she didn't pursue this field of art as she was obviously very good at it. Her answer revealed another aspect of herself that would become all too common as we got to know each other more. She told me that her heart wasn't really in it and she didn't really feel the need to continue.

As beautiful, smart, and talented as Amy was, there were a few things about her that raised a few red flags, at least in the eyes of some of my friends. She was still living at home with her parents and sister (who was only a few years younger), and had no immediate plans to move out. She did pay rent and live in the basement, so she had her privacy. But it was a bit peculiar that a 37-year-old woman would still be living with Mom and Dad instead of getting her own place. At the time, I think it had a lot to do with her expenses – living in Baltimore was (and still is) very expensive, and because she was a freelance artist like me, income was frequently inconsistent. Some suggested that this was no excuse, but I was not going to judge her decision. The other thing I noticed about Amy as we got to know each other was her odd lack of ambition in the field she had chosen. She wanted to be an actress and not do background work for the rest of her life, but she wasn't much of a hustler.

She did get her share of auditions, but she seemed rather nonchalant about everything. Maybe this was a part of her personality that charmed me; she was such a free-spirited girl that I felt very alive when I was with her.

But I digress. As we sat there looking at her art work, we ordered dinner and enjoyed another wonderful meal. Amy looked quite beautiful this evening; because she was always careful to protect herself from the sun, her skin had an ageless quality to it. And it was always a pleasure to discover a new dining experience outside of the typical chain restaurants that polluted big cities. Fell's Point had an abundance of wonderful out-of-the-way places; it was Baltimore's Greenwich Village. After dinner, we continued to walk around and talk. I was growing quite attached to Amy, and I hoped she was feeling the same way. We arrived back at her car, and she drove me to mine. Before I got out, I told her that I had not forgotten it was Valentine's Day (even though her soon to be ex-boyfriend apparently did). I pulled a small box out of my jacket which contained the key chain.

*“Amy, I found this and thought you might like it. Happy Valentine's Day.”*

She seemed genuinely surprised at my thoughtfulness, and took the box, looking like a child on her birthday.

*“What is it?”* she playfully asked.

*“Open it”* I chuckled.

She did so, and for about half a second, seemed a little puzzled by the gift.

*“I remember you telling me how much you enjoyed the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, so when I saw this, I thought of you.”*

She read the inscription and laughed with a joyfulness I had never heard come out of her.

*“I love it!!”* she exclaimed. *“Thank you!”*

*“You're very welcome.”*

She continued to giggle at the Poe writing but seemed more impressed with the fact that I had gotten it for her in the first place. Unlike previous incidences where I had hoped an expensive bouquet of flowers would melt a woman's heart, this \$5 key chain made more of an impression than all those other offerings combined. She kept telling me how much she loved it. I had to ask her if her NY boyfriend had gotten her anything. Not surprisingly, he hadn't. She thanked me again for the gift and gave me a hug, the type of hug two people do in the front seat of a car. I got out and watched her drive off. She waved at me as she drove by, and I knew at that moment that I had crossed the threshold of no return.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Less Is More (and Should Have Stayed That Way)**

As mentioned before, I never thought I was enough for the women I attempted to court. I never thought I was *good* enough. So I always looked for ways to make up for my supposed inadequacies by giving material things to my crushes, be it flowers, candy, or some awkwardly composed greeting card. The Poe keychain proved that sometimes, the simpler the better. But because my friendship with Amy wasn't headed in the direction I wanted, I felt it necessary to up the stakes – go big or go home. Bad idea.

One lonely Friday evening, I was browsing in a Barnes & Nobel book store as an excuse to get out of my apartment. I found myself hanging out in the self-help section looking at the endless cavalcade of publications about relationships, dating, sex, 'you-go-girl' self-esteem bibles, and other American dilemmas. Amid the colorful panels and eye-catching book spines both thick and thin, a plain, black monolith with the simple title "How To Succeed With Women" (written by Ron Louis and David Copeland) jumped out at me. I pulled it from the shelf and saw that the cover was also all black with those same words printed in a rather sloppy Times New Roman font that looked as if someone actually typed the words on the cover. I started flipping through the pages expecting this to be yet another feel-good examination of the sexes and how 'we're all so different yet alike at the same time' garbage. What I discovered was a very shrewdly written manual that took the reader step by step through the phases of dating and eventually bedding women. It pulled no punches; it spoke from an authoritative stance that I had never found in any dating book. It went through the motions of picking up women in bars, avoiding the dreaded Friend Zone, first date etiquette, gift-giving, first night of sex, and so on. After skimming a few chapters, I decided this was going to be my training manual for becoming Amy's Romeo and lover. I carried the book up to the check-out and attempted to be as discreet as I could when placing it on the counter. Because I felt like a loser in the first place for having to purchase such a book, I placed it front cover down hoping the cute clerk ringing me up wouldn't notice the title. (The bar code was on the back anyway, I told myself). She rang it up, I handed her my credit card, and she placed it in a bag. I was too embarrassed to make eye contact with her (that was something I'd learn to do from reading the book), and then I left.

A few days later, I sat down with the book and a yellow highlighter. I was determined to learn all the secrets of seduction so I could finally know what it was like to make love to a woman. I went through each chapter like a college student studying for finals, highlighting every important passage that I thought was relevant to my situation. After many years of talking to friends, colleagues, and people I hardly knew about how to win a woman's heart, I thought I had finally found something to take their places. It was all right there in black and white (no pictures). It addressed the reader in the second person ("You know women want to talk about feelings...", "When you pick her up in your just-washed car...", etc.) and asked questions that compelled me to answer out loud as if I was talking to a dating coach. I admit that I am not a very avid reader, but I was devouring these chapters on a daily basis.

Since Amy and I had been to several small cafes and restaurants that were somewhat casual atmospheres, I decided it was time to go to the next level. Actually, *The Book* (as it will henceforth be referred to) strongly advised taking a woman to a fancier eating establishment once you've gone through the motions of hitting all the cheaper places. Once again, I grabbed the Zagat restaurant guide to find the perfect place. While my intentions of showing Amy a good time were certainly heartfelt and sincere, I relied too much on the opinions

of two authors who were only trying to make a buck like everyone else. Not that their advice and suggestions were bad – on the contrary – some of it was revelatory to me, but I didn't understand that every girl is different. Not all women want goey romance and violins playing in the background. I should have known by now that Amy was not a chick flick gal. She was one of the guys. This is not to say she didn't want to be treated like a woman, but I made the mistake of stereotyping her into a category that was rooted in my old-fashioned upbringing. Key chains - not flowers - were what appealed to her.

But I wanted to be with Amy so badly that I was willing to try anything. And on this particular spring evening in 1999, I did just that. I had made reservations at this super-fancy, upscale restaurant in Washington, DC called 701, located on Pennsylvania Ave. – the kind of place that VIP's frequent as well as DC movers and shakers. I read good reviews of the place and hoped it would impress Amy. When I called to make a reservation, I explained to the host that I was bringing someone special and wanted to make it a memorable night. He said he had the perfect table for me. It was over in a corner by a window with lovely views of the Capitol and other DC landmarks. I told him it sounded great and to hold it for me. Before we hung up, he offered another suggestion. He asked me if my guest was from out of town. I told him that she was from Baltimore, but I was curious to hear what he had in mind. He said he had a colleague who gave limousine tours of DC and wondered if I might want to have a limo waiting for the two of us after dinner. I told him I'd think about it as I had no idea what Amy and I might be doing after we ate. But he gave me the phone number of the man who could make such a tour happen, just in case I changed my mind.

So the reservations were set, and a few days later on a Saturday, Amy was on her way to my townhouse. I had a nice flower arrangement on the coffee table in my living room as instructed by The Book. ("The flowers aren't exactly for her, but they *are* for her", so said the authors). I had told Amy earlier in the day that I was taking her somewhere 'different' and the rest was a surprise. When she showed up about 5 that afternoon, she was wearing what she typically wore when we got together – jeans, long-sleeved sweater or shirt, and casual shoes. She brought a change of clothes as I believe she had gone to an audition earlier that day. But she had no idea of the type of restaurant to which I was taking her, and that was the first of my many mistakes that evening. I thought the less she knew, the bigger surprise it would be, and therefore a better outcome for me – a selfish concept to be sure, but The Book was trying to teach me how to be an alpha male and get rid of my wussy ways with women. But Amy was intrigued at what I had planned, so we got in my car and headed down to the District for what would be one of the most forced and ill-fated nights of my life.

I realized my first mistake upon entering 701. When Amy saw how fancy the restaurant was, she became flustered and even embarrassed – the complete opposite of what I was hoping for.

*"I didn't know it was a place like this", she said. "Had I known, I would have worn a dress!"*

*"Ohhh..."* I stammered like an idiot. *"I wanted it to be a surprise."*

*"Well, you could have told me the type of place it was", she reiterated.*

She was absolutely right. I didn't think of her enough to at least give her some idea of the dress code. I had been too immersed in The Book's commandments for my own gains instead of being concerned with how Amy might plan for the evening. Once we got past my first faux pas of the night, we waited for the host to come over. When he finally turned his attention to us, I told him I had made a reservation and particularly for a special table in the corner. He checked his reservation list and then turned back to me. He explained that there was a "mix-

up,” and that table was no longer available. I insisted that I had reserved that table several days earlier and I expected Amy and me to get it. He pointed out that another couple had already been seated there and that it would be rude to ask them to move. When I looked over at this couple who had stolen our table, it was clear what happened. The man and woman sitting there looked like a couple out of *Vogue* and *GQ* magazines – impeccably dressed from head to toe, perfect hair on the man’s head, and a mile of legs on the woman. I’m sure they had money to burn, and I would bet everything I own that when they arrived at the restaurant (before Amy and me) they saw the table, were told by the host that it was reserved, and then calmly slipped the host a fifty to “forget” the reservation. After all, this was a highfalutin DC power couple, and I was just a clumsy dude who had the futile foresight to make a reservation. Because the host didn’t want to lose a potentially good tip (too late for that), he offered us an alternative seating arrangement. He walked us over to a large, round table that would have been appropriate for a party of five or more – not a goddamn couple. He tried to justify his suggestion by actually saying, “*See? You have this entire large table all to yourself!*” He was an idiot as well as a liar. Since Amy and I had no other choice, we went ahead and sat down next to each other at this monstrous piece of furniture. But because of the round shape of the table, we weren’t really able to look straight at each other. It was a very uncomfortable seating arrangement that didn’t allow us to have a very good dining experience. The seating was completely unacceptable. While we were waiting for our waiter to approach, I glanced over at the table I had originally reserved. I wanted to get up and go over there and slap the two spoiled shits who took it. The view out that window was as beautiful as I had been told, but Amy and I had to settle for twisting our necks to have a conversation.

As we scanned our menus, Amy’s face took on a rather ashen look when she saw the prices of the entrees.

*“Tim, you don’t have to pay for me.”*

*“Oh, I don’t mind. This is my treat to you tonight.”*

*“Are you sure?”* she asked.

*“Of course!”* I replied, pretending like everything was working out perfectly.

So we ordered our food and managed to enjoy the culinary delights of 701. I don’t remember what I ordered; my mind was too focused on getting results that night. ‘Results’ is a word that had come to be a very bad objective in this area of my life. Women weren’t projects that yielded ‘results’. They were human beings who deserved to be treated as such. But my 17-year-old mind was still pushing me to **LOSE MY VIRGINITY. CROSS THAT THRESHOLD NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES!!** I wish my adult side that truly loved Amy would have told that 17-year-old to go to his room. It would have made for a less stressful evening. But I put myself on a tightrope that night, hoping that every move I made would get me one step closer to holding Amy in my arms. I kept thinking about *The Book* and all its wisdom and how I could apply it here. Unfortunately, the mindset of me ‘not being enough’ was in full force, and what happened next was a new low in grasping at straws even by my standards.

When we finished dinner, I stupidly decided that the limo ride suggested to me by the host earlier in the week would be a perfect capper for the night. Take Amy on a romantic tour of our nation’s red, white, and blue, and maybe she would warm up to me in the back seat. How wrong I was. The nearly \$100 dinner tab that I just paid wasn’t enough (that word again); I had to continue to prove my worth to Amy. So I excused myself and told Amy I would be right back. I hustled over to the payphone in an attempt to get hold of the guy with the limo. It

was nearly 9pm, but I didn't care. I dialed the number the host had given me and a gentleman answered. I explained my situation to him, but he told me that all limo tours had to be arranged at least 24 hours in advance. I asked him if there was any way an exception could be made, and he reluctantly said he had a colleague who might be able to fill the position at this late notice. I gave him the number on the pay phone, and he said he would have his colleague call me back. I hung up and proceeded to wait. I looked over at our table where Amy was patiently waiting and lost in thought. I hated stranding her there, but I didn't want to walk away from the payphone for fear of missing the tour guide's call back. I thought it would only be a few minutes.

After 15 minutes went by, I started to panic. Amy was still sitting at the table staring into space. She had no idea I was at a payphone attempting to arrange a late night tour. I had just told her that I had another surprise in store. I don't think a more patient woman was ever born unto this Earth. Most women would have gotten up and left if their date had been so thoughtless. But Amy sat there and never complained one bit. Finally, after nearly 30 minutes, the phone rang. I picked it up like a maniac and said hello. Another voice was on the line this time. It was the voice of our driver who agreed to pick us up within an hour. I gave him the address and went back to the table. I apologized profusely to Amy for the long wait, and I could tell her patience was wearing thin (and rightfully so). I explained to her that I had something fun planned for us, and then asked her how she would like to have a personal tour of all the DC sights and landmarks. She wasn't exactly overwhelmed with enthusiasm at the thought of this suggestion, but she went along with it anyway. So after we left the restaurant, we walked to the opposite side of the street where I had told the driver we would be waiting. The weather had turned a bit cold, and I could feel a chill in the air with regard to Amy, too. I think she was ready to call it a night and get back home to Baltimore, but she stuck it out.

I told the valet that we were expecting a limousine to pick us up and to please let me know when it arrived. Since the driver had told me over the phone it might be an hour, I tried to keep Amy entertained as best I could. We sat down on the curb and began making small talk. Despite the restaurant's incapacity to fulfill the needs of its guests, I wasn't going to let that spoil the evening. I was happy just to be with Amy, and I wanted to let her know it. As we sat there on the curb, I reached over and put my right hand on top of her left. She was wearing gloves to protect her hands from the cold, and I was hoping my touch would warm her even more. As I put my hand on hers, I said

*"I really love being with you."* (Let the violins begin). Her response to that comment was straight out of an episode of *Seinfeld*.

*"Are your hands cold?"* she asked, a bit confused, both deflecting my remark and reducing it to meaninglessness.

*"No"* I said, defeated. I knew what was happening here, or rather what wasn't happening. Amy just wasn't into me the way I had hoped, and she was trying to escape without saying it to my face. Mercifully, a few seconds later, I heard the valet shout, *"Your car is here, sir."* Before I could even say 'thank you' to him, Amy stood up and darted away from me as if that car was her rescue squad. She didn't wait for me. She didn't say 'Come on, sweetie!' She just walked away. It was clear she wanted this night to be over. I caught up with her and tried to pretend everything was okay. But another expectation was about to be shattered. The car that we had waited nearly an hour for wasn't a limo at all. It was a town car. A nice town car, but not a limousine, which was what I was about to pay out the ass for. The driver held the rear door open for us, and Amy jumped in. I got in after her, and we both sat on opposite ends of the back seat like a couple going through a divorce. She deliberately stayed glued to her side of the car and made no attempt to sit close to me. Had she been interested in me the

way I hoped, she would have sat near me in the middle, my arm tightly wrapped around her. But it was obvious that we were not going to go there. My heart sank a little more.

We pulled out of the restaurant parking area and our tour began. The driver took us up and down all the famous streets of DC, educating us beyond our wildest dreams by saying things like, "*There's the Capitol. And over there is the Jefferson Memorial.*" Wow. With a tour guide like this, who needed a college degree? Sheesh! So Amy and I sat in the back and listened to Mr. History fascinate us with all sorts of untold trivia about the birth of our nation. When we got to the Jefferson Memorial, he suggested we get out and walk around to get a better view of it and the surrounding plaques. (He probably just wanted a cigarette break). But it was actually nice to get out and walk around. There were other tourists there from all over the world, and Amy and I joined in. Not surprisingly, Amy went her own way, and I followed her like the puppy dog I was rapidly becoming. After about 20 minutes, we headed back to the town car and got in. We finished the tour, and the driver took us back to the restaurant.

This is where things got even more uncomfortable. Once the car was parked, I got out of the car to pay the driver. Because I didn't want to do it in front of Amy, I motioned to the driver to come to the rear of the vehicle so we could take care of business. I knew that this eye-opening tour would set me back \$100, but then he looked at me and had the audacity to say, "*The total is \$150 - \$100 for the ride and a 50% gratuity.*" I told him that I would decide what the gratuity was. What a jackass this guy was to tell me how much I should tip. I guess since he knew I wasn't getting any action that night from Amy based on what he saw in the back seat, or rather, *didn't* see, that I might be fool enough to give him whatever he wanted. I handed him my credit card and he got back into the driver side. I was hoping that he would come back to me and we would deal with the credit card payment out of Amy's sight, but this night just wasn't going to go my way. He asked me to sit in the passenger seat while he ran my card through his little machine. Had I any sense at all, this transaction would have been paid for in advance, that is, if I had actually thought enough to make a reservation in advance. It would have been smoother and maybe made a better impression on Amy. Not that it would have gotten me laid, of course, but it may have demonstrated to Amy that I was savvy enough to plan ahead like most intelligent people do, especially for an important night. So I sat there while he attempted to run my card through, but naturally he just couldn't get it to work. He had nothing solid to place the machine on, so it ripped the receipt the first time he tried it, and he moved in slow motion to try again. Amy sat in the back seat much the same way she waited at the table while I was pacing in front of a payphone earlier. Finally, our genius driver handed me the receipt to sign, and I did so while my face turned red. I felt so abashed that Amy had to witness me paying for a service that wasn't that great to begin with. But the bigger picture was, it made me look even more desperate. I had just paid nearly \$100 for dinner, left Amy stranded at the table for half an hour, and now I was signing *another* credit card payment that cost even more. I should have had the words MR. FOOL tattooed across my forehead. I tipped the guy twenty bucks and got the hell out of his town car.

After the evening's comedy of terrors concluded, I drove Amy back to my house (after tipping the valet \$5 for parking my car right across the street from the restaurant). Surprisingly, Amy agreed to come inside as she wanted to play me some new songs she had written and recorded. We stepped inside the living room and sat on the couch. I offered her a drink and just started chatting with her. Despite all of the mishaps that occurred earlier, Amy looked lovely and delectable, and I was simply dying to hold her. I decided I would make an attempt to get physical in a subtle way, but I already knew she wasn't going to go there. Like all of the women before her with whom I had invited into my lair, she sat on the couch's edge, leaning forward with her back to me. Had she been open to any kind of fooling around, she would have leaned back, relaxed, and made intense eye contact. But being the unrealistic sucker that I am, I tried anyway. Amy had mentioned to me at some point

that she had a lower back problem that occasionally flared up. So I asked her out of the blue what point on her back bothered her the most. She started to describe the area, and I began to touch her in an attempt to massage her, hoping she would respond positively. Within seconds, she blurted out, “*Are we going to go downstairs and listen to my tapes?*” Realizing that was my cue to take my hands off of her, I told her ‘sure’. I got up off the couch, walked to the kitchen, and got us both some water. We headed downstairs to continue our loveless night.

Downstairs was where I lived. I had a roommate who lived two floors above me, and we both shared the kitchen which was on the main floor with the living room. I actually loved the downstairs. I had a full den, bedroom, private bath, and separate entrance. Plus, the laundry room was available to me any time. So Amy and I made our way downstairs and sat on the floor between my love seat and entertainment center. She pulled out a few cassette tapes, and proceeded to take over my electronics. I found this to be oddly charming and even more of a turn-on. She began operating my receiver, cassette player, and the volume as if it belonged to her. I was happy to sit there and let her play with my toys. She was passionate about her music even though she was also using it as a distraction from even thinking about sex with me. She played me a few tunes and talked about the history of each one. Don’t get me wrong: I loved every minute with Amy, and I don’t mean to imply that I was only with her in the hopes of getting laid. But still being completely inexperienced sexually was not something I could just dismiss, especially when I was with a woman that I was crazy about. I was falling for Amy more and more with each passing moment, so I wasn’t just looking for a one-night stand. I wanted to make love to her, not just fuck (even though I would have happily settled for that). So as we sat there talking about her music and just being together, I was trying my best to wrap my brain around the fact that I was, in all likelihood, going to have to settle for ‘just being friends’ with another woman. But I wasn’t giving up yet.

While Amy and I were discussing our musical histories again, we got up off the floor and sat on my love seat. I brought out my acoustic guitar to play her some new tunes of my own. One of them was a song I had written a couple of weeks earlier, a drippy ballad about proclaiming my love for a woman – hmmm... I wonder which woman that could be... Yes, I wrote the song with Amy in mind. I didn’t tell her it was for or about her; I just told her it was one I’d written recently. I played and sang it for her with as much feeling and tenderness that I could manifest. When I was done, she said “*That was nice.*” I didn’t elaborate on the inspiration; I guess I was hoping she would figure it out. After playing her one or two other songs, I handed the guitar to her. She revealed another talent unbeknownst to – she could really play the guitar. She had a very delicate picking style, a sort of jazzy fusion combined with a folk sensibility. It was somewhat different from the recorded music she had played me on tape. But watching her play and sing made me feel even closer to her as a fellow musician, friend, and hopeful companion. It was a very nice ending to an evening that began under dubious circumstances.

After we performed our mini-concerts for each other in my den, I put the guitar aside. We were both tired, and I knew Amy had a long drive back home. It was after midnight at this point, and I wanted more than anything for her to spend the night. This was not going to happen. We both stood up, and I decided to let her know what I was feeling at that point. This was our fifth date, and I wanted to see where we were headed. I took her by the hands, looked her in the eye, and this was the exchange that occurred:

*“Hey, you know I just wanted to tell you that I really enjoy doing this – being with you and spending time together. I’d like to keep doing it. I guess I just want to know how you feel about it.”*

She seemed flattered but not swept off her feet.

*“Oh, I like being with you, too, but I’m not sure what you mean”* she said.

*“I’d like for us to be more than friends and see where we could go from there”* I explained.

*“Oh. You’re talking about being in a relationship and dating.”* It was finally dawning on her.

*“Yeah. I like you, and I think we have a lot in common.”*

At this point, our hands had separated, and the discussion began to take on a more serious tone - serious on her part, imploring on mine. And then came a familiar echo from the past. The ghost of Carrie suddenly permeated the room.

*“Well, Tim, right now my life is so screwed up that I can’t imagine being in a relationship with anybody. I need to get some things figured out before I can think about that.”*

She went on to tell me that her situation with the New York boyfriend had not been completely resolved. I knew this to be true as she would occasionally talk about it with a bit of regret in her voice. But she eventually got around to telling me what I already suspected: that a romantic relationship between us would ever happen, and that if I wanted to stop hanging out with her, she would understand. Like the naïve, apparently deaf idiot that I am, I said:

*“Oh NO! I do want to keep hanging out with you. Who knows what might happen?”*

She assured me, *“Well, Tim, I don’t want you to keep thinking it might, because it won’t.”*

She was very clear and confident about this fact. My mind was convinced that she meant every word, but my heart refused to listen. And of course, my ego had to deal with the reality that another girl only saw me as a platonic buddy. I had failed again on all counts at trying to woo her and cross that mysterious and unattainable threshold that all my male counterparts had achieved many years earlier with other women. The frustration I felt was very familiar yet not any less painful. After both our intentions were made clear, I walked her upstairs. I grabbed a rose out of the bouquet of flowers on the coffee table and secretly placed it behind my back into my belt. We walked out to the parking lot still chatting about relationships. When we got to her car, she asked me for directions on how to get back to the beltway. I put my arms around her as a way of producing the rose “out of thin air” from behind her. When she saw it, she seemed genuinely impressed with my feat of prestidigitation and flashed a big smile. *“Where did that come from?”* she asked with surprise. I gave her some vague answer and handed her the rose. While she continued to ask for directions, I began giving her little pecks on both her cheeks in between what was certainly an unclear explanation on how to escape my clutches and how to get back home. But she took this in good fun, and I finally gave her directions that seemed sufficient. I watched her drive away with a heaviness in my heart that was only going to get worse.

I walked back inside with a fuzzy feeling that I couldn’t quite explain. I had just been told by another girl of my dreams that the kind of relationship I wanted with her wasn’t going to happen. My head was swirling with thoughts of everything that happened over the previous six hours, and I kept replaying it in my mind. As I had done so, so many times in the past, I created a mental transcript of my conversation with Amy, looking for clues buried in the text that might reveal what my next step should be. There was no ‘next step’ of course, but I was hooked on Amy to the point where I couldn’t imagine a sexual, romantic relationship with her not happening. It was that or certain death. *If her life was “so screwed up” as she told me, then maybe once her situation with the*

*New York boyfriend was resolved, her life would be un-screwed up, and then I could move in once again! My delusions were taking on a life of their own.*

One of the many things that kept my fantasies going about Amy (as well as other women from my past) was the myriad examples that had been demonstrated to me over the years – on television, in movies, books, and songs, from friends and colleagues – that a romantic relationship between two people could evolve out of practically any situation. I read and heard anecdotal accounts of people who hated each other in the beginning and wound up becoming best friends and lovers. There were stories of men who had to ask out a particular woman ten times before she finally said ‘yes’, and now they’ve been happily married for ten years. Other tales recounted incidences of men who had supposedly been banished to the Friend Zone with the girl of their desires only to emerge a few years later as their monogamous sexual partner. These kinds of real life events only encouraged me to keep up my pursuit of Amy. I figured, *it happens to other people, why not me?* Of course, that’s the whole theme of this book - Why am I always on the outside looking in?

My hopeless delusions continued the next day when I awoke. I got up and prepared for what was no doubt a day filled with more attempts at getting acting work as well as DJ gigs. I probably sent out more headshots and/or postcards to casting directors and anyone else holding auditions for paid work. But I distinctly remember doing something that, while not a foolish thing, just stirred up more emotions in me to keep up my hopes of winning Amy. Because of my selective memory about the night before – only choosing to think about the good parts (of which there weren’t many) but mainly about giving Amy the rose and kissing her repeatedly – I decided to put on some music to “celebrate” my false victory. While I was getting dressed, I popped on the CD *Lucky Town* by Bruce Springsteen. The first song was a glorious exaltation of good fortune called “Better Days” in which The Boss sings of a new relationship with a woman who has rescued him from a much darker life without her. The lyrics, melody, and passion with which Bruce belts out the song really connected with me – but it was all a lie on my part. I began singing along with the record with a joyousness and glee that would have made the average person think that Amy and I had had amazing sex the night before. But because of my refusal to accept the truth about Amy’s feelings (or lack of them), I remained buried in the fantasy that things would change. Well, things would change alright, but not in the way I hoped.

May 3, 1999 would prove to be a night that I still think about to this day.

## **PART FIVE**

### **‘Overkill’**

I suppose it’s my own fault that I continued to prolong and even increase my misery over Amy. Since I had told her that we could still hang out as friends, it wasn’t her problem that I continued to ache for her. She still called me several times a week to chat or get advice about some audition she had approaching. I saw every phone call as another chance at turning the tide in my favor, of course, but Amy was just killing time. And whenever we planned to get together, I would prepare for those occasions as if I was preparing to skydive for the first time. I knew it could kill me, but I was willing to jump for the thrill of it. Like Fiona before her, I was happy to endure the pain of being with her rather than the pain of being without her. I wasn’t ready to go

through the withdrawal of not seeing her anymore just yet. If she had ever told me to get lost during this period, I would have obliged. But the carrot was still dangling in front of me, and I was determined to take a bite.

In the spring of 1998, I had the good fortune to appear in a production of *You Can't Take It With You* at Arena Stage in Washington, DC. I was an understudy, but I also had the small role of a G-man with a few lines. For seven weeks, eight shows a week, I got to perform on one of the most prestigious theaters in the United States alongside some of the most respected actors in the DC area, including movie and TV veteran Robert Prosky (*Hill St. Blues*, *Rudy*, *Thief*, and many others). I was getting paid an hourly wage to do what I loved and meet some new people along the way. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was a joy to know I was driving to work every day at a theater and not a record store. The play was nominated for several Helen Hayes Awards, DC's equivalent to the Tony Awards and almost as big a spectacle. The nominations were announced in the spring of 1999, and because I was a cast member, I was able to obtain tickets to the awards ceremony – held at the Kennedy Center For the Performing Arts - at a reduced price (They weren't free – that's how big a night this was). I asked Amy if she would like to go to the ceremony with me, and she said yes. I explained to her what this night meant to the DC theater community. Even Liza Minnelli would be performing. Unlike my negligence in suggesting to Amy how she might dress for a fancy restaurant, I made it clear to her that the Helen Hayes Awards were not a t-shirt and jeans affair. She understood, and I couldn't wait to see what she would be wearing.

The ceremony was held Monday, May 3, 1999 at 8pm. It was a beautiful evening, and it was like prom night for me. I got dressed up in my best suit (my *only* suit, actually) and waited for Amy to arrive at my house where she would park her car. I got a little nervous as Amy was running late. I wanted to leave no later than 7pm to beat traffic and get us a good seat. As 7:30 approached, Amy was nowhere to be found. I called her home, and spoke to her mother who told me Amy had already left. A few minutes after I hung up the phone, Amy finally showed up. I asked her why she didn't call me to let me know she was running late, and she told me she didn't have her cell phone with her – a reply that turned out to be a little white lie as I would later discover. But we moved beyond that and headed down to the Kennedy Center. Once we parked the car in their massive garage, we made our way upstairs to the lobby. As we got on the elevator, I pointed out to Amy how nice she looked. She was wearing a silky blue pants suit that showed off her cute, slim figure. Her alabaster skin glowed, and her wavy, light-brown hair flowed like a 1940's movie star. Think Gene Tierney in the 1944 film noir *Laura*.

When we got up into the lobby, it was almost 8:30pm. I was relieved to find that the ceremony had not yet begun, and people were still mingling outside the theater. I had never felt so proud. Here I was, Tim the 38-year-old virgin who had never really been on a proper date, walking around the lobby of the Eisenhower Theater at the Kennedy Center with one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. And she was with me! I'm sure there were those who observed us and wondered how this happened. Most of my colleagues were used to seeing me at theater-related events dateless or with a male friend. They might have even wondered if I was paying Amy to be my date. It was a little overwhelming, but I soaked in the majesty of the night and decided to enjoy every minute of it. Finally, people started migrating toward the theater doors as the show was about to begin. Amy and I found a pair of very good seats about halfway back and just slightly off center. An acting colleague of mine who had also been in "You Can't Take It With You" was sitting a few rows in front of us with his wife, and I was happy to say hello. The ceremony began, and I was especially excited, because I had never been to this awards show although I had heard all about it ever since venturing back into the acting community. Although my play didn't win any awards, I felt honored to be a small part of the proceedings. Liza Minnelli performed a sensational set, and Amy even gave her a standing ovation.

After the show ended, it was time for the after-party that was even more legendary than Helen Hayes herself. Hundreds of people, both actors and civilians, roaming all parts of the Kennedy Center grounds, eating great food, dancing to a live jazz band, and consuming more alcohol than a brewery produces in a year. Amy and I were starving, so we indulged in the culinary delights, and I even had three glasses of wine and a glass of champagne. Since I wasn't a drinker, this nearly took its toll on me later when Amy and I were walking back to my car. But all I cared about was being with Amy on this glorious night, introducing her to my acting associates, and dancing a slow dance with her. My buddy Peter was there, too, and he finally got to meet this girl I had been telling him about for six months. Remember, Peter was the one who gave me the ill-conceived advice to "find out where I stood" with Amy on only our second date. But that was all behind us now, and he was happy to meet her. They had a brief conversation, but I could tell there wasn't a whole lot of chemistry between them. In fact, Peter later pointed out to me that he thought she looked a bit detached from the whole thing. Whenever I went to get her a drink or some food, she would stay behind rather than accompany me. I attribute this to the fact that, like many others there that night, Amy was shy around people she didn't know. She probably felt a little out of her element. I knew she was a loner, so going to an event such as this was not as easy for her as it seemingly was for me. She was by no means rude to anyone, but just a little quiet.

After we ate, we made our way into the ballroom where the band was playing upbeat standards to get people dancing. In an ironic twist of fate, I saw Fiona shaking her booty on the floor with some guy she was apparently dating. I said hello to her and even made a joke about how bad a dancer I was. Amy excused herself to go to the ladies room, and I took this opportunity to go ask the band's singer if they could play a slow song. I wanted to hold Amy close to me on the dance floor all night. Just as Amy returned to our table, the band started playing "It Had To Be You". I took Amy by the hand and led her to the floor. But before I could do anything else, she said to me, "*Let me lead.*" I found this rather curious, but I knew exactly what was happening. She was not allowing me to seduce her in any way. By playing the role of 'lead dancer', she was basically taking my masculinity away. I should have been the alpha male here, but Amy wouldn't have any of it. I don't think she did it to be cruel, but she was definitely protecting herself. Some might argue that she was revealing the dominant side of her personality, and because we were dancing cheek-to-cheek (more or less), this was an indication of her behavior in bed. I don't know how much truth was in that speculation, but I was never going to find out anyway. I had to settle for being neutered while dancing to a song that was written in 1939.

After I finished dancing the Eunuch Waltz with Amy, we sat down for a few more minutes before deciding we'd had enough excitement for one night. It was probably around 11pm when we exited the building, and I can remember almost throwing up in the parking garage as we approached my car. This was due to the fact that I had had a little too much to drink – for the first time in my life I was nearly drunk. In fact, I shouldn't have gotten behind the wheel. As I drove Amy and me down the dark, winding George Washington Parkway toward the Maryland state line, I started to feel unfocused. The inebriation was taking over my senses, and I actually thought I might have to ask Amy to drive. But trying to reclaim some of my manhood precluded me from swallowing my pride in addition to the wine, so I drove on. We got home okay. It was after we went inside that I *really* wanted to throw up.

I invited Amy in, not exactly sure what to expect, but I guess I was hoping that my slightly uninhibited condition would allow me to loosen up and not be as uptight with her. We went downstairs and sat on my loveseat (or rather, my indifference seat). I noticed Amy had been wearing a very nice necklace that evening, so I commented on it.

*"That's a very pretty necklace, Amy."*

*“Thanks.”*

*“It looks very nice against your skin.”*

And with that, I inched toward her in an effort to kiss her neck.

*“You know, I’m feeling very uncomfortable right now”* she said.

*“Why?”* I asked.

*“Because I don’t want you to do that.”*

I stopped and pulled back. It was time to get to the bottom of this.

*“I’m not trying to make you feel uncomfortable. But why are you so against me getting physical with you? We’ve been going out for some time now, and sex hasn’t even entered the picture. We haven’t even talked about it. How do you feel about sex?”*

*“I don’t even think about it.”*

*“Why? Did someone hurt you?”* I asked like a first-year psychology student.

*“Nope. I just don’t think about it, I don’t want it. It’s just something I don’t care about.”*

I was stunned but I guess it made sense. Amy had never even so much as made a raunchy joke the entire time I had known her. She then told me that it had been seven months since her and the New York boyfriend had made whoopie. I began asking her about her past lovers.

*“Have you ever been in love?”* I inquired.

*“No, not really. I almost got married when I was 21, but since then I can’t say that I have.”*

*“So, your last boyfriend before [NY Boyfriend] was just a physical thing?”*

*“Yeah. It pretty much was just a physical thing. We were together for two years. But all he wanted to do was get high with his buddies instead of spending time with me.”* She also told me that he was 8 years her junior, much like her New York boyfriend. She was clearly into younger men, boy toys. As she told me this, I continued to elevate her pedestal even higher. How could any straight male ignore this beautiful creature? Especially if he was sleeping with her? I kept putting myself in his place, imagining all the different ways I would have treated her if I were him. And then she asked me the most personal question she ever had.

*“Have you ever gotten involved with a married woman?”*

*“No”* I said. *“There was one young lady I worked with at the record store a few years ago that I had a little crush on, but she was married, and I would never have made a move. I draw the line there. Why?”*

She was reluctant to answer but finally did.

*“Well...I had a little liaison with a married man when I was much younger. It was only one time.”*

She didn't expand on this, and I didn't force the issue. I was too anxious to get back to her current state of affairs.

*“So, you're not into having sex now. Has it always been that way?”*

*“No, that's just the way it is now.”*

*“And what was it like before?”* I asked. And boy, did I get my answer.

*“Overkill.”*

When I heard her describe it that way, it was all I could do to keep from passing out. Not unlike seeing Becca in the parking lot with her legs wrapped around surfer boy, this was a punch to the gut. The reality that this girl was once banging her boyfriends, probably on a daily basis, hit me like a ton of bricks. Of course, I knew this to be the truth. Of *course* it was. She was a young, beautiful woman who dated younger, beautiful guys. Of *course* she was having sex with them. I believe I had deified her to the point where I couldn't imagine her taking her clothes off with another guy and fucking him. What it also was, I think, is that I couldn't get past the reality that I had never done it myself with any woman, and I was dying to do it with Amy. All these other guys crossed that line, so why not me? It was the same question that came up again and again.

*“So, what were you, a nympho?”* I interrogated her as if she was a suspect in a crime.

*“NO!”* she exclaimed. She even seemed a little amused at this suggestion. *“I'm not a prude. But I'm not...”*

I had clearly embarrassed her, and I didn't feel good about it. I told her I didn't mean to imply that she was promiscuous. I was just so in love with this girl and I wanted to be more than friends. At this point, even that seemed improbable after this night.

*“I guess I'm just wondering what I could have done differently. Maybe I'm just too nice.”*

*“No, that's not it,”* she assured me. *“[New York Boyfriend] is nice.”*

At this point, the conversation began to run out of steam, but I was still frazzled with the first-hand knowledge that Amy had been sexually active at one point. *Very* sexually active. But for God's sake, I knew she wasn't a virgin. So why did it bother me as much as it did? We stood up and went upstairs. My head was reeling, but I had to tell Amy what I had wanted to tell her all along. As we stepped out onto the porch I said to her,

*“Amy, I may as well tell you something that I've wanted to tell you for a long time.”* I figured I had nothing to lose. *“Amy, I love you.”*

“Awww,” she said with both sympathy and pity, as if I told her my kitten had just run away. I had officially hit rock bottom and found a way to kick the bottom out and find a second rock bottom. Without saying much more, she got in her car and left. That was the last time she ever set foot in my house.

After Amy left, I crawled back inside. It was nearly 2am at this point. I wanted to cry and vomit at the same time. All my hopes and dreams had just driven away. What started out as a night of pomp and circumstance had ended with heartache and despair. Even my greatest sexual fantasies about Amy could never equal what I assumed her past boyfriends had experienced for real. When I got back downstairs to my room, I crumpled up on the floor. There wasn't a number big enough to describe how many mixed feelings I had. I guess this is how one feels when they get dumped and didn't see it coming, or how it feels to find out your girlfriend has been cheating on you. But it didn't matter. I didn't even have the luxury of at least knowing what it was like to make love to Amy, much less get dumped by her. Obviously, we were never in a romantic relationship. My therapist at the time even suggested that Amy and I weren't even really friends, that I was just a sounding board for Amy's problems. I don't agree with this assertion; maybe Amy and I weren't best buds – there was always an odd, invisible barrier that surrounded her – but we were definitely close.

The last thing I could do at this point was try to go to sleep. So I did what I had done many, many times in the past when it came to dealing with inevitable situations such as this. I called Andy. Even though it was late, I knew he'd be around to listen to me cry, whine, and wonder why it happened again. In the next chapter, I'm going to talk about how invaluable a friend Andy was and continues to be to this day. But on this night, I called him and told him the whole story of May 3, 1999. He listened as he always did but could only offer his regrets. He had been with me throughout this entire journey and given me the best advice anyone could ever receive. Even though Andy had been with more women sexually than I could ever count, he had also had his heart broken and world shattered, too.

While Andy and I were talking, my Call Waiting beeped. *Who could be calling me at 2am?* I looked at my Caller ID but didn't recognize the number. I put Andy on hold and picked up the other line. It was Amy calling from a pay phone on the other side of the beltway. She told me she had left her cell phone – the one she told me she didn't bring with her earlier – at my house. It was imperative that she get it that night since she was headed to New York for an audition in a couple of days. I asked her to hold on and clicked back over to Andy. I told him that Amy was on the other line and that I had to go and that I would call him later when the sun came up.

Amy told me where she thought she left her cell phone, and I managed to find it while keeping her on the line. She asked me if I could bring it to her that night. After all we'd been through, it still wasn't over. She told me she was sitting in her car at a convenience mart at an exit off the beltway. I barely had any strength to stand up, much less get in my car and drive 30 miles, but I was determined to please Amy, despite what I already knew to be true. Most guys would have said, *“Fuck you, come and get it yourself!”* Maybe I would have gotten laid if I *had* said this to her. It worked for real men. But being the laughable schmuck that I was, I stumbled out to my car and drove the distance to return her phone. Somehow or another, enough time had passed between Amy leaving my house, me calling Andy, and me driving to return her phone, that dawn had started to break. The god-awful feeling I had watching the sun come up, just having had my heart crushed, and not getting enough sleep combined must have been what it was like to wake up in an alley after an all-night bender. It was sick beyond normal sick. Plus, the morning rush hour was just beginning. Oh, the joy!

When I finally arrived at Amy's waiting spot, I got out of my car and walked over to her. I handed her the phone and she thanked me. Instead of just turning around and getting back in my car, I decided to linger a bit

longer and dig my grave even deeper. While she sat in her car, I hovered outside her driver side window and attempted to make small talk with her about...hell, I have no idea what. But I do remember actually asking her if she wanted to get breakfast. She should have called the funny farm upon hearing this suggestion. I definitely needed to be committed for a period of not less than 30 days to find out what the hell was wrong with me. "*I JUST WANT TO GO HOME!*" she yelled in no uncertain terms. She was done with this evening and done with me.

After I finally got back in my car, I pulled out of the parking lot and entered into a sea of automobiles that stretched all the way back around the beltway. Morning traffic had begun, and I would have plenty of time to sit in my car and think about the previous night's events. The trip that took me about 40 minutes to drive to where Amy was waiting took nearly an hour and a half to drive back home. The sun was now in the sky laughing at me and daring me to continue living. I was too tired to fight him, so I went to bed when I finally got home. But before I drifted off into what would be no more than three hours' sleep, I masturbated and cried at the same time while thinking about Amy and all that I wanted and all that I lost. I was hoping that I would slip into an irreversible coma, or better yet die, when the cum erupted from my aching penis.

## **PART SIX**

### **Aftermath**

I didn't want to get up the next day. I just wanted to lie in bed and disappear. But I had an audition class at the acting conservatory that afternoon. I didn't want to go to that either. I just wanted Amy to come back and lie there beside me. The emptiness and disappointment I felt - not to mention the thoughts of Amy making love to all those younger, tougher guys - occluded any other desires or hopes that I had pursued in my life. She was all that mattered.

Somehow, I did manage to find the strength to get out of bed and fall into the shower to cleanse all the humiliation off my shell-shocked body. The "Better Days" that Bruce Springsteen had sung about a few months earlier in this same room were nowhere to be found. Lack of sleep only added to my misery. I could barely keep my eyes open as I drove down 16<sup>th</sup> Street toward the District to get to my afternoon class. I kept replaying everything from the night before (as well as that morning) in my head. Once class started, I was mildly distracted, but at one point I nearly passed out and collapsed. I was sitting in my chair watching another actor run through his monologue when the exhaustion and weight of everything just hit me. It was all I could do to keep from falling out of my chair and/or bursting into tears. I felt so alone as if no one else in the world had ever gone through this. I didn't even feel like a real human being, much less a man. But I made it through to the end and found my way back home to wallow some more.

I remember Amy telling me she had an audition in New York on Wednesday of that week, so I decided to use this as an excuse to call her and wish her luck (as if she needed it from me). I knew I was taking a chance by trying to make contact with her so soon after the Helen Hayes debacle. But I dialed her number anyway and asked to speak to her when her father answered the phone. When she got on the line, it was pretty much what I expected. I naively acted as if nothing had happened and wished her 'good luck' in New York. She responded politely, but she sounded quite mystified as to why I would even bother. And frankly, I don't blame her. But at

the time, I was attempting to salvage what I could to fool myself into believing that I still had a shot with her. Amazingly, unlike all the other women before her, Amy and I still had more adventures ahead of us. Just not right away.

We didn't stay in contact as much as we had in the past, but Amy still reached out to me every now and then to chat. She was definitely pulling back from hanging out with me though; every social invitation I extended to her was now met with odd excuses such as "*Well, I'm still organizing....*," meaning she was straightening up her room or cleaning the house (even the brightest woman will eventually run out of clever excuses). Rather than beg her, I just accepted it and tried to move on. I can remember one particular instance where I invited her to a one-act play in which I was performing. I had been telling her about it throughout the rehearsal process, and she expressed a modest interest in attending. Since it was only a one-time performance, she was either going to show up or not. She didn't. I was disappointed in her absence but certainly not surprised. But what made it even more pathetic was what happened when I ran into her a couple of days later doing background work on some movie. While we were sitting on the bus with dozens of other listless extras, waiting to be hauled off to the set like lambs to slaughter, I kept waiting for Amy to at least inquire about my one-act. She never asked me how the show went or even brought it up. Finally, like a child dying to tell everyone it was his birthday, I not only brought it up myself, but I actually apologized to Amy for her not attending! It went something like this:

*"Hey, my show went really well last night. I'm sorry you couldn't attend."*

She should have been the one to say 'I'm sorry I was unable to attend', but because she couldn't have cared less, I did it for her. What an imbecile I was. I had so much egg on my face you could have made an omelet out of it.

The next few months, everything was status quo – Amy calling me less and less frequently, and I still hoping things would change in my favor. In September 1999, the two of us were cast in a video for a telecommunications company that was going to be used as the opening at some major convention. It was a complete coincidence that this happened. She had already shot her part with another actor, but the producers weren't happy with his performance. So they had to start over and find his replacement. I got the call to go in and read having no idea that Amy was involved. I went to the audition and saw her headshot lying on the table in front of the director. When I mentioned that I knew her, the producer explained the situation to me. I apparently aced the audition, because they cast me on the spot.

For two long days, I worked alongside Amy in this video, the first one we had done together since the window pane commercial in 1995. It was great to act with her again, but it was stressful, too. On the second day of shooting, we were to portray a couple who is hurled back in time to experience the history of cell phones and other forms of wireless communication through the decades. For each decade, we had a different wardrobe which included 1960's hippies, the 70's disco era, the yuppie 80's, and finally the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the outfits that Amy wore to represent the changes in fashion knocked me out. I had never seen her in some of these more revealing clothes, and needless to say, it made me want her even more. Her body was even more toned and buff than I imagined; it was clear this girl kept in shape, and her vegetarian diet kept her looking ten years younger than her 37 years. Even though it had been four months since I nearly lost my mind after the Helen Hayes Awards, I was still deeply in love with Amy. And this was the closest I would ever get to seeing her like this. Thoughts of her making love with other men started to infiltrate my mind again. I managed to get through that second day without incident (even though I did have to go to the bathroom several times that day to "relieve" myself), but I was still addicted to Amy like she was a drug. I couldn't shake it, and I felt completely

helpless. After Amy and I filled out all the paperwork in order to get paid, we walked outside to our cars. I said goodbye to her as if I was never going to see her again. I would see her again, several times in fact. But as a new millennium dawned upon us, Amy and I gradually became strangers.

## PART SEVEN

### Man on a 'Wire'

On New Year's Eve 1999, I had a DJ gig to ring in the year 2000. Amy had a catering job, but it was just another night for her. Since I was the romantic and she was the pragmatist, she had no visions of being swept off her feet at midnight. Not everyone lives through the turn of a century, and I wanted to be with Amy more than anything on this night. But it wasn't meant to be. I worked at a community center that night playing music for adults and kids of all ages. It was a very G-rated affair. There was booze, but everyone was civil – no brawls or arrests. This was also the year of the Y2K mythology; many people were terrified the world might end at midnight due to the rollover problem of computers and the '99 – '00 conversion. The world was safe, however. It was me that wasn't sure he would survive another year without Amy (let the world's smallest violin begin playing).

As 2000 progressed, I continued to DJ, audition, do more background work, and understudy at various Equity theaters. I was still in touch with Amy, but our time spent together dwindled. She and the New York boyfriend were official kaput at this point, but she had found refuge playing music with a guy who had been a friend of hers for at least 15 years. She sang her mix of standards and oldies in various clubs and lounges, and he played a very mellifluous jazz guitar behind her. He was quite good, and I saw them perform on many occasions. Not surprisingly, he and I were completely different types. He was a tall, mysterious, bad boyish lad who bared a slight resemblance to Sean Penn. He built guitars in his own shop and made a living at it. Even though I never got to know him that well, I could tell that he and Amy had a special bond, one that she and I lacked. I always suspected and wondered if the two of them were sleeping together, but I never got my answer. He could have been gay for all I know. I never saw him with a girlfriend, and Amy never talked about it. I just know that whenever I asked her to spend time with me, she would always tell me she was rehearsing with him. Her attention had shifted to a more desirable primate. Unlike me, he never reeked of desperation or neediness around her. He was comfortable in his own skin and she seemed more relaxed around him. I do remember asking her some months later if the two of them had ever dated in the past, and she quietly nodded and said 'no'. Maybe that was all there was. Maybe they were platonic friends and fellow musicians and nothing more. I had to remind myself that as smitten as I was with Amy, not every guy in the world felt the same way. It *is* possible to be friends with a woman without wanting to sleep with her.

In the spring of 2000, I was in a play at the acting conservatory's Second Stage – a performance space for up and coming actors, mostly students. It was the most challenging role I had ever done, and the grueling rehearsal process was enough to finally distract me from the fantasy world of Amy. I was playing three different parts with three different directors, so the attention this work demanded was unlike anything I had done before. The play was *Love's Fire*, seven one-acts based upon seven Shakespearean sonnets. To borrow the slogan used by the Peace Corps, it was the toughest job I ever loved. Amy did come to see this production along with her

fellow guitar-playing friend. I was excited to see her there after the show, and I had actually gotten the two of them a couple of comp tickets. This was the first play Amy had ever seen me perform in, so I felt like I was back in my element without having to lean on her for approval or validation. I was still crazy about her, but I was slowly reclaiming my life – for now.

After the show that night, the three of us went to a pub where all the acting students hung out, across the street from the theater. We sat at in a booth and ordered food as we were all famished. What struck me as curious and even more disappointing was that the whole time we were together, Amy never once mentioned the play or my performance. No comments, compliments, or even so much as a pat on the back for all the work I'd put into it. Maybe she hated the play (there were certainly those who did, including some cast members), or maybe she just didn't think I was any good. Either way, she was very detached from the whole thing as usual. Her friend asked me a couple of questions about the school and theater, and I was happy to tell him all about it. He wasn't much of a theater guy, so now he was in my world, and I welcomed his interest. But Amy just couldn't bring herself to say anything about it, which was ironic since she had done plays herself in the past. So it wasn't like I invited her to some devil worshiping ceremony.

After our late dinner, I said goodbye to the two of them and watched them walk away down the sidewalk together. I kept my eye on them for as long as the street lights would allow me in order to see if they put their arms around each other or held hands as they walked, but they never did. Maybe my paranoia about them was unwarranted. As they faded into the darkness, I went to my car and drove back home. The play was nearing the end of its run, and so were my days with Amy.

In late July 2000, I decided it was time to get out of town. Andy had been living in Los Angeles since 1994, and I wanted to go visit him. I had not been to the city of angels (or, as Eric Carmen called it, a "town full of desperate fools") since 1985. I was looking forward to getting out of the DC area for a while, and I was hoping that I could clear my head in the process. Maybe California was exactly what I needed. I flew out and stayed with Andy in his 2-bedroom apartment that he shared with a fellow actor and buddy who was out of town. It was a splendid time meeting Andy's friends, seeing the Pacific Ocean, going to plays, and just enjoying the sights and sounds of Hollywood. I was considering moving out there since I felt I was running out of options back home. I was 39 years old and felt it was time to make some kind of decision about the rest of my life.

It would be another five years before I actually made a permanent move to L.A., but this trip gave me a taste of what I could expect – up to a point (more on that in a later chapter). I felt rejuvenated by this expedition to the Golden State, and I hoped it would help me when I returned to DC to continue my travails as an actor. But I also wondered where I would be with regard to Amy. Even though I knew the steam had more or less run out in my pursuit of her, I still chose to hang in a little longer. A few days after I returned home, I called Amy. She didn't know that I had been to L.A., so I was anxious to tell her about it. She seemed genuinely excited to hear about my trip, particularly when I suggested I might move there. For about two seconds I thought I had intrigued her once again about my life for the first time in ages. Maybe she was actually admiring me for taking a risk and traveling 3000 miles away. But all of this collapsed (or at least I let it) very quickly. No sooner had I told her about my journey, she announced to me that she and her jazz guitar-playing friend had just gotten back from New York where they spent a week together. "*Oh, really?*" I said in a slightly hushed tone while my overactive imagination kicked into gear. "*Where did you stay?*" I nonchalantly asked but knowing the answer might kill me. I believe she said they stayed in a hostel of some sort, but that didn't quash my fears. I knew I couldn't pry any further, so I asked what the purpose of the trip was. She told me they just wanted to see New York and maybe check out some clubs where they might possibly perform together. In other words, they just

wanted to spend time together in the greatest city in the world. Like a fool, I suggested that she and I take a trip to the Big Apple sometime. There was dead silence on the other end of the phone.

It's clear that their trip was more meaningful than any outing she and I ever took. I had invited Amy to take a day trip with me to Philadelphia in 1999 - on my birthday no less - so we could meet with some agents and drop off headshots. She had agreed to go, but the morning we were to leave (and I was going to drive), she cancelled for reasons that were never made clear to me - something about not having her resumes stapled to the back of her headshots. The truth is she simply didn't want to make the effort with me. (I wound up going by myself). So it hurt me to know that she would spend an entire week with another guy in New York. All this did was reinforce my already low opinion of myself and make me search in vain for an answer to what I had done wrong with her as well as other eternal mysteries. My little trip to California didn't seem all that impressive now. This was also not the last trip she took with a male companion out of state. In fact, a few months later she informed me that she was about to take a 5-week vacation to Europe with some guy she had known for... actually, I don't know how long she had known him. It wasn't her musical partner; it was apparently some dude who worked at Johns Hopkins University. She obviously had other things (and men) going on in her life, and I was no longer one of them.

I believe I saw Amy one more time over the next year. She came into DC one day to audition for the League of Washington Theaters' annual cattle call where actors have 90 seconds to wow all the artistic directors in town with a monologue. She was a little nervous about her audition since she hadn't been on stage in several years. The morning of her audition she called me to get some last-minute advice, as I had participated in the League auditions many times in the past. After giving her my usual encouragement, I asked her if she'd like to have lunch after she was done. This was the longest we had gone without seeing each other, and my feelings were still hanging on by a thread. She agreed.

We met in Georgetown and decided to try one of the many restaurants that lined M Street. Because I hadn't seen Amy in a while, I was nervous and anxious to get caught up. A little too anxious. As we sat and waited for our food to arrive, the conversation didn't flow like it once did. There were awkward silences, and I could tell she would have rather been anywhere else than sitting across from me. Not surprisingly, Amy didn't make much eye contact as she told me about her audition, and I was once again trying too hard to re-establish the connection I had with her two years earlier. Even though we never had a romance, I did feel we had *something*. But it was too late. My obvious desperation and lack of any other female possibilities only fueled my urgent behavior as we sat in the crowded restaurant. It was almost like a bad first date. After we got through what was to be our last dinner together, I walked her back to her car. She stood there looking at me as if she were waiting for me to finish doing a monologue of my own. The last thing I said to her was something along the lines of, "*It was great to see you again. Don't be a stranger.*" She kind of chuckled, we gave each other one last light hug, and she got in her car. I wouldn't see her again until several months after a national tragedy.

Like most Americans, I remember where I was on September 11, 2001. The evening of September 10, I had driven to Laurel, Maryland to spend the night at my friend Peter's apartment. He was moving to Bethesda the next morning, and I had agreed to help him. To avoid the early morning beltway traffic, I decided to just bunk at his place so he wouldn't have to wait for me to show up. Around 9am that Tuesday morning, Peter's father came over so the two of them could go get the moving truck. I was still asleep while they were gone, and I wound up rising about 10:30am. Because all of Peter's electronics were unplugged and the TV disconnected from the cable, I had no idea what was happening in the outside world. I didn't own a cell phone at the time, so no one could call me. At approximately 11am, the door opened, and Peter and his father walked in.

*“You won’t believe what’s happened”*, Peter said. I assumed he was going to tell me there was a problem getting the truck or that he didn’t get it at all. He turned to his father.

*“Tell him.”*

Peter’s father spoke the following words as if he were reading from a news bulletin.

*“Terrorists have attacked the United States. Two planes have crashed into the World Trade Center. Both towers have collapsed. Another plane struck the Pentagon and destroyed part of that. There was also a plane that crashed somewhere in Pennsylvania.”*

No sane person could have assimilated all of this terrible information in a few minutes without asking dozens of questions or trying to comprehend the enormity of it all. I thought he was describing the plot of some doomsday movie that was about to be released. But this was real. I asked him if the two planes that hit the towers might have been small twin engine aircrafts that just got off course. He assured me it was deliberate and that they were jets that had been hijacked. The plane that hit the Pentagon was also hijacked as was the one in Pennsylvania. But it was the image of the Twin Towers collapsing that stuck out most in my mind. Since we had no TV, there was no way to see the footage of this horror. In fact, I wouldn’t even see it until after midnight, September 12 when I finally got home from helping Peter move. So we proceeded to load up the U-Haul and get on with it. In addition to all this, Peter was in the process of casting a play he was directing, so he was on his cell phone in between loads trying to work out how and when his crew would meet.

Once we got the truck loaded, we pulled out of the parking lot and drove toward Bethesda. At 3 o’clock in the afternoon, the normally backed-up beltway was deserted. Practically every government employee had been sent home soon after the terrorist attacks, so the normal early afternoon rush was nowhere to be found. It was one of the eeriest things I had ever seen – like a post-apocalyptic Washington, DC. I half expected to see a tumbleweed roll across the eight lanes of road. There was the occasional lone automobile that passed by us, but it was more barren than a Sunday walk down a dirt road. We had the radio tuned in to a local AM news station that was giving us a play by play of the day’s events so far. It was hard for me to imagine the extent of what had happened without seeing it. Once we got to Peter’s new apartment, we unloaded until we were finished, and then I drove back home to my townhouse. I immediately turned on the TV. Every channel had footage of the tragedy, and I was finally seeing all the destruction for the first time. It wasn’t real to me at first. When I saw the towers collapse, I thought I was watching the trailer for a disaster movie. It didn’t seem like the same New York I had come to love over the years. It had forever changed. I thought about all those trips I had taken to visit Andy when he lived there in the eighties. We had even gone up into the observation deck of the World Trade Center once. I still have a photo I took looking out onto the magnificent city from up there.

I was 40 years old and felt a shift in my life on that September day. The odd thing was, I didn’t even wonder about Amy. It had been over a year since I had even heard from her, and that part of my life had faded away. Every now and then, someone would ask me if I’d seen her. In fact, I didn’t even know if she still lived in Maryland. I no longer saw her on movie sets doing background work. She could have gotten married for all I knew. But I no longer felt the compulsion to call her and see what she was up to. Unfortunately, that streak would be broken in February of 2002.

Arguably, the greatest television drama in history (so far) was an HBO series called *The Wire*. Set in and filmed on location in Baltimore, it ran for five seasons from 2002 - 2008 and employed hundreds of local actors both as day players (actors with lines) and extras. Each season focused on a different facet of the city including the illegal drug trade, the seaport system, the city government and bureaucracy, the school system, and the print news media. (There are some very good, detailed books about the show, but if you've never seen it, all five seasons are available on DVD). Because I was still willing to do background work to make money, I was frequently called to work on this show. I usually played a court bailiff or someone walking down a sidewalk. While shooting the first season, no one knew how terrific the show would be. It was just another production that had come to the DC – Baltimore area (like *Homicide: Life on the Streets* for seven years and *The West Wing* which would shoot exteriors twice a year in the District). So I got up before dawn one morning and drove to Baltimore to make \$108 for eight hours when the first season started shooting. Once I parked my car, I and a vanload full of extras were hauled off to our holding area which turned out to be an old church. It was just going to be another long, long day of sitting, waiting, and eating from craft services until we were called to walk on cue. I sat in a pew filling out my extras voucher like I had done on so many other shoots. About an hour after I had arrived, another shipment of people came through the door. One of them was Amy. My heart began to race when I saw her, and I wasn't sure what to do. Should I just sit there and ignore her? Get up and go say 'hello'? Before I could think about it any further, Amy spotted me. She walked over to me and said 'Hey' in her happy voice – one I had not heard in a long time. I have to admit that even though she may have had an extra laugh line on her face, she had not noticeably changed in the 12+ months since I last saw her. She was still as lovely and enchanting as ever, but I'm afraid I can't say the same for me. Like those days long ago at the record store when I would actually be relieved when Becca was absent from work, I had begun to hope over the past year that Amy wouldn't be present on any movie shoots. It was easier to get through the day and chat with other people or simply read a book without having to see her or worry about who she was hanging out with. So when she sat down next to me in the pew, all the feelings of inadequacy, nervousness, and limerence came rushing back. My longing for her had only been in hibernation. I wasn't over her yet.

Our getting reacquainted started off well enough. She asked me if I'd been working a lot as an actor and DJ, and she even asked if tinnitus was still affecting me. It was refreshing to hear her express interest in my life, but I know she was only making small talk. She looked at me differently than she had in the past when we were hanging out. There was a bit of circumspection about her as if she wasn't quite sure where I might be headed with my answers. I asked her how she had been doing, and she said fine. She was also happy to report that she no longer had to work catering jobs as she had been making money painting murals for various clients. I remembered that she was a very talented artist. Even though we were amicable and cordial with one another, I didn't get the sense that Amy was dying to spend the day with me in the holding area. I was probably putting out an uncertain and nervous energy that told her to stay away. I read her signals well enough and just kept to myself once our little reunion was over. But the day just got more and more awkward, and it was nobody's fault but mine.

At some point in the day, I asked Amy a question that everyone has probably been asked in the past ten years: Where were you on 9/11? She told me she was in Salerno, and I had no idea where that was. She informed me it was off the coast of Italy, and it hit me that she was still traveling abroad. I was dying to know who she went with, and I eventually got my answer. She kept saying 'we' saw it on CNN from 'our' hotel room, and 'we' felt so bad for all the people in New York. The other half of the 'we' to which she was referring was the same guy she had gone to Europe with a year earlier. She told me his name and said they were there for five weeks. This only increased my unjustified curiosity about the nature of their relationship, so I tried as discreetly as I could to find out more about what was none of my business to begin with.

“Wow, you two have been seeing each other for a while, haven’t you?” I asked as if she had told me all about it before now, which of course, she had not.

“Hmm,” was her reply, and with that she turned away from me with a look on her face I had never seen in all the time I had known her. I had made her uneasy with my prying question, and she reacted the way any woman would if she felt she was being cross-examined. Maybe she over-reacted, maybe I was little too jealous to see straight, but either way, it was very uncomfortable.

As the day dragged on, I attempted to make her laugh at one point by reading a few passages to her from a book I had brought with me called *Brain Droppings* by George Carlin. As I stood over her pew reading Mr. Carlin’s politically incorrect diatribes about the absurdities of the human race, Amy stared at me like she would have rather been nailed to a cross than listen to me ramble on in my desperate attempt to prove I was still the same ol’ fun-loving guy. Another extra was lying down in the pew next to her taking a nap, but this wasn’t going to stop me from getting close to her. I suggested she slide over so I could sit down next to her and we could continue our conversation from earlier in the day. She pointed out the snoozing body to her left, but I was beyond any kind of decorum by now. I practically wedged myself into the pew forcing her to slide up against this poor guy who was just attempting to get a little shut-eye in between trips to the craft service table. This did not sit well with her, and after a few seconds, I got up and walked away.

The day ended on an even more pitiful note. It was now dark, and some of us had to return certain articles of clothing to the wardrobe trailer before we could get our vouchers back. Amy was good to go however and didn’t have to wait around. She got on a shuttle that would be taking her and several other people back to their cars. I was about to get on with her when a production assistant told me I had to go to wardrobe first and that another shuttle would be waiting when I was done. I stared at the assistant and then stared at Amy, back and forth, back and forth. What was I going to do? I wanted to tell Amy “*Wait for me!*” Not just at her car, but in life. Since I had no choice but to go to the wardrobe trailer first, I said okay to the assistant, and the shuttle carrying Amy drove off. Like a madman, I ran over to the trailer and thrust my coat or whatever it was in the face of the wardrobe lady so I could get the hell out of there and take the next shuttle to my car, where I was certain Amy would be waiting for me to wrap up our day. Once I got my voucher, I hopped on the next shuttle, and sat praying that she would be there.

When we arrived at the drop-off point, I got out along with a few other people. I looked around the cold, indifferent streets of Baltimore for what I feared I wasn’t going to see. I walked to the end of the block and looked either way hoping I would find Amy standing by her car waving at me. I didn’t see her. Like a lost dog searching for his master, I turned around and walked to another part of the parking area where a few cars remained, hoping I would see her waiting for me. She was nowhere to be found. *How could this be?* I thought to myself. *Why didn’t she wait for me? She knew I was going to be on a different shuttle. And we were still talking to each other!* She had left without any intention at all of sticking around. She may as well have been a ghost. She was gone, gone, gone.

For the first time in over a year, I felt the pangs of loss, disappointment, and heartache over a woman whom I thought was history. Seeing her on the set of *The Wire* that day yanked me back in time to a place that was all too familiar. I didn’t understand how I could still be feeling this strongly about her after all the time that had passed. Maybe 14 months wasn’t really that long, considering how much she had meant to me. My life had hardly been through any profound epiphanies during that time, but Amy had been to Europe twice with the

same guy, and I was still drifting through life alone hoping my acting career would take off. The drive back home that night was silent except for a phone call I made to a former female scene partner of mine from the acting conservatory, Kellie, who had been a good friend and romantic advisor to me over the years. I left her a voicemail about what had happened that day and how lost I felt. I wanted to know if I should call Amy the next day and ask her why she didn't wait for me and just see where she stood with me. "*I'm really in trouble!*" I said to Kellie on her voicemail, meaning I had no idea where I was headed. A few days later, she left me a 30-minute response on my answering machine with a lecture that should be required listening for anyone going through this. I listened to it over and over trying to gain some wisdom that might soothe my aching heart and give me peace of mind. Since it was on a cassette, I even listened to it in my car over the next several weeks. She told me: under no circumstances was I to call Amy. "*Let it go and move on!*" she insisted. I took her advice. Instead of calling Amy, I listened to the cassette as a type of intervention (which I was probably due the real thing anyway). I'm glad I did, because a few weeks later I would run into Amy again on another shoot, and this time there would be no crowded pews.

Everything seemed to be coming full circle for Amy and me. We saw each other again on the set of a movie called *The Recruit* starring Al Pacino and Colin Farrell, and I was once again a little apprehensive about how we would get on with one another. But I seemed a little more relaxed this time, maybe because I was gradually letting go of any hope of a full reconciliation. I wasn't as intent on getting Amy's attention like I had on *The Wire*. The truth is we were separated most of the day, being placed in different locations, so we didn't really see each other that much. The pressure was off me even though I was still creating flow charts in my mind of what might happen if I did this or that when I saw her again. I remember seeing her at the end of the day and casually saying "*Stay in touch and let me know what's happening.*" She just kind of shrugged her shoulders and said the word "*Faux*" referring to the type of painting technique she had recently started using. I would see her one last time, and I would at least go out with a little of my dignity restored.

On April 10, 2002, I got called to work on the movie *Red Dragon*, a "re-imagining" of the 1986 film *Manhunter*. Shooting again in Baltimore, I had a 12:30pm call, and as usual, arrived with a shuttle van full of other extras. When I arrived at the holding area, I didn't see Amy, so I assumed she wasn't going to be working on this one. I had brought a book with me anyway, and so I had something else to focus on. But about an hour after I sat down, another group of people paraded in, and Amy was included among them. I decided I wasn't going to budge from my spot. For the first time in two years, I didn't feel the need to gravitate toward her. It was as if a huge burden had been lifted from me, almost like getting over a long bout with the flu. This is not to say I had any animosity toward her; I just didn't feel like my happiness depended on her like it once did. So I just sat at my table reading.

That old axiom about not chasing women, but rather letting them come to you never applied to me, but on this day it was partially true. As I sat reading my book in the holding area, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and saw Amy standing there.

"*Hey, Tim. How's it going?*" she asked.

"*Good. How are you?*" I replied without leaping to my feet.

"*Why don't you come over to my table and sit with us?*"

Since I had no agenda that day, I figured, Why not be sociable? So I walked with her to her side of the room and sat down. There were a few other actors sitting and waiting, and I knew a couple of them. Unlike my behavior the last two times I saw Amy, I was more relaxed and carefree. I wasn't concerned about whether or not she was dating anyone or the last time she had sex or if she would be headed back to Europe for another tour of Italy with some mystery man. In fact, it was like being with her in the days before we started hanging out together, before I asked her if she wanted to go see a 'flick'. There was no desperation, no longing, and no wringing of hands. I still had feelings for her, but I had finally given up on trying to make something happen between us. As a result, we had a newfound connection that had been lost for quite some time. The conversation flowed more freely, and she laughed again at my bad wisecracks. Of course, this had nothing to do with her and everything to do with me. Her behavior was never in question. I'm the one who acted like an idiot and moron the last several times we had seen each other. She simply responded to it the best way any civilized person would. Now that I had come back down to Earth and was treating her like a person and not a prize, the stakes weren't as high for me. For the rest of the day and into the night, Amy and I talked about our health (a frequent topic), work, music, and other things. I never brought up trips to Europe or her love life. As the other extras were released for the day, Amy and I remained behind in the holding area with only a handful of others. Finally, everyone else was wrapped, and Amy and I made our way to the line to get our vouchers signed. Because I had to also get my parking ticket validated, I was required to wait in two lines before I could leave. Amy's parking arrangement was different, so no validation was needed on her part. So I was in one line and she was in another. She looked over at me and mouthed the words "*What are you doing in that line?*" I held up my ticket and said "*Parking.*" She nodded that she understood. She then leaned over and signed her voucher before the production assistant tore off her copy and handed it to her. I kept looking at her, secretly hoping that she would look back at me one last time and wave goodbye. Instead, she took her copy of the voucher, turned in the opposite direction, and walked away, never looking at me again. That was the last time I ever saw her.

Of all the women I've fallen for, Amy is really the only one who sticks out in my mind as The One. I even remember actually considering asking her to marry me and having a conversation about it with a total stranger on the set of some film. It was an absurd notion, to be sure, as Amy and I were never a romantic couple. In fact, my very wise therapist at the time concluded that we weren't even really friends. We were 'colleagues' she argued – real friends have a deeper connection beyond the acting arena. I idealized Amy so much that I lost sight of the fact that she was a normal human being with flaws and foibles like everyone else. Maybe if I had treated her like that instead of elevating her to the level of goddess, things might have turned out differently. If my feelings were just too strong to dismiss, then I should have just stopped seeing her until I had them under control. Of course, hindsight is 20/20, and it's highly doubtful that I would do anything differently if I went back in time. I thought Amy and I were meant to be together, and that our paths converged for a reason. How else to explain a girl this beautiful and single reaching out to me as much as she did? Remarkably, Amy was one of those rare women that didn't use her looks to take advantage of people or heighten her ego. She was just one of the guys. Because I had gone down a similar path with Fiona seven years earlier, I couldn't imagine that lightning would strike twice. But it did. I just wish I could have seen the signs. And even as I write this in 2012, I still miss her. I don't miss the obsessing or the pain of rejection – that would return in good time with a completely different girl – but I miss her free spirit and refusal to conform to what society expected of her. As far as I know, she still lives with her parents, has never married, and doesn't have children. But she's far from being a spinster. She's an independent woman who is happy with who she is. I confess that I've typed her name into Google since those days back in DC, and I've discovered that she continues to perform her music in lounges and paint murals. She's not on Facebook, and neither am I. Three years later in 2005, I did call her one afternoon to let her know I had moved to Los Angeles and to see how she had been doing. For some reason, I felt the need to connect with her again. We had a nice conversation, and she revealed that her life was virtually

unchanged. She still lived at home, never married, and continued to sing in clubs. That was the last time we ever spoke. I often wonder if I'll ever see her again. It's unlikely, but I'm sure if I did, we would share a laugh, grab a bite to eat, and get caught up. Even though we would both have a few more gray hairs and some new laugh lines, I seriously doubt her exuberant spirit would have aged a day.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **PART ONE**

#### **With A Little Help From My Friends**

Four of my friends know about my virginity. Others may suspect it, but I don't ever discuss it with anyone else other than Andy and Peter. The third person is a friend from high school who I don't talk to that much anymore but is very aware that I haven't ever seriously dated anyone. Walt was the most recent person to whom I revealed my shame. Andy has known me for 30 years and was the first person I ever told, probably a couple of years after I met him. My friend Peter has been aware of it for about 15 years. Both of these guys first experienced sex in their late teens and continue to partake of it today with their respective girlfriends. But what I want to discuss in this chapter is the invaluable advice and suggestions both of these guys, as well as a few other colleagues, have given me over the years through the various unrequited loves, obsessions, and mistakes I've made when it came to dating.

I met Andy in 1980 when I was playing in a band. He was also a musician who fancied the same singers, songwriters, and musicians of the day that I enjoyed as well as AM radio hits of the 60's and 70's that influenced our musical upbringing. We eventually wound up playing in the same band together. He was also still dating his high school sweetheart when I met him. He lost his virginity when he was eighteen and has been with more women in the past 30 years than I've ever even met. Unlike a lot of guys who are 'players' Andy is one of the good guys. Never arrogant or pompous about his successes, Andy is one of the rare Nice Guys who women just fall in love with almost immediately upon meeting him. His boyish charm and cute-guy-who-lives-down-the-block looks still have girls in their 20's giving him their phone numbers even though he turned 50 last year. Andy's list of women runs the gamut from one-night stands to relationships that have lasted over two years. He will be the last one to tell you he's a Casanova, but I've seen many of his partners, and most of them were beautiful, sexy, and adventurous. His history with girls is the complete opposite of mine. This is not to say he hasn't had his share of heartbreaks. In fact, some of these women were the "love of his life," but like many relationships, things just didn't work out in the long run. It would be unfair of me to delve into Andy's personal history and reflections (he can write his own book), but I'm mentioning all this to give you an idea of where his point of view originated when helping me with my romantic quandaries.

Andy was always a phone call away. It didn't matter whether he was in New York, Los Angeles, back home, or on the road. Even before the era of cell phones, all I had to do was leave a voicemail on his answering machine

(the ones with cassettes, kiddies), and he would call me back as soon as he could, especially if I told him my life was falling apart over some girl. I usually did most of the talking while he patiently listened. Many times he would give me sound advice on what my next move should be or if I should just accept my losses and move on. I would typically argue with him even though I knew he was right about certain situations. But even if my situation seemed hopeless (and it usually was), Andy would always have something wise and comforting to say to help me get through the night. His extensive experiences with all types of women only added to his knowledge when it came to giving me advice. Let me be clear that Andy will be the first one to tell you that he's no expert; his modesty precedes him. Even today, he's as confused about the fairer sex as most men and is dealing with relationship issues of his own. But if anyone could write a thesis on what it's like to have sex, make love, fool around, or any number of other libidinous acts, it's Andy. I would be lying if I said I wasn't envious of his successes. Many nights I've paced the floor wondering what it would be like to break through that invisible wall to a woman's heart, and how Andy managed to do it with such ease. But my envy could have applied to any other guy who was getting laid, too. I can remember nights in the early 1980's when Andy and I were in a band playing music in clubs, and women would flirt with him while I was standing right next to him. I may as well have been invisible. Even if he didn't get a phone number every night, at least he got the reassurance from women that they were interested. I never even so much as got a "hello" or eye contact.

There were instances when I would be at the end of my rope when talking to Andy on the phone, and after regurgitating all my fears, concerns, and bad choices I had made with a particular woman, he would calmly give me his thoughts in an exquisite monologue that revealed he understood exactly where I was coming from. It was empathy of the highest order and it made me feel less alone. I just wish some of those calls could have been recorded so I could have transcribed his words to read at a later date. Even today as I still deal with the same disappointments with women, Andy continues to guide me through the fog.

Peter and I were more similar in our early experiences with girls. Even though he had lost his virginity at a reasonable age, he had periods of involuntary celibacy himself. We met in 1995 at the acting conservatory in Washington, DC where we were both students. It took him a while to warm up to me, but after we got to know each other doing background work on a movie one night, he let his guard down and began telling me about his goals in the world of theater. We also discovered we had a mutual interest in some of the more dubious and unintentionally campy television programs and stars of the 1970's. *Dean Martin Roasts* and the annual *Jerry Lewis Telethon* were frequent topics of discussion and ridicule. The many nuanced and awkward moments, as well as truly great ones, that occurred on numerous talk shows such as *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and the *Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder* gave us hours of discussion on the phone. In addition to being an actor (and later a theater director), Peter was a professional magician. The stories he would tell me about unruly kids in the audience, hysterical parents, and unreliable booking agencies never ended, and I loved hearing about all of it. When my situation with Fiona was in full bloom, I began telling Peter about my interest in her. This inevitably led to me revealing my Big Secret.

Through the years of Fiona, Amy, and women I have yet to talk about in this book, Peter would give me no-holds-barred advice. Because he had been through some of the exact same situations himself, he could relate to my stories of rejection and disappointment. We even had the same therapist at one point. He was in several long-term relationships in the late 90's, but when those ended, he crashed and burned like I did the night of the Helen Hayes Awards. He felt as if his world had ended and no recovery would be in his future. I wound up consoling him as best I could during these periods. But more often than not, I was the one that needed consoling. I would sometimes share Andy's suggestions with Peter (and vice-versa), and the two of them usually agreed that I needed to let go once it was clear that my feelings weren't going to be reciprocated. But

Peter was a little brasher and more blunt than Andy at times, not because he was annoyed with my predicaments, but because he couldn't understand the logic of chasing after a dead lead. There were times when he would leave me a bundle of voicemails that eventually ended with the words, "*I don't know what else to say, man. It's time to let go and move on.*" And he was right. Peter had seen the writing on the wall, and we would share many stories with each other about girls going as far back as elementary school (he still loves hearing me recall my attempt at getting Melinda to go see *Clarence, the Cross-Eyed Lion*). But my despondency over not being able to consummate my attempted relationships with any of these women was what kept me hanging on. The mystery of sex was always in control of my actions, and even though both Andy and Peter understood this, they knew that no girl could be magically transformed to fall in love with me. After all was said and done, the words "someone else" would have to be considered.

In addition to Andy and Peter, another one of my co-therapists was an acting colleague named Kellie whom I had also met at the Conservatory. Kellie was my scene partner during my first year studying there, and as we got to know each other, I told her all about Fiona and my interest in her. Kellie had a boyfriend, but we had one of those male-female friendships that were never going to go beyond that anyway. As attractive as Kellie was, our chemistry and relationship was purely platonic, and she was one of the few women I met during this period that I didn't fantasize about fucking. And I know for a fact that she didn't fall asleep at night pleasuring herself to me. And that was okay. In fact, it was great to have a woman friend with whom I could share my hopes and fears without falling in love or wondering how I might seduce her. We spent hours on the phone at times discussing not only my situation but also her boyfriend problems as well. She gave me wonderful insights into the female psyche and what Fiona or Amy might have been thinking at any particular time with regard to my behavior. Although she could no more give me the magical words to change Fiona's or Amy's feelings than Andy or Peter could, Kellie was a wonderful friend who alleviated a lot of my anxiety, sometimes with the tone of her voice alone. Unfortunately, after Kellie moved to New York in 2004, she gradually cut off all contact with me. I knew she was moving, and I was excited for her. We had agreed to stay in touch since I made frequent trips to NY anyway to audition or just see the town. But once she left DC, she stopped returning my phone calls and emails. Despite inquiries as to how she was doing, I never heard back from her. This is a mystery that I never solved. Peter is still in contact with her to this day, but he swears he knows nothing about the reasons behind her sudden severance from my life.

And then there's Walt, whom I met in another acting class in 1992. Even though acting wasn't in his future, Walt eventually found a career as a photographer and journalist. He appreciated my sense of humor and easygoing manner, and I recognized the same traits in him. Never married, even to this day, Walt had seen his share of women, both in and out of bed, and was always more than willing to discuss the subject at length. He was also ten years older than me but looked much younger. Standing at about 6 feet, 4 inches, Walt was a very bright guy who stayed well-informed about world affairs (hence being a photojournalist) as well as having strong opinions about various topics. I recall, quite fondly, many nights where Walt and I had lively debates about politics, women, and the state of the world in general. We could disagree without being disagreeable. But of all the people I was lucky enough to call my friend, I don't think there was anyone more optimistic or hopeful about my chances with women than Walt. Every time we'd go out to eat, for example, there would always an instance where Walt would swear that some girl in the restaurant was looking at me. Maybe, but not for the reasons he thought. Other times, Walt would tell me how my visits to the gym would pay off big time when women went out with me. Never happened. He even suggested that when Fiona or Amy talked about other men in their lives, it was really to get me jealous so I would continue to pursue them. Wrong again. I think Walt was trying to convince himself that his own loneliness and confirmed bachelorhood was not written in stone, and I don't blame him one bit. Rather than sit around and whine and complain about it like I did, Walt

saw the glass as half full. But despite his occasional overzealous enthusiasm and encouragement, he always had my best interest at heart. I still stay in touch with him, though not as much as I used to, simply because I now live on the West Coast. But whenever we do email or speak on the phone, I never fail to hear that familiar optimism and fortitude of a guy who hasn't given up yet.

Going all the way back to my Carrie fixation when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I've been lucky to have a kind ear or two to bend in my times of crises. I no doubt stirred up frustration and even resignation in the minds of my patient listeners with my constant argumentative responses to their advice and suggestions. The two most common words I've become known for are "*Yeah, but...*" Someone could have told me I won a million dollars, and I would have found a fly in the ointment ("*Yeah, but think of all the taxes I'll have to pay.*"). That same so-called reasoning usually applied to any hopeful words dispensed to me during a "session" about women. I only wanted to hear a guarantee of happiness one way or the other, but of course, there was no such thing. A few years ago, someone thought it might be a good idea for me to hang flow charts on my wall so I could map out every possible outcome that might occur as a result of my actions asking out a woman or calling her. I even remember seriously contemplating the differences between calling Amy at 1pm and calling her at 1:30pm on many Sundays, as if 30 minutes would make or break whether or not I got laid. This was no doubt due to my slight obsessive-compulsive disorder which I had since I was a child. Although I never washed my hands repeatedly or opened a door several times before going through it, my insecurities about women and dating created certain rituals that dominated my decision-making. Those decisions had no bearing whatsoever on the outcomes - the girl was either into me or she wasn't. But my good friends understood my stubborn process and walked with me through it. In addition to phone calls, I have a box full of letters that Andy wrote to me when he lived in New York (before the days of email) with pages of wonderfully sensible musings on the female condition and how it applied to my (and his) quests for a fulfilling relationship. 25 years later, I'm sure his words are still valid. Maybe I should read them all again without countering every sentence with "*Yeah, but...*"

## **PART TWO**

### **Love For Sale**

Around the time I turned 29 in 1989, when I was in the middle of my sexual hopelessness over Becca, it was brought to my attention that another solution might be in order to release me from my unfulfilled needs: an escort service. Even though I was in "love" with Becca, my sexual appetite for her was stronger, and I was at a point where I just wanted to experience sex, period. I had seen many ads in the free Washington City Paper each week for "massages" and/or "discreet encounters" with beautiful women. I knew exactly what these meant, but for legal reasons, the Paper couldn't say what they really were: prostitutes. The pictures that accompanied these ads were most certainly not representative of the actual women in question, but how else to draw the interest (and wallet) of a potential customer? Up to then, I had never even considered the idea of paying for sex. Why? Because I wanted to experience the touch and feel of a woman who was also interested in me. I believed that sex was something that should be shared – not bought or sold, in my case. This is not to say I'm against prostitution. If two consenting adults want to engage in it, and use proper protection, that's fine by me. According to a 2010 study from Indiana University at Bloomington, 69% of men have frequented prostitutes. Other surveys have ranked that percentage much lower. Most of these men are not virgins, certainly not virgins over 30, but just single guys, traveling salesmen, or married men who no longer get what they need at home.

But at the risk of sounding like a TV Afterschool Special, I wanted my first time with a woman to be special, to mean something. I don't mean I had to be in love or want to marry the girl; I just wanted it to be a mutually desired carnal affair, be it a one-night stand or ongoing relationship. I felt that by paying for it, by treating it like a commodity, I was admitting the ultimate defeat: I'm so undesirable that the only way I can get laid is to pay cash for it. Since no girl will ever want me for who I am (my looks, intelligence, sense of humor, etc.), I would have to bargain with a woman for her to touch me. And since most, if not all escorts refuse to kiss their customers on the lips, no intimacy whatsoever would ever be involved. And that missing element was what this book is ultimately all about: true intimacy with a woman. Over the years, I've seen my friends in real, romantic relationships, and the intimacy and mutual attraction that was present was something that I always envied in addition to the physical side of it. This is what I wanted, and I refused to substitute that possibility with a cheap, female hired hand who probably had other customers that same day. As far as I'm concerned, I would have still been a virgin even if I had had intercourse with a prostitute. And the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases was not worth the risk either.

But there was one afternoon when I was just curious enough to make a call. I looked up 'escorts' in the Yellow Pages of the phone book and found a listing near my suburb. I had no intention of actually hiring a woman to come over – I was just window shopping – but I wanted to see what was out there. I dialed the number, and after one ring, a woman answered. "*May I help you?*" said the voice with no emotion. I told her I was calling about an ad I saw in the Yellow Pages. She asked me where I lived and I told her. "*I have a girl in \_\_\_\_burg*" she replied. I thanked her and hung up. The way she said it convinced me not to go there. It was so impersonal. "A girl in \_\_\_\_burg" might as well have been "*I have a few used cars for sale.*" I know that an escort service is a business not much different than a barber. You pay for a service and you get it. Sometimes it's outstanding, and other times it's so-so. But I didn't want my first sexual encounter with a woman to be a business transaction. Despite many lonely nights since I turned 30, I've never made such a call again.

It was also about this time that I found temporary, vicarious release through my trusty VCR. Pornography (or as they were now called, 'adult films') was readily available to rent on VHS tapes in the back rooms of your local neighborhood video store, and I had memberships at several of these. Although I was never proud of it, I had no other way to engage my fantasies without some kind of visual stimulation. The days of reading Playboy magazine were never a big part of my life – I actually *did* buy them for the articles – but once I moved out of my parents' house, I discovered a world of beautiful, well-endowed women that could be played on my TV for about \$3 a night. I'll never forget the first time I rented a porno. There was a mom 'n' pop video store within walking distance of the first townhouse I lived in after moving to Maryland. It was called Captain Video and had all the latest blockbuster hits on crappy, cropped VHS tape as well as an ample supply of adult titles. Since I wasn't familiar with any of the performers in these X-rated masterpieces, I could only make my selection based on the box covers. Unfortunately, this particular store had apparently never heard of the word 'discretion', as they had it set up so that in order to rent any movie, you had to walk up to the counter and announce to the clerk (and whomever else was standing nearby) what movie you wanted to rent. To prevent theft, the tapes were kept behind the counter, but it would have been nice to be able to hand a corresponding number from the box to the clerk so he/she could just get the matching film from the shelf and hand it to me without any fuss. But since it wasn't my store to manage, I had to embarrass myself by walking up to the clerk and basically tell him I was going to masturbate that evening. In order to lessen my humiliation, I also chose a legitimate movie – *Raging Bull* – in addition to the porno. My voice sounded like a shivering Barney Fife as I said to the clerk, "*Uh...let me get 'Raging Bull'...*" to which he cheerfully replied "*Okay!*" He turned and searched the shelf for the title while dodging other clerks doing the same thing for other customers. As he handed the De Niro classic to me, I added "*And, uhh, 'Roman Holiday' ...adult film there...*" The clerk had the

good sense to keep his good cheer intact as he pulled the tape down. This was NOT the 1953 movie starring Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn, as if I even need to mention that. No, it was a very badly produced, completely un-erotic mess that featured an 80's porn starlet named Barbara Dare. When I saw her on the cover of the box, her tight, toned little body convinced me that was the one to pick for my evening's fun. As it turned out, the film was so bad I never even unbuttoned my pants. Shit - My first pornographic movie - and I still couldn't get laid, even with myself. (A side note: I did watch *Raging Bull*, but as of this writing, I've only seen that terrible VHS copy. I believe a remastered DVD is in order).

While I was never a porn addict, I did rent my share of junk, mainly to discover what people did when their clothes came off. Being a virgin in his 30's, I wanted to know what it was like between a man and woman who desired each other. I've long since been told that most pornography rarely represents the actions of men and women who aren't porn stars, i.e., more than 99% of the public. But Andy has recounted certain experiences to me regarding women he's slept with, and after hearing his stories, I have my doubts about those statistics. While not everyone may experience mind-blowing sex every time, most people enjoy it immensely. I'm convinced that most sexual encounters between men and women are pornographic and exciting in their own way. And there's certainly nothing wrong with that. I bet even Barney Fife eventually got naked with Thelma Lou after a dance in Mayberry.

### Part Three

#### End of DC Days

After I watched Amy walk off the set of *Red Dragon* in April 2002, I had finally fully accepted that all hope of ever being with her was gone. I guess you could say that I was worn out, exhausted. My romantic and sexual interest in her had finally waned due to the grace of time. Yes, there were scars that remained for a while, but I was no longer pacing the floor every day thinking about my next plan of action. In a way, I was free of it. The burden had been lifted, and her whereabouts and who she might be dating weren't really important to me anymore. I still wondered about her from time to time, but it passed. We never called each other, and I never saw her again on the sets of any future productions that used extras. I had also started doing more understudy work for various theaters, and between that and the DJ gigs, plus auditioning for other film projects, I had my hands full. Meeting new people and attempting to get involved in other projects also helped me forget about Amy. But from April 2002 until February 2005, I was free of any obsessing over a woman. There were certainly women I met during this time that I would have loved to have gone out with or just have some fun, but as was always the case, they just smiled politely and walked away. I figured it was either going to happen or not; I had basically surrendered to the future. If a woman had shown interest in me and I felt she and I were a good match, I most definitely would have invited her to coffee. But it never happened. My last two and a half years on the East Coast continued to be loveless and sex-free. I watched most of my friends date here and there, but I just concentrated on trying to get cast in an Equity play and book a principle (speaking) role in a TV show or movie that was coming to town. I was sick of only being considered for background work and unpaid understudy jobs.

In March of 2004, I was forced to move out of the townhouse in which I'd been living since October 1997 because the owner (who also shared the house with me) had bought another house closer to the city. Rather than allow me to continue to rent out the basement, he decided to rent the entire home to one family (he said it was

easier for him that way). He did give me almost two months' notice, so I had a reasonable amount of time to make other plans. But it was a major blow to my lifestyle as I had come to really love my humble downstairs abode there. What made this even more inconvenient was the fact that I had just started understudying a very sizeable role in an Equity show that required many rehearsals and meetings. They say that moving is one of the most stressful things that can occur in a person's life, but they didn't mention trying to understudy and find a new place to live at the same time. I began looking around every day for a comparable living arrangement using the local community papers, Craigslist, and word of mouth. I couldn't afford my own one-bedroom apartment, so I had to try and find another roommate, preferably a basement situation that gave me the same amount of space but without having to live with a bunch of other people. One day I saw an ad on Craigslist that seemed perfect: a basement with a den, private bath, and separate bedroom. The only other person that was to live there would be the owner. The price included all utilities and cable TV. So I called the owner and met with him several times to see if we were a good match. From all appearances, he seemed like a good guy and a trustworthy housemate – at the time. Like my current one, he would be two floors above me, and we would share the kitchen. Without going into lurid detail about how big a mistake I made by moving in with this psychopath, I'll just say that I spent the next 16 months looking over my shoulder and hoping my belongings wouldn't be destroyed whenever I got home. I know everyone has roommate horror stories - there are many forums on the internet devoted to the subject – but up until now I had been spoiled by the ease of living with reasonable and sane people.

In January 2005, I decided to dive head first into a weeklong series of casting director workshops that were being offered in Los Angeles. The company that was arranging this was based in New York where I had done a few of their workshops in 2004. It would also give me the chance to see Andy who had been living in L.A. since 1994 as well as get away from the parasite that I paid my rent to every month. The thought of spending ten days in Los Angeles excited me to no end. I would be staying in a hotel for the first 5 nights and then with Andy and his girlfriend in their lovely two-bedroom apartment for the remainder of the trip. The course consisted of meeting with and auditioning for casting directors for seven days from 10am to 10pm every day. The price of this education wasn't cheap, but my parents were willing and able to help me out. So I signed up for it, and on February 27 I flew west to a warmer climate and a new adventure.

The casting director seminars were held at a hotel in Studio City, CA. The first day was simply an orientation where all the participating actors would meet and greet each other along with the organizers. There were about 25 actors, mostly in their 20's and early 30's that made up the group. I was 44 years old and was relieved to meet a couple of guys that were in my age range. It was a good mix of people, and everyone seemed to get along fairly well. Because the days started early and ended late, no one really had that much time to socialize other than on lunch and dinner breaks. So by the end of each day, everyone usually went to wherever they were staying to go to sleep. The hotel where I was bunking was up in Sylmar, about 15 miles away. So I wasted no time heading back so I could hit the sack.

It won't come as any surprise to learn that there were quite a few very cute, pretty, hot, sexy, lovely girls that participated in the group. It was Hollywood, after all. Unlike my awkward attempts at meeting women in social situations outside of classes or work, I had no problems talking to or joking with these girls. Why? Because I didn't feel any pressure to impress them in order to get a date or get laid. That's not why we were there in the first place. Plus, these girls were 20 years younger than me. Sure, I naturally thought it would be nice to meet an attractive, available woman that might want to hang out after the workshops ended and perhaps get to know each other a little better. But I was spending too much money on these classes to concern myself with getting a phone number. While I didn't become fast friends with every girl I met in the group, I was still able to

communicate with them without sounding like my alter-ego Barney Fife. On the final night of the workshop – February 6, 2005 – we were told by the organizers that it was a tradition that we celebrate the week’s completion by going to a karaoke bar in Burbank to sing, make fools of ourselves, and get drunk if we were so inclined. Since I had sung, and of course hosted, karaoke shows in the past, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to experience the nightlife of Los Angeles with people I had gotten to know that week and maybe even make a few new friends if fate was to be kind. Little did I know that my nearly three-year sabbatical from heartbreak and disappointment was about to end.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **PART ONE**

#### **‘Go West, (Middle-Aged) Man’**

*“Young girl, get out of my mind. My love for you is way out of line.”*

“Young Girl” by Gary Puckett & the Union Gap

When I was in my mid-30’s, the idea of trying to date a woman more than ten years younger than me seemed absurd. I guess I felt like I had graduated beyond the realm of girls who had just gotten out of college or even high school. But the real reason was probably because I had had no luck whatsoever with women when I was in my 20’s, and now I was ready to approach more mature women who were no longer looking for jerks as companions, but rather decent and thoughtful men. I convinced myself that women over 30 were more open to guys like me – less concerned with looks and more interested in a sense of humor, chivalry, and strength of character. Of course, I was dead wrong. As I’ve painfully learned in the 20 years since then, looks, status, and income still matter more than ever to women of all ages. But I was naïve enough to believe that I had the goods to seduce and romance women in my 30’s and make up for lost time. As I’ve recounted with Beth, Fiona, Amy, and several other briefer obsessions, my attempts yielded a 100% failure rate.

So imagine my surprise when I found myself attracted to a young lady who was 23 years old at a time when I was 44. Karen was a perky, pretty blonde with almond eyes and a smile that could light up a coalmine. She and I met in the workshop and got to know each other over the course of the week. While we never hung out during the dinner breaks (I usually dined with the guys who were closer to my age), we talked quite often in between meeting casting directors. Frankly, I didn’t think that much of it at the time; Karen was just one of several very cute girls that attended that week’s workshop, and I enjoyed passing the time with her as much as anyone else. It never even occurred to me that I might want to ask her out. Me ask out a 23-year-old? I was old enough to be her...older boyfriend, and I couldn’t imagine that she would be interested in me. But it was the final night when we all gathered at the karaoke club that made me think about attempting the impossible once again. My mind started racing, no doubt as a result of pure exhaustion and lack of sleep that week. Plus, I didn’t yet live in Los Angeles, so I put any thought of dating her (or anyone else) out of my mind. But at the end of the night when everyone was saying their goodbyes, I stood there feeling that familiar pang of loss and need. Wearing a red

leather jacket and probably a little drunk, Karen reached up and put her arms around my neck, hugged me, and wished me luck. She also asked me if I was going to be moving to L.A. I told her it was very likely.

When I left the karaoke club and its bad sound system, I headed to Andy's apartment that he shared with his then girlfriend. My stay at the glorious Good Nite Inn in Sylmar had ended, and Andy and his lady had generously agreed to let me stay in their guest bedroom for the remainder of my stay in California, another four days. I felt a sort of rebirth that week – seeing my best friend on the West Coast, experiencing warm weather in February, and being around new people that had the same goals as me. Andy and his girlfriend were also actors, so I felt that I belonged in this new environment which seemed to offer unlimited possibilities. Meeting Karen awakened that conflicting excitement in me that I had not felt since my days with Amy, but it was at a very low-key, back-of-my-mind level. I remember sitting with Andy the day after the workshops had ended and jokingly suggesting that I should call her and invite her to go to one of the many amusement parks that adorned Los Angeles. *“All four of us could go!”* I foolishly postulated, even though I knew it would never happen. Andy confirmed that fact without hesitation. Even though he had never met her, he told me that a pretty 23-year-old girl would not want to spend her valuable time with some middle-aged man whom she barely knew. So I put that thought out to pasture and enjoyed spending time with Andy, seeing the sights of L.A., and having many late night discussions about our lives up to that point.

Later that week, when the very early morning came for me to get to LAX and catch my flight back to Washington, DC, I felt both a sense of sadness at leaving as well as a fledgling sense of hope about coming back to stay permanently. The seven-day workshop had been a real eye-opener as to how the business works (or doesn't), and the casting directors we met were a mix of personalities both nice and nasty. I said goodbye to Andy and his girlfriend, drove my rental car back to the site near the airport, and dropped it off. I then proceeded to sit in the airport and wait for my row to be called. I had mixed feelings at this point. I was looking forward to getting back home to the East Coast but not the townhouse in which I was now living. It was time for me to make some decisions, and within a couple of months, the inexcusable actions of my landlord would convince me to get the hell out of Dodge.

## **PART TWO**

### **The Seventeen Year Itch**

When I arrived back at a very cold Dulles Airport, I was already missing L.A. My friend Walt was waiting to pick me up, and the icy wind was cutting through us as we searched the vast parking lot for his car (he couldn't remember where he parked it). After he finally spotted the old clunker, he drove me back to my Maryland house and dropped me off. It was time to readjust to life with a little less sunshine and a housemate/landlord that was clearly out to make me miserable. Very tired, I walked downstairs to my den to discover what looked like a construction site. My bathroom was ripped out, for the most part, as my landlord was installing a shower where there hadn't been one (it was originally a half-bath). I knew he had been planning to do this, but apparently it was taking longer than he expected. All my furniture, stereo equipment, CD's, etc. were covered in dust and plaster. The workmen at least had the good sense to cover everything up with heavy plastic, but it didn't make much difference. I was going to be living in filth for the next several weeks. All pisses and other bodily

functions would have to take place upstairs in either the living room bathroom or the full bath two floors above me where I had been showering since moving in nearly a year earlier. All I could do was wait it out.

One morning a couple of days after being back, I woke up early to use the bathroom. Since mine was still under construction, I made my way upstairs to the living room facilities. As I stood there doing my business, I felt a sense of dizziness and nausea come over me. I wasn't sure if I was going to pass out or vomit. I stumbled over to the sink and splashed cold water on my face hoping I would do neither. My heart was racing, and I felt that familiar 'fight or flight' syndrome take over. After a few seconds, the room stopped spinning, and I went back downstairs. For the first time in several years, I had just had a panic attack. I immediately tried to reason with myself as to how this could happen. Surely, it couldn't be because my bathroom was under construction. Did I feel a weird sense of displacement because of it? No, I knew what it was. My too many years of experience with panic attacks helped me figure it out. I was on the precipice of a major change in my life. I was considering making the biggest move I had ever made. If I was serious about giving California a shot, it would have to be now - not a year from now, not six months. To make such a decision would require a lot of bravery on my part as well as a lot of uprooting. The little boy inside of me was pitching a fit at the thought of leaving the familiarity of the Washington, DC area where he had settled seventeen years prior. It was that same kid who gave me my very first panic attack in January 1988 when I was about to move out of my parents' home for the first time. Even though I didn't know it at the time, my subconscious was screaming to be heard. Fortunately, this episode didn't recur like it had done in the past. 24 hours later, I was my old self again. For the next few weeks, I started thinking about the details of moving – where to live, procuring employment as a DJ to support myself, and the drive cross country to name a few. But there was going to be one more roadblock that held me up a bit longer - the unwelcome return of a very loud nemesis.

A few weeks later, my bathroom was finally complete. I could shower and shave on the same floor where I slept. It was nice to have this amenity, but my focus was on when I was going to be making a permanent move to L.A. I didn't want my excitement and momentum to be interrupted or stopped altogether by my routine life in DC. It's so easy to fall back into old ways and habits without following through with plans. Now that the dust and grit was cleaned off my furniture, I could start living a normal life in my den again for as long as I was to remain there. But I wasn't quite out of the woods yet. Toward the end of February 2005, I started hearing the familiar tones of tinnitus again. Like the panic attacks that had occurred a few weeks earlier, the tinnitus had been absent from my life for some time. I had learned to deal with the fickle nature of this affliction ever since contracting it in April 1996. Whenever it came back, I always told myself it would go away again. But with its return came its companion – major depression. I was never sure if the depression was caused by the noise in my head or the other way around. But this time it hit me hard. All the joy and anticipation I had felt after I returned from L.A. was gone. The camaraderie I had experienced with the actors in the workshop was nowhere to be found. I was lying alone in bed in a windowless bedroom in the basement of a townhouse feeling like a completely different human being as the noise raged on in my head and ears. I didn't care about anything else but getting better. I didn't care about moving to L.A. or acting. That's what depression does to you. It robs you of your passions. My trip to L.A. seemed like a dream from which I was rudely awakened. If you had told me the trip never happened, I would have believed it.

My entire focus shifted from making a move to finding a cure. I learned many years earlier that tinnitus had no cure, only a myriad of treatments that worked for some sufferers and not others. Antidepressants had helped me, but I wasn't on one at this time. My feeling was, I can't move to L.A. in this condition. I have to be of strong mind and spirit to be so bold. It was about this time that I saw an ad on Craigslist for paid volunteers to

participate in a depression study being conducted at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, MD. Since I had no health insurance and couldn't afford to pay for any meds, I responded to the ad hoping that I would be given free antidepressants if accepted into the study. There was always the possibility of getting a placebo instead, but I was willing to take the risk. I also attended a depression support group in Bethesda, hoping I might find some answers. I felt so defeated going from the exhilaration of experiencing L.A. and all its wonders to sitting in an ugly metal folding chair in the basement of some church, in a circle with people who looked like they would have been happier in a concentration camp. The stories I heard from these people made me look like I had won the lottery by comparison. My tinnitus and depression were real, but these people had no joy at all in their lives. It was a sad bunch, and even my depression got depressed. I left after the meeting was over and never went back.

As it turned out, I never got around to being a part of the depression study at NIH. My landlord pulled a stunt one morning that eclipsed any thoughts of living in his house a minute longer than I had to. I woke up about 11:30 am to the sound of two people moving my furniture around in the den outside my bedroom. I thought I was imagining it at first, but then I heard voices. I walked into the den and saw my landlord and his girlfriend's mother attempting to pick up and carry my very heavy CD rack from one part of the room to another. They had already shifted my TV stand and stereo to one side and slid my couch away from where I had originally placed it. When I asked him what the hell he thought he was doing, he explained to me that he was going to put a small fridge and cabinet for my dishes and silverware in the den because I was no longer allowed to use the kitchen upstairs. I would also have to move my microwave oven downstairs and cook and eat all my meals there, too. This self-righteous prick told me it was because when his relatives visited him, they felt uncomfortable seeing me in the kitchen whether I was cooking or eating. They spoke no English, so the "cultural differences" as he put it made it awkward whenever they ran into me. He was speaking of the woman who was helping him move my furniture as well as her sister and brother who were visiting from south Florida. I had no problem with them; I always smiled and said hello whenever our paths crossed in the common areas upstairs. But for some reason, they felt that I should have no access to the kitchen as it interfered with their comings and goings even though I rarely saw them. Plus, they were only in town for a few weeks. But it didn't matter. Once they complained to my landlord, he took action. Instead of telling them that my rent included use of the kitchen, he decided to violate my tenant rights.

After he finished giving me this outlandish and completely ludicrous explanation, we wound up having a nearly two-hour argument about my rights and his obligations. As far as he was concerned, it was his home, and he could do whatever the hell he wanted. I could write a whole other book about what a sociopath this individual was, but he's not worth the ink it would take. The main point of all this is, while we were arguing, I made a decision that I was done with him and his castle. As soon as he went upstairs, I composed a letter giving my 30-day notice to move out. I notified my parents of my decision and told them I would be moving to California.

A few weeks earlier, I had received a phone call from Andy who told me the sad news that he and his girlfriend had split. She was in the process of moving out of their apartment, but he was planning to stay there. He didn't want to have to search for a smaller, cheaper place as he loved the area too much. Since he couldn't afford to live there alone, he needed a roommate. He asked me if I was still planning to move to L.A., and if I was, I now had a place to live. The news was a mixed bag for me. I was sorry to hear that he was going through the pain of a break-up, but I was thrilled at the prospect of moving into that apartment. It was a lovely place – lots of natural light, two full bathrooms, carpeting, central air conditioning, laundry on premises, and within walking distance from Ventura Blvd. and all its shops and restaurants. It was in a quiet neighborhood in the tony area of Sherman Oaks. I remember telling Andy how much I loved it when I stayed with him in February. So the day

my landlord attempted to hijack my possessions, the decision was made without hesitation. I called Andy back and told him it was a done deal, and I would send him a deposit for my share of the rent.

The decision to leave the town I had called home for seventeen years was bittersweet. I had grown to love this historical city with all its museums, theaters, monuments, movie shoots, and even the traffic that clogged up the I-405 and I-270 on a daily basis. There was a certain urgency to everything that kept me on my toes both as a DJ and an actor. It was also the first place I lived after I moved out of my parents' house in 1988. There was real symbolism there. I grew up. I met new people, got my heart broken, and learned a new skill that I still utilize to this day. As much as I hate cold weather, it was always comforting to know a huge snowstorm was about to blanket the DC area, especially when I had no work commitments but I did have plenty of TV shows backed up on my two VCR's to keep me company on cold winters' nights. And when spring arrived in DC, there was always a new awakening for everyone. The Cherry Blossom Festival was an annual event that signified the beginning of warmer weather and longer days. Walking along the National Mall made me feel like I was a part of something important. I felt connected to a bigger purpose living in a town that had such a vibrant pulse of activity and possibilities. When I think about it nearly seven years later as of this writing, I feel I left something special behind.

But I also understood it was time to leave. I had gotten into a professional rut. I no longer wanted to do background work in movies or only be considered for understudy work in the theater. Most of my friends had already made the move out west, including Andy who relocated to L.A. in 1994 just weeks before the big Northridge earthquake hit. And considering the crimes that were being perpetrated by my landlord, I was done with trying to find another townhouse basement in Maryland. It was time to move on. Andy's offer to have me move in with him was the final proverbial sign I needed. But before I left, my little crush on 23-year-old Karen would go to the next level.

In my final weeks before moving out, I received an email from Karen. She had sent me a link to a batch of her new headshots. She wanted me to look at them and give her my thoughts. I somewhat nervously clicked on the link which took me to a page with dozens of small thumbnails on which I could click to see full-size. There were several pages of pictures, and opening them reminded me of how pretty Karen was. It had been over three months since I had seen her, and her face had partially faded from my memory. But when I saw her big smile and luminescent eyes, I could feel that familiar itch creeping up on me. I knew she was way too young, but I still felt an odd connection to her. I looked at each picture, and like all actors' headshots, some were really good and others were not. But she had a good variety of looks, and I was certain that she was on her way to breaking into Hollywood.

A few days later, I called Karen to see how she was. She seemed genuinely happy to hear from me, and we wound up talking for over an hour. We discussed her new headshots and my plans to move to L.A. I told her about my acting career in DC as well as my DJ gigs, and she told me about her New York days and childhood growing up in the Midwest. The last thing she said to me before we hung up was "*Call me when you get out here.*" I promised her I would. A seed was planted in my tiny little brain that afternoon that eventually sprouted into a pathetic weeping willow.

## **PART THREE**

### **Freedom**

Packing up my belongings to move out of a tyrant's townhouse was the closest I'll hopefully ever come to knowing what it's like to get released from federal prison. Even though I had only lived there 16 months, it felt like 16 years. I tossed out a lot of old junk, gave some stuff away, and hired a moving company to transport all my huge necessities cross country. The night I finally walked out of that basement for the final time – July 27, 2005 – I had to pinch myself. Despite all the friction, I parted ways with my landlord on “friendly” terms. He wished me luck, we shook hands, and I got in my car and drove away. I even got my full security deposit back (plus the renter's interest that had accrued) in a check he handed me that night. I'm sure he and his live-in girlfriend were just as elated to have me leave as I was to never see their faces again.

My car was stuffed with other possessions that I would be taking back to my parents' house to drop off before the big 3000-mile drive. For the next two nights, I would be staying at Walt's house so I could spend time with him and see a handful of other folks that wanted to wish me well before departing DC. I had dinner one night with my first roommate from 1988 and his wife. I saw another roommate and his wife who lived on the other side of the Beltway. I ate lunch with an acting colleague who still lives in DC and regularly books gigs on television and movies (he's never done background work a day in his life). Finally, after shaking a lot of hands, shedding a few tears, and remembering some wonderful times, I hit the highway and headed to a little town in Virginia called Glen Allen to see one more friend. It was on the way back to my parent's house, so it wasn't inconvenient for me to make the stopover. I stayed with him for one night, cooked steaks on the grill with him and his wife, and watched him smoke a big cigar while he gave me suggestions about making it big in Hollywood. The following day I got back on the road where the next stop would be my childhood home.

As I drove south, I thought about my DC days and all the women who I nearly lost my mind over. The obsessing, the floor-pacing, the crying, the hoping and wishing, the late-night phone conversations with Andy, several therapists who made attempts to help me face reality, and of course, my incurable virginity at 44 years of age. It was still my cross to carry. But I was also letting Karen seep into my thoughts as a possibility of new romance. The pattern was an all-too familiar one. The same fantasies I created about the girls I've discussed thus far were now being applied to a young woman who wasn't even born when I was masturbating to Chloe in 1980. But Karen was only part of the impetus that made me look ahead to what I hoped would be brighter, less virginal days.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Wherever You Go, There You Are**

Once I arrived back in my hometown to drop off too many possessions that I had accumulated in the seventeen years living in DC, I prepared for the longest drive of my life. I sold my old car, bought a new one, and loaded it up with just enough clothes, toiletries, and other necessities for a cross-country journey. I also brought an ample supply of CD's and cassettes to enjoy while watching the lines on the nation's highways. I was home for about

two weeks before I said goodbye to my family for a second time. They were sad to see me leave again, but they knew I had to follow my dream. I was 44, not exactly a young man anymore, and I was going to Hollywood to try and break into the business with what little credits I had on my resume. I was also hoping that perhaps I would meet a woman who would finally reciprocate my affections, and Karen was my current hopeless cause.

I had always wanted to drive cross-country. To hit the open road, feel the magnitude of the wide open spaces, and see the windmills and cornfields that painted this great land. The music of Aaron Copland comes to mind when I think about the pioneers who did it long before me. Of course, they didn't have the luxury of an SUV with air conditioning to make their journey. But I still felt a connection nonetheless while making my long drive west. While listening to some of my favorite tunes, I kept thinking about my latest crush, Karen. I imagined her waiting for me to arrive in L.A. so I could spend time with her, get to know her better, and hopefully fall in love. I foolishly had it all planned out: all the disappointments from my past would soon be forgotten if Karen and I connected the way I hoped we would. My biggest mistake was thinking that I would somehow be a different person in Los Angeles, and that my fears and insecurities would miraculously disappear. Life ain't the movies.

Among the many stops I made on my journey west was to see Fiona and her husband who now lived in Colorado. They had moved there a few years earlier, and when I told them I was finally making the move to L.A., they asked me to stop by. Even though it was slightly out of my way, I thought it would be good to see the two of them, and it would also be an excuse for me to stopover in Las Vegas after I left their home. I hadn't seen Fiona since she left the DC area with her husband. They were married in 2001, and I was long over her by the time they tied the knot (Amy was my heartache during that time, for those of you keeping score). Having never visited the Rocky Mountain State, I looked forward to taking time off from my long drive for a few days and hanging out with her and her family.

When I arrived at their doorstep, Fiona was home with her infant daughter, while her husband was at work. Seeing Fiona again was nothing more than seeing an old friend from DC. There were no lingering feelings or regrets about what never happened between us. She was the only ex-obsession of mine that I still occasionally talk to even now. But Fiona was not in good health when I saw her on this day. The girl that used to have a curvy, delicious figure had become nearly anorexic. The years, workloads, and probably having a child had taken its toll on her. Lack of sleep and too many hours at a job she wasn't crazy about didn't make things any easier. Frankly, I was shocked at how terrible she looked. I was so worried about her appearance that I mentioned it to her husband at some point during my visit. He said he agreed and was trying to get her to pay attention to it. But I did enjoy spending time with them, and after a couple of days, I hit the road again.

After a twelve-hour drive, including a never-ending, labyrinthine expedition through the Rocky Mountains, I came upon a giant sea of lights after traveling in the pitch black. It was Vegas, baby. Even though it was one in the morning, the town was still up and at 'em. I gradually made my way toward Sin City and, after a few turns, found myself driving down the main strip. I had no idea where I was going to stay, and I didn't care. I was just excited to be there. But I couldn't shake the thought of Karen and wanting her to be there with me. Once again, here was a young girl I hardly knew, and I was already pining for her presence. It was more of anticipation about what might happen the next time I saw her. And the excitement of being in a town that I had always wanted to visit only stirred those feelings in me more - Las Vegas! Karen! Hollywood! Having sex for the first time! A new life!

I wound up staying off the Strip at a Motel 6. It was surprisingly clean and safe, and far enough from all the Vegas action to be relatively quiet. The next day I walked for nearly twelve hours around the town visiting casinos, tourist spots, and having postcards from strip clubs snapped in my face every ten seconds by street peddlers. I played the slots in one casino and won a whopping \$15. There are those who may wonder why I didn't take advantage of a town where prostitution is legal and sow my wild oats when I had the chance. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, I just didn't want my first experience to be with a hooker. Plus, I was hoping against hope that Karen or some other lovely L.A. lady would find me desirable without asking, "*Are you sure you're not a cop?*"

After my fun-filled (i.e. walking tour) day of Vegas, I returned to my motel room, ordered a pizza, and watched TV. Check-out time was 10am, so I had to be up early the next morning to make my final 4-hour drive to Sherman Oaks, CA. and to Andy's apartment. It was close to 100 degrees as I made my way through the desert, and I attempted to do so without running the air conditioning in my car in order to save gas. But I could only tolerate the heat for a few minutes at a time. It was August after all, and as much as I admired the pioneers of olden days, I was sure as hell going to use the AC to complete my journey west.

I pulled onto the street of my future home at around 3:30 in the afternoon. Andy was there to greet me, and it was great to see him. I could tell he had been through the mill with his recent break-up, but he was happy to see me just the same. We walked up the stairs to our second-story apartment (yes, it was "ours" now), and as I entered, I remembered the first time I had stepped foot inside back in February of that year. Andy had kept most of the furniture that he and his girlfriend shared for the two years they lived there, and the guest bedroom was now to be mine. But until my bedroom furniture, TV, and other things arrived via the moving company, I was stuck sleeping on the couch and living out of my suitcase. I was just hoping that my possessions would arrive, complete and undamaged.

After hanging out for a little while, Andy took me to one of his favorite restaurants that would soon become a favorite of mine also, a charming place called The Good Earth. I hadn't eaten since leaving Vegas, so I was anxious to sit down and talk with Andy over a meal about what lie ahead for me in Tinsel Town. As we sat and discussed the obvious uphill battles I would face as an older actor coming to Hollywood for the first time, the thought of Karen floated in the back of my mind. The anticipation of calling her to see if she wanted to see me again was like a dangling carrot. But I had more important things to consider first like finding DJ work and getting new headshots. As much as I wanted to see Karen again, I had to lay down stakes first, get settled, and try to plug myself into the Los Angeles complex.

I suppose I thought that by moving to L.A., many things in my life would change. I foolishly thought that all of Andy's friends (of which there were many) would naturally become my friends, too. I also assumed that women would react differently to me out here, maybe be more open to dating me than women on the East Coast. But what I didn't take into account was my own behavior. In order for things in my life to change, I would have to change. As Andy has said to me on many occasions, "*Wherever you go, there you are.*" The same baggage I hauled around with me in Washington, DC as well as in my hometown was still very much a part of my carriage. There was no magic city in which all my dreams, be they personal or professional, would come true without some effort or revised applications on my part. The way I approached women in L.A. would yield the same results because of my insecurities, lack of confidence, and questionable appearance (yes, people dressed differently out here as I would soon learn). And Karen would be the next name to go on my list of disappointments in love.

# **CHAPTER TEN**

## **PART ONE**

### **Meanwhile, Back At the Ranch**

After a couple of weeks, I began to adjust to my new environment. I made close to a hundred phone calls to DJ companies; introducing myself to try and get work (less than 5% of my calls were returned). I started looking online for acting communities, theater companies, headshot photographers, and anything else that might help me dip my toe in the waters. Andy was also a great help, recommending many avenues to explore. My furniture finally arrived, too, and I'm happy to report that I have no horror stories to tell about that. All my boxes and possessions were accounted for, and there was no dispute over money owed to the movers. Even though they were not the most congenial human beings, they did their job and left. After reading online about all the terrible things that had happened to people because of disreputable moving companies, as well as many moving scams, I felt lucky to have been left out of that demographic.

So now it was finally time to pick up the phone and call Karen. That same kid in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade whose heart was pounding the night he barricaded himself in his parents' bedroom to call Melinda to invite her to go see a movie about a cross-eyed lion was alive and kicking as I dialed Karen's number. Karen had both a landline and cell number, but I called the former thinking she might be at home. It was about 7:30 on a weeknight, and I had no idea what her schedule might be. After a few rings, I got a voicemail that wasn't hers. Even though I suspected I might have dialed a wrong number, I left a message anyway. It was a straightforward message telling Karen that I was now in L.A. and would love to see her at some point. Nothing fancy and no big suggestions to go to any theme parks. I hung up and was actually content with what I had said.

After a few days, I still had not heard back from Karen. I figured she was busy, what with her being 24 years old and all. It's unlikely she was without a full plate of social activity; girls like her don't have enough hours in the day to do all they need to. So I figured, why not try again? This time I would call her cell phone hoping my luck would improve. It was another weeknight about the same time when I called her. This time she answered.

*"Hello?"*

*“Karen?”* I said.

*“Yeah?”*

*“It’s Tim. I’m in L.A. How are you?”*

*“Oh my god, what’s going on?”* she replied with excitement in her voice.

I made a little small talk, and then she surprised me - caught me off guard actually - with the following question:

*“Hey, what are you doing right now?”*

*“Uhh, nothing, just hanging out here at the apartment.”*

She then explained that she was up at the Sunset Hollywood Ranch as part of a charity event to raise money for a local animal shelter. There were lots of people partying, drinking, and listening to live bands. She told me I should come up and be a part of it, and that way we could see each other and get caught up. There was a \$10 admission (all for a good cause), and it would probably last until at least 11pm. I asked her for directions and told her I’d see her soon.

The fact that this meet-up was not planned in advance or discussed with Andy for 6 hours ahead of time made me feel more spontaneous than I had felt in a long time. Even though this was by no means a date, I was still a bit nervous about seeing this young woman whose image had been floating around in my brain since February. Since I didn’t feel I was dressed for the occasion, I went through Andy’s closet to find a nicer shirt, since his wardrobe was much hipper, sexier, and smarter than mine (he was at work this evening, and I was sure he wouldn’t mind). I wound up grabbing one of those fake Hawaiian shirts that a lot of middle-aged men wear to appear younger than they are. Of all the shirts in Andy’s closet, I probably chose the one that he probably rarely wore. But no matter. It was different for me, and I wanted to try and not be the same geeky Tim that everyone back east knew. This was California Tim!

I got in my car, and as I pulled out of the alley in the rear of the apartment complex, I kept thinking how this was the last thing I thought I’d be doing that night – seeing Karen and spending time with her. I drove down the 101 to the Gower Street exit and proceeded to head up Beachwood Dr., a very steep road that leads into the Hollywood Hills. I eventually saw many cars parked along the side of the road that was now nothing more than a narrow concrete pathway the higher up I drove. After finding a parking spot, I got out of my car and started walking uphill. I passed a young couple walking toward me and asked them if they knew where “the ranch” was where a party of some sort was going on. They pointed in the direction I was walking and told me to just keep on and I’d run right into it. So I hiked up the hill and finally came to an open field that spread out like a miniature Woodstock - lots of horse trails, music, and spectacular views of Los Angeles. There was lots of young people drinking alcohol, smoking, dancing, and generally having a laid-back time on a beautiful summer evening. I saw a couple of guys at the entrance, and I told them I was there to see Karen, if they happened to know who she was. They told me to come on in. Just then, a perky blond wearing jeans and a t-shirt with a jacket caught my eye. It was Karen.

*"HEY!!"* she exclaimed as if seeing a long-lost friend. She ran toward me and gave me a big hug. It felt really good to see and touch her again.

*"What's going on? What have you been up to?"* she inquired.

I was bit tongue-tied and overwhelmed. So I stammered like the Most Boring Guy on Earth.

*"Oh, not much. Just...glad to finally be here...and...Wow! What a view!"* I noticed the lights of Hollywood rising up from below the canyons. The combination of seeing Karen as well as those lights made me feel like I had passed into a new diorama of my life. I felt an unusual sense of hope and excitement. I say 'unusual' because I couldn't quite decide if it was a good thing or one of foreboding. But I was there, and I was going to enjoy myself. I walked around with Karen and asked about how things were going for her as an actress. It was inevitable that we would discuss "the business" as this was the most obvious thing we had in common at the moment. I told her about my drive cross country, moving in with my best friend, and looking for a headshot photographer. She introduced me to some of her friends, and to be honest, it was bit awkward. I don't think they expected to see someone their father's age hanging out with a 24-year-old girl, but this was Hollywood after all. Anything was possible. Had I been famous, I'm sure I would have been revered by these young people no matter what my age. But I didn't follow Karen around all night; I did talk to other people. Many of them were actors and musicians from all over the United States. I just wish I had grabbed a beer and loosened up. I'm not a beer drinker; in fact, I can't stand the taste of the brew. But instead of carrying around a bottle of water like a squeaky clean little boy, it wouldn't have hurt to pop open a Samuel Adams (or whatever was in the back of the truck) and be a part of the crowd. I didn't have to get drunk, just be a bit more sociable. I wasn't a wallflower that night, but I did feel a bit constrained, as if I had to prove something, not only to Karen, but to myself. Karen did have an ample supply of alcohol as she loved her libations. She danced with a group of guys, started talking and laughing a bit louder, but never made a fool of herself. She displayed grace even in this party atmosphere. For all I knew, she could have been to parties where she got plastered, threw up, and even woke up the next morning in some strange guy's bed. I just didn't know that much about her, but seeing her again made me want to get to know her even more.

About 10:30pm, Karen told me she was going to head back down the hill to her car and go home. I was ready to call it a night myself, so I told her I would walk down with her. She waved goodbye to some girls and then turned and accompanied me out of the party. As we walked down the steep road, she told me how glad she was that I came up that night. I thanked her for inviting me and said it was great to see her again. As we approached her car, she started digging around in her bag, ostensibly for her keys. She said she couldn't find them and thought she may have left them back up at the Ranch. I was a little curious as to how and why she would have taken them out at the party, but I had no reason to question her. I stood there while she continued to nearly put her hand through the bottom of the bag, waiting to see what she was going to do. I asked her if she wanted me to go back up the hill and help her look for her keys. She said that wouldn't be necessary, so I took the obvious next step of trying to make a date to see her again. I asked her if she had ever heard of a restaurant called The Good Earth. I told her that Andy had taken me there my first day in L.A. and that it was a great place to eat. Instead of answering my question, she once again caught me off guard with another proposition.

*"You know what? We should go get sushi sometime. There's a great sushi place that I love to go to."*

*"Yeah, that would be great!"* I responded. *"I'm not that familiar with sushi dishes, but I'm always willing to try something new."*

*“Okay!” she replied. “Why don’t you call me next week, and we’ll go to this sushi place.”*

*“I would love to. I’ll call you and we’ll set up a date,”* I assured her.

I couldn’t believe that this pretty, young girl had apparently asked me out. She also suggested that we should both come back up to the Ranch during the day and go horseback riding. And then she topped it off with this jaw dropper:

*“I’m serious. If I find out that you went out for sushi and didn’t invite me, I’m going to be really mad!”*

*“I promise I won’t! I’ll call you next week!”*

And with those words, I headed down to my car, probably floating on air a little bit as I moved.

Had Karen actually been flirting with me? Had I passed over into another dimension? Is it possible that something I’d wanted since I was 16 years old might actually happen for the first time in my life? I told myself to reel it in, don’t jump to any conclusion. After all, she was a little drunk and may not have realized what she was saying to me. I also wondered if her ‘missing keys’ were simply an excuse to go back up the hill to hook up with some young guy she had met. Maybe she didn’t want to hurt my feelings by leaving with him while I stood there and watched. Or maybe she thought I would disapprove, me being the older man that I was. Either way, regardless of my imagination, I was thrilled at the prospect of seeing Karen again. Her invitation to have sushi was a sexy one (I read somewhere that sushi is a type of aphrodisiac for some people), and I couldn’t wait to take her up on her offer.

When I got home that night, Andy was watching TV after having worked his waiter job. He was surprised to see me wearing his shirt and asked me where I’d been. When I told him I just spent the evening with Karen up at the Sunset Ranch, he nearly went into a state of shock. I explained how a simple phone call turned into an unexpected invitation from Karen to come up to the Ranch, and Andy was thrilled to hear of my good fortune. When I told him about her offer to take me out for sushi, he nearly fell out of his chair. He was certainly used to young girls hitting on him, but for it to happen to me was as likely as winning the lottery. I knew it, and he knew it. But he encouraged me to follow up and call her, but to keep it together.

*“I can’t understand why a young girl like Karen would be interested in taking me out. I’m not some famous actor or powerful agent,”* I said.

*“Well, maybe she just wants to fuck you, Tim. Some young girls aren’t looking for anything serious, and she may just want to fool around.”*

When Andy proposed his theory of Karen’s possible intentions, I felt the blood go to my feet. Could he be right? Here was a guy who had been with many, many beautiful young girls, so if anyone would know how a young woman thinks, it was him. He wasn’t a prophet, but his suggestion got me all amped up. He told me to take it slow, wait until next week to call her, and don’t put all my hopes for happiness into it.

At least I waited until the next week to call her. One out of three isn’t bad, but I was in for a rude awakening.

## PART TWO

### Yelling At the Screen

I don't think I had ever spoken the word 'sushi' more times in my life than I did over the next several days. Every day I would mention it to Andy and how I was planning to call Karen and take her up on her offer. Andy was just as hopeful as I was about seeing where my next encounter with her would lead. He was still working through the emotions of his own break-up with his former live-in girlfriend, so I tried to be as supportive of him as he was of me. Andy was also a big sushi eater, so he gave me some suggestions as to where I might take Karen. I reminded him that she already had a favorite spot, but I just wanted to see her regardless of where we went. So the following Monday evening, about one week after I had seen her at the Sunset Ranch, I called her again to follow up on her invitation. Karen answered the phone, and like the previous phone calls I had made to her, she seemed happy to hear from me. But this phone call would be the first of many mistakes I would make with regard to trying to get a date with her. It was also the same mistakes I had made with every other woman who took the time to speak with me on the phone. As I would later learn from the world of so-called dating gurus by way of compact discs (more to come on that subject), staying on the phone too long with a woman conveys the message that you have nothing else going on in your life. The idea is to make contact, talk for a few minutes, ask her out, and then end the call. Don't linger and talk about the weather just as an excuse to hear her voice. But alas, I was under the naïve impression that the longer you stay on the phone with a woman you're trying to court, the better. I could not have been more wrong. After talking to Karen for at least half an hour, I finally got around to asking her about our sushi date. Since this was Monday, I asked her which day that week she might want to meet up. Her answer was a glimpse of where I was headed.

*"Well, this week is really bad...I'm going to be so busy trying to get things done. Why don't you call me next week?"*

She then mentioned the pressing issues that would make her unavailable that week. I honestly don't remember what they were, but I'm sure sending out headshots and other acting-related tasks were part of it. Undaunted, I told her, *"Sure. No problem. I'll call you next week!"* She then told me she had to go (second mistake of the night – letting her end the call instead of me). After hanging up, I felt a little twinge of hope die inside of me. Was she really so busy that week that she couldn't find an hour to have lunch? I already knew the answer. But I was determined to try again and not give up. When I told Andy about the disappointing ending to my phone conversation with Karen, he wasn't that surprised. He wished me luck, but reminded me to not get my hopes up. He already knew the truth, but he didn't want to completely shatter my expectations. Since he was already dealing with his own heartbreak, he would never wish it upon someone else.

So I continued to get on with my week, trying to find DJ work, interview prospective photographers for new headshots, and going to actors' groups to meet new people. But I still foolishly kept thinking about Karen and the exact date and time I would call her again. Old habits die hard, and this was Amy all over again, believing that plus or minus thirty minutes in any given hour would really make a difference as to whether or not a woman would want to see me. In fact, it was my own fear and insecurities that had been with me since I was 15, masquerading as "planning". So in order to not appear desperate or too anxious, I wound up waiting *two* weeks

before calling Karen again. *Maybe she'll think I've forgotten about her and will be worried that I'm not interested anymore,*" I tried to convince myself. Finally, after two long weeks, I dialed Karen's number again. I may have gotten her voicemail this time; I honestly don't remember. But she did call me back, and we wound up having a carbon copy of the conversation we'd had two weeks earlier. After putting it off for as long as I could, I mentioned sushi to her again. I guess her love for the Japanese rice dish had waned since our night at the Ranch, because once again she told me that *"This week is really bad."* And also, she had to hang up because she had a friend coming over. It was 11pm, so it was probably a guy, but that was just my imagination taking things to their worst possible conclusions. But it didn't matter of course. The writing was on the wall. This young girl was clearly not interested in seeing me again. And it doesn't take a genius to figure out what happened: She had been a little drunk and uninhibited that night we walked down the hill to our cars at the Ranch. When I asked her to go to The Good Earth restaurant, she blurted out her sushi invitation without thinking. It was really the alcohol talking, not Karen. Maybe the idea of getting sushi with me wasn't totally unthinkable to her, but when I called her a week later and reminded her of the possibility, she was completely sober. Her common sense was in control again, and she realized that she didn't want to give me the wrong impression by agreeing to go out with me. But she also didn't want to admit this fact, so by telling me that every week was *"really bad"*, maybe I wouldn't take it personally. So rather than argue with her, I simply asked her to call me next time if she wanted to meet up. I put the ball in her court, and I should have left it there. But nooo...

My friend Peter, who never minces words, used to compare situations like this to watching a movie. Whenever I told him about the repeated rejections and excuses I would get from the same woman, he would say to me, *"If this were a movie, and you were watching the main character do exactly what you're doing now, what would you be yelling at the screen?"* The answer of course was, *"STOP! Leave it alone! She's not interested! Move on!"* And I understood this. In fact, I *had* seen movies where the protagonist was chasing a girl who clearly wasn't interested, and I would just shake my head as I recognized myself in the character. But I would also be silently encouraging him to follow Peter's advice: Forget her and move on. Unfortunately, it's easier to write a screenplay with characters that will do what you desire than it is to figure out the behavior of real people. Karen may have simply changed her mind, drunk or not, about seeing me again. If I had only let it go I would have saved myself more misery. But it wasn't my nature; that's a major part of why I'm writing this book. As I'll discuss later, my addictive qualities when it came to rejection would be examined on quite a few internet forums. The internet would also be a source of either pain or happiness for me in the near future as the world was changing very quickly. Information about a person was now readily available at your fingertips in the privacy of your own home.

### **PART THREE**

#### **Virtual Voyeurism**

One day a few months after I arrived in Los Angeles, I was walking down Sunset Blvd. in West Hollywood, dropping off headshots at various agencies. As I walked back to my car, I noticed a stenciled imprint on the sidewalk that said "MySpace.com". A few days later, I saw the same logo again in another part of L.A. Over the next few weeks, I would hear more about this new website called MySpace. And then the phrase 'social networking' would enter the lexicon. Karen sent me an invitation to join her on MySpace, but I had no idea

what that meant. Further exploration of it revealed it was a way to connect with your friends online and post lots of unnecessary information about yourself along with photos, music and eventually videos. Karen's profile had her age, place of birth, current location, occupation, favorite movies, TV shows, and songs, as well as her 'relationship status' documented. This last category was what captured my attention. Hers was listed as 'Single'. I took this to mean that she wasn't dating anyone nor was she in a serious relationship of any kind. As ridiculous as it sounds (but more common than I thought), this 'status update' would make me feel safer and more secure when I went to sleep at night.

Being the old fuddy-duddy that I am, I decided not to venture into the world of social networking (I'm not on Facebook either). Email and phone calls were enough for me to stay in touch with my friends and colleagues, plus I didn't feel the need to advertise my private affairs to the entire world. But discovering Karen on MySpace stirred up a lot of anxiety in me. Unlike the days of old when a person's secrets were revealed via word of mouth and even snail mail, today's world allowed instant access to it with the click of a button. It was technology at its worst, an Orwellian nightmare that broke a lot of hearts as more and more people joined the hyperspace revolution. Anytime, day or night, I could click on Karen's MySpace page and see what she had been up to – new pictures, where she'd be traveling, and of course, whether or not she had a boyfriend. Whereas I used to eavesdrop on Becca outside her office 15 years earlier as she talked on the phone to a mystery caller, I could now "spy" on Karen and learn if she was sleeping with anyone.

Every morning (or afternoon) that I got up, there would always be a therapy session between Andy and me. He would talk to me about his break-up and I would talk to him about my next move with Karen and her MySpace status. Although he knew my situation was hopeless, he did his best to empathize with me about the pain I was feeling and my ongoing sexless life. But I was glad to have him there. He was my rock, and I guess I was his pebble. His break-up was far more soul-crushing than my simple unrequited attraction to a young girl; he had actually *lived* with his former girlfriend for two years. They loved each other and had great sex, took vacations together and even talked about marriage. He had every reason to be in the state he was in. I was simply pining over an uninterested 24-year-old girl instead of forgetting her and getting on with my new life in California. But my pain also stemmed from the fact that I was once again going through another rejection that would only prolong my virginity and possibly foreclose any chance at a sexual relationship with a woman. It wasn't just Karen; it was nearly 30 years of tears (to borrow a song title from the great John Hiatt).

I finally got a new headshot for the L.A. market, ironically done by a photographer that Karen recommended to me. Once I had my hardcopies and resumes ready to go, I did a mass mailing to commercial agents as this was the area where I would probably have my best shot at getting representation in the beginning. I sent out twenty pictures over a 3-day period. A few weeks later, my phone actually started to ring. I got calls from seven different agencies saying they wanted to meet with me. I was blown away to say the least. I didn't expect such a quick response and certainly not from multiple agencies. So I began setting appointments. One of the agents to whom I submitted was also recommended to me by Karen. As it turned out, Karen was an intern in this office, and she told me that I should consider signing with them. I met with all the agents over the next few weeks. Some I ruled out (or they ruled me out) after walking out of their offices, but I eventually narrowed my choices down to three. Karen's agent was one of them, and I thought I could perhaps kill two birds with one stone – sign with her agent and get closer to Karen as a result. But I tried to be as objective as possible. I couldn't let my feelings for Karen get in the way of making what could be a career decision. I absolutely had to separate the two. But after taking everything into consideration and doing my research, I called Karen and told her I decided to go with her agent. She was very excited and assured me that I had made the right decision. I was nervous for

both signing the contract but also seeing Karen again after having not seen her in a couple of months. I made an appointment to go into the office and sign on the dotted lines.

I now had a commercial agent, and I started going out on auditions. I was green to say the least, so I enrolled in a commercial acting class to help me learn the tricks of the trade. Commercial auditions were different than theatrical (film and episodic TV) auditions, and I had to understand the differences. In the midst of all this new activity in my life, I was still holding out hope that Karen and I would eventually see each other socially again. One afternoon in early October 2005, I had just gotten out of an audition and was feeling pretty good about it. My confidence was a bit higher than usual, and I decided to make good use of it. For the first time in a long time, I spontaneously picked up my cell phone while sitting in my car on some Hollywood side street and called Karen to see if she wanted to meet for lunch that week. I spoke to her as if I had something going on in my life instead of just pacing the floor in my living room. I told her I really wanted to take her to lunch and asked if she had a free day available. Surprisingly, she asked me to call her late Friday morning, and we would pick a place. Maybe I had finally worn her down, and maybe she was willing to give me a second look. Either way, I did call her the following Friday, and I was delighted to hear that she still wanted to get together. Neither one of us wanted sushi (I had to ask), so I suggested my then-favorite place, The Good Earth. She agreed, I gave her the address, and we planned to meet at one o'clock. She told me she would be coming from an audition, so she would try and meet me there as close to one o'clock as possible. I told her I'd wait for her.

When Friday, October 7, 2005 arrived, I woke up with my heart pounding. I was finally going to see Karen again after a two-month wait. Andy gave me some tips on making a good impression, and he even gave me one of his cool shirts to wear, from Banana Republic. I left the apartment at around 12:20pm and headed to Studio City where The Good Earth was located. I parked in the free garage behind the restaurant and walked inside. It was about ten minutes until one o'clock, so I sat on the cushioned seats in the waiting area. About 20 minutes later, I heard someone knocking on the window behind me. Karen was letting me know she had arrived. She walked in, and we gave each other a friendly hug. She was wearing a light blue, short-sleeved top and a beige denim skirt. I asked her how her audition went, and she told me it went well, and that the casting director pointed out to her how nice her legs were (questionable on the casting director's part, but he was correct). The host took us to our table, and we sat down.

Seeing Karen again was wonderful. She looked pretty as ever, and I could tell that things were going well in her life. Our conversation flowed nicely and naturally, and I looked at her more than I did the menu. It finally came time to order, and Karen decided she was having breakfast instead of lunch. She ordered a breakfast burrito with eggs and diced potatoes. I was in more of a lunch mood, so I ordered their orange chicken pasta. While waiting for our food, we got caught up on our lives and talked about strategies for getting more auditions. Neither one of us had been in L.A. very long, so we were novices at the whole Hollywood system. When our food arrived, we began to eat, and everything seemed copacetic and relaxed. But then Karen said something that instantly made me realize that we were there for completely different reasons.

*"I met this really great guy!"* she said, almost as a warning.

*"Oh...really?"* I responded, feeling my heart drop to the floor. *"Who is he?"*

*"He's a comedian, and I Googled him to make sure he wasn't a serial killer."*

I laughed a fake laugh.

*“How old is he?”*

She ventured a guess. *“Early thirties, probably. I just want to know that I can beat him up!”*

This last statement let me know that Karen wanted to be in control of her men. Not just mentally, but also physically. It also told me that she had no problem getting physical even to the point of play-wrestling and of course, sex. The fact that she made this point to me was like a stake through my guts. I somehow managed to keep the conversation going until we were through eating. When the bill came, I did something that would have made anyone sitting near us think I was deaf. I offered to pay for her meal. Maybe this wasn't so unusual considering I had invited her out, but the fact that she had just told me that she had met a “great guy” and wanted to “beat him up” should have been my cue to treat this lunch as nothing more than two colleagues getting together. But I wanted so desperately to be more than a friend. So I practically pretended that I didn't hear her mention that she was interested in someone else. Naturally, she told me that she would pay for her portion, and that it was too much for me to cover the entire bill. But I insisted, and after she graciously agreed, she said, *“Well, Okay. I'll get it next time.”*

Next time? Was there actually going to be a Next Time? Could I also be a “great guy” for her to also want to see again? I already knew the answer, but I told myself that there was still hope. I paid by credit card, and as we walked toward the exit, I pointed out the very large cookies that were for sale in the glass case by the cashier. I suppose I wanted to let Karen know I had sweet tooth for some reason. We stepped outside and gave each other a departing hug as she told me, *“It was great to see you.”* – a phrase that usually means this was a one-time event and now we'll get on with our separate lives. As Karen walked away, I shouted at her, *“Hey we should do this again! Maybe next time we can have dinner.”* She looked at me with a slightly furrowed brow and said with very feigned interest, *“Yeah, maybe so...”* I walked away feeling like this lunch had been a success of some sort, but I wasn't quite sure why. She had just told me that there was a new man in her life, but she also said she would see me again. The truth is I didn't want to accept the reality of the situation. She was not interested in me at all romantically or sexually, but my ego refused to deal with that fact. I drove back home, replaying everything that was said at lunch, looking for clues as to what my next move should be.

When I got home, I went straight to my bedroom to check my email. Andy walked in and asked how it went with Karen. I told him I thought it went very well, and he was happy to hear it. I told him about the conversations between Karen and me, but when I got to the part where Karen tells me she met this “really great guy,” Andy's smile turned into a disappointing frown. I continued to tell him how lunch ended with me offering to pay the bill.

*“You paid for her meal?”* Andy asked incredulously.

*“Yeah. So?”* I was baffled by his question.

*“Tim, she had just told you she had met a guy she was obviously interested in, and you paid for her food. That makes you look like a schmuck, man!”*

I was angry. *“What the hell do you mean by that? A schmuck? I invited her out. Why wouldn't I pay for lunch?”*

Andy taught me, *“Normally you would. But when a woman tells you in the middle of lunch that she’s met another guy, that’s a clear message that she’s not interested in you. You should have split the tab.”*

I was speechless. I knew Andy was right. I felt like a complete fool. I stared at him as if I was asking for forgiveness. But it was more about asking for help. How could I fix it? Why was I such a schmuck? Andy said he had to go to work and told me not to sweat it too much. *“You learn, man. Just be aware of what’s going on,”* were his final words on the subject.

I tried to continue to live in the real world and decided to attempt another get-together with Karen despite my schmuckness. I tried to think of another excuse to call her again. I waited several weeks to avoid being perceived as a stalker, hoping that she would eventually find the time to get together. As I drove around L.A. going to classes, taking workshops, dropping off headshots, and other pavement-pounding chores, I thought about Karen and how wonderful it would be to have her with me sharing my days and nights. I was romanticizing and idealizing yet another unavailable woman, and every song on the radio would make me think of her. I was still 16 years old. As the fall approached, so did Halloween. I thought it would be fun to invite Karen to go to one of the many haunted houses that would be soliciting visitors who wanted to have a good scare to celebrate the night. I got online and started doing my research. There were quite a few choices both in L.A. as well as the surrounding suburbs. Once I found one that got good reviews from the previous year, I called Karen during an early mid-week evening to see if she’d like to go trick-or-treating with me. I got her voicemail and left a message simply asking her to call me.

The next morning around 11 she called me back. I woke up to the sound of my cell phone ringing and Karen’s name on my Caller ID and rolled out of bed managing to barely stand up. I had to get my bearings aligned if I wanted to have an intelligent conversation with her. After I cleared the phlegm out of my throat, I answered. We chatted for about twenty minutes, and once again I kept putting off asking her the Big Question. Just as I finally got around to telling her about *“this haunted house I read about,”* she interrupted with, *“I’m sorry – I really need to go. I’ll talk to you later.”* Before I could even say ‘okay’, she had hung up. I stood there feeling like a complete idiot in my pajamas. I didn’t know whether to scream or go back to bed. So I moped for a while and then lied down and stared at the ceiling, replaying the entire conversation over in my head. I finally got up for good about a half hour later and went to the bathroom to piss and sob.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Goodbye, Old Friend**

As the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays approached, there was another major change looming on the horizon: Andy would be moving back east. After nearly twelve years in Los Angeles, he had decided that it was time for him to go home, be with his family, and re-group. The break-up he had recently suffered had also taken its toll on him, and he just didn’t want to live in that familiar apartment anymore. I, of course, didn’t want Andy to leave. I enjoyed having him as a roommate, and he was a great source of support both personally and professionally. But I knew he wasn’t happy living here. He needed to get out and start over. He began making phone calls to his old agency in North Carolina as well as friends and colleagues to let them know he was coming back. He gave me a 6-month notice which also allowed him some leeway if he started booking a lot of

acting work during that time. We talked about the pros and cons of his decision, but his mind was made up. He would hit the road in March 2006. For the next few months, Andy continued to audition but eventually told his agent that he was leaving for good. Neither one of us flew back east for Christmas in 2005, so Andy spent the day visiting all his L.A. friends to begin saying goodbye. I sat in the apartment alone, but my parents had sent me a nice Christmas box of presents to open. Andy still worked at a restaurant, so he had to go in on December 26. The only thing I had coming up was a DJ gig on New Year's Eve which would be one of the most forgettable evenings of my life (a thankless job at the Hollywood American Legion for a bunch of very nasty senior citizens who didn't have a kind word to say to me all night). But at least it was a paycheck. Once 2006 began, I knew that I had to find a regular, full-time job. The DJ work had been nearly impossible to find anyway, and now we had entered the slow season.

In early February, I got an email from Karen inviting me to come see a show that she was in. It was a series of comedic one-act sketches all having to do with Valentine's Day, and there were only going to be two performances. She was in a few of the sketches, and she also directed one. I told Andy about it and asked him if he'd like to go. I could introduce him to her and he could get a read on what she was like. He made arrangements to get off work that night so we could go together. I had been interning at an agency once a week in Hollywood for about a month as a way to get my foot in the door, and Karen's play happened to fall on the day of the week that I interned. So once my shift was over, I headed back to the Valley so Andy and I could go to the show. I was as nervous on this night as I was the day I met Karen for lunch a few months earlier. Not only was I going to see Karen onstage, but I was going to introduce her to my best friend. She would be the only love interest I had ever introduced to him before or since. The show was held in a small theater in North Hollywood that held about 50 people, and most of the audience was friends of the cast. Some of the sketches were amusing and others were not. But it was what happened after the show that mattered. As soon as the cast came back out to meet and greet, Andy and I walked over to Karen who had a group of people surrounding her. Once she saw me, she gave me another friendly hug, and I introduced her to Andy. He congratulated her on the show, and they chatted for a few seconds before I jumped in. Because there were other people waiting to talk to her, I only had her attention for a few minutes. So I walked around and attempted to talk to other people. I actually wound up talking with another, very attractive young girl about the show who happened to be a friend of Karen's. I told her how Karen and I met, and we also talked about our L.A. experiences. Like all events of this nature, she eventually drifted away from me, and I proceeded to chow down on some of the refreshments that had been donated by various patrons. Andy talked to a few other people as well, and then things started to break up. Not surprisingly, I hung around too long waiting for Karen to leave as well. I foolishly thought we would have one last big goodbye before Andy and I left. So I finally walked over to Karen and said good night. But that wasn't enough. I practically shadowed her all the way to the lobby while Andy looked at me and said, "Let's go!" He didn't want me to overstay my welcome any longer. In the car on the way home, he told me we should have left earlier so it would not have looked like I was waiting for Karen like a puppy dog.

When Andy and I got home, I was on needles and pins waiting to hear what he had to say. First he told me that he thought the show was terrible, and the sketches weren't funny. He had seen so many of these kinds of do-it-yourself productions during his time in L.A., and most of them just weren't any good. Then we started talking about Karen. He told me under no uncertain terms that based on his observations of both me and Karen that night, she was absolutely not interested in me. He said her body language and indifference while talking to me after the show convinced him. I argued that she was talking to so many people, how could she show interest in me? Andy said that if I wanted to keep chasing after a fantasy, go right ahead. But he was sure that she had no interest in me and that I should forget about her. He wasn't telling me this to be cruel. He wanted me to face reality and get on with my life and not be miserable anymore. He asked me, "*Are you done?*" - a question that

would enter the lexicon of my friends' vocabulary in the coming years when they were trying to get me to face reality about a hopeless situation. I wouldn't hear of it, and Andy finally got up and left the room. The next day when we got up, I had that familiar empty feeling in my chest, knowing full well that Andy was 100% correct in his analysis of the night before. I told him that seeing her again for the first time in several months brought all my desires for her back. He said that I needed to move on and try to put it behind me. We also talked about his ongoing heartache regarding his break-up. He was still in pain over that, so we continued to commiserate with each other. It was like a two-person support group every day.

In addition to my constant worrying and obsessing over Karen, I was now faced with the task of finding another roommate to replace Andy. I didn't want to move, because I loved the apartment too much and it was a very good deal rent-wise. So I started running ads on Craigslist for potential roommates. I was also dealing with the reality that my best friend was moving 3000 miles away, and I was going to have a complete stranger replacing him. As each day drew closer to Andy's departure, I began to feel a sense of dread. I wanted to be with Karen more than ever now. I wanted to tell her how sad I was that I was losing my best friend. But because I had not been in contact with her for a few months, it would have been weird to call her up out of the blue and tell her my problems. So I focused trying to find work and helping Andy get ready to move.

A couple of weeks before he left, one of his friends threw him a big going away party. It was at a Greek restaurant in Hollywood, and most all of Andy's friends, colleagues, acting buddies, and even ex-lovers attended. I was amazed at how many people were there. It's hard enough making friends once you pass the age of 40, but Andy had more friends in that restaurant that night than I've ever made in my entire life. People loved him, and it showed. On the afternoon that Andy was getting ready to leave L.A., I had a callback to be one of the tour guides at Universal Studios' theme park. It was bad timing. I wanted to help Andy get his things out of the apartment, but I had to be at this location to see if I was going to get hired. While Andy and another good friend of his was loading the U-Haul trailer with all his belongings that he decided to take with him, I was with a bunch of 20-somethings in a hotel doing an improvised sketch about the Academy Awards to show the employers at the Universal Studios Tour that I could 'work well with people.' As soon as this dog and pony show was over, I drove back home to help Andy continue loading his truck. But they were done. He wasn't upset with me, because he knew the callback was important. But I just wished I could have been a part of what I know was a very difficult afternoon for him. Andy's friend, who had also been his roommate back in New York for a few years and was now a very successful actor in L.A., invited Andy and me to have dinner with him and his wife. We decided to go to the restaurant where Andy had worked for five years, as it was within walking distance of our apartment. Andy was anxious to hit the road; he didn't want to spend another night in L.A. So we all planned to meet up at the restaurant around 7pm.

That night was one of the hardest I've ever had to get through. I was still lovesick over Karen. My best friend was leaving Los Angeles for good. I had no job, no other friends to speak of, and no potential acting gigs. I was going to have to welcome a total stranger into the apartment later that night – a guy whom I found on Craigslist who was coming in from Florida having only seen the bedroom in pictures I emailed to him. While Andy was still making his goodbye rounds, I headed over to the restaurant where Andy's friend and his friend's wife were already seated and waiting. The one thing that stands out in my mind about my walk over to the restaurant was a billboard on Ventura Blvd. It was an ad for the Spike Lee movie *Inside Man*, with the faces of its stars Denzel Washington, Jodie Foster, and Clive Owen looking intense. I remember how heavy my heart was that night - knowing my best friend was leaving, and knowing Karen wasn't in my life – but something about that poster caught my eye. It was a portrait of success and a worry-free life. Seeing those three actors, hell – movie stars – on that billboard, represented what I considered to be the ideal life. All three of them were doing what they

loved and getting paid big money to do it. All three of them were (at the time) in loving, successful romantic relationships. They were in a whole other world, or so it seemed to me. Their hearts weren't breaking that night.

After a wonderful dinner with Andy and his friends, I took a few pictures of us standing in front of the restaurant. Then all four of us walked back to the alley where Andy's car and trailer were waiting for him. Andy took each of us aside separately to tell us goodbye. He spoke with his friend and wife first, and when they were done, they waved goodbye to Andy and me and headed back home. Now, it was just the two of us standing in that back alley behind our apartment complex where he had welcomed me seven months earlier.

*"Hey, man," he said with a quiver in his voice. "I just wanted to let you know that you saved my life by being here, helping me deal with the break-up and other things."*

*"Well, you've saved my life more than once in the past, so I didn't mind returning the favor."* I was on the verge of tears myself.

Andy continued.

*"You take good care, and don't worry too much about Karen. It'll work itself out. Try to meet other women and focus on the acting."*

*"I'll try. It's just really difficult right now."*

I then took a few goofy pictures of us together in the alley. Both of us looked like we could use a good night's sleep. After we hugged each other one last time, I watched Andy walk down the badly-paved alley and get in his car. I stood there and watched until he got to the end and turned left to head for the freeway. I don't think I had ever felt more alone in my life.

I immediately went back up to the apartment and began moving stuff around to get ready for my new roommate's arrival. I would be moving into the master bedroom, and he would take my old bedroom. I finished hauling furniture just in the nick of time as the new guy showed up about 11:30 that night. He was much younger than me, but we got along fine. He would only stay there until July of that year as he just had too much stuff and needed a bigger space in which to live. Plus, he was apparently a hit with the ladies and needed his own apartment to take care of business. I don't blame him and good for him. My next roommate would be even younger – 22 – but he would stay for a year.

I eventually got a part-time job working for an advertising agency that I had seen posted on Craigslist. It was also less than a mile from where I lived, so it was very convenient. My thoughts of Karen were always with me even as I was learning the ropes at my new job. And when I started booking more DJ gigs, I would always think of her on the late-night drives home. I emailed her every once in a while, and we also spoke on the phone occasionally. But I still couldn't take that big step of asking her out on a proper date. Again, I didn't want to ruin the fantasy. But we seemed to be getting along well as acting colleagues. I was okay with that, but I was still in love with her. Whenever she got new headshots, she would email the file to me so I could look them over. Each new session was better than the last, and she was slowly looking more mature and less like a teenager. This was a good thing for her, but it only made me want her more.

Over the next few months, I backed off from calling Karen as I needed to give it a rest. However, I did continue to look at her MySpace page from time to time as a way of having some kind of connection with her. As long as her relationship status said “single,” I thought I still had a chance with her. It was a stupid notion, to be sure. A website is no accurate representation of a person’s life, and as the world has now learned, lives can be destroyed by social networking when it’s used to affirm one’s validity as a human being. My extreme lack of any self-esteem made me so dependent on Karen’s site that my happiness waxed and waned as a result of what I saw. Ultimately, though, I would have to see her in the flesh again in order to see things as they really were. As Christmas approached, I saw visions of romantic miracles happening just as I did 16 years earlier with Becca. Even though I’m an atheist, the Christmas holidays still bring out a little of the kid in me, although that becomes less and less true as each year passes. I hoped this year would be different, i.e. I would win Karen’s heart despite all the evidence to the contrary.

It’s an unwritten rule that when you’re an actor and you have an agent, you are expected to let your agent know how appreciative you are of his or her services when the holidays roll around. It doesn’t matter if you’re Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or agnostic; you had better spend a nice chunk of change on some kind of gift to bring through their door during this time of year. Anything from a nice bottle of wine to some decadent dessert to a homemade delicacy is always appreciated. But I’ve always believed that the best gifts are the ones that come from your own hands and mind, not Hallmark. Being the music lover that I am, I enjoy burning compilation CD’s for friends and family with personally made covers and artwork to insert into the CD case. So I decided to do double duty this year and pick up a nice Christmas food basket and also burn a CD to stick into it to give to my then-commercial agent. Because Karen was still working as an intern there, I wanted to impress her with my knowledge of a musical landscape of songs that both she and the other girls working in that office would appreciate. I picked up a very nice holiday basket of nuts, chocolates, and other assorted goodies from a shop in Encino in mid-December. I also burned a CD with an assortment of Motown, oldies, and a few esoteric musical artists that I hoped would interest Karen enough to want to hear more or at least ask me about them. The CD cover I made was a photo of me as an 11-year-old juxtaposed next to my headshot so my agent would see my face(s) every time she picked up the CD to play it (hopefully). This kind of silly gimmickry is very common among actors trying to get their names out there. (Karen even showed me a clever creation of hers where she had converted bottles of Snapple Iced Tea so the logo was her name and her headshot was imprinted on the label. She told me she had dropped a bottle off at quite a few casting directors’ doors).

Now that I was bearing gifts, I called my agent’s office one afternoon and asked to speak with Karen. Since this had more to do with the business side of things, I wasn’t quite as nervous as I would have been if calling her at home, but I was still apprehensive considering the last phone call I had with her ended with me jabbering about a haunted house. When she answered, all was seemingly good as we got on fine. I told her I had some special treats to bring down to the office and wanted to know the best day to bring them in. She said Friday was always a safe bet, and with the holidays approaching the following week, things would be shutting down soon anyway. So I made plans to head down to Melrose Avenue that Friday where my agent’s office was located. As important as it was for me to see and talk up my agent, I was more concerned with seeing Karen. How would I behave? Should I invite her to go out with me again, or should I just keep everything strictly business? And whatever happened to that “great guy” she met?

I drove down to my agent’s office around 3 that afternoon and found a good parking spot just around the corner. Knowing that Karen was in the building made me feel like jelly. It was an all-too familiar sensation going back to when I was a sophomore in high school - the fear, the pounding heart, the lack of confidence, as well as the inability to not care so damn much. I walked into the building’s old and barren lobby and got on the

elevator. The office was on the second floor, so it was a quick ride up. Once the elevator doors opened, I took a deep breath and walked a few steps down the hall to my agent's door. I knocked and walked in, and I immediately saw Karen come out of one of the offices.

*"HEYYYY!"* she exclaimed when she saw me. I put down the basket on a table, and another friendly hug ensued between the two of us. Touching her again made me feel warmer than I had felt in months, and it was clear to me that my feelings for her were still very much intact. I pulled the CD out of the basket and showed it to her. She thought the cover was clever and immediately opened the case and took out the CD. Within seconds, she had it blasting out of the stereo in the office, the first song being the Fontella Bass classic "Rescue Me". I said hello to my agent and wished her Happy Holidays. My agent and I had a rather odd chemistry; despite my geniality toward her, I always got a sense of detachment on her part, as if she would rather be talking to someone else or simply be left alone. But her assistant was always very nice to me and was the one who sent me out on auditions anyway. After exchanging niceties with her, I turned my attention back to Karen. We talked about a lot of things, but I didn't want to overstay my welcome. Karen suggested we go outside where we could talk a bit more and maybe even gossip a bit. We walked downstairs and stood outside the lobby on the sidewalk. I told her that I was flying back home for Christmas and would return before New Year's Eve as I had booked a DJ gig for that night. While I was standing there, I felt that invisible wall dividing us - The Wall of Sex and Romance. I wanted to break through it and tell her how much I wanted to go out with her and be her boyfriend and lover. But I knew to say such a thing would have meant doom for me and sheer embarrassment for her. I felt helpless knowing that my feelings were one-sided and there was nothing I could do about it. The future pain I would have saved myself by simply growing a pair and flirting a little and maybe even teasing her about anything would have been immeasurable. I would have found out right then and there whether or not I had any chance with her. I imagine it could have gone like this:

*"So Karen, whatever happened to that comedian you met? Did you ever beat him up?"*

*"Oh, he turned out to be a loser."*

*"Hmm. Too bad. Maybe you punched him too hard (wink). Anyway, when I get back from the east coast, would you like to go out sometime? I've wanted to ask you for quite a while, but you're a tough girl to get hold of."*

Who knows? Maybe she would have appreciated my directness and said 'sure' or maybe it would have shocked her and even amused her. I might have wound up with egg on my face, but at least I would have taken the chance. But instead, I played it safe. I didn't want to destroy the fantasy. If she had said 'no' and meant it, telling me she only wanted to be friends, then I would have nothing more to hope for. All my dreams and sexual desires for her would have to die, and I wasn't ready for that to happen. I had invested too much in it to let it go with a simple question. I didn't want my Christmas to be ruined. So after she ended the conversation (again) by telling me she had to get back upstairs, I told her I'd call her when I got back (to which she didn't respond). I walked away feeling like I at least didn't make a fool of myself, but I knew that I hadn't really accomplished anything.

## **PART FIVE**

### **How To Date Like A Pro!**

By the time 2006 rolled around, a website called Youtube was starting to gain notice all over the world. I don't remember how I first discovered this treasure trove of video oddities, but over the past five years, practically anything that was ever put on videotape or film in the last fifty years, from TV shows to musical performances to home movies, is available for the asking. In the early days, the choices were minimal, but one night I started typing in words like 'dating advice', 'how to score with women', etc. in the search box. There wasn't much from which to choose, but through a series of links, I stumbled upon a website called [doubleyourdating.com](http://doubleyourdating.com). It was run by a so-called dating guru named David DeAngelo, and I was fascinated by his approach to picking up women. His course was not about how to have a long-term relationship, but rather how to be a pick-up artist. He made few free downloads available that would whet the listener's appetite in the hopes that he would spend hundreds of dollars on the complete course. As I was desperate to learn the secrets of winning a woman's heart and body, I downloaded these files and began to listen. I also ordered a collection of CD's that were recorded lectures Mr. DeAngelo had given to groups of horny, lonely, young men. I sat in my living room playing the CD's on my stereo, taking mental notes and hoping I could learn something that would alter and improve my attempts at winning Karen. I was convinced that this guy had all the answers, and that he was explaining the 'right' way to approach women. Since I knew I had been doing it all the wrong ways since I was 16, I had nowhere to go but up.

I remember telling Andy about these CD's, and he thought they were silly. He had never needed any coaching in his life, because women just naturally gravitated toward him. (In fact, once he got back to the east coast, he almost immediately started dating a 24-year-old blond knockout. They dated for over two years, and their 22-year age difference was never an issue). But ultimately, these CD's never did anything for me. In order for me to put the advice into practice, I would have had to basically become an asshole. This guy was "teaching" vulnerable men how to bullshit and deceive women, all for the goal of bedding as many of them as possible. It was known as Pick-Up Artistry or PUA. I just couldn't imagine myself saying some of the things to women that were on these CD's. On the other hand, "being myself" as so many people had suggested to me over the years had never gotten me anywhere. So while I don't endorse the philosophy behind [doubleyourdating.com](http://doubleyourdating.com), I can see why sometimes a radical approach is sometimes necessary. DeAngelo's course is one of many available these days.

Today, there are hundreds of videos on Youtube offering advice for would-be lovers, ranging from sensible to ridiculous. I still occasionally watch them, but ultimately it's about taking some kind action if I want to achieve results. In 2006, when I still had hopes for Karen and me, I kept doing the same things – waiting, hoping, spending hours in front of my computer composing emails to her, and talking to Andy about her every week. But one night, an email from her prompted me to take an action that would ultimately bring every hope I had about her crashing down. And then I would find a way to make it crash down even further.

I had emailed Karen one lonely evening about something – I can't remember what – and she wrote back telling me how miserable she was. She wasn't getting any auditions, things were slow, and she didn't know quite what to do. She actually offered to buy me a drink so we could talk about it. She asked me to call her and we would meet up somewhere. After months of not hearing from her, I thought I'd been given a new lease on life (and love). Without appearing too anxious, I told her that her suggestion sounded good, and that I'd call her soon. It

didn't take long. The following Saturday night I went to a SAG screening of a mediocre movie called *Breaking and Entering*, the final film directed by Anthony Minghella. After the movie was over, I decided to call Karen and take her up on her offer. I had visions of the two of us meeting at a club or restaurant, getting a little drunk, and her inviting me back to her apartment where we would make love all night. Sitting in my car somewhere in Hollywood, I dialed her number and she answered. I told her where I was and asked her if she'd like to meet at a comedy club. It was about 8pm, and she said that she was with a friend in West Hollywood, but she would see me there in a little while. I hung up and my heart started racing. The comedy club where we were meeting was one of the places where I was taking classes that year. It had become an unofficial hangout for me when I wasn't working as a DJ on Saturday nights, and it gave me a chance to be with people. Unfortunately, most of these people were in their 20's, so I never really found my groove there. But on this particular night, it would be fine.

I arrived at the club and immediately went to the bathroom to fix myself up. I combed what little hair I had and made sure my clothes didn't look like they had just been pulled out of the dryer. To appear like I was a part of the scene, I went over to the bar and ordered a Dos Equis beer. Even though I don't like beer, I had tried this brand before and found it tolerable for a few sips. Instead of mingling with other people, I stood there like I was waiting for a bus. I was nervous and anxious about seeing Karen again, and I was also wondering who this friend was that she mentioned when I called her earlier. Was it a male or female? I kept telling myself that it was probably one of Karen's many girlfriends who partied with her. As I stared at the lime poking out of my Dos Equis bottle, I heard the door to the club open. I saw Karen, seemingly by herself, and for half a second I breathed a sigh of relief. But then I saw that she was accompanied by her friend – and it wasn't a female.

Karen walked over to me and said her familiar “*HEYYYY!*” along with her famous friendly hug. But standing right behind her was a guy that looked like he had never smiled in his life. He was probably about 5'9" with dark hair and an intense gaze. I knew immediately what the situation was, but in my disarray of emotions, I tried to tell myself that he was probably gay or that he was a blood relative. She introduced me to him and then asked me how I'd been. I shook his hand, and he seemed like a decent enough fellow. He was in his early thirties and bore a slight resemblance to the actor Eric Dane from the TV show *Private Practice*. Still hoping he wasn't straight, I began a conversation with the two of them, but mostly with Karen. I asked them if they wanted to see a couple of comedy shows that were about to start, and they said that sounded fun. We went upstairs to get a seat, and Karen sat between me and Eric (as he will henceforth be called). Karen and I chatted about what we'd been up to, and I realized very quickly that I still had feelings for her. Eric wasn't very talkative, but I knew it was because he would be with her after they left the club, and he had nothing to prove. In fact, at one point he went downstairs leaving Karen and me alone to continue our conversation. I was praying that he was trying to pick up someone for later. As we sat there talking about everything from Halloween to MySpace, Karen finally said what I feared.

*“Eric and I used to go out.”*

*“How long ago?”* I asked. I just had to know where I was and what I was doing while they were sleeping together.

*“Mmm...a couple of months,”* she replied, without going into any more detail. And I didn't want to know. Well, actually I did. But I figured it would sound creepy if I started asking too many questions. Eric came back upstairs as the show was starting. There were still a few empty seats, so after he sat down a few feet away from Karen and me, Karen went over and sat next to him. I felt abandoned and heartbroken; not because she sat next

to him, but because my little fantasy about us going back to her apartment or some such nonsense wasn't going to happen on this night or any other night. It was like being in middle school again, seeing the girl I wanted sitting with the jock. And then it got even worse. There was a comedy duo onstage talking to the audience about why all of us were really there at the club that night. They said it was "*so you could all get picked up and get laid!*" They even suggested that maybe some of us had already gotten lucky before we came to the club. With that comment, I looked over at Karen and Eric just in time to see them give each other big smiles and then put their arms around each other. It was clear who had already been in her (or his) apartment that night. I sat there trying to enjoy the show, but it was no use. I couldn't hear a damn thing coming off the stage. All I could do was picture Karen making love with Mr. *Private Practice*. And this was a guy she *used* to go out with. They were now apparently friends with benefits but not exclusively in a relationship anymore. I wondered what that must be like, how wonderful it must feel to have an attractive woman to hold at night and roll around with naked. A primitive thought, to be sure, but it's all I had. After the shows came to an end, Eric excused himself and went back downstairs. I sat there with Karen trying to carry on a conversation but wanting to tell her how much it was all killing me. So I did the next stupidest thing. I asked her if she had ever heard of a restaurant called Zak's. I told her it was an Italian place in Studio City. Almost immediately the air changed. I could feel it like someone had dumped ice on me. She hesitantly told me that she wasn't familiar with it. I started to suggest we go there sometime, but before I could finish my sentence, Karen politely said, "*You know, I think I'm going to go downstairs now.*"

It was over. We both went downstairs, and I paid a second visit to the bathroom where, thankfully, there were no razor blades in sight. When I came out, Karen and Eric were standing there, ready to leave. I asked her where she was parked. As it turned out, they were parked right on the way to my car, so I told them I would walk with them. I was not going to remain at the comedy club alone. We got to Karen's car, and Eric got into the passenger seat. I noticed an overnight bag of clothes in the back seat, or at least that's what I told myself it was. I was sure she would be staying at his place that night, and she had come prepared. I told Eric it was nice to meet him, and he said likewise. I told Karen it was good to see her again. She got in the driver's seat – how appropriate – and I watched them drive away. I walked back to my car which was parked far away from any sounds of the night. I couldn't hear anything except the words, "*Eric and I used to go out.*" In other words, they were making love while I was looking at her MySpace page and the word "single" next to her 'Relationship Status' profile.

When I got home, I wanted to vomit. Or cry. Or vomit and cry. I was in such a daze over how the evening unfolded that I didn't know what I was feeling. But it was a familiar one just the same. It's amazing how a pattern can repeat itself over a period of many years despite efforts to change it. The pattern of thinking about Karen sleeping with this guy Eric was in full force. Now I actually had a face to put on Karen's lover. He was a real person. Like all the women over whom I obsessed in the past, I tried to imagine what it must be like to be the guy Karen wanted to fuck. To be the object of her affection. These thoughts drove me to take even further action that would only put another nail in my emotional coffin.

I remembered Karen had told me that she and Eric used to go out. Despite all evidence to the contrary, I wanted to believe that she was sending me a subliminal message that she was now available. My mind was playing cruel tricks on me; I just didn't want to let go of any perceived hope. So a few days later, I called her again. This time I was going to officially ask her out and make it clear that I wanted to see her again, but not so we could talk about auditions. I dialed her number and she picked up. She sounded happy to hear from me but asked if she could call me back, as she was on the other line. I told her yes and waited with my head in my hands. A few minutes later, she called back. I don't remember what was said at the outset, but I do remember

talking about the previous Saturday night. I told her it was really great to see her, and that her friend Eric seemed cool, but now I wanted to take her out - just the two of us. I wasn't demanding; I just told her that I really liked her. I mentioned the restaurant Zak's again, but I told her it didn't really matter where we went. As if she were handling the most delicate crystal china in the world, she said something along the lines of

*"I...don't really think I'm in a good place to do that right now. I'm just going to cool it for a while and not date. It's weird. I'm not sure what's going on. But listen, it was great to see you, and I hope you start getting some good auditions."*

The realization that she simply wasn't interested in me was too much for me to accept. The fantasy about her had become my lifeline, and I didn't want to let go. So I took things a step further and committed virtual suicide on the phone. A few months earlier, Karen had sent an email to all her friends (including me) letting us know that she had moved into a new apartment. She didn't tell us where, but she wanted to let us know she loved it. This email popped into my mind as I struggled to hang onto Karen that night.

*"Well, listen, before you go, you mentioned in an email that you recently moved. Let me get your new address!"* I beseeched her.

I was desperate to maintain a connection with her even if it was by simply knowing where she lived. As I sputtered through my request, I scrambled from one end of my bedroom to another to try and find a pen. I was so sure she would give me her new address that I was going to write it down. But before I could find a writing instrument, Karen slowly said

*"Why do you want to know my address? You're not going to send me flowers, are you?"* She asked this, not with the playfulness in her voice that I usually heard, but with a grave concern about what my future actions might be.

*"Not yet!"* I replied, trying to keep my good humor up while also trying to flirt. But I was way beyond any hope of that. *"No, seriously,"* I continued. *"I just like to have all my friends' addresses on file so I can mail them notices or fliers about any plays I might be in."*

But she wasn't buying it.

*"Well, if you have something you really need to mail me, let me know by email, and I'll see about a way to get it,"* she said with absolute assurance.

*"Okay. I'll talk to you soon. Stay in touch."*

And those were the last words I ever spoke to her. I hung up and literally felt like I was going to die. I immediately called Andy and told him what had just transpired over the phone with Karen, and all he could do was feel bad for me. He didn't think that calling her and asking her out was a bad thing. But he couldn't understand why the hell I would ask her where she lived right after she told me she wasn't interested in going out with me. I explained my reasons, but he wasn't buying it either. And I don't blame him. He knew exactly why I asked her for her new address. He knew I was doing anything to maintain a connection with her. I felt like I had just committed a kind of rape. I felt like the worst fuck-up in the world, but I also knew I had alienated another girl who was perfectly happy to be my friend and colleague just a few nights earlier. All I

wanted to do at that point was go back in time and *not* ask her for her address. It was like a nightmare from which there was no awakening.

The next few days were agony. I still felt like I had to fix it somehow. What was I to do? I called Peter and left him endless messages on his voicemail about what had happened. He told me to let it go. Do not call her again. Do not email her. And most importantly, do not apologize. He felt it would only make things worse by reminding her of my indiscretion. But nothing anyone could say could stop my hurting inside. I remember pacing the floor for three straight hours (no exaggeration) one afternoon, replaying it over and over again and also talking to myself about what she might have thought, what she was thinking now, what it might have meant to her, and on and on and on. I tried to convince myself that it wasn't as bad as I thought, and that maybe she had even forgotten about it by now. But it wasn't enough. I had to do what my gut told me to do. So one night I composed an email to send to Karen to let her know that it wasn't my intention to pry into her private life by asking her for her address on the phone. I mentioned this as an afterthought in the email following a few other paragraphs about unrelated topics. I kept it casual and low-key, and I re-wrote it many times before I hit the 'send' button. I hoped that she would respond with something like "*no biggie – don't sweat it*", or something like that. But as each day passed, there was no response. Every day when I checked my email, I hoped I would get some kind of redemption from Karen telling me that we were okay. But it never came.

At the fervent urging of Peter, who had been through his own share of heartache over women, I had decided to get back on an antidepressant to help me get through this difficult period after my indiscretion with Karen on the phone. My life was in pieces in the fall of 2006, and I wanted 2007 to be a fresh start. Peter strongly suggested the drug Lexapro as it had worked for him and was the latest rage in the world of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. I started a regimen of the drug, and it started to bring me back up to speed. No contact with Karen also helped. A couple of years later, I happen to see some videos that Karen had posted on Youtube. I had seen the links on her personal website which I occasionally looked at out of curiosity. They were videos of her doing stand-up comedy in some club as part of a class she was taking. In her routine, she spoke about an old boyfriend with whom she used to have sex in the shower. I found her material to be amusing, and her delivery was good. But what struck me was how little I cared about her revelations. I imagine that her stories of sex in the shower were based on real events and probably with Eric (although she never mentioned him by name in the video). Enough time had passed that I was no longer concerned about going out with her or whom she was dating. I never thought I'd get over her, but I never thought I'd get over any of the previous women either. I haven't seen or spoken to Karen since 2006, but I know as of this writing that she still resides in L.A. I don't know her address, and I won't be asking for it if I ever do see her again.

# **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

## **PART ONE**

### **Let Sleeping Cats Lie**

For the next two years, I was free of any girl's tender traps. I continued to take classes, do workshops, and just tried to get on with my life. The Lexapro seemed to help me get over Karen, and I discovered after a few months that I was no longer checking her MySpace page or talking to Andy about her. That nightmare had run its course, but it taught me nothing. I even asked a few other women out whom I met in class or at readings but got the usual excuses or no reply at all. I chalked it up to my belief that women simply were not attracted to me physically or romantically. It was the same thing I had been dealing with since I was 16 years old. I just shrugged my shoulders and acknowledged that at least I gave it a shot.

Peter encouraged me to give online dating a try. He had met several women on Match.com while living in New York and had pretty good success at it. So one night just for kicks, I put together what I thought was a funny, friendly, and even slightly self-deprecating personal ad for Match.com accompanied by my recent headshot. I decided to not take myself seriously or brag about the size of my... wallet or car like I had seen in other guys' ads on the site. I paid for a six-month subscription with two free months tacked on as part of a special deal. I sent it to Andy, Peter, and Tina - a cute, spunky girl who had been a platonic friend of Andy's when he lived in L.A. and who occasionally got together with me to hang out and get coffee. They all agreed that it was a good representation of who I was as well as my sense of humor. Once it was up and running, I checked it regularly for responses. I also answered women's profiles with my own hoping that I would find a match or two. During the initial six months, I received two responses. The first was an email blast from some Russian bride service. The second one was from a woman (or her pimp) who looked like soul singer Gloria Gaynor circa 1977. Both of these responses were spam or fakes as they looked ridiculous and neither one of them addressed my profile specifically. After my subscription expired, I tried Plentyoffish.com which was a free dating site. I posted what was essentially the same ad with a few new pictures thrown in. I was on that site for nearly a year. Again, no responses. I was done with online dating.

In the fall of 2008, I auditioned for a play that was going to be performed at the Odyssey Theater in Los Angeles. This was a very prestigious theater in which to work, and even though the play was a guest production (as opposed to being produced by the Odyssey Theater itself), I still wanted to be a part of it. Ironically, I read for the role of a cuckolded husband, but it was a nice role with some funny lines. After the initial audition, I got a call from the director offering me the part. No callbacks, he told me. He was sure I was the right guy for the role. I accepted. We started rehearsals just before Thanksgiving, and I was super excited to be in a play again, my first one in L.A. I still had my part-time job working for the advertising agency, and they were very supportive working around my schedule. I felt like I had a purpose again, and along with the DJ work, I was very busy. I felt good about myself, and I had no infatuations or obsessions with any women.

One night after work, I was walking past the swimming pool outside my apartment complex. I glanced over at the chaise lounges that sat at one end of the pool, and I noticed a beautiful cat sleeping on one of them. Being the animal lover that I am, I approached the kitty to say 'hello' and see if it was friendly. Since no pets were allowed in my apartments, I knew that it had probably wandered over from a neighboring complex or that it was a stray. Opening the gate to the pool area, I slowly walked toward the cat and extended my hand. It leapt from the chair and skirted away to the other side of the pool. After a few minutes, it gradually slithered back toward me. I sat very still as to not startle the cat. Eventually it allowed me to pet him/her gently, but it was still checking me out carefully. After a few minutes I got up and walked away to my apartment door. Over the next few nights, I would see this Siamese mix cat sitting in his favorite chair by our pool. I would always walk over to 'chat' with it, and after a few introductions, it warmed up to me. Discovering it had made a new friend (as did I), the cat decided it wanted to take our new relationship outside the pool area. So one night it followed me back to my apartment. I opened the door to see if it wanted to come in for a few minutes, but like any self-respecting feline, the cat stared inside before entering a virtual stranger's home. When it did come in he walked around from room to room to see how high and mighty I was living. I noticed that it was not wearing a collar or nametag but seemed to be in good shape and well-groomed. But I wasn't sure. So even though it was against my better judgment, I picked up a few cans of cat food from the local CVS a few nights later. I knew that feeding him/her would keep bringing him back for more, and that it could get me in trouble with the manager if he discovered my guest. But since this always happened late at night long after the manager went to bed, I knew getting caught was unlikely. But I knew it couldn't continue indefinitely.

I took a few pictures of the cat which I had temporarily named Miss Pool (I thought 'he' was a 'she' when I first found him by the pool). I wanted to try and find a home for him as I had no idea if he had been abandoned by an owner who may have moved. I also suspected that Miss Pool might have been in heat. So I uploaded the photos and did an email blast to everyone I knew who might be interested in adopting a stray cat. After about a week, I got a phone call from a woman who told me my email had been forwarded to her from a colleague. She told me that she fostered lost animals in her home and wanted to come over and take a look at the cat. While talking with this woman, I discovered that she had lived in the Washington, DC area about twenty years earlier and was also an actress there for many years. In fact, we both had a lot of acting colleagues in common. Her name was Hannah, and I invited her over a few nights later to meet Miss Pool.

Hannah's plan was to take Miss Pool to her veterinarian, have him checked out, and also see if there was an electronic chip implanted in his neck with the owner's identification. As Hannah walked up the stairs leading to my door, I noticed that she was a very attractive woman. She had long reddish-blond hair and a trim, toned body. We shook hands and I invited her to have a seat. Miss Pool was napping by my dining table and didn't really take much notice of her. Hannah and I had an immediate chemistry. Since we had both spent many years in DC, there was plenty to talk about. She told me about her acting history there as well as her reasons for moving to L.A. (to be near her then-boyfriend who had recently relocated here). It was wonderful to meet someone who clicked with me and who also understood how tough it was to try and make a living in L.A. as an actor. She told me she had not acted in a while because she was taking care of some personal affairs. After about an hour, she approached Miss Pool in an attempt to put him into the cat-carrier. He slid into the case without a fuss, and Hannah told me she would let me know what her vet said. Before she left, I told her about the play I was doing. I invited her to see it when it opened in January 2009, and she said she'd love to come. Since we were both members of the Screen Actors Guild, I suggested we should go to one of the SAG screenings of films that were being touted for the upcoming awards season. I felt very comfortable asking her to get together, but I wasn't entertaining any ideas of dating her. Not yet anyway.

## **PART TWO**

### **The Doctor Is In (again)**

I was happy to discover that the poolside cat did indeed have an owner. Hannah's vet found an ID chip in his neck, and he turned out to belong to a guy in an apartment two buildings down from mine. Hannah contacted the owner and explained what was happening, and the owner said that his cat just liked to visit the neighbors. He was very appreciative of our efforts, and said that his cat kept removing his collar and nametag. Hannah returned the cat to his owner, and the mystery was solved.

When Hannah informed me of the good news, I asked her if she'd like to get together again. She told me she was headed back to Washington, DC for a couple of months to go through a round of auditions there for the local Equity theaters. She said she would stay in touch via email and call me when she got back. I continued to rehearse my play and didn't really think about Hannah. I was doing what I loved for the first time in a long time, so I was totally focused on that. The play opened in January to not much success. The reviews weren't good, and audience attendance was low. But I still had a good time performing, and a few of my friends found time to come see the show. Hannah got back into town during the play's run, and so I got her a comp ticket. She did attend; however, she left before it was over. She said she was so put off by the play that she left during the intermission. She later left me a message on my voicemail telling me that she loved my work as an actor, but the play was "unwatchable." I wasn't happy she left early, considering I had given her one of my comps, but there was nothing I could do about it.

A couple of days later I called Hannah and invited her to lunch. She said that sounded nice. She told me about a neat little deli/restaurant near her home that she was sure I would like. I asked her if she wanted to meet me there, and she paused on the phone.

*"Oh, I thought you might want to come by my house and pick me up," she said.*

*"Well, I think you're a little out of the way going to the restaurant, but yeah, I could do that."*

*"Actually, that's okay. I'll just meet you there. My father will have to drive me because my car is in the shop."*

She sounded a little perturbed that I wouldn't come pick her up. And she had every right. But because I didn't want to appear too anxious like I had with previous women, I wanted to keep it as casual as possible and not assume we were going on a date. That kind of thinking had always gotten me into trouble with women, so I made a firm decision not to go there this time. It was just lunch and nothing more. But we had already gotten off to an awkward start.

When I arrived at the restaurant, I saw Hannah waving at me. We gave each other polite hugs and got in line to order our food. She told me that her father had dropped her off and would be coming back later. Frankly, I was happy that he had enough discretion to not hang around. Hannah was a 44-year-old woman and did not need a chaperone. We sat at a table outside on the patio, and she told me all about her trip to DC. I found that our

chemistry was still good considering we hadn't seen each other in three months. But I was still making sure that I didn't appear too anxious to please her or desperate to see where this was going. After we finished eating about an hour later, she looked up and waved at someone behind me. Her father had returned. She introduced us and he sat down. He was a very pleasant, mild-mannered gentleman who did not appear to be rushing us in any way. All three of us continued the conversation, and I felt very comfortable in their company. Eventually, Hannah and I knew it was time to go, so I thanked her for meeting me there and told her I would call her again. I walked back toward the parking garage to retrieve my car.

Unlike my lunch with Karen a few years earlier, I wasn't a schmuck this time. We both paid for our own lunches, and Hannah didn't mention whether or not she was dating anyone. It was probably the most relaxed, pressure-free afternoon I've ever spent with a girl. I decided beforehand not to have any expectations even though I was attracted to her. And I had no idea what she was feeling at that point. A couple of weeks later I called Hannah and invited her to go to a comedy club. It was the same one where I had seen Karen and Eric together, but I knew the club very well and thought Hannah would enjoy the improv shows. She said she'd love to, and I told her I would pick her up this time. And then she asked me something that created another awkward moment.

*"So, since you're going to pick me up, should I consider this to be...like a date?"*

*"Well, I don't think we need to put a label on it. We're just two people going to a comedy club to have a good time."*

*"Okay...I'll see you when you get here."*

I didn't even want to *suggest* that this was going to be a date. Again, that kind of language and presumption had always set me up for disappointment. I wanted to keep it simple. No expectations. No labels. Just two people going out- no - I couldn't even use those words either. "Going out" suggests that it is a date, and that both people are physically attracted to one another. I had no reason to believe that Hannah had any such feelings for me. After what I had gone through with all my previous love objects, I refused to go through it again.

I arrived at Hannah's home around 7:30pm. It was a lovely house with a huge backyard deck. She and her father were in the process of remodeling, so she asked me to excuse the mess (it looked fine). I met her father again as well as her menagerie of dogs and cats that she either owned or was fostering. They were sweet creatures, and they seemed to like me. After she gave me a brief tour of her home, we got in my car and headed down to Hollywood. I explained to her that I had taken improvisation classes at the club where we were going. I had also been an intern there running lights for shows on Sunday evenings. She seemed impressed with the fact that I had some things going on in my life. When we got to the club, it was starting to get crowded as this was a Saturday night. The show we were there to see was a very popular attraction and usually sold out. We got there early enough to secure tickets. As we were standing in the lobby waiting for the doors to open, Hannah and I continued our conversation. I seem to remember that I ordered a glass of red wine to calm down, as I was starting to get those anxious feelings again, being out with a woman to whom I was attracted. I managed to keep it together and even flirt a little bit. But then Hannah burst my bubble in a way that had no previous woman had done. While we were standing there supposedly getting on very well, she said,

*"You know, Tim, I want to ask you something."*

*“Okay.”*

*“I don’t quite know how to phrase this...I don’t want to offend you with the question. So I’m not quite sure how to ask it.”*

Before she said another word, I figured out exactly where she was going. So I saved her the embarrassment and answered her question before she asked. I looked her right in the eye and said,

*“No. I’m not gay.”*

*“Okay...I wasn’t sure...”* She was clearly embarrassed anyway.

*“Why in the world would you think I’m gay?”*

Her answer stunned me. But then again, it didn’t.

*“You’re just so easy to talk to, and you actually listen to what I’m saying. I’m not used to that. Most of the guys I’ve gone out with never listen to me and they’re jerks.”*

Now I was speechless. But I spoke anyway.

*“I still don’t understand what that has to do with being gay.”*

*“Well, you’re just so nice and considerate.”*

And there it was. The original ‘N’ word. The last thing I ever wanted to be called again. But I couldn’t escape it. ‘Being myself’ as so many folks had suggested to me in the past was a recipe for disaster. And then Hannah took it a bit further.

*“When we had lunch a couple of weeks ago at the deli, I have to admit that my dad wasn’t sure either. In fact, we both watched you walk down the sidewalk toward your car to see if the way you walked would give us any clue.”*

I had no response for this. I looked away and said nothing. The lobby was filling up with more people, and my mind was filling up with disgust. I was angry, not just at Hannah, but at every woman who had ever snickered at the thought of dating me. I’m sure that my apparent sexual ambiguity was one of the reasons that women were never into me. Who knew that treating a woman with respect was considered a homosexual act?

The doors finally opened and we walked into the theater. The lights went down, and the show began. Despite her game of 20 Questions, Hannah and I both enjoyed the performance. When it was over, we walked back to my car. I wasn’t holding a grudge against her; in fact, I wanted more than ever to make it clear to her that I was *not* gay. We were both hungry, so I suggested a famous all-night diner called Cantor’s where we might grab a bite to eat. She agreed. Once we were seated in the restaurant, our conversation went in a direction that I have to admit was all my fault. Like so many times in the past, I revealed too much too soon. Instead of leaving a bit of a mystery about my life, I felt the need to ‘share’ with Hannah my insecurities, fears, and lack of experience with women. I was slowly nailing my coffin shut. At one point, I started telling her about Andy and how

successful he had been with women. I explained that it was effortless for him to get laid. I then made the mistake of telling Hannah that my past was the complete opposite.

*“Tim, are you telling me that you’re still a virgin?”*

Her question caught me off guard. I felt all my blood go to the floor.

*“NO! I’m not saying that at all! I’m just saying that my approach to women has been different than Andy’s.”*

It was a quick save on my part, but I didn’t exactly tell her the truth. I felt like someone had finally figured it out and had caught me in a lie. I quickly tried to change the subject. Fortunately, Hannah followed my lead. It did not come up again.

After our late dinner we got in my car. I didn’t start the engine right away. We just sat there. Hannah began spilling secrets about her life. Some were very personal, so I won’t reveal them here. Suffice it to say that she had a rough childhood, and her most recent experiences as an actor weren’t very good. I told her about my demon tinnitus and bouts with depression. Big mistake of course. What girl wants to know that the guy she’s on a first date with is clinically depressed? She thought it was an awful thing for anyone to go through. But there was no reason for me to tell her any of this. Once again, I thought that by being vulnerable in front of her, I would come off as ‘sensitive.’ Girls only like sensitive if you’re a Big Bad Boy wearing a wife-beater t-shirt. Although I felt like Hannah and I were getting closer, I couldn’t help but recognize old familiar patterns. Here was another attractive woman telling me all her problems. Like Amy and Fiona before her, I was her therapist. I thought that by listening and understanding, I would get laid. Alpha males and assholes pretend to listen to what women have to say all the time. Their little façade usually works because the woman feels protected by them. In my case, I come off more like a big sister or gay best friend. I don’t know why I hadn’t learned this many years earlier.

I drove Hannah home. She invited me in for a few minutes, but it was really just to let her dad know she was home. We walked back outside and stood by the road. I told her I really had a great time and reached in to give her a good-night hug. Instead of a brief, platonic embrace, we wound up holding each other for several minutes. It felt wonderful to be holding a woman in my arms like this for the first time in my life. It was clear that the feeling was mutual for her. Or so I thought. I stood there with my arms wrapped tightly around her telling her how good she felt. I didn’t know if she was waiting for me to let her go or if she was enjoying the moment, too. I asked if I could see her again, and she said yes. I finally let go of her. We didn’t kiss (I didn’t want to push my luck), but I planned for that to happen the next time.

When I got in my car to drive home, I had to remind myself to not get any hopes up. I had been down similar paths before only to discover that heartbreak awaited me. A hug from a woman did not mean that she wanted to sleep with me. A third date with a woman did not mean that she wanted to sleep with me. In fact, from past experience, no woman wanted to sleep with me under any circumstances. Why should Hannah be any different? If I let me mind race ahead of me, it could turn into an obsession so severe that I might not be able to concentrate on anything else. If Hannah was actually attracted to me sexually, it would be a brand new experience for me at the age of 47. But I would have to wait a bit longer to find out.

## PART THREE

### The Closest I've Ever Come (pun intended)

The next time Hannah and I got together, we decided to take in a movie. I can't remember the last time I went to a movie on a Friday night, especially opening weekend of a very-publicized comedy. But since Hannah and I were apparently officially dating now, I had to show her the town, so to speak. I am loathe to go to movie theaters these days, because I have yet to sit through any feature without having to deal with talking patrons, ringing cell phones, or glowing text messages that just *have* to be read or sent during the movie. So I usually wait for the DVD or go to a SAG screening where I know everyone will behave relatively civil. But this night wasn't about my pickiness surrounding the Correct Way to Watch a Movie. It was about spending more time with Hannah and getting to know her better. So we went to see *The Hangover*, a comedy that just didn't make me laugh like the rest of America. Hannah seemed to enjoy it enough, and that was fine by me. After the movie, we went to get something to eat at a neat little outdoor café. The conversation flowed freely, and the food was tasty. After I paid the bill, we headed back to her house again. We didn't talk about what we were going to do. I was hoping that the previous date's long hug would lead to something more.

It was beautiful summer night. Once we got back to Hannah's home, we walked around to the back so she could show me the huge deck that looked out onto her wooded backyard. Her cats were happy to see us, and we were paying them much attention. I could hear the crickets chirping while Hannah stood there caressing one of her cats. I moved closer toward her. I then started commenting on the dress she was wearing. I touched her waist and made a silly comment about it. I could feel the heat between us, but I still wasn't sure if it was only one-sided. I put my other arm around her waist and leaned in to kiss her. We kissed once. I then leaned in again and wrapped my arms completely around her. We kissed again, but this time we didn't stop. For the first time in my life, I was holding a woman and kissing her without her pulling away. I felt like I was in a movie playing a role. Because I had kissed women onstage in plays, I couldn't help thinking that this was a performance. Hannah was my scene partner, and she was just pretending. This is what it felt like to me. We continued to kiss as my hands explored her body. At one point I stopped and began kissing her neck and down her front. She looked down at me as I attempted to go up under her dress and asked,

*"Don't you like to kiss?"*

*"Of course, but there's so many other yummy parts of you I want to kiss."*

She asked me to stand up. She said I was moving too fast. I obliged and began kissing her mouth again. I also whispered in her ear all the things I wanted to do to her. Nothing kinky, just good old-fashioned burying my face in every orifice of her body. She responded with the words, "*Oh, my*" several times in a manner that suggested that she was okay with my wants. After a while, my pants felt like they were going to explode. I reached down and began to unbutton my button-fly jeans. I just wanted to take my cock out to give it some room to breathe. I also hoped that she would relieve me of 47 years of sexual tension. Once I got it out, Hannah looked down and touched it gently. There was something holding her back from committing 100%. I lay down on the long bench that ran along the length of the deck.

*“Would you give me a blowjob? I’ll return the favor tenfold.”*

She stared down at me.

*“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea.”*

*“Why?”*

*“Well, we haven’t even really held hands yet in public, and now you want me to go down on you.”*

I stared up at her.

*“Oh, I’m more than happy to hold your hand whenever you want.”*

I then realized she wasn’t going to take me up on my mutual oral sex offer. I sat back up. For the next half hour or so we talked, caressed each other, and talked about having sex. She informed me that she was on her period that night, so sex wouldn’t be advisable. I agreed with her. But my manhood wanted to be relieved so I could at least go home without having to jerk off in the car. So I lay down on the floor of her deck and told her that I was going to take care of it myself. She had no problems with this. While I was lying there looking up at her, she began rubbing my chest and kissing my neck. It didn’t take long for me to explode all over myself. After I was done, Hannah got up to get some rags so I could wipe myself down. Once that task was complete, she crawled on top of me and said, *“Is there any doubt in your mind now that I’m attracted to you?”*

I had never heard these words or even anything remotely similar from any woman. It actually made me feel a bit uncomfortable. I was so used to rejection that I didn’t know how to deal with Hannah’s apparent attraction to me. I almost felt like a fraud – if she knew the truth, I thought, she would tell me to leave. The ‘truth’ of course, was that I was a 47-year-old virgin, and no woman had ever been sexually attracted to me. I had to wonder what was so different about Hannah. She knew I wasn’t rich. She knew I was a struggling actor and DJ. I was aware of the fact that she could still turn men’s heads if she got out more. But I went with the moment and just decided to enjoy the evening and the fact that I had just ejaculated with a woman present and watching. And she wasn’t a hooker. She also told me while I was still lying on the floor that she couldn’t wait to make love with me. I appreciated the fact that she wanted to take things slowly. But it couldn’t have happened fast enough as far as I was concerned. The evening ended with the two of us standing by the gate to her front yard. It was after midnight. We kissed for a few more minutes, and then I finally left. Even on this night, I drove home telling myself not to get my hopes up. For all I knew, I might never see her again.

I would see Hannah again, but only two more times. The first of these two involved simply going out for ice cream and taking a walk around her neighborhood. But it was what happened after we finished our walk that goes down in the record books as the furthest I’ve ever gotten with a woman. Hannah had a garage that had been converted into a small studio apartment. She rented it out to a woman who happened to be out of town on this night. Hannah took me inside to show me the space. Within a few minutes I was kissing her as we collapsed on to her unsuspecting tenant’s bed. It was at this moment that I thought I would be receiving my very first blowjob. I was on my back with my legs hanging off the side of the bed. Hannah began to unbutton my trousers as my excitement grew. I had waited my whole life for this moment. I noticed I wasn’t as hard as I expected to be. *Nerves*, I assumed. Hannah offered to remedy that problem by licking the tip of my cock. But only the tip. While I was waiting for her to take in my now-engorged member all the way, she suddenly stopped and began

giving me a hand job. As much as I enjoyed this, I was hoping she would return to her oral talents. Before I knew it, I blew my wad. No blowjob tonight. After I was done, I went to the bathroom to get some paper towels. I cleaned up, and Hannah and I lied down on the bed. For the next half hour or so, we lay there and just enjoyed each other's company. But I still wanted to return the favor to Hannah. I crawled over top of her and knelt on the floor beside the bed. She was lying face down, so I began kissing her firm butt all the way down to her toes. She kept telling me how good it felt; I just wish I had not cum earlier. As we shifted around, Hannah eventually wound up on her back with me on top. I wanted more than anything to go down on her just to see what that was like. She had been reluctant to let me do it earlier that night, and I couldn't figure out why. She wasn't on her period. But as we started to fool around again on this night, I slowly made my way down between her legs. This time she didn't resist. She kept muttering, "*Oh my god, oh my god*" over and over again. I finally got to the promised land and went at it. In addition to my oral performance, I inserted my fingers inside her vagina which sent her over the edge even more. She kept moaning, "*Oh my god*" as if she couldn't get enough. On several occasions she jerked upward and grabbed my head. I knew that she had just cum.

I have to say that while all of this was going on, it felt very natural to me. Even though I had never been with a woman in this manner, I acted as if I knew what I was doing. And in this case, I apparently did. All those years of watching porn as a substitute for the real thing taught me a lot of things. I'm not claiming that I was a stud, but Hannah enjoyed my technique. I could have continued pleasing her all night. But finally, she sat up and told me she was exhausted. But in a good way. She was now more concerned with straightening up the room and making sure the sheets and blanket looked like they did before we tore them up. If her tenant suspected that we had been in there, it could be bad news for Hannah and her father. I assured her that there was no way that her tenant would remember every wrinkle and fold in the bed, especially since she had been out of town for several weeks. Once Hannah was satisfied that we had restored the room to its original state, we walked outside and to her gate.

This is where my life takes on a separate identity and laughs at me. As we were standing by the gate, I kept telling Hannah how great a time I had with her. And then she said something that I don't believe any woman in history has ever said.

*"It was fun, but I kind of wish you hadn't made me cum."*

*"What? Why? Didn't you enjoy it?"*

*"Yes I did. In fact, you made me cum four times."*

Even I was astonished at my dexterity on the female anatomy.

*"Then what's the problem?"*

*"Well...I...just didn't know if we should have done any of it. I just don't like being vulnerable like that. You're wonderful, but I feel like I let myself lose control."*

For God's sake, we barely took our clothes off. No intercourse occurred. And this was all being spoken by a woman who, one night over dinner, told me she loved sex. I was very confused to say the least. I told her not to think about it so much. Still, she had a look of concern on her face that foreshadowed what was to inevitably happen. I kissed her good-night. It was 3:30am, and I was very tired, too.

The next day I sent Hannah an email telling her what a wonderful time I had with her the night before. I had no hesitation about telling her how “delicious” she tasted; the first and only time it felt natural and okay to actually say that to a woman. I had never had a secret connection with a woman, much less a sexual one. As far as I was concerned, it was only a matter of time before I would seal the deal. Despite Hannah’s ambivalence about her multiple orgasms at my fingertips, I thought we were well on our way to finally getting naked. She responded to my email by telling me that she needed time to cool off. I was okay with that. I had waited 47 years; a few more days wouldn’t hurt.

The next week, I called Hannah and invited her to go see the movie (*500 Days of Summer*). The reviews had been good, and I had a crush on Zooey Deschanel anyway. She agreed and also suggested that we go to a favorite restaurant of hers that served unique Indian cuisine. The more exotic the better, I thought. I also decided to come prepared. For the first time since the summer of 1995, I went to the store to buy a box of condoms. I was sure that Hannah and I would be making love that night considering the events of our previous date. I stood there in the CVS staring at all the brands, sizes, and objectives (ribbed? unribbed?). I was specifically paying attention to the ones that claimed to be for “her pleasure.” It’s hard enough for me to pick something off of a menu in a restaurant; choosing a rubber proved to be even more arduous. Finally, I chose a box of Trojans and paid for them.

The following Saturday, I drove to Hannah’s home and we headed out. The restaurant she chose not only had wonderful food but a gorgeous décor. The service was excellent, and the prices were reasonable. But Hannah was in a somewhat distracted mood that evening. Things seemed fine when we got there, but when she started talking about why she couldn’t bear the thought of auditioning or even acting anymore, I began feeling like her therapist and not her boyfriend. Her body language, lack of eye contact, and near-confessional tone of voice made me feel like I should have been taking notes at the table. As much as I tried to reach her, nothing I said seemed to get through. We talked about other things, of course, but my attempts to bring a little cheer to the evening weren’t altogether successful. I sensed something was bothering her, but she told me she was just in a funk that night about her life and what the future held.

As we walked out of the restaurant, I put my arm around her. I thanked her for suggesting we dine there and told her I’d love to eat there again at some point. She quietly said, “*Okay.*” We walked around the corner to where my car was parked. I unlocked the passenger door to let her in. My instincts told me to give her a big kiss before she got in, but hers did not. As I leaned in to kiss her lips, she turned away slightly and stared up at the sky. Shades of Fiona ran through my mind. But I still chose to remain optimistic about the rest of the night. We then drove to the movie theater that was fairly close to where we had dined. Because I paid for dinner, Hannah offered to pick up the movie tickets. This seemed fair, and I appreciated her gesture. We sat down in the theater, a beautifully designed multiplex with stadium seating, Dolby sound, and a giant screen.

Maybe my rituals of watching a movie were too much in play here. I don’t like to talk during a film, not even comment on it with my companion (I usually go to movies alone anyway). I like to get completely lost in the story, even if the movie sucks. There is always plenty of time to talk about it afterward. So on this night, I stared at the screen for the duration of the movie. This was not the first time Hannah and I had gone to a movie together, but it would be the last. I happened to love (*500 Days of Summer*), in fact, I put it on my top ten list of favorite films of 2009. I found it to be funny, smart, and unconventionally structured. I hoped Hannah did, too. After the film ended, Hannah went to the ladies room while I waited in the lobby. A few minutes later I looked

up to see Hannah walking toward me. She gave me a slight smile touched with a glint of sadness. Her eyes looked as if she was about to give me some bad news. I assumed she was just tired.

As we drove back to her house, we started to discuss the movie. I was reveling in my enjoyment of it, commenting on the performances and the director's choices. Hannah wasn't quite as enthusiastic. She sounded almost offended by the actions of 'Summer,' the character played by Ms. Deschanel. (I won't spoil it if you haven't seen it). I had no problem with her unfavorable review; she had a right to her opinion. In fact, one of my biggest mistakes in the past was always agreeing too much with the opinions of the women I was trying to court. I was scared that disagreeing with them would lessen my chances of getting laid. In fact, the complete opposite is usually the truth. Women respect men who stand by their beliefs. It shows strength instead of kowtowing for approval. So tonight it was thumbs up for me and thumbs down for Hannah. But I didn't really care about the movie now. It was late, it was warm, and I was ready to hold Hannah and kiss her all over. We got to her house and got out of the car. We walked in silence to the side door that led to her back deck. I knew her father was probably home, but I hoped he was a sound sleeper. I had never seen Hannah's bedroom, but I didn't really care where we had sex. I just wanted it to happen.

Several cats and one of her dogs were waiting by the side door as they usually did when Hannah came home. She picked up one of the kitties and began caressing it and talking sweetly in its ear. I stood there petting the cat as well, but I wanted to pet Hannah instead. Trying not to appear too anxious, I waited for Hannah to put the cat down and invite me in. The anticipation was killing me, but I figured it was worth it. My entire life had been leading up to this moment. Every fantasy I had ever had about what it would be like to make love to a woman was possibly going to come true tonight. Hannah had even told me a few weeks earlier that she "*couldn't wait for us to make love.*" The time had come. Or so I thought. I couldn't take it any longer, so I said to the cat (yes, to the cat), "*Now it's time for me to get some lovin'.*" I was really saying it to Hannah, of course. I leaned in to kiss her. And then everything changed. 180 degrees.

*"I didn't feel any connection to you at all tonight,"* she said as she pushed me away with her free hand.

*"Why?"*

*"You just didn't seem to hear anything I said to you at dinner."*

*"Of course I did!"*

*"No, you kept changing the subject whenever I was talking about my concerns about my life."*

*"I don't remember that, Hannah. I listened to everything you said. If I changed the subject, it was because I thought we had finished discussing whatever it was. I've always listened to you."*

So much for her thinking I was such a good listener even though I wasn't gay. She then revealed that she was still holding out hope that she might get married one day. She pointed out to me that I had told her on our first date that I had no desire to ever get married. I probably did tell her that. My mistake I admit. But it was the truth. I had never even had a girlfriend. How could I even think about marriage? She was still unaware of my virginal past, but my fear of matrimony raised red flags in her eyes. I tried to explain that I had never considered marriage because I had not met anyone that made me feel that committed. (That was a little white lie – I would have erroneously married Amy in a heartbeat). As I stood there politely arguing with her, all I could think about

was how it came to this. All indications the week before pointed to the two of us consummating our relationship. She had told me that she loved sex. Why now did she act as if it was a bad idea? She had had many casual lovers in the past – not all of them were even considered boyfriends. Once again I was the exception. She then told me that she was worried that she might get hurt six months down the road if she stuck with me.

*“Why are you worried about six months from now? Why not just live in the moment?”* I asked. She told me that for all our similarities, she simply felt we had no emotional connection.

It was then I realized that Hannah had been hurt too many times. Too many bad men littered her past. She just didn't want to take the chance that I would be her next heartbreak. We've all been hurt in love. But Hannah had no idea that I was completely inexperienced as a lover and boyfriend. If she knew that I was a virgin in every sense of the word, she probably would have dumped me weeks earlier. So I couldn't tell her to *“please have sex with me because you're the closest I've ever gotten to touching a woman.”* It would have sounded pathetic and sad (which it was). So I finally stopped trying to convince her that we should continue to go out. It was over. The height of my sexual experiences ended the week before and would go no further.

If I thought I could walk away from this with at least a hint of dignity, I was wrong. I stepped off the porch where Hannah and I had been talking. I reached into my left pocket to grab my car keys. I had forgotten that I also placed a condom in the same pocket assuming it would get used that night. As I pulled the keys out of my pocket, I could hear something hit the pavement with a thin slap. I looked down and saw the condom package laying a couple of feet away from me. It had fallen out of my pocket as I yanked my keys out. Hoping that Hannah didn't hear or see my clumsy indiscretion, I immediately reached down to retrieve the Trojan. But it was too late.

*“Is that a condom?”*

*“Yeah. I brought it because I...you know...just in case...”*

An awkward silence cut the air. I saw Hannah shake her head, step inside her house, and shut the door as I stood outside alone. That was the last I ever saw of her. No goodbyes. No more conversation. What seemed like the most logical item to bring on a 5<sup>th</sup> date was now a source of humiliation and embarrassment. I should have left it in my glove compartment, but I didn't think. Of course, had she wanted to have sex that night, it wouldn't have mattered where I was keeping the condom. It would have just naturally happened. I got in my car and drove home without turning on the radio. I just wanted to ponder what the hell had just happened. I was focused more on the condom drop than I was on Hannah's sudden disinterest in me, but it was all bad. And like all the silly, sentimental greeting cards I had sent to other women who rejected me, I was about to do the same thing via email with Hannah. But I thought it was definitely warranted in this case.

I decided to wait until the next day to email her. Without sounding apologetic, I wrote a simple message telling her that I had a lovely time and that I didn't mean for things to get weird. I explained that I still wanted to see her again, but I understood that she was at a crossroads in her life and that I supported her all the way. Again, I was being Mr. Nice Guy instead of a man who would have (and should have) been royally pissed about her fickleness. But she had been my only prospect and I didn't want to lose it.

After a few days, I finally got a response from Hannah telling me that she needed some time to think about everything. It should come as no surprise that we never did see each other again, although we did have a few

more email exchanges (none pertaining to our “relationship”) and one phone call that put everything into perspective for me. I called her about a year after we had last been together. I can’t remember why I took the initiative, but it may have been the result of an email she sent me where she told me about some health crisis she was going through. But what she told me on the phone didn’t surprise me one bit. As it turned out, an ex-boyfriend had re-entered her life about the time she and I were getting hot and heavy. He appeared out of the blue one day at her house with a wedding ring begging her to take him back. Apparently, they had broken up a few years earlier but still stayed in touch. Of course, I knew nothing about any of this while we were dating. A few months after Hannah and I stopped seeing each other, he convinced her to move with him to his home out of state. She did, and they lived together for a couple of months. For whatever reason, he quit his six-figure income job and just lay around the house while Hannah took care of him. He also got violent. He had been on meds to control his temper and bipolar episodes, but had stopped taking them for reasons Hannah never made clear to me. One night in a fit of rage, this productive member of society started throwing things at Hannah and screaming at the top of his lungs, threatening to kill her. A married couple who lived next door heard the commotion and intervened. The woman told Hannah that she needed to leave immediately and not ever come back. Not surprisingly, Hannah wasn’t the first woman that had been the victim of this brute. The neighbors had heard other episodes take place and didn’t want Hannah to be his latest. Hannah followed her advice and got out of there. She got back home without any injuries and hasn’t been in touch with this guy since.

It really broke my heart to hear about this terrible incident. Not because she had lots of sex with him (which she told me about), but because she allowed herself to get involved with an animal who might have really killed her. She worried that I was going to “hurt” her had we stayed together, but she wound up going back to a guy who took that word to a whole other level. It only confirmed to me that women are usually attracted to dangerous men, both figuratively and literally. Nice Guys like me get left in the dust. After she told me this story, all I could do was tell her how sorry I was. She assured me that she would never contact this guy again, and I implored her to resist any future pleas from him. Since it had been over a year since I had seen Hannah, I suggested we get together to have coffee. I suppose I felt like I wanted to be there for her but not in a sexual way. I’m not really sure what I wanted. Maybe it was simply curiosity on my part to see how she looked or if there was any remaining spark between us. I told her I was doing a workshop the following Saturday afternoon, and I could stop by her house when I was done. She said that would be fine. That Saturday morning I checked my email before leaving my apartment to go to the workshop. I wasn’t the least bit phased when I saw an email from Hannah with the word RAINCHECK in the subject line. This was a word she had used frequently when we had first started going out. She explained that she wasn’t feeling well and didn’t think it would be a good idea for us to meet that night. I emailed her back asking her to let me know when she was feeling better and we could reschedule. I never heard from her again. Oddly enough, I occasionally received mass emails from her with attachments to silly cat videos. Whenever I responded with, “How are you?” I would get a very quick reply with no information that really mattered.

Considering that Hannah was the only woman with whom I’ve ever had any type of sexual contact, I still fantasize on rare occasions about what little we did do. I was never in love with her, and that’s probably a good thing. She’s the only woman I’ve ever met who let me touch her in the ways that I did even though neither one of us ever got naked. Had I fallen in love, I might have lost my mind, knowing how incredible it would have been. She told me how crazy sexual she was in her younger days, and I was dying for her to demonstrate that with me. Like all the women before her, all I could do was jack off to the impossibility of it actually happening. I don’t know if Hannah has had a boyfriend or lover in the three years since I last saw her, but I imagine she has. It would be very naïve of me to think that any attractive, sexy woman would go more than a few months (much less a year or more) without having a lover. But these men are usually successful, handsome, rugged

individuals who offer a woman over 40 excitement and adventure. Unfortunately, I've never been able to deliver those goods despite my best efforts. As I would painfully discover shortly after I began writing this book, Hannah was not the last unavailable woman whom I would pursue. But she would be the last woman who would let me even so much as kiss her.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## PART ONE

### Incel

When I arrived in Los Angeles in 2005, there were billboards all over town advertising a new comedy from director Judd Apatow called *The Forty-Year-Old Virgin*. The ad was simple – a photo of Steve Carell against an orange background looking up in a very innocent, almost childlike manner with a silly grin on his face. The tag line underneath him read “Better Late Than Never.” There had been other movies in the past that dealt with losing one’s virginity (*The Last American Virgin*; *Getting It Right*), but this was the first one that seemed to focus on an inexperienced older man. Knowing it was from Judd Apatow, who created the brilliant television series *Freaks and Geeks*, I was intrigued to see how he would approach a subject that was too close to my heart. I was also aware of the fact that the whole premise of the movie was that any man over the age of 40 (or even 30) who had never had sex was a complete loser. How could any reasonably attractive man (which Mr. Carell certainly is) who isn’t religiously or morally opposed to sex before marriage still be a virgin? In other words, such a man who made this fact known would be the object of jokes, criticism, and odd stares. When I saw the film, I found it to be a charming and very funny commentary on the way we see ourselves. Carell’s character, ‘Andy Stitzer’, had never imagined himself a ladies’ man. With the encouragement and advice from his very experienced buddies, he learns how to approach women and not “put the pussy on a pedestal.” It’s a lesson I still need to learn.

I put this film on my top ten favorite movies of the decade (2000 – 2009) list, not because I necessarily thought it was one of the ten best films released during that time, but because the timing of the movie was almost perfect. Okay, I did think it was one of the best films of the decade. I was 44 when it was released, so it may as well have been my face on the billboard instead of Steve Carell’s. I recently watched it again as research for this book, and I found it just as enlightening and funny as I did the first time I saw it in 2006. **(SPOILER ALERT)** Even though Andy’s actual consummation of his relationship with Catherine Keener’s character didn’t play out the way I would have liked, it still showed us Andy’s “breakthrough.” The irony of the final scene is that all the joy and jubilation about having sex for the first time is usually experienced at a much younger age. But that was the whole point of our hero’s dilemma.

After Hannah and I were done by July 2009, I spent the next two years back in ‘normal’ mode, that is, there wasn’t any particular woman with whom I was obsessed. Of course, I still came into contact with plenty of attractive ladies and even asked out a few for coffee, lunch, or a movie. These were women I’d met in classes; one was even my scene partner for a couple of weeks. In all these cases, I was told “*Thanks, but no thanks.*” One woman even told me, “*I’m just too busy these days to get together.*” I learned a long time ago that no matter how busy someone is, they will make the time to see you if they really want to. This woman didn’t want to. So I tried to not think about it and just concentrated on my career and making money. But approaching the age of 50, making Andy Stitzer look like a stud by comparison, was definitely weighing heavy on my mind. One evening, I was on the internet and Googled the words “involuntary virgin” just to see what might come up.

I was curious to see if my condition was a widespread problem or just my own affliction. What I found was that there are many others like me out there. Two websites in particular touched on the subject in very different ways. And upon further inspection of the discussion forums on these sites, I discovered a new word that would enter my vocabulary: Incel. This is an acronym for Involuntary Celibacy, or Involuntary Celibate. However, this word didn't apply only to virgins. It was applicable to anyone who had had too long of a dry spell from sex.

One of these forums - <http://incel.myonlineplace.org/forum/> - is a support site that invites members to share their stories of how they became incel and what they're doing to try and conquer it. The moderators encourage a positive attitude when posting comments and has little tolerance for posters who only want to self-pity and complain about lack of female companionship. There are a handful of female incels on this board, but it's mostly lonely men who are submitting their tales of woe. When I joined (under a screen name completely different than my real name), I eventually discovered that I was one of the older members. One guy posted that he is a 54-year-old involuntary virgin, has been all over the world, and met many women he's made laugh and shared good conversation. But he's never once had sex. Like me, he can't understand why no woman has ever been sexually attracted to him. Unless he has some kind of offensive personality or terrible body odor, he's as much in the dark about his situation as I am about mine. The average age of the incels here are late 20's, early 30's. The virgins still make up the minority of the membership.

The other forum I frequent - <http://www.love-shy.com/lsbb/index.php> - takes a radically different approach to the problem of involuntary celibacy. This board is a no holds barred angerfest, complete with name-calling, suicide threats, and absolute hopelessness. While not everyone has totally given up on finding love or at least a companion, there are many here who have all but completely shut themselves out from the human race. Andy has urged me not to visit this board anymore, as he believes it only reinforces my already negative self-image. He's correct. I suppose I do it as a way to blow off steam. While I've never gotten into a tizzy with anyone, I have posted grim observations about my virgin status and proclaimed that I am an incel for life. Most responses neither agree nor disagree with me; they're too busy trying to top my misery with their own. I do sometimes laugh at the tirades of some of these sad souls. Their dark humor and copious amounts of pessimism remind me of episodes of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Once in a while, a success story will pop up ("I met a girl last night!"), but those are usually met with cautionary anecdotes about getting one's heart broken.

If I've learned anything from reading the musings of these future rampage killers, it's that Henry David Thoreau was correct when he said "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." Some are just louder than others. But knowing there are many more incels like me in the world actually makes me feel worse, not better. It confirms that there are no magic formulas and that there is definitely NOT "someone for everyone" as I was told in my younger days by some naïve romantic. One of my favorite bands growing up - the rock group Bread - had a lyric in their song, "Today's the First Day" that went:

*"So my friend, you must know  
Love will come and love will go.  
But when it does, don't despair.  
Every space has someone that's meant to be there."*

I first heard this song in 1977 when I was in love with Carrie. I've listened to it many times over the past thirty years. While I originally heard these words as a source of encouragement and hope for future love, I now know it's just a song. A very nice song, but just a work of fiction.

Reading about incels reminded me of an encounter I had with a very bitter retail employee in 1990. This was during the height of my Becca obsession. I was in some discount department store shopping for a new shirt, something hip and cool in another desperate attempt to get her attention. As I stood in the men's section trying to decide if the shirt I was holding would do the trick, a young man in his early 30's swept by me who looked like he might work there. I couldn't tell if he was an employee as he had no nametag. I wanted to find out if the shirt I was considering for purchase would shrink too much when washed. So I asked him. I found out more about him than I did the shirt:

*"Excuse me; do you work in this department?"*

*"Unfortunately, yes."*

*"Okay...I wanted to ask you about this shirt. I don't know how much you know about laundry--"*

*"Oh, you learn a LOT about laundry when you've lived alone for ten years!"*

I saw my not-too-distant future self in this fellow. I did finally get around to learning from him that a 100% cotton shirt will shrink when washed and dried. I've learned even more about laundry living alone for the past 20+ years.

## **PART TWO**

### **Lessons Not Learned**

Up until a couple of months after I started writing this book, this particular entry was not to be part of my story. It originally ended with Hannah and the discovery of incel websites. But in November 2011, I realized that whatever sickness had been dormant inside of me for the previous two years was in the process of waking up. Once again I became attracted to a woman who was not at all into me. Her name was Tina, and she had been a friend for the previous six years. I always had her in the back of my mind as someone I thought I might like to ask out. But I never got any vibes from her that she saw me as anything more than a friend. There's nothing new to add to this episode. We hung out occasionally, talked on the phone, and shared some of our fears of being over the age of 40. Tina was actually a friend of Andy's when he lived here in Los Angeles. After he moved back east, I stayed in touch with her and even looked after her apartment and cat when she went out of town. Like Fiona ten years earlier, I was Mr. Dependable, more like a big brother to her (and maybe even a big sister). I fell into the Friend Zone immediately with Tina, although that was okay in the beginning. I even talked to her about my situation with Hannah, and she would talk to me about her past love disappointments. I honestly only saw Tina as a friend as well and didn't even have sexual fantasies about her. But that would inevitably change.

I can't say exactly why my feelings for Tina changed. Maybe it was because she was literally the only woman I had any regular contact with. She was also quite cute and very sexy. She had the greatest laugh I've probably ever heard, and her big heart and sassy manner complimented each other. At 43, she had the body of a woman 15 years younger, and her tanned, toned skin had always made me take notice. She also lived right around the corner from me. Toward the end of 2011 we began seeing each other more often although not romantically.

Andy said that he wasn't really that surprised when I told him I started to develop a crush on Tina; he knew me (and her) too well. Since Tina always seemed available and single, my illogical, blind heart just assumed that we were a perfect match. Andy assured me to no end that I was not anywhere close to being her type. He said she usually dated younger guys that were more rugged and blue collar. Men in uniform were especially appealing to her. I knew I didn't stand a chance in hell with Tina, but my naivety made me believe that maybe she would settle for me since so many of her past boyfriends had been assholes. I believed that fictional story about when a woman hits 40, she's tired of all the Bad Boys and is ready to give us Nice Guys a chance. Wrong. I must have also believed that by doing some of the same things I had done in the past with other unavailable women – sending little gifts, cutesy emails, and leaving funny messages on her voicemail – I would get different results. Wrong again. If she had been attracted to me, it wouldn't have been necessary to do any of those things. She would have appreciated me for who I am, and the gifts would come later as an expression of my love for her. But I apparently had not learned my lessons from the past. I obsessed over Tina by pacing the floor late at night, talking to Andy about her on the phone ad nauseum, and creating those mental flow charts to figure out what to do next. The fact is, I should have just asked her out on a date when I felt like I wanted to be more than friends. Instead of showering her with useless trinkets and only hinting at my feelings, she might have respected me more if I'd been more direct. The result would probably have been the same, but at least I would have saved myself months of misery. I could have found out and moved on. And who knows? Maybe she would have given the Nice Guy a chance. But as usual, I didn't want to ruin the fantasy. I figured, if she was into me, she would let me know. Andy tried to put me at ease by telling me that Tina would have even inquired about me to him if she had been interested. (She had always relied on Andy for his advice about some louse she was dating). He told me that no matter how I would have approached her, she would have never dated or slept with me. I'm sure he's right. But I'll never know now.

Not surprisingly, once Tina caught wind of my feelings (women have that sixth sense), she did a virtual disappearing act. She was no longer available to hang out or even talk on the phone. She even told Andy that she didn't want to "*fan [my] flames*" anymore. As I write this, I've only seen her once in the past seven months. We've had a few email exchanges, but her tone has changed quite a bit. In the old days, she would ask me to come over to her apartment just to chat and maybe have a glass of wine. Other times, we would walk up to get frozen yogurt at this cool little place on Ventura Blvd. But she wouldn't dare do that now. And frankly, I don't blame her. She has no idea that I'm a virgin, but she does know that I don't make a lot of money and have been stuck in a professional rut for several years now. I really don't have anything of value to offer her. If I were some big, muscular alpha male who didn't like cats (yes, I realize the contradiction), and maybe put out fires for a living, my income probably wouldn't matter. She'd be all over me like white on rice. Let me be clear that Tina is by no means shallow; she is a very smart woman who is highly respected by her friends and peers. But like every attractive, single woman, she can have her pick of the litter. So why would she settle for me? It's taken me fifty years to figure out that she – and all others before her - wouldn't. Now, I am fully aware that there are guys out there who are unemployed, drug-addicted, drunk, indifferent scumbags who wouldn't buy a woman a thoughtful gift if their lives depended on it. And yet somehow these men manage to have girlfriends to sleep with at night. I've often considered taking up crack, downing a bottle of whiskey every night, and talking to women like they were second-class citizens just to see if my luck would change. In my case I'd still not get laid, but I'd probably wind up in jail. But hey – some women are attracted to inmates.

I'm sure I'll see Tina again at some point. And I'll have to deal with the inevitable reality that she will have a new man in her life. She's not an actress, but she is involved in the entertainment business. Our paths cross professionally in ways I won't reveal here, and she still lives in my neighborhood. I miss our times together, as limited as they were. And I'm sure I'm attaching more importance and value to our get-togethers than she ever

did. We're all guilty of selective memory in situations like this, but I still wonder what would have happened if I had shown a little more gumption around her. As with Amy, I thought that by being friends first and getting to know each other would lead more easily to romance and sex. But the bottom line is: if a woman is not physically attracted to you in the first place, it's highly unlikely it will ever happen. But as I discovered with Hannah, even if a woman *is* physically attracted to you, that's still no guarantee you will be waking up with her the next morning. It's not an exact science, but some guys seem to have it down to such. I can only wonder what that must be like.

## CONCLUSION

*"I just don't see it happening."*

-Andy

I'll never forget one night when I was still living in the townhouse with two other roommates in a Maryland suburb, circa 1995. I went out for a walk to clear my head (as I still do all these years later). It was around 10pm, and I was out for about an hour. Both my roommates had their respective girlfriends over that night. Their bedrooms were on the top floor while I was living in the basement two floors below. I knew these ladies would be spending the night as they so often did. It never bothered me; they were very nice and considerate people, and I got along with them quite well. They even wound up marrying my two roommates. But on this night, I got a taste of what I had been missing for all these years. And it wouldn't be the last time. When I returned from my walk about 11pm, I opened the door to the living room only to hear what sounded like two porno films being filmed at the same time from the bedrooms above. Both my roommates were having sex with their girlfriends (in separate bedrooms, of course). I could hear the song "You Wreck Me" by Tom Petty blasting out of one of the bedrooms, ostensibly to cover up the very loud moans and groans that were coming through the ceiling. From the other bedroom I could hear my roommate's girlfriend making sounds like she was auditioning for a sequel to *When Harry Met Sally...*, the famous scene where Meg Ryan demonstrates her orgasmic skills to Billy Crystal in a deli. They apparently didn't hear me come in, and even if they did, it would not have mattered. All four of them were in the middle of a passionate experience that I can't even begin to imagine. I stood there motionless listening to the activities above. Not to be a pervert, but because I guess I was just curious. I had seen my share of porn, but even that was usually staged. Now I was hearing the real thing taking place in my own home. I thought about the night I brought Fiona over to watch a movie and have pizza and how much I wanted to make love to her. I wondered if she was engaged in sexual activity with some guy at her place now. She had already told me she wasn't interested in me that way, so I naturally thought about her doing exactly what I was hearing coming out of my roommates' bedrooms. The music continued to play, and the screams of ecstasy got louder. My heart started pounding faster, as I wanted to go over to Fiona's house and make mad love to her. But I was helpless. What was taking place in the rooms above was a whole world apart from mine. Like seeing Becca in the parking lot with her legs wrapped around a blond beach boy, I could only stand and suffer. How could I get a woman to want me that much? How did my roommates find girlfriends that would make love to them? I felt left out in ways I can't describe.

On another occasion – same townhouse, after yet another walk – I entered through the front door to hear one of my roommates' girlfriends sounding like she was about to die. I had never imagined that a woman could enjoy sex that much. Once again I felt completely alone. After she apparently came, she turned her attention to my roommate. It got quiet for a few minutes, but then I heard my roommate moaning and gasping for air. By the sounds of his girlfriend, he was receiving a blowjob from her. Hearing the two of them together was both a turn-on and heartbreak. A lot of guys might have run downstairs to masturbate after hearing these X-rated activities. I did the opposite. I slumped down the stairs to the basement in slow motion. I sat on the end of my bed and put my face in my hands. It was clear to me (as it always had been) that most people have sex and they love it. It was a club of which I was not allowed to be a member. As I sat on the bed, all I could do was think about Fiona

and all the previously unavailable women I'd pursued. I was only 34, but I felt like my time was running out even then.

Now I'm 51, and there doesn't seem to be any hope at all on the horizon. I've probably had thousands of hours of conversation with Andy about women during the 30+ years we've known each other. Many, many late-night phone calls, talking in our apartments, taking walks to both exercise and figure out our lives. My virginity and lack of success with women has almost always been a topic that inevitably comes up. Andy has given me loads of good advice as well as painful reminders of how things weren't going to change for me in certain situations. But he always gave me encouragement and a sense of peace that things would get better in time or at least go away. Hearing Andy tell me about all the women he's had sex with, all the lovers and girlfriends, and one-night stands has made me aware of how wonderful naked, human contact with a woman can be. He has never once bragged about his experiences. He's only related his stories to me and the joy and pain that came with it.

One night not long ago, Andy and I were having a typical conversation on the phone about our careers, women, and other dreams we still hope to achieve. This was a few months before I started fantasizing about Tina, so my concerns about my chances with the fairer sex were more of a general nature. I tried to sum up my feelings in a few sentences, but I didn't say anything that I hadn't said a hundred times before. Andy tried his best to give me some reassurance about the possibility of still meeting an attractive woman that might be interested in me sexually. But he couldn't say anything he hadn't said a hundred times before. After pondering my chances at the age of 50, and knowing that my lifestyle and social life was unlikely to ever change, Andy said something that hit me hard. But it was the honest truth, maybe the most honest thing he's ever said to me about it:

*"I just don't see it happening."*

He did not suggest that I give up. But he had to give me his absolute gut feeling about my chances at this point in my life. He wasn't saying that it was impossible. But he knew that I would have to make some radical changes in order for even the slightest possibility that I would ever attract a woman into my life who would want to be more than friends. Of course, he was fully aware of all the makeovers I had tried when I was 28 – joining a gym, getting contact lenses, lying in a tanning bed, and attempting to change my wardrobe from geek to chic (goodbye K-Mart, hello The Gap). But now he was talking about a deeper change. Something inside me would have to change as well. The whole self-esteem issue had been at the forefront of my romantic predicaments ever since high school, but it wasn't as simple as that. This was something that would have to come from somewhere else. And I'm still not sure where that is.

When I was still writing songs back in 1995, I wrote a little ditty called "(No Such thing As) Someday." It was in response to Andy and other close friends constantly telling me that "someday" I would meet a girl who would want to have sex with me. That day never came, and I have since banned the word from my vocabulary. As I end this chronology of my life as an involuntary virgin, I'm torn between continuing to search for that elusive lover (or lovers if I'm really optimistic) and just letting go altogether. Live my life. Avoid any possible contact with women that I might actually want to ask out or worse, fall in love with. I'll be cordial and respectful of all women I meet in the future, but to get all wide-eyed and lovesick over a girl who might want to have coffee with me is just plain stupid at my age.

David Gates (of Bread) has a song called "Love Is Always Seventeen." He released that song when he was about 54 years old. So I guess the feelings of first love and first heartache never really go away. I know there's no statute of limitations on getting those familiar butterflies in the stomach when the girl of your dreams is

walking toward you. But after trying so many times, it's more than likely that the girl is going to just keep walking.

Motivational speaker and author Tony Robbins once said, "*Your past does not equal your future.*" In many areas of one's life, that can be true. I've always tried to believe this especially when it comes to pursuing my tangible career goals. But love and relationships are so subjective that most of it is out of our control. The majority of my anxieties over unrequited love are about not being able to accept that fact. It doesn't make the pain go away, but if I can learn to move on to whatever else awaits me when a woman says "*No thanks,*" maybe I won't pace the floor so much. And maybe in time, I'll finally meet a woman who will be interested in getting to know me more than just as a friend, big brother, therapist, or acting colleague.

Maybe she will even want to go see a movie about a cross-eyed lion.

## **THE END**

*Author's note, 2014:*

Since I completed this book last year, several things have happened. I moved from California back to my home state in July 2013. I did not want to do this, but my financial situation went from bad to worse. Also, it seemed the most sensible thing to do for my acting career. My home state is a hotbed for movies and television filming, and since returning, I've had more auditions in six months than I did in the last three years in Los Angeles. Plus, my family and friends are all here, and I never had much of a social life in L.A. anyhow. But I do miss living there - the year-round warm weather, scenery, hiking in the wonderful canyons, and being much closer to the Biz than I am now. There's something wonderful and even magical about Southern California, and it will always be a special part of my life.

Before I left, I was still infatuated with Tina. But we never saw each other. In fact, the last time I saw her in person was by accident. I was walking up my street early one evening in August 2012 when I saw her drive past me. She waved, slowed, down, and called me over. I ran over to her, and we proceeded to have a rather dry conversation. She looked gorgeous – tanned, toned, and wearing a sexy short dress - having just come from work at the agency. But she seemed a little chilly conversing with me – probably because she could see the nervousness and desire in me. The days of inviting me over for a glass of wine and laughter were long behind us. It was never going to happen again. After we finished talking about trivialities such as 'how's it going' to 'how's work', she gave me the obligatory "see ya later" goodbye. I said to her, "*Call me and let's get together!*" She just chuckled and drove away.

I never saw Tina again. We spoke on the phone a few times, but she was never 'available' to get together. The day before I left Los Angeles, she called me up to wish me well and to thank me for looking after her cat all those times. But she just wasn't going to make the effort to see me in person. It was probably for the best

anyway. Had I gotten together with her, I might have spilled my guts and tried to convince her that we were perfect for each other. And it undoubtedly would have been awkward for both of us. Like so many times before, I should have let my feelings be known early on instead of dropping hints. Andy assures me that it would have never made any difference when or if I told her. I was not her type, and that would never change. I believe him, but at least I would have left knowing that I looked her in the eye and told her the truth.

A few weeks after I arrived in my home state 3000 miles away from L.A., I had to fly back to shoot an episode of a popular television comedy series. I had been on this show before, and they wanted me back to reprise my character. I was thrilled to return and even more thrilled to have booked another acting job. And of course, I hoped to see Tina one last time. But not surprisingly, she just didn't have (or want to make) the time to meet up. I think she was protecting herself from what could have potentially been more discomfort even though she knew I didn't live there anymore. Or it could be that she didn't want to say 'goodbye' the proper way as it might have made her sad to see me go. She wouldn't have been the first human to avoid a lengthy goodbye and the tears that sometimes follow. But I still think about her and am even friends with her on Facebook (although she rarely posts any news about her life).

The week I was back in L.A. to shoot the TV show, I got a call from someone I thought I'd never hear from again. I was sitting in a Baja Fresh restaurant eating lunch when my cell rang. I didn't recognize the number, but I answered anyway. A female voice said, "*Tim?*" I responded with "*Yes?*"

It was Amy.

I almost fell off my chair. A girl I nearly lost my life over and whom I hadn't seen since 2002 had reappeared. She further surprised me when she revealed she was in Los Angeles. Of course, she had no idea that I no longer lived there, but I explained to her that I happened to be in town for a job. After a few minutes of me being dumbfounded, she asked if I'd like to get together. Since I had no other plans that afternoon, I agreed. I drove to her hotel which was in Hollywood and waited in the lobby for her to come down. Even though I had no intentions with this girl anymore, my heart was still pounding a little faster than usual at the thought of seeing her again after so many years. How would she look? Would we still have any chemistry? Would it even matter?

I walked back out into the parking lot thinking she may have exited the building through another door. Finally, there she was coming out of the lobby. At first, I didn't recognize her as she was wearing a lot of archaeological-type clothing to protect her from the sun. She always had the loveliest skin, and she knew that the California sun could be brutal in August. But I quickly approached her and we gave each other a big hug. I wound up being her tour guide that day, driving her around the city and showing her some of my favorite spots. I suppose it wasn't unlike that fateful night in 1999 when I foolishly hired a town car to drive us around Washington, DC. Only this time, I wasn't hoping to get laid, and it didn't cost me over \$200. But it was good to get caught up with her. She hadn't really changed all that much; you would never know she was 52. She still had that glow of a woman at least ten years younger. We eventually went to one of my favorite restaurants as she had not eaten all day. Since I had just had a huge burrito, I told her I would just get a dessert. As we waited for our order, she told me why she had made the trip to L.A. To protect her identity, I won't reveal her reason as it involved several other people who were also there for the same reason. But we talked about other things including our days of doing background work in movies. Our connection, or whatever you'd call it, was still the same. She tended to talk about herself a lot and not really ask me about too many things that had happened to me in the past eleven years. When I mentioned that my father had died in 2010, she barely reacted. I'm still not sure what her motive was for contacting me except maybe she was bored and curious to see if I was still out

there. But I can say without hesitation that she was not looking for a hook-up nor was she even remotely interested in going beyond our casual friendship stage. Since I had no expectations anyway, I wasn't disappointed. In fact, it was nice to be able to sit across the table from her without my mind racing trying to figure out what I could do to woo her. We were just two people having a conversation, not a date.

But she did reveal something to me that I had suspected long ago. Back in the days when we were hanging out and I was desperately in love with her, there had been a man in her life. Not surprisingly, it was the guy she went to Italy with in 2001. As it turned out, they almost eloped after being together for about two years. Once again, it hit me that while I was pacing the floor at home trying to figure out what to do next, and while I was crying myself to sleep after masturbating over every imaginable sexual fantasy about her, she was having a real, sexual relationship with this guy. And this after she had assured me that she had no interest in sex at all. Had I known it then, I probably would have had to have been committed; I just wouldn't have been able to accept knowing she was sleeping with someone else. Eleven years later, I finally learn the truth. It bothered me, of course, but it didn't destroy me. After all, I had gone through three more episodes with other women after Amy, so she was just a scar now. Still, it was a reminder of the difference between my relationship with her and this guy's relationship with her - completely different. Like all women before and since, there were other guys who actually slept with them and learned their most intimate secrets. These women felt comfortable and desirous enough with these men to be at their most naked and vulnerable. And all I could do was try my best to imagine what that would be like.

After lunch, I drove Amy back to her hotel, and she thanked me for the ride. When I got back to my home state the following week, I emailed her and told her it was good to see her. She wrote back that she was happy to see me, too. I even got together with her again a few months later when I visited Washington, DC. We had a nice dinner and basically continued our conversation from L.A. But it's unlikely I will see her again. If I thought there was a chance that the two of us may have a different connection than we did eleven years ago, that thought was quickly quashed when she hugged me after we walked to our cars and said, *"Good to see you, and good luck with everything!"*

A most generic farewell that seemed all too appropriate.

It's January 2014 as I finally wrap this up. I'm still working as a DJ as much as I can and going on auditions for film and TV. But my living situation is almost as embarrassing as my virginity. I moved back into my mother's house for what was supposed to be a temporary stay. I had planned to get my own apartment within a couple of months. But because I haven't been working as much as I hoped, and because of all my moving expenses, I just haven't had enough consistent income to be able to afford my own place. And living with my mother again has been a Freudian nightmare. The old patterns, criticisms, and multiple personalities have not changed one bit. (My mother is not schizophrenic, but just like when I was a child, her moods swing from one extreme to another). At 53, the last twenty-six years seemed to have vanished without a trace. It's as if they never happened. It's absolutely imperative for my mental health that I find a good job that will allow me to move out (again) and continue to live as an adult. Finding a woman and getting laid isn't even on my mind these days. What woman would possibly want to date me if she knew the truth about my living arrangements? But once I do move out and start over, I don't anticipate my love life to be any different. If I'm lucky, I'll never go through another unrequited love obsession. I'll never again fall for a woman who simply isn't interested. I won't pace the floor and call Andy to discuss "my next move" with a girl who doesn't even know my name. And I'll try not to feel wounded if I discover a past obsession is now either married or sleeping with a more qualified guy.

In other words, I'm just going to try to live my life as best I can. At my age, it is highly unlikely that I will ever know what it's like to make love to a woman. Unless I visit a prostitute (which I still have no desire to do), I have a better chance of winning the lottery. It will be up to me to decide if asking another woman out is worth the risk of pain and rejection. And even if a woman agrees to have lunch, it certainly doesn't mean she wants to get naked with me. I'm all for having women friends, but it would be nice to have a lover.

But if there is no lover in my future, I'm probably better off having lunch by myself.