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The Venus Fly Trap

Sex, Lies & Repercussions

By Dr. Stephen Paul Edwards

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# Disclaimer

This work is based on personal experiences. Certain details, timelines, and any identifying characteristics have been altered.

This is a personal narrative based on my experience.

It is not presented as an objective or comprehensive account of another individual.

I use strong, profane language throughout *The Venus Fly Trap* for a few reasons.

First, I use it as a form of humor. Comedy thrives on surprise and breaking patterns—strong language does just that.

Second, it's how *Tómoz* and I sometimes talk to each other, usually when we are arguing or having sex. This is not something we do in public. But let's be real—behind closed doors, even with close friends, strong language is often used. It is everywhere in society today. It's woven into our culture.

Third, it's a way to express anger and frustration, both of which you'll find plenty of in *The Venus Fly Trap*.

Throughout this book you and I are having a conversation. A real conversation. I'll ask you questions, expect answers, and mind-read. In case you are ever wondering—YES, I am talking to you.

I'm English, and our humor tends to be sarcastic. My sarcasm is almost dripping off every page. The strong language and sarcasm are never intended to offend anyone, although it probably will. In today's world, people tend to be easily offended, and there seems to be intense pressure to be politically and socially correct. All too often, people are afraid to say anything that might possibly offend anyone. Fuck that! Why should we all walk around on eggshells because they might be offended? So if anything I write here offends you, remember two things. First, it is not intended to offend you. Second, get the fuck over it!

The Venus Fly Trap is based on a true story. What that means it is a true story I but I had to change the names of people in the story and some of their personal details so that you cannot identify who they are. You know protect the innocent, of which there are really none. Mostly because of lawsuits and all that.

You're going to get to know both *Tomoz* and I on a deep level. So, I'm going to be real, open, and brutally honest. My hope is that one day, we get to meet in person. Then you can tell me what a fucking asshole and idiot I am. I look forward to that.

In any case, considering the ridiculous, stupid, and downright humiliating things that I did and that I'm about to share with you— and the fact that I can laugh at myself—I think I get a pass. Hey, it's my book. I get to write the rules here.



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# WARNING

**T** his Book Is For Adults Only.

If you are not currently considered an adult, you will be by the time you have read *The Venus Fly Trap*.

This Book Contains Explicit Sex.

Our sexual relationship and encounters are a central theme of *The Venus Fly Trap*. We are extremely sexual people. Some of what you read might challenge your beliefs about sexuality and what it really means. I hope so. This experience certainly challenged mine!

If you're prone to premature ejaculation, I recommend you keep a box of tissues handy. If you are prone to getting strong erections and often feel the need to alleviate that condition, then you will also need a box of tissues.

If, while reading *The Venus Fly Trap* you find yourself sexually aroused or if you notice excessive moisture in your lower abdomen, don't worry—that's perfectly normal and you will also need a box of tissues.

Enjoy.

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# Prologue

Sometimes, things are exactly what they seem, yet we often choose to ignore reality, preferring to live in our own dreams—or delusions. Something that I am certainly guilty of as you are about to see. Our lives mirror who we are, both individually and collectively.

It's fascinating how easily we can accept the concept of creating our own reality when everything is going well. Victory? Clear evidence that God or the universe is on our side. Failure? Surely someone or something else must be to blame. Yet, the nonsensical nature of this thinking escapes us entirely.

When life turns ugly, when outcomes become what we consider terrible, sad, or shameful, we conveniently develop selective amnesia. Perhaps this memory loss stems from our desperate attempt to maintain an image of ourselves as kind, loving individuals while desperately hiding our darker nature from ourselves and the world.

What we resist persists. Whatever we judge, we hold in place and are destined to manifest in our physical lives. The forces of light and darkness coexist within us— what many call God and the Devil. We are both, though few want to admit it.

"All the gods, all the heavens, all the hells, are within you."

—*Joseph Campbell*

How do I know all this? Well, you're about to find out. While sex, sexuality, and the new sexual revolution happening in the world today are a theme of *The Venus Fly Trap*, there is also much, much more.

*The Venus Fly Trap* is also about our love for each other—deep, powerful, passionate love—and the sex, lies, and repercussions that followed. It is about the devastation, destruction, and desperation that love brought into our lives, as well as the deep joy, and happiness we experienced. It is about our inability to trust ourselves or each other, and the incredible hope and faith to just keep loving each other anyway.

It is about our complete madness, our deepest fears, our lack of self-worth, our codependence, and our insecurities that sometimes made it so hard for us to feel loved and to love each other. It is about things like the ridiculous idea that we needed to control each other—and the hilarious havoc that created.

The Venus Fly Trap is also a romance that will have you laughing hysterically and crying from deep within your heart. It will have you holding on to your seat as it takes you on an emotional roller coaster that will sometimes leave you dizzy and breathless.

There will be times when you think, "That cannot have possibly happened!" "That can't be true!" and "Nobody could be that stupid." But it did, it is, and we were.

I knew there would be consequences, but I was prepared to pay the price. I somehow knew it would all be worth it. And it was. As crazy as it all gets, I have no regrets—only gratitude.

You see, I found the love of my life. The only question was: could I find a way to hold on to the crazy bitch? While she was trying to hold on to me—another crazy bitch! As you will discover, we are both deeply flawed people. But that's what we loved about each other, and we wouldn't have had it any other way.

We are all in varying states of forgetfulness. If we could remember everything we have learned and who we really are, we would all be perfect. How boring would that be? Who the fuck wants that? Right?

Have you ever gone to the fridge and eaten a whole tub of ice cream, knowing that you would regret it later? I hope so.

It is not about being perfect—it is about learning to embrace the imperfections in ourselves and each other. Just like we know when we walk to the fridge to get that tub of ice cream, that it's going to be bad for us, yet we still sit down, scoop it into our mouths, and enjoy every last spoonful.

Just like girls love bad boys and men love bad girls. The badder the better!

The Venus Fly Trap is also about me walking to the proverbial fridge, knowing that what was about to happen would bring me tremendous pleasure and, at some point, extreme pain, yet I would still enjoy every last spoonful.

I forgot—or just overlooked—what I knew. Love will make you do that. I had to, in order to have the incredible and sometimes tragic experiences you are about to enjoy.

You will also see how I created some pretty harrowing experiences and almost lost everything—including myself.

But most of all, *The Venus Fly Trap* is about the raw, unfiltered reality of what happens when we can no longer maintain the illusions we've built around ourselves—when our carefully constructed façade begins to crack, what lies beneath comes rushing out like a broken dam, and all hell breaks loose.

# Chapter One

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## Manifesting Magic & Miracles

**Y**ou know those famous phrases you’ve always wanted to use in real life? Like jumping into a taxi and dramatically shouting, “Follow that car!” or starting an incredible tale about your life with, “This is a true story.”

Well, guess what?

I finally get to use one of those phrases because this is, indeed, a true story (I mean based on a true story...) about a very special period in my life—one that turned out to be even more amazing than I ever could have imagined, until I did. Sometimes, I can hardly believe I lived through these extraordinary events. To paraphrase Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” We had the time of our lives. Looking back, I realize those moments were both challenging and unforgettable, shaping my life in ways I never expected.

So, let me begin with another phrase I’ve always wanted to use: Once upon a time... Hey, it’s my story—I can use whatever phrases I want!

It was Friday, April 26, 2014, in Sarasota, Florida. It was probably the same day in every city in America. It was also another beautiful, sunny day on the Gulf Coast, but this one was special.

I was home for the weekend—a rare occurrence, given that most weekends, I would usually be on stage speaking at an event in some far-off city. That morning, I stood in my bathroom, excited about getting ready for a date that would turn out to be more special than I could have possibly known at that moment.

I say “my” bathroom because, at the time, I was going through a divorce. Divorce is rough on anyone. But for a hopeless romantic like me? It’s like open-heart surgery without anesthesia.

Some might even say that I’m delusional, considering this was the end of my fourth marriage. Julie—or Jules, as I always called her—was the latest in my series of “forever” loves. I had bought this dream home for us, imagining it would be where we’d ‘live happily ever after.’ Another phrase about my life that I hope to be able to use one day.

Spoiler: life had other plans.

Now, I know what you’re thinking... Four marriages? Isn’t that the definition of insanity? You know, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Right? Wrong.

You *think* you know the definition of insanity. But you don’t. Not yet.

Stick around.

Even though I had been through four marriages and still had not found my happily ever after marriage, I was not about to give up. But what a home it was—7,500 square feet of pure architectural brilliance. Handcrafted, obsessed-over, and furnished and finished to perfection. No expense was spared. Mr. and Mrs. Wharton the previous owners of the property, poured a fortune into building, furnishing, and finishing this masterpiece and built the home like it was their legacy.

And it *was*. Until they sold it to me.

The home was perfectly positioned, overlooking a serene lake and one of the country club’s three golf courses.

The infinity pool was massive, with no pool cage obstructing the view. Next to the pool was a large Jacuzzi with room for up to twelve people. From the designer outdoor furniture, it looked as if the lake flowed seamlessly from the infinity pool’s edge.

This became a space where *Tomoz* and I would spend countless hours discussing everything imaginable. As you’ll discover, *Tomoz* is incredibly intelligent. It was through these conversations that she shared her profound wisdom and reshaped my perceptions and views on many things, including the meaning of life, relationships, sex, marriage, and monogamy.

Inside, the house was breathtaking. Fourteen-foot ceilings soared above the first floor, with windows draped in flowing, designer curtains cinched back by ornate rope ties. The wood floors and light mahogany-engineered staircase were flawless.

Mrs. Wharton made every visitor wear those little blue doctor booties—she followed them around with cleaning spray. I'm not kidding.

It was annoying during our viewings, but I kept a couple of boxes of those booties—mainly for contractors and my parents. Well, mostly my parents. Actually... that would have been pretty funny. Actually, no, probably not.

The kitchen was a masterpiece of design, anchored by an eleven-foot kitchen island and illuminated by three massive black iron lamps hanging above it.

Upstairs was another family room with two sofas, three built-in TVs, and a massive L-shaped bar with an incredible granite countertop and eight leather barstools. Huge, heavy-pocket sliding doors opened to a balcony with breathtaking views of the lake, golf course, and pool. As you came back inside through the pocket doors, to the right was a gold elevator. I know—so over the top.

One of my favorite rooms was hidden behind the pool table—a full-blown movie theater, complete with a popcorn machine, eight electric, fully reclining leather chairs, a massive screen, gaming systems, and a projector room.

Even more incredible entertainment spaces were downstairs.

Four massive pocket doors opened on one side of the of the family room, blending the indoors with the outdoors. There was an outdoor sitting area with a double-sided fireplace, a barbecue, and an outdoor kitchen, all overlooking the lake and pool.

When guests arrived, they entered through two massive double wooden doors that swung open dramatically—I always loved seeing their impressed expressions as they came into the house through the grand entrance and saw the formal living room, fireplace, pool, and lake through the French doors straight in front of them. It was quite breathtaking.

My master suite occupied an entire wing of the house. I accessed it through two 12 foot high doors that led into my private domain. The first thing I'd see was my bathroom on the other side of the hallway. There were two more large white doors that were always open, leading to the bathroom where two square mahogany pillars stood guard beside my sunken Jacuzzi bathtub. The bathtub faced a beautifully curtained window looking out to my private meditation garden.

The main three-car garage housed my Bentley GTC, Rolls-Royce Ghost, and Extended Escalade. I had gotten vanity plates for the Rolls and Bentley, featuring my special number—'23'—with plates reading '23 SPE' and 'SPE 23.' There's quite a story behind the number 23, but I'll save it for later.

Walking down the hallway to my bedroom, I'd admire the angled floor-to-ceiling fitting mirrors that reflected three sides simultaneously. Though designed for trying on clothes, I had far better plans for them—as you'll soon see.

The two huge closets followed the his-and-hers theme, though, at this point, I had taken over both. I'll admit it—I had a fashion addiction.

My bedroom was my true sanctuary. At its center sat my huge king-size bed which together with the mattress stood 4 feet off the ground with a massive mahogany and leather headboard, topped by a painting of a Florida beach home. Ornate wooden nightstands with marble tops and oversized lamps flanked on either side.

One of my favorite spots was the bay window on the far-right side of the room, overlooking the lake, where I'd placed an ornate round walnut table, on top of which stood a beautifully framed piece of my 'Soultry'—written in elegant calligraphy. It was a gift from Jules. I'll explain what 'Soultry' is later. The 14-foot ceilings allowed for one of my favorite features: curtains that cascaded to the floor like waterfalls. This is just a small sample of the luxury lifestyle this magnificent home provided.

And then, there was the sex room—hidden behind the wall behind the bed.

The what?

You heard me.

What is even in a "Sex Room"? I'll save those details for later. Trust me—you'll get to know that room better than any other in the house.

I'm sharing all this because this house wasn't just my dream home—it was where much of this story, *The Venus Fly Trap: Sex, Lies & Repercussions*, would unfold.

I am a very sexual person with the right partner. And that is rare. For me, there has to be a certain undeniable sexual chemistry, as you'll see.

I've always been very private about my sexual experiences. I've never shared any of this with anyone other than one person before.

Almost everybody I know will be extremely shocked to learn about all of this.

So, why now?

Because the story is very entertaining, sure. But more than that—it's relatable. It's a cautionary tale, a love letter, a confession, and a mirror. *The Venus Fly Trap* also delves into sex, alcohol and drug addiction, as well as mental illness.

For years, I didn't have the courage to write it. But then... life nudged me. And I realized: it was now or never.



I'll be judged and vilified no doubt. It will not be the first time nor the last. Whenever you put your heart and soul out there it is inevitable.

But as they say: *the truth will set you free... after it pisses you off.*

So if this story offends you, congratulations—you're on your way to freedom.

Now, I know what you're wondering: how did he afford all this luxury and opulence?

Well, it's obvious, right? I was, of course, a drug dealer.

Although that might have made things interesting, I wasn't a drug dealer.

Though drugs would play a significant role in this story.

As I said, this is a true story, or based on true and real experiences. (I think I got that right, I'll check with my lawyers) so I'll stick to the truth. And in any case, the truth was far more interesting and exciting than fiction. You just couldn't make this up.

So, let me explain how I came to own such an impressive home.

It was a dream of mine to become a personal development and spiritual teacher—someone who inspired and guided others. After years of struggle and being broke, I finally made that dream a reality. As a result, I now earn a significant income, which explains the house and the cars.

I travel the world, helping people break free from the rat race, manifest their dreams, create financial freedom, and develop a deeper connection with their Creator. This makes much of what I will share even more ridiculous and funny. I have no excuse!

Money was never a motivator for me. Money was a byproduct of following my heart and passion.

More on that later.

But for now, I was—living alone in what to me, felt like a mansion.

Still, compared to the billionaires of the world, my estate wasn't much. But for a working-class kid from Blackpool, England—told he'd never amount to anything?

It was my dream home.

Finding a way to buy it was like a miracle—one of many I had already experienced in my life and one of many still to come, as you will see.

I came to understand that the world is not run by reasonable people: The world is run by unreasonable people.

There's a quote I love.

*"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."*

— George Bernard Shaw

I decided to be unreasonable. As many people testify.

To follow my own rules. That meant I took many hard falls, I had to reinvent myself again and again, but no matter how many times I fell down, I picked myself up and started all over again. Each time the fall was harder but the recovery made me even stronger and wiser. I realized that's what it takes to grow—to level up.

Sometimes, life rips everything away... just to make space for what your heart really wants.

Yes, I played my part in manifesting this incredible world. But I didn't do it alone; far from it.

I was blessed with the guidance of incredible mentors and, most importantly, the presence of my Creator, who has been with me throughout my entire life, through every high and every low—and there have been many lows—but has never left me.

I am profoundly grateful for that and for everyone who helped me along the way.

I never forgot where I came from—those humble beginnings in Blackpool, England. That place and the people in my life shaped me and were instrumental in my transformation.

Those relationships had kept me grounded, authentic, and true to my core values.

Up until now.

I was about to forget all that. I didn't know it yet but I was about to lose everything, including myself, and reinvent myself again, at a whole new level.

I was about to manifest a whole new world.

I was on the verge of forgetting it all and spiraling out of control.

This is my story—my truth. Wild, messy, beautiful, and real.

Now, buckle up.

Because once I met *her*—The Venus Fly Trap—everything changed. Forever.

# Chapter Two

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## “What’s Your Favorite Flower?”

First, losing Jules shattered me. Our love ran deep, making the divorce a trauma neither of us saw coming.

Second, it all happened so fast—a massive shock that rattled me to my core. I felt like curling up and dying, spending weeks lying in bed, unable to function.

Despite my confident exterior, I’m very sensitive beneath all my bluster. I use humor as a shield, a way to protect myself from emotions too overwhelming to face. So, I withdrew.

Third, this was my **fourth** divorce. Four times, I had built a life with someone, only to watch it crumble. At this point, I had to ask myself—was I cursed or just catastrophically bad at relationships? (*Rhetorical question, but thanks for your invaluable input.*)

In all my relationships, there was one constant—me. Childhood trauma followed me like a shadow. I pushed people away, fearing they’d leave me. I manifested what I was most afraid of—again and again.

It became a self fulfilling prophecy I seemingly couldn’t escape.

All those emotions I had buried for most of my life would eventually boil over, leading to explosive fights—just like the ones my parents used to have. Over time, those fights chipped away at the foundation of our marriage until there was nothing left to hold onto.

But slowly my friend Jerry gently coaxed me back to life.

After months of mourning my divorce from Jules, I finally had something to look forward to—a date with *Tomoz*.

*Tomoz?*

Who’s *Tomoz*? Oh, you’ll get to know her—very well.

Her name? It means 'tomorrow.' From the future. And oh, how true that would turn out to be...

That morning, standing in front of the mirror, I realized: It was time. Time to stop grieving and start living again.

Some of my friends suggested I start dating. They said it might be a good distraction—though that would turn out to be the understatement of the Millennia.

Dating again? After everything? The idea terrified me.

I hadn't been on a date in years. And with my travel schedule, where would I even start?

I looked online and found a dating site I liked the look of.

I looked through the pages and pages of attractive women. Then suddenly, there she was. The one.

Not just beautiful. Breathtaking. Supermodel-level stunning.

Tall, poised, endlessly leggy. Brown hair. Sophisticated. Irresistible.

Her profile name? Aleeze. Real name? *Tomoz*. I later discovered she was born Kendra Kingston.

She had that aura—like she had just walked out of a European Vogue cover shoot.

And me? I was paralyzed. A teenage boy again, staring at his crush across the cafeteria. Even though I was a 54-year-old man.

All I needed to do was send her an email. Easy right?

What if she didn't reply? Worse—what if she did?

I stared at her profile on and off for two full days. Drafted, deleted, and redrafted my message.

Then I hit send. And immediately regretted it.

I'd written too much. Way too much. Classic me.

Three days later, she replied—with just three lines.

Casual. Nonchalant. Cool. And I was hooked. She likes me! Even though nothing she said in her response indicated that.

Our emails followed a pattern: I'd write a novel. She'd send a haiku.

I showed one I had sent to Jerry. He laughed so hard he nearly cried.

"Way too long," he said. "She probably bailed after the first paragraph!"

He wasn't wrong.

Jerry and I had a long, twisted friendship—equal parts therapy and comedy club.

We had offices in the same building, and one day, as I parked my Bentley, he caught the elevator just before the doors closed. "How does someone end up with a car like that?"

he asked. That was the start of a conversation—and a friendship—that continues to this day.

We've helped each other through some tough times. When it came to relationships, we were equally disastrous—always giving each other great advice but never following it ourselves.

We've also shared some incredible adventures, from impromptu road trips, to surviving disastrous blind dates.

And our humor? Let's just say... not for polite company.

"If I can just get her to meet me," I kept telling myself.

"You mean, ask her on a date? Are you crazy?"

Yes, I talk to myself. So do you. You just asked yourself, "Do I talk to myself?" See?

I finally got *Tomoz* to agree to have coffee.

YES!

Then she canceled the next day.

**NO!**

Brutal.

I tried distracting myself by browsing other profiles, but I kept coming back to *Tomoz*. She even lived close by—only 30 minutes away—a rare find on this dating site.

So I tried again. This time, ending with the lamest line of all time:

"Worst-case scenario, you gain a new friend."

Then—desperate or brilliant—I sent another: I said I was looking for a new assistant.

She replied instantly: "Me, me, me!"

I shot back: "A little eager, aren't we? How about an interview over dinner?"

It worked.

She agreed. Friday night. It was only Tuesday, and I was determined not to let her cancel again. I needed to lock this down.

So I did what any rational grounded man would do. I called my psychic. Don't judge.

Debra came over, she told me I was destined for greatness, as usual. I paid her as usual. It was a nice arrangement.

Then, I asked for her opinion on a date venue. She recommended 'The Birchwood,' a boutique hotel in St. Petersburg with a restaurant downstairs and a rooftop bar featuring cabanas overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. Perfect.

I immediately made dinner reservations for Friday evening and secured a cabana for after dinner.

I texted *Tomoz* to let her know arrangements had been made. Making it harder for her to cancel. Or so I hoped. I casually asked her, "What is your favorite flower?"

"Bird of Paradise," she replied.

"No way, mine too!" Then I texted back, jokingly, "It's a bit expensive, though... What's your second favorite...?"

Without missing a beat, she responded:

"Venus Fly Trap."

And there it was.

I had never even heard of a flower called 'Venus Fly Trap.' Something inside me whispered a warning. I brushed it off.

But the predator had just named herself.

People always tell you who they are when you first meet them. We just don't listen. We see with the eyes in our head instead of our real eyes—our intuition. And that never lies.

Over the next few days, we texted back and forth. I told her about the venue and hinted at a few surprises, building excitement and anticipation.

"It all sounds wonderful. I am looking forward to meeting you. I hope I get the job," she teased.

I was confident that the date was tied down. Curious, I Googled Venus Fly Trap.

It's carnivorous. It eats meat.

Well... the meat of insects and flies. But still. That ominous feeling grew stronger.

The way it catches its prey fascinated—and disturbed—me.

Sensitive hairs inside the trap detect movement. If touched multiple times, the trap snaps shut, ensuring it doesn't waste energy on raindrops or debris.

Once caught, the insect is slowly digested.

Deep down, in the far recesses of my mind, I knew.

I was going to be her prey.

But it was already too late.

That's how it always goes, isn't it? Our intuition speaks clearly, but our ego drowns it out. We want what we want and will justify having it—even when, deep down, we know it's not good for us.

Sometimes, that dangerous element makes it even more compelling. We can spot trouble a mile away when it's happening to our friends or family, but when it comes to ourselves, blind.

I remember that ominous feeling like it was yesterday—a clear red flag I chose to ignore.

I ordered an arrangement of Bird of Paradise flowers to be delivered to my house on Friday so I could give them to *Tomoz* myself. I even attempted half-heartedly to find a Venus Fly Trap but secretly felt relieved when I couldn't locate one in time. Apparently, most florists don't keep them in stock.

I had no idea I had already found one.

Looking back, the symbolism couldn't have been clearer: the beautiful, exotic Bird of Paradise versus the deadly Venus Fly Trap. I chose to focus on the beauty and ignore the danger.

But then... don't we all?

Okay, maybe not *you*, but most people. *You probably lie about other things too.*

Leaving nothing to chance, I arranged for two dozen red roses to be placed on our table at the restaurant before we arrived. I had no idea if she liked chocolates, but I wasn't taking any chances. Dark, I thought. So, I bought a box of expensive Belgian dark chocolates.

I had never gone to such lengths for a date before, but something about *Tomoz* captivated me. The Venus Fly Trap was already pulling me into her jaws with her irresistible *nectar*.

Everything had to be perfect.

The day before our date, I called *Tomoz*.

She picked up.

And then I heard it. Her voice.

Deep. Smooth. Educated. Seductive.

I was toast.

As we talked, I paced around my dining room table.

We went through the usual pleasantries, laughing about our email exchanges. Well, I laughed. She may have broken a smile.

I knew she just had to have been a model. Her voice was deep, controlled, and undeniably sexy. She spoke with a highly educated, almost regal tone.

"It sounds like you've had an amazing life," I said, thinking, *"This woman is not going to be easy to impress."*

"It has certainly had its moments," she said, smiling, without revealing anything.

"How did you end up in Florida?"

"My ex lived in Maine. He had a huge estate that had been neglected. I was working hard bring it back to it's greatness."

"Hold on a moment," she said, distracted by something else.

Then she continued, “He was away a lot and no help when he came home. He was an alcoholic and abusive. In the end, our relationship became untenable, so I had to leave.”

She said it nonchalantly, like she was telling me the time.

As I listened, I could tell there was much more behind that story. No doubt we’d explore that in more detail later—assuming I got past this first date.

“It was tough for me, so my father was kind enough to find me an apartment here And I have a good friend here, making it a little easier.”

She seemed to catch herself. Again, it was obvious there was a lot of pain there, especially regarding her father. Just how much pain was beyond anything I could have imagined.

“That’s enough about me. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from? I hear an accent,” she asked, shifting the focus away from herself. She had started revealing more than she was ready to.

“I’m from England originally. I emigrated to America years ago. I first came here when I was 21, and I knew from the moment I arrived that I wanted to live in the U.S. It took me eight years to finally make it happen.”

“My parents bought a holiday home in Sarasota, so the whole family used to spend the holidays there. I fell in love with the place. Now I live here.”

“I haven’t been to Sarasota yet. I’ve heard it’s beautiful, with great beaches,” she said, then added, “Perhaps you can show me around...”

“I’m pretty sure that can be arranged,” I teased.

“I’d be honored if you could fit me into your schedule.” The banter had begun.

“I’ll have my people call your people,” I said, keeping it going.

“Oh, you have ‘people’? That sounds impressive.”

I laughed. “Well, actually, I do have people. Just not the kind that arranges tours of Sarasota and its beaches.” I paused. “That, I think, I can manage myself.”

“So, what are your plans? Do you intend to stay in Florida for a while?” I asked.

I needed to know how long I had to tie this chick down. At this point, I had no idea she *liked* to be tied down.

She replied, “I like it here, but I’m unsure what the future holds. So, we’ll see.”

It was as though she felt adrift, a little lost at sea, looking for a beach to land on.

I decided to make sure she wanted to land on this beach.

The moment I heard her voice, I was spellbound. It just *resonated* with me. Our sexual chemistry crackled through the phone line, and the conversation flowed effortlessly.



What felt like five minutes turned out to be over an hour. By the end of our conversation, I knew she was coming to dinner.

Now it was Friday morning—barely 10 a.m.—I was already getting ready. After an almost sleepless night, I'd been up for hours, taking my time with the preparations.

Phil Collins' *In the Air Tonight* blasted through the house sound system. I couldn't resist playing along in the air when that famous drum riff hit. I was momentarily transported back to my younger days in London and Miami.

I got ready like it was the Oscars.

I dressed carefully in what, back then, was one of my most stylish outfits: black Italian snakeskin shoes with silver tips, a black Masatomo jacket, and matching black Masatomo trousers with zip-up side pockets for a tight fit. A black python belt with a silver buckle tied the look together, perfectly matching the shoes. Underneath, a black and blue silk shirt.

Black was the *new* black back then. It may sound ridiculous by today's standards, but at the time, it was cutting-edge.

My love affair with clothes had started in England and never waned—I'd spent a small fortune curating the perfect wardrobe.

Carrying the stunning Bird of Paradise arrangement that had arrived earlier, I walked through the kitchen, past the laundry room, and down to the garage.

A moment like this had seemed so far away just a few months ago. But now, I was ready to step into a new life.

Or at least, I *thought* I was.

Nothing could have been further from the truth.

I had no idea what I was walking into.

# Chapter Three

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## She's My Bird.

As I prepared for what would become the date of a lifetime, I descended the steps into my garage, surveying my collection of cars. The choice seemed obvious for this special evening—the Rolls. As I pulled out of the garage, I caught a glimpse of the Bentley GTC in my rearview mirror, knowing it would have its moment another time.

The Rolls glided down the road, and I was on my way—completely unaware that my life was about to change forever.

It was only 2 PM—five hours before picking up *Tomoz* at 7. There was no way I was risking being late for this date. As it turned out, leaving early was a wise decision, as you'll soon see.

But why all the preparation and attention to detail for a first date—or any date, for that matter? Good question. I had dated many beautiful women, but none compared to *Tomoz*. It wasn't just her stunning looks that captivated me—it was her entire presence.

I knew she would have high expectations, and I wasn't about to disappoint. I had never done anything like this before. Even I recognized it was completely over the top—but then again, so was *Tomoz*.

The Bird of Paradise arrangement lay next to the dark Belgian chocolates on the backseat. Being English, I found it amusing that, when I was young, growing up in England, we called girlfriends “birds”—as in, *She's my bird*. I thought *Tomoz* would be my Bird of Paradise.

Little did I know, she'd also turn out to be my Venus Fly Trap.

The drive from Sarasota to the restaurant takes about 40 minutes. It leads over the magnificent Skyway Bridge, with stunning blue-green waters below.

On this beautiful, sunny afternoon, the journey in the Rolls-Royce Ghost added an extra layer of luxury to the experience. The Rolls combined comfort with raw power, and I wasn't one to hold back. Speed thrilled me—sometimes a little too much, as you will see.

St. Petersburg has undergone a stunning transformation in recent years. Revitalization efforts had turned it into a vibrant, modern city, boasting sleek, high-end condominiums, a lively waterfront, an impressive pier, and a main street teeming with excellent restaurants, bars, and nightlife.

Known for its dog-friendly atmosphere, the city's main strip was always dotted with people walking their pets day and night. The mix of locals and tourists created a dynamic energy—young people cruised in their flashy and souped-up cars, music pulsed through the streets, and the outdoor seating at eclectic restaurants brought Ocean Drive in South Beach, Miami, to mind.

After soaking in the afternoon ambiance with a quick drive around town, I headed to the Birchwood Hotel. I valet-parked the Rolls and walked up the steps to the hotel. Just past the lobby entrance stood the restaurant. Approaching the hostess at the podium, I announced, "Hello, I have a reservation under the name Edwards."

She studied her list before looking up with visible confusion. "That's not until 7:30 PM, Mr. Edwards?"

"I know," I replied. "I'm bringing my girlfriend here for dinner tonight and wanted to ensure everything is perfect. Could I see the table?"

The hostess seemed to appreciate the effort I was putting in—at least initially. Walking through the empty restaurant, we discussed table locations and which would be the most romantic. Eventually, we found the perfect spot on the balcony, overlooking the hotel gardens, the main strip, and the Gulf of Mexico beyond.

"Can I meet our waitress?" I asked.

"Excuse me?" Meaning, *are you serious right now?*

"I just want to be sure she has the right personality for us," I explained.

"Oooo-kay..." she responded, using that *this guy is crazy* voice I'd grown quite familiar with over the years. You might not recognize that tone, but I certainly do.

So, I met our waitress, Sarah. As she walked across the dining room, she smiled, held out her hand, and said, "Very nice to meet you, Mr. Edwards."

We shook hands, and I explained that this was a very special date. We were celebrating an anniversary, and I wanted it to be perfect—a little white lie to avoid seeming completely unhinged for going to all this trouble on a first date.

I told Sarah, “An arrangement of two dozen roses will arrive at 6 p.m. Please make sure they’re on our table before we arrive.”

“Of course, Mr. Edwards, I’ll take care of that,” she said.

Sarah was intrigued by the whole thing—maybe not as much as I was, but her enthusiasm was infectious.

She had a great sense of humor and assured me she would provide excellent service and be attentive without being intrusive—perfect.

We walked back to the podium, where the hostess smiled. “Okay, Mr. Edwards, we look forward to seeing you this evening at 7:30 PM.”

“Yes, well, I’ve also booked a cabana for after-dinner drinks,” I added, implying that we were not done with the conversation yet.

“Yes, I see that here. We’ll make sure the cabana is ready for you once you finish dinner.” she replied, subtly signaling that this conversation was, in fact, over.

“Yes, I’m sure it will be,” I said, keeping my tone polite but firm. “But I’d like to take a look at it, please.”

“They’re all the same,” she stated flatly.

“Well, I’d still like to see it, if you don’t mind,” I pressed, staying courteous while being stubborn.

The hostess hesitated, then sighed. “I’m sorry, but I can’t leave the podium for that long.”

She thought she’d won this round.

“Is there anyone else who could show me?” I persisted, watching her eyes widen with disbelief and—surprisingly—growing respect.

She had clearly dealt with demanding guests before, but something about my tenacity caught her off guard.

“Only the manager.” she said finally, nearly throwing her arms up in surrender. She knew exactly what my next words would be.

“Okay, yes, the manager will be fine,” I responded cheerfully as if she had just suggested the perfect solution.

She gave me another familiar look—the kind that silently asked, *Who do you think you are?* But then, something in her expression shifted. As she turned to fetch the manager, it was as if she suddenly realized exactly *who I thought I was*.

The manager approached, wearing the practiced expression of someone ready to dismiss an unreasonable guest. But persistence always pays off, and two minutes later, we were both standing in line for the elevator to the rooftop bar.

I've always lived by the motto: Ask for what you want and never accept no for an answer. When you're truly committed to something, you'll either find a way—or make one.

The rooftop was only accessible by a single outdoor elevator. On this gloriously sunny Florida afternoon, a lengthy queue waited in the sweltering heat. There wasn't a scrap of shade to be found, and the manager, dressed impeccably in his dark suit, was visibly wilting under the sun's relentless glare.

I could tell he regretted his decision to accommodate my request. Still, I'd learned long ago that discomfort was often the price of perfection.

Upon reaching the rooftop, the manager quickly located the bar manager, made hasty introductions, and practically sprinted back to the elevator before I could rope him into any more unwanted adventures.

The bar manager escorted me to our reserved cabana, giving me that now-familiar look that suggested I might be slightly unhinged. If only he knew the half of it.

The cabana was perfect, secluded for privacy yet open enough to soak in the atmosphere. *Tomoz* had mentioned that she liked to play backgammon as did I.

"We're going to play backgammon tonight," I announced, gesturing to my car below. "I have a set—I'll bring it up."

The bar manager quickly responded nervously, "I don't know how to set it up!"

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll set it up when we arrive." He looked relieved as I walked to the elevator to return to get the valet, bring the car around, and retrieve the backgammon set.

When I finished arranging the details and returned to my car, the clock read 6:50 PM. Panic surged through me—I was supposed to pick up *Tomoz* at 7:00 PM!

In all my meticulous planning, I had overlooked basic necessities—including using the bathroom, which was now an urgent issue as I neared her apartment.

Not wanting to immediately ask to use her bathroom upon arrival (first impressions and all that), I texted to announce my presence and decided to try my luck with the lobby restroom.

After carefully positioning the Bird of Paradise arrangement and the dark Belgian chocolates on a bench outside, I rushed inside.

By the time I returned, *Tomoz* was already waiting on the ramp walkway beside the lobby stairs, putting the final touches on her face, looking in the mirror of her compact—a vision that made all the day’s chaos worthwhile.

She wore a thin, multicolored, knee-length lace dress that hugged her tall, slender frame as if it had been designed just for her.

Her shoulder-length brown hair caught the golden glow of the setting Florida sun, creating a halo effect that took my breath away.

The scent of spring flowers mingled with her perfume, and the warm breeze lifted soft strands of her hair. She stood there, unaware of my presence—an image of effortless beauty.

“Hello,” I said, deliberately thickening my English accent—a secret weapon that had served me well over the years.

The effect was immediate. She paused, slowly turning her head toward me as if savoring the moment.

Her lips—perfectly painted and utterly kissable—curled into a smile that radiated pure sensuality.

“Well, hello,” she responded as she slowly looked over her shoulder. Her voice carried a warmth that melted away all my earlier frustrations.

My heart stopped. My mouth dropped.

The lid of her compact snapped shut.

And the fly was trapped.

# Chapter Four

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## “So, Did You Rent The Rolls?”

Regaining my composure, I walked down the ramp to meet *Tomoz*. As we hugged, I felt her hard body—and she felt mine. Body, I mean.

Our embrace was electric. It revealed the firmness of her athletic frame pressed against me. She was tall—statuesque, really. We were both 5’11” barefoot, but she never was. She lived in her six-inch heels like they were extensions of her body, making her tower over me with a kind of graceful dominance. And yes, I liked it.

“I have something for you,” I said, a little nervously.

“Oh really?” she replied, coy and playful, raising an eyebrow with that mischievous glint I’d already come to recognize as dangerous territory.

I guided her back up the ramp to where the Bird of Paradise arrangement and chocolates waited like stage props in a scene I’d rehearsed in my head a hundred times. She moved with the practiced grace of a supermodel—because, of course, she *was* one. or at least used to be. Every step was deliberate, like she knew the world was watching, even when it wasn’t.

Her eyes widened at the sight of the flowers. One hand rose to cover her mouth in genuine surprise. For a moment, her tough veneer cracked, and I saw the girl beneath the goddess.

“Oh my, they’re gorgeous! We need to put them in the apartment,” she said, her face lighting up with real pleasure. And just like that, I was ten feet tall.

Inside the lobby, she slipped her hand into mine.

“Let me show you around,” she said, leading me confidently through the ground-floor bar and out onto the back patio.

I struggled behind her, trying not to drop the damn Bird of Paradise arrangement or the box of chocolates. The tall, exotic blooms flopped awkwardly in my arms like a flaming trophy I wasn’t quite sure how to carry. The chocolates kept slipping down from under my arm.

*Why am I carrying this stuff?* I wondered. It was a sign of how things were going to be.

The patio was stunning—clean lines, soft lighting, a whisper of ocean breeze in the air. She walked like she owned the place. Hell, maybe she did. That was *Tomoz*: if she didn’t own it, she simply acted like she did until the universe caught up and handed over the deed.

I tried to focus, but my brain was short-circuiting from her proximity. The scent of her perfume mixed with the ocean air—something warm and floral with a hit of danger underneath. It was intoxicating.

“This is where I come to think,” she said, gesturing to a quiet corner of the patio, just a table and two chairs under a slatted pergola, backlit by the setting sun.

“Think about what?” I asked.

She turned and gave me that look—half seduction, half warning.

“You’ll find out.”

We made our way to her apartment, but not before she knocked on another door, hoping to introduce me to someone named Tristan. When no one answered, we continued to her apartment.

When she opened the door, I was shocked. The mess was overwhelming—far beyond untidy. Opened boxes were everywhere, clothes spilling out of them. The apartment was a small one-bedroom, yet it felt even smaller under the weight of the chaos.

There was no furniture except an unmade bed in the bedroom and a cloth-covered cardboard box beside it, serving as a makeshift nightstand. A used coffee cup sat on top, which appeared to have been there for days. The sink overflowed with dishes, untouched for maybe a week. The place was dirty, and it stank. It was a cold, dark place. The whole scene was total mayhem and chaos.

*Tomoz* quickly got rid of the flowers and chocolates, and we left the apartment. For a fleeting moment, the thought crossed my mind: *The inside of your home is a reflection of the inside of you.* How true that would turn out to be. It was another red flag I chose to ignore. I quickly pushed the scene from my mind and refocused on *Tomoz*.



As we headed back to the elevator, Tristan emerged from his apartment and joined us. He had a pronounced stutter but came across as genuinely pleasant. *Tomoz* introduced us, we exchanged pleasantries and said we looked forward to getting together. When we walked out of the building, *Tomoz* mentioned he was a trust fund kid, though *kid* wasn't quite accurate—he had to be at least forty. She also mentioned that her friend Melania was dating him.

When we reached my car, *Tomoz* showed no reaction to the Rolls-Royce, as if such luxury was merely expected. It wasn't an entitlement mentality—it was just what she was used to. Like buying a house, you don't feel entitled to a bathroom; you expect the house to have one.

At the Birchwood Hotel, staff members greeted me by name at every turn—the valet, the lobby attendant, the hostess, even the manager. I could see *Tomoz's* mind working, probably assuming I was a regular who brought all his dates here.

"Mr. Edwards, your table is ready," the hostess announced warmly.

I followed *Tomoz* to our balcony table, appreciating the view in more ways than one. After holding her chair, I watched as she noticed the arrangement of roses in a small, short vase, pressed tightly together, ideally placed for intimate conversation. She lifted them gently, inhaling their fragrance with evident pleasure.

I was thrilled to be with *Tomoz* in this stunning setting on our first date. Yet, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was in over my head. She seemed almost *too* amazing, and I struggled to believe such an incredible woman could be genuinely interested in me. Still, I was determined to do whatever it took to keep her attention.

Sarah appeared instantly. "Good evening, Mr. Edwards. I hope everything is to your liking."

"Everything looks wonderful, Sarah. Thank you," I replied, appreciating how perfectly she had executed our earlier plans.

*Tomoz* arched a brow. "Well, you've obviously been here before," she observed wryly.

"No, never." I smiled. "Though it's not what you might be thinking."

"Oh? And what might I be thinking?" she challenged playfully.

"Well, you might be thinking that I've brought other, or perhaps *many*, dates here before," I said.

"It crossed my mind," she replied. We had a good banter going.

I shared the story of my afternoon preparations. While *Tomoz* wasn't one for obvious flattery, I could tell she was impressed. The conversation flowed naturally from there, with Sarah providing precisely the attentive yet unobtrusive service she had promised.

It was the perfect way to break the ice and earn points in *Tomoz's* book, which I was certain she had, either literally or metaphorically. I was slowly beginning to feel more relaxed and confident.

*Tomoz* made a fuss over the roses, and she was now at ease. The conversation flowed effortlessly. Sarah was the perfect waitress—engaging in polite yet natural conversation while providing outstanding service and food, just as she had assured me she would.

I barely registered what I ate that evening, completely captivated by *Tomoz's* presence. I remember *Tomoz* had fried Branzino because that damn fish kept looking at me throughout the whole dinner with its accusing eye. Everything about her was mesmerizing—her perfectly styled hair, expressive eyes, full lips, that sultry voice, and the way she carried herself with effortless confidence. She exuded both blue-blood sophistication and down-to-earth charm.

She sipped sparkling rosé while I drank beer. I know, I know—no class. But I've never enjoyed wine; in fact, I barely drank at all. Though that was about to change.

I needed to step up my game.

During dinner, we kept up a playful, engaging banter. After finishing our delicious main course, the conversation took a deeper turn.

"You mentioned your father helped you find a place. That was nice of him. Are you guys close?" I asked.

I really wanted to get to know this woman—to understand her, to relate to her. Would we have things in common, or were we total opposites? Asking about family seemed like a good place to start.

"Unfortunately, not. My father is devoid of emotion and extremely analytical. He has a strange sense of humor—morbid even—and he can be ruthless."

*Tomoz* continued, "He's always there for me if I need him, but we're not in each other's lives the way I wish."

She sighed, swirling her wine. "He measures everything in terms of business and money—things that have never mattered to me. So, we had nothing in common. He never had time for me. He wanted me to work in his business, but it's not for me."

"What kind of business is he in?" I asked.

"He started out owning a chain of production companies. He sold them for a few hundred million dollars. Then go into some kind of investing in business ventures. He was very good at it." She tilted her head slightly as if reflecting on it. "He's semi-retired now and spends most of his time buying classic cars. They are very beautiful. He has quite a collection.

"I'm not sure how much money he has, but he told me he's close to being a billionaire. I don't know," she said nonchalantly.

Then, her expression darkened slightly.

When I was 16 I caught my father cheating on my mother. I ended up telling my mother and my father has never forgiven me. My parents are divorced.

She quickly shook off the somber moment, perking up again.

"Anyway, you're very good at getting me to talk about myself, which I don't like to do," she said with a smirk. "Tell me about your life. You said your parents live in Sarasota—you must be close to them."

That was a lot to wrap my head around. A thousand thoughts and questions flew through my mind. I knew she came from wealth—that was easy to see—but *that* kind of wealth? Holy shit.

Now I was even more intimidated. But in a way, it also gave me confidence. I have never been impressed by material things—not even my own. I had them because I enjoyed them, not to impress anyone. Back when I was happily married, Jules and I lived a quiet, reclusive life.

Now that I was looking for a new partner, I didn't want to attract a gold digger. But *Tomoz* was anything but. She could have anything she wanted. My job was simply to be the right guy. Not that it would be easy, but I felt more confident.

I somehow managed to bring my focus back to the conversation.

"I am," I replied. "We're close now. I've always been close with my mum, but my father and I have never gotten along. Success and money have always been the most important things to him, too. He's been successful, but nothing compared to your father."

I paused and took a sip of my beer.

"Money and success were never important to me either," I continued. "I've managed to do well at something I love. The money resulted from following my passion and my dream."

"It took a long time. My father always tried to push me toward things he thought I could make money doing. But making money was never important to me. I stuck to what I wanted to do—and I was broke for most of my life."

"At one point, I lived in a rented house, selling my belongings to pay the rent. Things would constantly go wrong, and my father would pounce on the opportunity to rub it in, telling me I should be selling insurance."

"I'd always say, 'It's all going to come good in the end, Dad. This will all be part of my story.'"

"And he'd fire back, 'It's going to be a bloody long story.'"

*Tomoz* smiled.

"I think I know why you're so frustrated with your father," I added, a mix of emotions swirling inside me. "My father can be just as stubborn. I've lost count of how many times I've tried to explain my perspective, only for him to dismiss it because it doesn't align with his views. He expects everyone to think exactly like him, without ever considering anyone else's feelings."

"So, what is your passion?" *Tomoz* asked, changing the subject.

"I love to speak—to share the wisdom I've learned from my many mentors, to help people overcome their fears, and to guide them toward living the life of their dreams," I said proudly.

"Oh, so you're a motivational speaker?" she asked, trying to simplify it.

I hate being called a motivational speaker. Motivation is like taking a warm bath—the positive effects wear off in about 20 minutes. That's not what I do. The tools, strategies, spiritual principles, and wisdom I share can genuinely transform lives, just as they have transformed mine.

I replied, "Well, I wouldn't call it motivational speaking. Motivation is temporary. I teach strategies that, when applied, create lasting change." I tried not to sound too self-important.

"Well, you've certainly motivated me," *Tomoz* said with a smile. "Perhaps you could teach me some of these life-changing strategies?" she added playfully.

"I have a feeling that might be biting off more than I can chew," I said, aiming for humility.

"You'll never know unless you try," she replied in that deep, sultry voice, her demure smile suggesting she had something else in mind.

"Touche," I said.

Sarah suddenly interrupted our exchange with an unexpected dessert—a divine cheesecake adorned with chocolate drizzle and raspberries, “Happy Anniversary” elegantly written across the plate.

I had completely forgotten that I’d told Sarah we were celebrating an anniversary. It hadn’t even crossed my mind that she would, of course, bring out a special dessert.

*Tomoz* played along flawlessly. “Oh, honey, thank you!” she purred, planting a sultry kiss on my cheek.

“How did you know?” I asked Sarah, who simply smiled and disappeared.

“Hmm, wishful thinking?” *Tomoz* teased.

“Just eat your cheesecake and look grateful,” I said with a grin. “I had to say something to justify going to so much trouble for this date. They already think I’m crazy. If they knew it was our first date, they might have called a doctor to come and check my mental state.”

She smiled, put a tiny bite of cheesecake on her fork, and placed it delicately in her mouth. Tilting her head slightly like a royal princess, she said, “Well, happy anniversary, darling. You thought of everything. I am cautiously optimistic about you.”

I could tell I was beginning to melt her ice walls, inching my way into her heart. She was making me earn her attention and affection—she wasn’t going to let me win her over easily. Yet, at the same time, she wanted me to know I was heading in the right direction.

The hours slipped away in conversation and laughter. Around 10:30, I leaned in and said, “I have another surprise. I’ve reserved a rooftop cabana overlooking downtown and the ocean.”

“Really? That sounds wonderful,” she replied, her voice low and sultry.

As we made our way through the restaurant, we commanded attention like a magnet. Every head turned, drawn to her graceful exit. She moved with practiced confidence, clearly savoring her effect on the room.

I was beginning to own the fact that she was with me. I wasn’t just her chaperone—I was her date. Damn, that felt good.

As we stepped out of the elevator onto the rooftop bar, once again, the waiter led us to our cabana. The sky was a deep velvety blue, streaked with beautiful cloud formations. The ocean stretched before us, flanked by the glittering lights of downtown St. Petersburg on either side. As we entered the cabana, she smiled—excited, no doubt, to school me at Backgammon.

Once inside, we set up the game board and began to play literally and metaphorically. We sipped sparkling rosé—my first concession to her more refined tastes—while I won the first two games. She was not happy. Her competitive nature blazed hotter than the sun, but I held firm to my belief that letting someone win was an insult.

Then she looked at me and said, “I need a break, baby.”

She was calling me *baby*—she could have whatever she wanted!

“I need a cigarette,” she said casually.

I was in shock. A cigarette? Please be joking. She wasn’t.

My heart sank. I quit smoking years ago, fully committing to a healthy lifestyle. For a moment, I considered it a deal-breaker. Then reality hit: Was I really about to reject a supermodel over cigarettes? This was the third red flag I’d chosen to ignore, though I’d soon lose count. She was a siren and a Venus Fly Trap wrapped into one irresistible package.

“I’m surprised you smoke,” I said, hoping she’d reply with something like *I’m quitting tomorrow*.

“I don’t smoke very often. I know it’s a bad habit, but I like to indulge occasionally,” she said nonchalantly. Still, there was an underlying tone: don’t *try to control me*.

We then returned to our game. *Tomoz* proceeded to win three straight matches—no charity involved, just pure skill and strategy. Like any great player, she knew exactly when to take a time-out and refocus.

When she won the third game in a row, she let out a loud squeal of joy.

She was happy now, so I took advantage of her good mood, like any great player would. As I leaned in to roll the dice and start the next game, I made my first move—cupping her face with one hand and drawing her into a kiss.

I kissed her gently at first, teasing her lips with soft nibbles. Then the kiss deepened, growing more passionate, more intense. Soon, our tongues were exploring places that perhaps they had never been before, and we were utterly lost in the moment. It was intoxicating. Sensual. The sexual chemistry between us was undeniable. The real game had officially begun.

While her beauty was unquestionable, *Tomoz* was much more than her looks. She was confident, elegant, funny, intelligent, and effortlessly graceful. She carried herself like a princess and a supermodel combined. She was easy to talk to but had high expectations—an alluring mix of charm and challenge. As the evening unfolded, I became more and more captivated by her.

Okay, infatuated with her.

“Why do I feel like I was strategically beaten by a backgammon hustler?” I mused.

“Because you were, darling. As you said, maybe you’ve bitten off more than you can chew,” she replied, her sultry voice laced with a playful challenge, that irresistible smile sealing my fate.

She knew she could challenge anyone and win.

“Hmmm... are you declaring war, young lady?” I teased.

“Oh, the war started the first time you sent me that epic email.”

The banter was heating up, becoming even more playful.

“Yes, that was epic, dear,” I said. “Your response was so short as if to imply you weren’t really interested—when, in reality, it was obvious you were completely smitten.”

She was resetting the backgammon board at that moment, but my words made her head snap up. She quickly caught herself and looked back down at the board. “In your dreams,” she said coolly. “The only reason I responded at all was because you were so annoying.”

“Do you often date men you find so annoying?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“All men are annoying, darling,” she shot back without missing a beat.

“Good to know,” I said, wondering, *Does she have men issues?* Little did I know.

“Okay, set them up because I’m about to get even more annoying,” I challenged, leaning in.

She sat up, locking eyes with me. “Like I said, in your dreams.”

She was ready to take the challenge and raise the ante.

She always had to have the last word. That would be the last time she did, though.

Well... not really. But it sounded good.

Backgammon would soon become a major part of our sex lives in the days, weeks, and months to come. You should be curious.

During one of our games, *Tomoz* called the waiter over.

“Would you please ask our waitress from the restaurant to come up and see us?” she requested.

“Of course,” he replied before heading off.

As soon as he left, she turned to me. “Baby, I love the roses you bought me—they’re gorgeous. And the Bird of Paradise arrangement was stunning too. But Sarah was such an amazing waitress for us tonight. Would you mind if I gave her the roses?”

“What a lovely idea,” I said, struck again by her thoughtfulness.

The waiter caught Sarah just as she was leaving for the night. A few minutes later, she appeared at our rooftop cabana, her face lighting up the moment she saw us.

"Hi, guys!" she gushed. "How's everything going?"

*Tomoz* smiled warmly. "We're having such a wonderful time. Thank you, Sarah. You've been such a special part of our evening, and we just wanted to thank you in person."

"Awww, that's so sweet of you to say," Sarah replied, visibly touched.

*Tomoz* continued, "As a small token of our appreciation, I'd love for you to have the roses from our table."

Sarah's hands flew to her mouth in shock, her eyes welling up.

"Oh my goodness, that is *so* nice of you." She was visibly touched. "Thank you *sooooo* much! You have no idea how much this means to me."

As Sarah skipped away with renewed energy, I marveled at *Tomoz's* ability to create such meaningful moments.

We ordered another bottle of sparkling rosé and continued our dance of discovery—though, in retrospect, we weren't truly discovering each other. We were merely meeting the carefully crafted versions of ourselves, the ones we wanted each other to see.

Neither of us wanted the night to end. By midnight, we had closed down the bar.

The valets had long gone, leaving the Rolls parked outside Cassis, a restaurant down the street.

"It's such a beautiful night. Let's go for a walk," I suggested.

"I would love that," she said.

So we strolled hand in hand along the main street, the night air wrapping around us. After a moment, *Tomoz* glanced at me, a playful glint in her eye.

"So... did you rent the Rolls?" she teased.

"Was it that obvious?" I played along. "Actually, I need to return it to the rental place in Sarasota before they open in the morning. Would you like to come with me?"

"Nice try," she said, smirking. "I'm not going anywhere with you, mister." She paused, then added, "You *look* like you would take advantage of me."

"Guilty," I said, pulling her closer by the waist. "But we don't have to go to Sarasota for me to do that."

Before she could respond, I kissed her. Soft at first. Then deeper. The kiss quickly turned passionate, lingering longer than I had intended but still not long enough.

When we finally came up for air, I whispered, "Your feet must be killing you. Let's sit down over there." I gestured toward a grassy area across the street near the water.



She smiled knowingly. "If you think you're going to have your way with me on the grass over there, you are *sadly* mistaken."

She said as she walked to the 'grass over there' with me anyway. *Tomoz* took off her shoes and we sat side by side with our knees up, looking out over the water. We sat in silence for a few minutes both lost in our thoughts. Then *Tomoz* stood up, picked up her shoes, and took my hand, "It's time to go, before I do something I might regret." She teased as she dragged me back across the 'grass over there' onto the side walk. The heels were immediately returned to their natural locked position .

The bars were winding down, neon signs flickering off one by one.

As we strolled along Main Street, I glanced over at *Tomoz*, taking her all in—the way her elegant, sexy dress clung to her, the way her long legs moved effortlessly beneath it. A sight for sore eyes.

Or *any* eyes, for that matter.

It had already been the most incredible date I had ever been on. I had meticulously planned every detail, but *Tomoz's* magic made it unforgettable. I had high expectations for the evening, and *Tomoz* did not disappoint. In fact, she didn't just meet them—she exceeded them.

We stopped and once again sat on the grass overlooking the water. Neither of us spoke; we just sat together, wrapped in the quiet intimacy of the moment.

Then I looked at her.

She turned her head, meeting my gaze.

For a heartbeat, we simply *existed* together, looking into each other's souls. It was a moment to treasure forever. We would share many more like it.

The kiss that followed was inevitable—deep, all-consuming. A magnetic force pulling our souls together. My hands cupped her face as if trying to fuse with her very being, before trailing down exploring the curves of her body—caressing her thighs, her breasts, and the delicate curve of her neck.

We lost ourselves in each other, giving new meaning to the phrase '*they were really into each other.*'

Time ceased to exist until we finally broke apart, breathless, and then we walked together to retrieve the car.

Once inside the Rolls, passion overtook us again. *Tomoz* moved gracefully across the center console and into my lap, all 6'5" of her folding into my embrace like a cat, fluid, effortless.

As I held her, stroking her hair, a vision flashed through my mind: a wild black Arabian horse galloping across a dark horizon, fleeing unseen dangers. It was *her* spirit I saw. Instinctively, I pulled her closer and whispered, “You’re safe now. You don’t need to run anymore.”

She snuggled deeper into me.

The moment was abruptly interrupted by a tapping on the window. I sat up, rolling it down, confused.

The restaurant manager stood there, looking sheepish.

“Hey guys, sorry to bother you, but... the car’s headlights reflect off the building—everyone can see you.”

We burst out laughing at our teenage-like recklessness.

To our surprise, he even offered to drive us around so we could sit in the back and make out in private.

Apparently, the Rolls-Royce’s headlights couldn’t be turned off while the engine was running. I suppose most Rolls-Royce owners don’t use them for steamy make-out sessions in front of restaurants at one thirty in the morning.

I grinned at the manager. “That’s incredibly thoughtful of you, but we have somewhere we need to be. Rain check?”

“Of course,” he said with a grin. “You guys have a great night.”

I turned to *Tomoz*. “Are you hungry?”

She stretched slightly and smiled. “I could eat something.”

“You like Denny’s?”

She laughed. “Sure, Denny’s would be perfect.”

We both enjoyed going to extremes, and we were both comfortable wherever we went.

As we set off, *Tomoz* began to drift off. I let her sleep, watching her breath’s soft rise and fall as I drove. Instead of heading to the Denny’s in St. Petersburg, I took a detour to the Denny’s in Sarasota.

She’d find it funny that I got her to Sarasota anyway. Or at least, I hoped she would.

The drive back was exhilarating. With the freeway wide open, I let the Rolls stretch its legs, pushing it to 140 MPH—my preferred speed when circumstances allowed. Reckless? Maybe. But God, it felt good. The Rolls is by far the most comfortable and safest car I have ever driven at high speed, gliding over the road like it was built for it.

When we arrived outside Denny’s, I gently woke *Tomoz*. She stirred, a little groggy at first, then waited for me to walk around and open her door—something I loved doing.

She was my princess now.

As she stepped out, she glanced around, taking in our surroundings. “Where are we?” she asked as she stretched her arms, though I knew she already had suspicions.

“Denny’s,” I said smoothly, which was *technically* true—I just wasn’t geographically specific.

“Hmmm... I knew I couldn’t trust you.” She smiled, shaking her head.

We walked inside. The place was practically deserted—just one person taking care of customers—though there weren’t any actual customers to take care of. We had the place all to ourselves.

The waiter greeted us at the podium. “Good evening... I mean, morning,” he corrected himself with a grin.

I leaned in, lowering my voice as if making a grand request. “I know this is going to sound ridiculous, but is there *any* chance you might have a table for two available? We’re willing to wait if necessary.” I said it with the seriousness of a man pleading with the *maitre d’* at Spago in Beverly Hills.

The waiter smirked and played along. “For you, sir, we have the finest table in the restaurant.”

“Perfect,” I said. “Because this is our first date, and I really want to impress the lady.”

He chuckled. *Tomoz*, on the other hand, rolled her eyes.

“You certainly know how to impress a lady,” the waiter teased.

“Oh, he’s made quite an impression on me. He has kidnapped me. Could you please call the police and let them know I’ve been abducted by a madman?”

She played along flawlessly, and we all laughed.

We all had fun together. The waiter seemed glad to be seen and appreciated. We left him with a generous tip and a big smile on his face, having brought some life to his graveyard shift.

Back in the Rolls, I drove back to my house, and we soon found ourselves on my bed. In fact, we went directly to the bedroom—which made perfect sense if you think about it.

I don’t remember exactly what time it was, other than that it was time for bed.

We made out and had a great time without going all the way. Which was really pointless because we both knew we’d soon be fucking each other’s brains out soon anyway.

Eventually, we fell asleep in each other’s arms.

I didn't want her to go home—ever. But by late morning, I drove her back to her apartment. I wanted to see her again that evening, but she had “other plans.” Which, of course, meant she had another date.

I couldn't stop thinking about her.

Everything about *Tomoz*—her walk, her laugh, her voice, the way she looked at me as if she already knew how the story would end—had lodged itself in my mind like a song I couldn't stop playing.

After dropping her off that morning, I drove home in silence. No music. No phone calls. Just the hum of the engine and the echo of her kiss on my lips. I replayed every moment: the rooftop kiss, the backgammon games, the grass over there, the make-out session in the Rolls, the way she slipped so easily into my lap and somehow made it feel like I belonged to her.

And I did.

She hadn't said much when I dropped her off. Just a quick kiss on the cheek and a teasing, “Don't get into trouble today.” It was vague enough to mean nothing and yet somehow managed to mean everything. She didn't invite me up. Didn't say, “Let's talk later.” No confirmation of another date. Just that smooth, maddening exit, leaving me craving more.

I hated that she had that power.

By early afternoon, I'd already texted her. Something casual. Playful. Nothing too eager.

No reply.

By evening, I was spiraling.

I met some friends at the Ritz-Carlton patio, our usual haunt. The sun was setting in that gold-and-pink Florida way that makes everything feel like a movie. But I wasn't watching the view—I was watching my phone.

Still nothing.

I tried to act normal. Made conversation. Laughed at the right moments. But my mind was elsewhere, trapped in a loop of what-ifs. Was she testing me? Playing hard to get? Or had she already moved on? That idea—the one where she was out with someone else—burrowed under my skin like a splinter.

Eventually, I gave in and sent another message.

Still playful. Still casual.

No reply.

So I sent a cricket.

A literal cricket emoji.

Passive-aggressive? Maybe. Pathetic? Absolutely. But I was slipping, and I knew it.

Finally, hours later, she responded.

That was it.

No words. Just a smirking emoji, as if she knew exactly what she was doing. And then:  
*"Didn't want to be rude. I should probably give some attention to my date."*

My stomach twisted.

Of course she had a date. Of course she did. A woman like that doesn't stay still. She doesn't wait by the phone. She moves, always, and the world bends to accommodate her.

Everything in me wanted to believe that what we had on that first night was real. That it wasn't just a performance. That she wasn't just indulging me for the sake of roses and rooftop views. But every time I reached out, she kept me at arm's length—just close enough to keep the hope alive, just far enough to make sure I never felt secure.

And I couldn't walk away.

Because despite all the signs—despite the red flags and the cryptic responses and the other dates—I was already in too deep.

I told myself it was just chemistry. A fling. A distraction.

But I knew better.

This wasn't just about sex or beauty or even desire. This was about obsession. That dangerous kind. The kind that makes you forget who you were before it started.

I was disappointed but understood.

The romance had begun.

I'm going to catch this girl, I thought.

I had no idea the Venus Fly Trap had already caught me.

# Chapter Five

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## A Bridge To Nowhere

*T*omoz and I had a lot of demons—and a lot in common. We revealed the complex dance of our own traumas through stories of family and experiences.

One of the many things we shared was the struggle to earn the attention of emotionally unavailable fathers—men incapable of expressing love in a way we could *feel*.

When my father was home, the house turned to glass—fragile, silent, always on the verge of shattering. We tiptoed, barely breathing, afraid that a misplaced word or a creaky floorboard might trigger his disapproval. No matter how hard we tried, nothing was ever good enough.

He was highly critical. Children were to be seen, not heard.

But his rage wasn't born from nowhere—it was passed down like an unwanted heirloom. His father, an alcoholic, had been cold. His grandfather, another alcoholic, had been cruel. A man who thought stuffing Christmas stockings with sawdust was *hilarious* had raised a son who believed fear was the best form of discipline. And so, the cycle continued.

A legacy of fear and bullying handed down through generations.

My grandfather feared his father. My father feared his. And in turn, they all became bullies.

I feared my father too.

But I broke the pattern in my own way. Instead of becoming an abuser, I became an advocate for the underdog, standing with the abused rather than the aggressor. I despised bullies and often found myself in fights, defending their victims.

Yet, suppressing my anger came at a cost.

As a child, I would bang my head against my pillow, while making a strange guttural sound that would often keep my sister awake in the next room. I did this each night until exhaustion finally pulled me into sleep. I felt voiceless, helpless—suffocating under the weight of unspoken, unexpressed emotions.

At seventeen, while working as a trainee manager at Tesco, a retail grocery chain in the UK, I experienced my first manic episode. A promotion ignited a newfound dedication to work, pushing me to sleep less but feel more energized. Euphoria hit me like a tidal wave.

Everything intensified—my strength, my confidence, my ability to persuade. I felt invincible.

My mum took me to the doctor. He advised rest and told me not to go anywhere. She took me home and put me to bed.

I climbed out of the bedroom window.

It was a ground-floor bedroom, so escape was easy—no grand prison break. I circled the house, got into my car, and sped off.

The episode became a blur. My mind must have blocked much of it out. But I remember organizing a new nightclub, negotiating a lease, and securing the best DJ in town.

I only recall that because the DJ called after it was all over, asking when we were opening. The landlord sent over a lease to sign. Who knows how many people I roped into that project and probably others without realizing it?

I bounced from bar to bar, talking to—I couldn't even say how many people. My friends tried to talk me down, but the high was too intoxicating. I didn't want to come down. It all culminated in a wild night with the owner of a local brothel. Someone told me she wanted to meet me, so I called her. She said, "Why don't you come over?" So I did. I was gone, physically and mentally for days. At one point, I was driving 100 mph on the wrong side of the road, flying over a bridge.

When I finally returned home late one night, I proclaimed to my parents that I was Jesus Christ and that stigmata would soon appear on my palms.

So, overall, it was a pretty good night.

By 4 a.m., that morning, I was admitted to Wesham Psychiatric Hospital.

I still remember the smell of bleach. The sterile hospital odors filled my nostrils, and even now, the scent makes my stomach turn whenever I step into a hospital.

They put me in restraints immediately. I couldn't understand why—which, ironically, was probably the very reason I needed them.

Funnily enough, I was probably their most compliant patient. I loved everyone and everything.

Years later, I wondered if, in some ways, I had actually gone sane rather than insane.

But eventually, I realized that love alone isn't always the answer. Sometimes, it leads to serious trouble.

The doctors gradually increased my sedation until I was deemed "under control"—which really just meant thoroughly miserable.

Apparently, that's what they call normal.

They recommended electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). I agreed, not fully grasping the long-term consequences. My mother was deeply concerned and questioned my decision. That moment stands out in my memory—she understood more about its implications than I did.

The aftermath of ECT was devastating. Once the initial terrible headaches subsided, I plunged into a two-year depression that matched—and maybe even surpassed—the depth of my previous euphoria.

Sleep became my only escape. Each morning, I'd wake up hoping the weight had lifted, only to find myself back in that familiar living room chair, staring out the window into nothingness.

Friends tried to reach out, but even basic conversation felt unbearable. The pressure of interaction was overwhelming.

Eventually, they stopped calling, unable to understand what I was going through. The isolation only deepened my depression, trapping me in a cycle that felt impossible to break.

When I finally emerged from my depression and reached out to old friends, I was met with anger and rejection—some of them wanted nothing to do with me. They felt they had been there for me and that I hadn't appreciated their support.

The medical professionals diagnosed me with manic depression—now known as bipolar disorder—and prescribed a lifetime regimen of lithium to "balance me out." At the time, I had no idea just how much this diagnosis would shape my future in ways I couldn't yet comprehend.

It's funny how even our most harrowing experiences can provide a silver lining. My struggles with depression have given me a depth of empathy, humor, and understanding I could have never gained otherwise. This deep compassion has become the foundation



of my speaking career. In fact, it is one of the key reasons for my success as a speaker and my ability to reach people's hearts.

My relationship with my father was practically nonexistent, which made his dinner table proposition all the more surprising.

"Why don't you come and work in the business?" he said casually as if discussing the weather. "One day, it will be half yours."

The business in question was C.L. Edwards & Sons Limited, a wholesale jewelry company that had grown from humble beginnings to national success.

So, I went to work for my father.

Then came that fateful Friday morning in 1981. I was in the office, planning the following week's appointments, when Mrs. Harvey from the packing department told me that my father had summoned me to his office.

Taking the stairs two at a time—just like him—I knocked and stepped inside, anticipation buzzing in my chest.

His desk was always tidy—everything was where it was supposed to be, nothing was out of place. His office smelled of Pledge as if it had just been cleaned and polished. My desk had I had one, would have been the opposite, which might have been one of the reasons I didn't have an office or a desk back then. It was a reminder of how, in many ways, we were so different.

"Take a seat," he said from behind his imposing desk, immaculate in his pressed blue suit, white shirt, and matching tie. "I have some great news."

His next words hit me like a punch to the stomach.

"We sold the business," he said proudly.

Everything after that became a blur. The room seemed to recede, like a scene in a film where reality distorts around the protagonist. I sat there, frozen, unable to process what he'd just said—desperate to escape and to curl into a fetal position.

A ringing noise filled my ears, drowning out everything else. I was talking to myself in my head, but I couldn't even hear my own thoughts.

I went into shock like I had never experienced before—or since that moment.

This wasn't just a business transaction—it was the ultimate betrayal. How could he promise me half the company's future while secretly negotiating its sale?

That moment cemented every negative belief I had about my own worth and my father's priorities. Money and self-interest seemed to be his only genuine concerns. That's

why I was determined never to make money the most important thing in my life—to follow my heart instead.

But the betrayal cut deeper than I realized at the time. It seeped into all my relationships, including my marriages. After all, if you can't trust your own father, who can you trust? I carried that fear with me, convinced everyone would eventually betray me. The mere thought of going through an experience like that again was terrifying.

I wasn't consciously aware of this underlying mental pattern until many years later. I pushed people away—even, or perhaps especially, those who truly loved me.

I destroyed and left relationships in a desperate attempt to avoid betrayal again. But, of course, the pattern just kept repeating.

I was too afraid of my father to say anything, so I buried my anger. But buried emotions have a way of resurfacing, and in my case, they exploded into reckless self-destruction.

Though I couldn't see it at the time, this was a crucial crossroads in my life. Among the many possible paths forward, I chose self-destruction, fueled by the rage of my father's betrayal.

Out of spite, I left my father's business and started my own wholesale jewelry business, determined to prove I didn't need him. But I quickly learned it wasn't as easy as it looked. It was a disaster.

I was fortunate that my body chemistry wouldn't allow me to become addicted to alcohol or drugs. I never touched heavy substances like heroin, but I did take amphetamines and cocaine. I drank alcohol, but mostly socially and rarely to excess.

I didn't like feeling out of control. I could always take or leave all of them. At the same time, I did go on benders occasionally. All the anger inside me, the benders, and my lack of business acumen led me to make some terrible choices—both in business and in my life—with serious consequences.

However, that is another story—perhaps even crazier—for another book. In the end, my father disowned me.

Like I said, *Tomoz* and I had a lot in common. We wrestled with some of the same demons, both rebels without a cause, always finding ourselves in trouble—sometimes serious trouble.

Even now, my father seethes over the things I did and the ways I tarnished his precious reputation. But not once has he admitted his own mistakes. In his mind, I was the stain on his legacy. It never occurred to him that maybe—just maybe—he had handed me the brush.

For a while, I tried to build a bridge to carve out some kind of relationship with him. I played golf with him every week while Jules took my mother shopping. But it was a bridge to nowhere.

It didn't make a difference. In the end, it wasn't enjoyable for me.

Maybe all of this played a part in why I've been married four times—not to mention the countless girlfriends along the way. What does that say about how fucked up I am? A lot.

As you can imagine, I could write a book about each of my marriages. But let me tell you a little about my first.

## Chapter Six

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# We Are All Searching For Someone Whose Demons Play Well With Ours.

**M**y first marriage was in England. Her name was Mandy. Mandy was a second-generation Indian. People would often ask me, “Was she Indian-Indian or Native American Indian?” I would say, “First of all, rude. Second of all, I’ll look into that.” I stole that joke from Ray Hanley—a great comedian.

Her Indian-Indian name was Manjit. We met while working for a company called Kitchens Direct, which sold kitchens all over the UK. She was the top salesperson. I had come from selling advertising to industry, where I was the top salesman. So naturally, I had to find out what Mandy was doing to stay ahead—so I could beat her.

When we met, I asked her to come to the showroom and show me exactly how she sold a kitchen.

We lived in Coventry, in the Midlands, a predominantly industrial city known for its car factories, which mainly built cars like Jaguar and other lesser-known brands. Mandy had a broad Midlands accent, which was a little disconcerting coming out of the mouth of an obviously Indian woman.

As she was explaining what she did, I interrupted.

“No, I don’t want you to tell me. I want you to actually sell me a kitchen.”

I know—I was very cocky.

As you can imagine, that didn't go down too well. We ended up arguing, and Mandy stormed out.

However, as is often the case, the best relationships start with conflict.

We soon became great friends. In fact, we ended up working together, traveling all over the country selling kitchens.

And before we knew it, we were living together.

Mandy's parents were born in India. Her mother spoke no English, and her father spoke only a little. Both of her older siblings were in arranged marriages.

Mandy, though, was different. She was hilarious—she could have me crying with laughter just telling a story about something that had happened to her.

But her family couldn't accept us being together. Eventually, they forced her to choose between her family and me.

She chose me.

It was devastating for everyone. She was especially close to her father, and his disappointment crushed her. Mandy was his favorite, and he made no secret of it. She meant everything to him.

It shattered him that she chose to stay with me. It devastated Mandy that he had made her choose between me and her family. It was purely a cultural thing.

That experience opened my eyes. I realized that racism isn't just one-sided—it exists across all cultures. I had never thought about it that way before.

Growing up in Blackpool, a seaside holiday town with no real industry, I never had to.

Most foreign immigrants who came to England settled in major cities, where there were many industries and jobs. So, I had never really experienced racism and did not have any racist biases.

But now, I know what it feels like to be the victim of racism. It is a terrible feeling. You feel completely misunderstood, but you can do nothing about it. You are being told—explicitly or implicitly—that you're not good enough. It's devastating.

That experience turned me into an advocate for victims of racism. And it also opened my eyes to what Mandy endured daily. She was constantly subjected to racism, and watching it happen—seeing how normalized it was—was difficult for me to understand, let alone tolerate.

For five years, we shared a life. But if I truly wanted to help her reunite with her family, there was only one thing I could do—I had to marry Mandy.

And so, I did.

Her parents came to the wedding. And for a short time, after selling everything in preparation for our move to America, we lived with them.

They were wonderful and treated me like a son. It was a healing experience for all of us—her parents had overcome their prejudices and fully accepted me into their family.

Her older brother, however, was a different story. He was adamant that he would never accept our marriage or speak to Mandy again.

I loved Mandy deeply. We spent every day together and never grew tired of each other. But there was one undeniable truth I couldn't escape—there was no sexual chemistry for me. Whenever we kissed, I waited for the spark—the rush of heat, the dizzying pull. But nothing came. Just the press of lips, the motion without the fire.

A quiet certainty settled in my chest: this wasn't what it was supposed to feel like.

The realization crept in slowly. First, a whisper. Then, a voice I couldn't ignore.

I had made a mistake. I thought our marriage could survive without physical intimacy. I was wrong. It left a void. It was something I could never tell Mandy. It would devastate her.

But leaving Mandy wasn't a decision I could make overnight. She had already lost so much, and I couldn't walk away until I knew she had all her family back and a solid foundation to stand on.

So, I stayed.

Five years passed.

Then when she was finally reunited with her whole family, I knew it was time for us to move on with our lives. I had done my best to repair the damage I had caused. Not long after Mandy and her older brother were reunited, Mandy and I got divorced.

Yet our love for each other never truly faded. Even after the divorce, we spoke every day—multiple times a day—for another five years.

Then, one day, my mother told me, "Stephen, if you don't let Mandy go, you'll never have room in your life for anyone else." She was right. I knew I had to let Mandy go. Even then, we remained close for many years.

But when Mandy remarried, out of respect for her husband, we agreed it was time to part completely. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done.

I still miss her. Sometimes, I long to reach out for her guidance and support. But then I remind myself—that would be selfish. I have to love her enough to let her go.

Over the years, I married three more times. Each of them had their own unique qualities, yet somehow, they all shared striking similarities. Looking back now, I realize I was searching for the connection I had with Mandy in every marriage.

I never found her again.

My past is littered with wounds—some healing, some still raw. The scars remind me of the battles I've fought and the ghosts I carry. But I'm not the only one.

*Tomoz* has her demons, her scars that have shaped the person she is today. Maybe, in some way, that's what drew us together.

*Tomoz* and her father were estranged. As a child, they had terrible fights. Then, one day, she discovered he was gay. She walked in on him with his lover. It was *Tomoz* who told her mother the truth—a truth she believed her father could never forgive her for sharing with her Mother.

But he had, of course, forgiven her long ago.

Years of conflict and pain eventually severed all ties between *Tomoz's* parents. Her mother was devastated when she learned the truth and later divorced him, walking away with a \$25 million settlement.

But fortune was fleeting. Her mother remarried, only for her new husband to embezzle every last dollar. She was left with nothing, surviving on social security and living with her own mother in Virginia.

*Tomoz* attended the finest schools, and her mother even sent her to finishing school. It showed. But she was the quintessential rebel without a cause. She got herself expelled from her elite school multiple times, dragging her classmates into all kinds of trouble, which, of course, was very surprising—I mean, predictable.

Her father was a genius—an intensely analytical man, so focused on logic that he often seemed devoid of emotion or empathy.

*Tomoz* had inherited his brilliance, along with his emotional detachment. For the most part, the only person she ever truly felt sorry for was herself.

Her father once told me that *Tomoz* had done some terrible things when she was a teenager. He never said what exactly, but the weight of his words stuck with me.

When *Tomoz* was sixteen, he had her committed to a psychiatric hospital.

He told me, "Stephen if you put the best ten psychiatrists in the world together, she would run rings around all of them." Looking back, I know that was undeniably true. He also said her character flaws were so deep they could never be repaired.

Another thing we had in common—we really were, crazy.

*Tomoz's* privileged upbringing was evident in everything about her, from how she carried herself to the eloquence in her voice—a product of elite schools and finishing school refinement. But when she spoke about her brother, Miles, her entire demeanor changed. Her eyes sparkled with admiration.

She idolized him. He was a gifted athlete, supportive, and always protective of his little sister. She said he was like a real-life 007.

For a while, he could do no wrong.

Then she spoke of how he lost himself when he married his wife, Anatole. It was clear *Tomoz* harbored more than a little jealousy, resentful that Anatole had taken Miles away from her and become the center of his world.

Miles worked for their father, and though *Tomoz* never said it outright, she strongly insinuated that he was under their father's thumb—a reality that stirred complex emotions in her.

Her modeling career had taken her across the globe—to New York, Paris, Rome, Brazil, and London, to mention just a few of the cities where she had done modeling work. Her career was a source of immense pride for her. She was highly sought after and had a very successful career for a while.

Of course, she was beautiful. But more than that, she had worked relentlessly at her craft. *Tomoz* had risen to the level of a true supermodel through sheer determination as well as innate talent.

Her previous marriage had not lasted long.. She hadn't married for love—she had married to get away.

*Tomoz* had once lived the kind of life most people only dreamed of—glamorous parties, ocean-view penthouses, and a husband whose career took him around the world. But beneath all the luxury, she said she felt suffocated.

"He was just so boring," she said with a sigh. "He had no personality."

Although they lived the high life in Miami, *Tomoz* wanted more. She told me that after just a year, they divorced.

As she described her restlessness despite the glamorous lifestyle, I couldn't help but think—it must take someone truly extraordinary to hold this woman's interest.

Each revelation added to the mystique—the international lifestyle, the sophistication, the fearless confidence. She seemed almost too perfect to be real.

She confessed that her rebellious streak—her addiction to partying, drugs, and sex—came at a steep price. She told me that she became unreliable, blowing off highly



paid gigs and disappearing for long period and that slowly but surely, the opportunities dried up.

She explained that high-fashion modeling is a short-lived career at the best of times, but due to her self-destructive behavior, her career came to an abrupt end long before she reached her true potential.

That downward spiral only pulled her deeper into addiction. Drugs and alcohol became her escape. She surrounded herself with other addicts, learning from those who survived by their street smarts.

*Tomoz* was secretive about her past, revealing only fragments. Whenever I asked about her marriage, past relationships, or former life, she would quickly change the subject—not that it mattered to me. I wasn't interested in who she used to be—I cared about who she was now.

We were both impulsive, drawn to risk, chasing adrenaline highs. It made us feel alive. That shared thrill-seeking was just one of many things that attracted us to each other.

We were, in fact, mirrors of each other.

We embodied many traits—stubborn, a little crazy, fiercely humanitarian, and an uncanny ability to see the future, to mention just a few. One of our highest values is friendship, and we both like to create a deep bond with our partner. We also liked to be around other crazy, zany, creative people from all walks of life.

Both of us had fathers who controlled every aspect of our lives. As a result, we found ourselves locked in a battle for dominance—both afraid of being controlled yet unwilling to surrender. It was a paradox, but one we lived every day. Both of us, having had controlling fathers, were constantly trying to control each other to prevent each other from controlling us.

What? If you read it slowly, it does make sense.

Although I wouldn't recommend reading it too many times—you might get stuck. It's a terrible, endless loop.

Throw in our intense personalities, our instability, our tendency for reckless behavior, and our constant thirst for excitement, we had all the ingredients for a long and happy marriage—or nuclear destruction. You decide.

Jules was the complete opposite. She had a calming, grounding effect on me. I would go back and forth between these two extremes—seeking out women who were either steady and soothing or wild and chaotic—always searching for the deep connection I had once shared with Mandy.

I had been with plenty of wild, crazy, and sexy women in my life. I loved the madness. I was addicted to it. Like a moth to the flame, I kept coming back for more. But *Tomoz*? She was by far the wildest, craziest, and sexiest of them all.

We had both endured trauma in our childhoods. Both carried deep psychological scars—wounds we were about to be forced to face. We seemed destined to be what, in spiritual circles, they call ‘Master Teachers’ for each other.

The lessons we were about to learn would be the hardest either of us had ever had to face. They say the universe never gives you more than you can handle. Well, that theory was about to be tested beyond belief—literally beyond what either of us believed possible.

Looking back now, I realize I was insane long before I met *Tomoz*—she merely helped me recognize this truth.

This insanity was cultivated through years of familial dysfunction, betrayal, and unprocessed trauma. *Tomoz* would simply become the catalyst that brought it all to the surface. In fact, we would become all that for each other.

We were like two comets destined to collide. Our comets were formed and directed toward each other many years ago—perhaps even before we were born.

That’s a very cursory overview of our backgrounds, which is enough for now. As the story unfolds, much, much more will be revealed.

Another thing we had in common was our terrible fear of being abandoned and left alone with our demons.

I was just hoping *Tomoz’s* demons would play well with mine.

# Chapter Seven

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## Closet Sex

*T*omoz had told me about her friend Melania, who was from Serbia and, according to Tomoz, a “business coach.” She was “coaching” Tristan and “dating him.” This seemed like a conflict of interest, but again, my mind just didn’t want to register it as an issue.

Although she was beautiful and initially came across as elegant and sexy, Melania seemed cold, with a hard hard energy. My impression of her was that she was an opportunist—tough and unyielding—seemingly concerned only with her self-interest.

*Tomoz* shared some of those traits, but she was a little softer. Unlike Melania, *Tomoz* could be manipulated. Melania, however, seemed utterly devoid of emotion.

*Tomoz* invited me to dinner with Melania and her boyfriend, Tony, at a fine dining restaurant in St. Petersburg.

I went to *Tomoz*’s apartment building to pick them all up. On the way to the restaurant, *Tomoz* was in pain—her back was hurting—so we stopped by Walgreens downtown to get her some heat pads.

As we pulled up, a small group of people was gathered outside. As I exited the Rolls, a Black man approached me and asked for money.

I looked at him and asked, “Why do you need money? What’s going on?”

He looked surprised that I had asked.

“Well, I’m a vet,” he said. “I’m here getting treatment at the VA hospital. I have to stay for five days of treatment, and I have no money. I need money for food.”

You see, you never really know unless you ask. Of course, he could have been spinning me a yarn. But we were right by the VA hospital, and he looked like he was starving.

OK, he didn’t look like he was starving. But he did seem to be telling the truth.

I hardly ever carry cash—just a card and a few spare bills—so I walked over to the car and got everyone to empty their pockets. We pooled all our cash together. It came to exactly \$23—my number. That caught my attention.

I thought that's *not going to buy much food*.

Meanwhile, the guy was watching us—four people in a Rolls-Royce, scrounging together a few bucks. The whole scene was absurd. By now, a small crowd had gathered, watching these *stupid rich people* in a Rolls, who—judging by appearances—were probably all coked up, desperately scraping together \$23.

Of course, that wasn't true.

Well, not all of it.

So, I asked him, "What's your name?"

"John," he said.

I believed him. Again. He looked like he was bracing for me to say, *Look, John, that's all we've got. Good luck, and go get a job*.

What I actually said was, "OK, John, here's what I need you to do. Grab a shopping cart from over there, fill it up with food from Walgreens here, bring it to the checkout, and I'll pay for it."

John stared at me. "Are you serious?"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

"No, no—let me grab a cart," he said, hurrying off.

He seemed nervous, probably unsure if I was playing a mean trick on him. I went to get the heat pads for *Tomoz* and headed to the checkout.

John was already there, waiting. At the bottom of his cart, there were four items.

"That's all you got?" I asked, almost frustrated.

Here was a guy who had put his life on the line for his country. He had traveled hundreds of miles for medical care, forced to be away from his wife and family. No money. Hungry. And yet, he barely took anything.

Now, here's this white guy offering to pay for his food because he can't afford to buy any himself. How would you feel?

He could have filled that cart, but he didn't. He chose not to take advantage of the situation and returned with only four items.

Did I feel guilty? Of course, I did. I had just pulled up in a Rolls-Royce with a gorgeous girl next to me in the front seat, and now I wanted to help him? How bad did that look?

But at this point, I didn't care how it looked.

I said, “John, I should have said this before—I really appreciate all the sacrifices you’ve made so we can live here safely in this amazing country. I know times are tough right now, but I know you are a man of faith, right?”

“Oh, yes,” he replied.

“I believe God sometimes sends people into our lives to help us. Would you agree?”

John nodded in agreement.

I looked him in the eye. “You have no idea how much you’ve helped *me, you are inspiration.*”

He looked at me with a blank stare. I said, “OK—now, having said all that, go and fill that *fucking* cart, and don’t come back until you cannot get another damn thing in it. Do you understand?”

He started laughing, grabbed the cart, and headed back to get more food.

“And hurry up—you know that girl out there is a princess and *hates* waiting!” I called after him.

He laughed even harder and started loading up the cart faster. He didn’t want to risk pissing *Tomoz* off either.

Finally, I walked out of the store and back to the car. John headed off to wherever he was staying, pushing a cart full of food, still shaking his head.

*Tomoz* opened her car door, and I handed her the heat pads.

“What the fuck were you doing in there?” she asked, ripping open the box.

I smirked. “Funny thing—we got to talking. Turns out we dated the same girl. He actually thought he knew *you* too.”

*Tomoz* rolled her eyes and shut the door.

Well, if you ask a stupid question, you get a stupid answer.

Luckily, we made it to the restaurant before it closed—no thanks to John!

We had a great dinner and conversation. Tony was sharp, engaging, and funny. He had travelled with friends and they had lived all over the world. His stories about their time there were hilarious, full of bizarre situations and unexpected twists.

*Tomoz* was raving about my house, clearly hoping I’d suggest we head over there—which, of course, I did.

After dinner and drinks, we all piled into the Rolls and sped off to my place. Tony and I were slightly inebriated, while *Tomoz* and Melenia were utterly wasted. I was driving fast, which just added to the intoxication. As we crossed the Skyway Bridge, the ocean

stretched beneath us, and the freeway lights reflected off the water, streaking past so fast it was almost like they were flashing.

The music in the car was blasting. Melenias and *Tomoz* started making out in the back seat. They were really going at it. It was intense. I thought they were showing off—doing it for Tony's and my benefit. Turns out they were not just showing off.

Like I said earlier, Melenia came across as a cold fish. She was from Serbia and according to her she had a brutal childhood. *Tomoz* told me Melenia had been repeatedly sexually abused when she was a child and that as a result, She hated men.

We got to my house, made some drinks, and got in the jacuzzi. The girls took off all their clothes. Tony and I protested, but they wouldn't listen. We were all playing around and having a great time. Then *Tomoz* said something insulting and disrespectful and started treating me like I was her minion.

I told her that it was not OK. She got angry, thinking I would back down. I didn't. She feigned being upset. I said, "Not acceptable."

She said, "I'm leaving." I said, "OK."

I wouldn't let her behave like a brat and treat me disrespectfully. That was a huge button for me.

She got dressed and headed for the front door with Melania and Tony. As they were leaving, I walked away into my bedroom.

Tony, unwilling to let things spiral, turned to *Tomoz*. "Look, I don't want to leave, and neither do you. Stop being stupid and go apologize to him."

She knew she was being a brat and that I wasn't going to put up with her behavior. She was annoyed but resigned. She turned around and walked into my bedroom.

I was walking in front of one of the two closets when I felt her hand on my shoulder. She gently turned me around, her touch hesitant.

*Tomoz* placed her hand behind my head, fingers barely grazing my skin. Her breath was warm and uneven as her forehead met mine. Her brown eyes searched mine, filled with something raw—regret, longing, something deeper I couldn't name.

"I am so sorry," she whispered, her voice unsteady.

My chest tightened. Such simple words, yet they carried a weight that unraveled something deep inside me. I exhaled slowly, my fingers curling around hers—not pulling, just holding. The air between us shifted, thick with the heaviness of unspoken truths. My gaze dropped to her parted lips, the silence crackling, electric, waiting to be shattered.

That was all I wanted. All I needed. She finally understood—she couldn't treat me with disrespect or like a minion. I had made my point. Set my boundary.

And then, we fell into each other and started kissing passionately.

My hands roamed her body, tracing every curve, feeling the heat between us. She clung to me, pulling me closer, devouring my lips and my face as if she couldn't get enough. We tumbled to the floor, limbs tangled, breathless, and wanting.

I dragged her into the closet, underneath the clothes hanging above us. Pinning her hands over her head, —kissing, touching, losing myself in the fire of her body.

I put my hands on her thighs and slowly moved them higher and higher. I lightly pushed her legs apart and put my hand on the outside of her panties. I felt her wetness and gently but firmly moved her panties to one side. I slowly slid my finger along the outside of her pussy and then began playing with her clit.

*Tomoz* was beginning to writhe even more and pushed against my pressure as I pushed two fingers inside her. I started slowly moving them deeper and deeper inside her. Moving each finger separately and then moving them back and forth lightly around her G Spot.

I then began moving my face down her body as I pushed her clothes off, enabling me to kiss her neck and body. My mouth moved over her nipples; I gently put them in my mouth, sucked, and nibbled them. She responded by breathing faster and pulling me down onto her.

After a few minutes, I pushed away, moved my mouth further down her body, and began kissing and licking her inner thighs. Going from side to side and passing my mouth lightly over her pussy, stopping as I kissed the lips and gently used my tongue to tease and excite her even more before continuing my journey towards her other inner thigh.

Then slowly and deliberately, I began teasing her, using slow, deliberate strokes of my tongue. By now, she was in another world, another dimension. My pleasure comes from giving pleasure. The more I give pleasure, the more I experience pleasure myself.

Slowly putting just the tip in and out before I fully entered her with my cock. She let out a loud gasp, and her body completely gave way to me. She was mine now, completely.

Her eyes were closed, her mouth open, and her heart exploding. I was constantly feeling her body's movement and responding accordingly. I tuned into her body and mind. She was in ecstasy.

We moved around the closet, using almost every inch of the floor.

When she thought it was over, I pulled her up and led her to the bed. She stood at the edge, breathless, and we continued kissing.

Then I pulled away and pushed her onto the bed. She landed with a bounce, and I fell on top of her as her body sank into the thick mattress. I slid my knee between her legs, gently parting them—which is exactly what they wanted to do.

I grabbed a large pillow and tucked it under her hips before lowering myself again. She gasped as I devoured her, her hands gripping the sheets. “You’re amazing! Oh my God!” she moaned, her voice raw and breathless. Each word fueled my fire.

I could not get enough of her, her lips, her legs, her breasts, her neck, her thighs, her face, her hair, everything about her. I was utterly and completely infatuated by her. I continued to kiss, lick, suck, caress, fuck, and explore every inch of her body.

We made love for hours. Finally, we collapsed breathless in silence. *Tomoz* fell asleep. I lay there holding her in my arms from behind, watching her sleep. Her chest moved up and down slowly with each breath. She looked so peaceful. I hope we can keep it this way, I thought as I drifted off.



# Chapter Eight

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## "Get out? This is MY House, And YOU Need To Leave!"

I woke up after hearing a noise in the house and then went to investigate. Tony and Melania had found one of the guest rooms and had a similar experience. Tony was in the kitchen looking for food to reenergize.

I walked into the kitchen and joined Tony in the food search. We sat down together.

"Man, this is a nice house," he said.

"Thanks, I like it," I replied, trying not to sound like a self-absorbed dick. Not sure I pulled it off. No, not my dick, you know what I meant.

"So, what do you do?" he asked.

"I'm an entrepreneur," I said—a very loose interpretation of what I actually do. I never like discussing what I do.

"How about you?" I asked.

"I'm an entrepreneur too," he said. Ah, someone else who likes to be vague.

"What is the focus of your entrepreneurship?" I pressed.

"I have several interests," he said casually, "but mostly marijuana."

"Must be interesting work," I said with a wry smile.

"Haha, yeah, very interesting," he replied, grinning. "Also very lucrative. I have five houses growing the plants."

I was no stranger to the marijuana business. I'd invested a considerable amount of money with the son of a friend—a kid I'd known since he was 12 years old. He was 26 now, brilliant and street-smart.

He had built a nationwide distribution network, and I had become a silent money partner.

Tony's operation was impressive, but I'd seen similar setups: houses converted into grow spaces, lined with high-powered lights and humming AC units. The plants thrived under careful cultivation, boosted by selective breeding and chemical enhancements. It was a well-oiled machine, but I wasn't here for a botany lesson.

"Okay, so you're not selling retail," I said. "That's quite an operation you've got."

"I want to expand it across the country," he replied. I knew exactly where this was headed.

"Sounds like you've got a plan," I said. "Let's head upstairs, take in the view from the balcony, and grab a drink at the bar up there."

Tony told me more about his business plan. He wanted to grow his marijuana business and was, of course, looking for investors.

While I could tell that Tony was sharp and had a solid plan, there was no way I was going to trust him. I never do business with anyone I don't know and trust completely. I had been burned many times. I didn't mention my own investment.

I politely declined, citing the fact that I would not do well in prison. The food is awful, and I would be the food.

After an hour of catching up with Tony, I was drained. We eventually rejoined our girls and called it a night. The next morning, my thoughts shifted back to my business—specifically, to the new assistant I'd just hired.

She was a formidable woman with a bulldog-like demeanor.

Her name was Brenda Barker. She liked to be seen as someone who thought of everything, so you never had to tell her what to do.

She hated being asked to do anything and was a total control freak. If she didn't think something was a good idea—or didn't want to do it—she would ignore my request. Very frustrating.

*Tomoz* and I left the next morning before Tony and Melania got up. *Tomoz* had a hair appointment and wanted me to come with her—probably to make sure she got there and, of course, so I could pay, more than any other reason. Although she did love driving with me in the Bentley with the top down.

Brenda arrived at the house after we left, and by then, Tony and Melania were already in the hot tub—naked. Later, they strolled back into the house the same way.

They told me about Brenda's obvious disdain for them and their behavior, but that wasn't necessary. Brenda had already called to fill me in.

When *Tomoz* and I returned home after her hair appointment and shopping for makeup at Ulta—I picked up a new foundation, so I was happy—Brenda was leaving. As we pulled into the garage in the Bentley, Brenda was walking down the steps from the laundry room.

I asked her about one of the tasks I'd asked her to do. She replied that she hadn't done it and offered no explanation as to why or when she would get it done. I had explicitly told her it was a priority.

"I told you that was a priority, Brenda," I said.

She was flippant and dismissive about it. My frustration got the better of me. I became aggressive, telling her it wasn't good enough and that she needed to get it done.

She was clearly angered by my tone. People often mistake my polite and kind demeanor for weakness. A big mistake. Things build up, and when they do, I can go off like a bomb. It's not exactly a great way to be. I'm doing much better now, but it's something I still need to work on, so shut the fuck up.

That was the beginning of the end of her time with me. A few days later, I let Brenda go.

I soon hired a new assistant—a very proper French guy in his mid-to-late 30s who was actually training to be a professional butler. He'd worked for a wealthy family on the East Coast, but his time there had come to an end.

His name was René', and probably still is. He was incredibly efficient and worked hard.

Everything was always immaculate. He did do some unusual things, though. He would fold my underwear—I mean, with like about four folds. It took me a while to figure out for some reason. I really didn't care anyway.

I had a very expensive laser machine. A few years ago, I suffered a rupture in my back while working out. I'd tried all kinds of treatments—Prolotherapy, acupuncture, massage, ozone therapy, chiropractic care—and I also purchased a hot laser. I still used it on my knees and back. *Tomoz* had watched me use the laser. Later that week, I had to leave town for a speaking engagement. *Tomoz* reminded me that she had hurt her back and asked if she could come to the house and use my laser while I was away.

I was hesitant about letting *Tomoz* into my home without me being there. Still, I didn't want to make her feel like I didn't trust her, nor did I want to say no to her using the laser to help with her back—even though I had a strong feeling that her "bad back" and the request to use the laser were just a ruse to get into the house.

"As long as it's just you," I said reluctantly.

"Can I bring Melania?" *Tomoz* asked. "She's the only way I can get here. I don't have a car," she pleaded.

"As long as it's just you two," I conceded. I showed her where the emergency key was hidden in the gazebo. I felt better that I had only conceded to her promise to only be there with Melania during the day. After all, a promise is a promise, right? I mean, how could she go back on that?

I flew off on Thursday as usual.

The next evening, after finishing my speaking engagement and having dinner, I called *Tomoz*. It was around 10:00 p.m.

"Hi Baby, how is your event going?" She purred.

"It's going well, thanks."

I could hear Melania and Tony in the background.

She was at my house. WTF!

"Is Tony there?" I asked.

"Yes, why?" she replied.

"I said, just you and Melania!" Now, I was angry.

"Well, she wanted to bring Tony. It's no big deal," she said like it was no big deal.

"Baby, I specifically asked you not to bring other people over. You're obviously not there to use the laser. I feel like you have betrayed my trust, and I want you all to leave," I said, trying to put my foot down.

"Okay, baby, we'll leave," she responded.

So everything was fine, right?

NO! I knew she wasn't going to leave. She knew I was a thousand miles away and that I could do nothing.

I realized I'd made a big mistake. There was no reasoning with *Tomoz*. Trust had been broken. I knew they'd be partying and who knows what.

I called Jerry and asked him to go over there and get them to leave.

He reluctantly agreed and drove over to the house.

When he arrived, they were partying. The sound system was playing Enigma, and the lights were dim—almost like the house had been set up for a very sensual evening. The kitchen was a mess. They were all sitting outside by the fire pit overlooking the pool smoking weed.

Jerry told *Tomoz* they all needed to leave. She danced around the issue.

"Look, Jerry," *Tomoz* said, "there's nothing to worry about. Stephen said it was okay for us all to be here."

"*Tomoz*, Stephen only agreed for you and Melania to be here during the day so you could use the laser. It's almost 11 o'clock, Tony is here, and you guys are partying," Jerry told her. He waited for her response, but she ignored him.

"*Tomoz*, you have broken Stephen's trust, and he has sent me over here to get you to leave," he said urgently.

*Tomoz* looked at Jerry like he had lost his mind and said, "Get out? This is my house! And YOU need to leave!"

"You have known Stephen for two weeks, *Tomoz*. That is just crazy talk!" Jerry said incredulously. "Stephen has asked me to come here and get you guys to leave. You have broken his trust, and now he wants you to please leave." He was getting angry.

"Well, I don't know why he is asking you to do this. He said it was okay for me to come over here," she lied. "But we will leave."

Jerry left the house and called me. "They said they are going to leave," he said.

"Jerry, really? You think that *Tomoz* is just going to leave?" I said in disbelief.

"They said they are going to leave, and I believe them," he said.

"I don't." I said flatly. "Jerry, I need you to go back and make sure they have left." I understood that Jerry just wanted this to be over and didn't relish the idea of going back for more confrontation.

At the same time, I was very concerned about them being in my house, potentially for days, until I returned. I needed them gone.

"I'm pretty sure they're going to leave," Jerry said, trying to relieve himself of the responsibility of having to return to the scene.

I was determined to go to sleep, knowing for sure that they had all left my house.

"Jerry," I pleaded, "If you're right, they'll be gone by the time you get there, and I'll have the assurance they've left."

"Okay, I'll call you after I get them out," Jerry reluctantly agreed. He went back to the house to make sure they had left as he agreed.

Jerry stepped into the house and froze. The scent of sizzling onions and garlic hit him first, then he saw them—Tony and Melania, standing over the stove like they owned the place, stirring something that smelled way too inviting. His jaw clenched. They were supposed to be packing up, not making dinner.

“Are you serious?” he snapped, his voice sharp enough to cut through the steam rising from the pot.

Melania barely glanced up. “We figured we’d eat before heading out,” she said in her stern Serbian accent, making the words seem to sound even more dismissive.

Jerry exhaled slowly, resisting the urge to grab the pan and fling it out the window. Every time he thought they were leaving, they devised a new excuse to linger.

*Tomoz* was sitting outside by the fire pit next to the pool, drinking wine and smoking weed. Not only that, but there were now two massive guys who had joined them. Jerry said they looked like bodybuilders.

At this point, Jerry’s frustration turned to anger. They were making a fool of him, and he didn’t like it.

“You’ve got five minutes, or I’m calling the police,” Jerry barked, his patience completely gone.

The two new guys were taken aback.

“We don’t want to be anywhere we’re not wanted,” one of them said. “We’re leaving.” They stood up and began heading out. The mention of the police was enough to send them packing immediately.

“Look, nothing’s going on. We’re just having a business meeting,” *Tomoz* avoided Jerry’s eyes, her voice syrupy with fake charm. “We’re just having a business meeting,” she repeated, but the words came across as flimsy as a house of cards.

*Tomoz* tried to prevent the party from ending. I’m sure she was probably looking forward to a great night with her two new “business associates,” but then she realized it was futile.

Jerry called me from the house to update me on what was happening. Now I was seriously freaked out.

“I’m going to take them all back to St. Petersburg,” he said.

“That’s a good idea,” I replied. “Get the house key back off *Tomoz*. You can use the Escalade.”

Tony and Melania’s relationship was a storm waiting to happen— From what *Tomoz* had told me it was violent, dramatic, and fueled by manipulation.

*Tomoz* told me that Melania had taken out a restraining order against Tony and that Tony had beaten Melania—because she had asked him to. I don't know but my guess was that Melania was some kind of masochist. Afterward he hit her, Melania told him he had taken it too far, called the police, and Tony was arrested. The judge issued a restraining order against him.

Tony, of course, knew about the restraining order, but Melania had told him she had forgiven him and would never use it against him. He believed what he wanted to believe. It must be contagious.

Melania could use the threat of calling the police on him again to control him. Now they were both there—at my house—and they could be in serious trouble if the police showed up and did a background check. The restraining order would show up, and they'd both be in hot water. So, they had to bolt.

This keeps getting crazier and crazier, I know! We haven't even scraped the tip of the iceberg yet.

Finally, Jerry got them out of the house and into the Escalade. He cajoled them, trying to keep the peace, explaining he was just being a friend to me.

Jerry was very persuasive and did an amazing job. I mean, how many friends would go to such lengths? Especially considering I'd given her a key to the house! I know—I can't believe it either.

Once they got to St. Petersburg, Jerry took them to a piano bar, where they continued drinking. They gathered around the piano, chatted, and drank together. Jerry doesn't drink alcohol. After about 20 minutes, Jerry left and returned to Sarasota.

Jerry and I have been friends for a long time. We've helped each other through many tough times. I've helped Jerry many times, assisted him with his business, and helped him make hundreds of thousands of dollars.

We're like brothers and take care of each other, no matter what. Jerry knew that if the shoe were on the other foot, I would do the same for him. We have a loyalty to each other that is very rare.

Of course, after this incident, I never spoke to or saw *Tomoz* again...

Hmm, well, that's what *should* have happened, but that's not exactly what happened—or even close, for that matter.

When a fly lands on a Venus Fly Trap, the nectar causes the fly to become disoriented. It doesn't even notice the jaws closing around it. All the fly can focus on is getting more of that delicious *nectar*.

*Tomoz* called me the next day, apologizing for the "miscommunication." She insisted nothing had been going on—they were having a meeting with some potential partners for a new business venture. She thought the house would make a good impression.

What was the point of asking her about the "meeting"? Any question I posed would only give her more room to weave another story. I had already decided to let it go—or rather, to let her go unchallenged. Of course, the business associates were never seen again, nor was the business ever discussed. My energy was better spent elsewhere. Just like the fly, I was intoxicated by her *nectar*—her words, her charm, her promises. Even as the jaws closed around me, I couldn't stop reaching for more *nectar*, oblivious to the danger.

I was completely under her spell. I didn't want her to know that, so I made every effort to convince *Tomoz* I wouldn't tolerate her betraying my trust.

She continued to profess her innocence and begged for the chance to prove I could trust her. In other words, telling me whatever I needed to hear. I just wanted any reason to forgive her and forget the whole thing.

We had already made up before I even got on the plane home.



# Chapter Nine

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## “So, What’s In The Room Behind Us?”

It was late Sunday night when I landed in Sarasota. I had a limo pick *Tomoz* up at her apartment and bring her to my house.

I got home, quickly showered, dimmed the house lights, scattered candles around the bedroom, and chilled some champagne.

Then *Tomoz* called to let me know she was close. As she arrived in her white chariot, stepping out in fabulous style, I opened the limo door for her. I’m English—what can I say? *Tomoz* loved me treating her like a princess.

As she unfolded her body and stood up in front of me, all 6’5” of her towering above me in those 6-inch heels, I wrapped my arms around her, gently pushed her against the limo, and kissed her passionately. When we finally pulled away for air, she smiled and said, “Hi,” in that deep, sexy voice I couldn’t resist.

“Hi,” I replied, shaking my head and smiling as she sashayed up the steps to the front door, which I had left ajar.

I thanked Wes, the limo driver, for getting *Tomoz* there safely and handed him the payment with the usual generous tip.

“My pleasure,” he said.

She thoroughly enjoyed how my eyes lingered on her gorgeous figure, and she absolutely loved that I wasn’t intimidated by how much taller she was than me in her 6-inch high heels. The higher, the better, as far as I was concerned. She told me many men didn’t like it—it made them feel insecure. Their loss.

We walked into the house together, a little more composed, but we were all over each other within seconds. It was like two powerful magnets pulling us together—impossible to resist.

As we moved through the house, directionless in our urgency, searching blindly for any available surface, we found ourselves in the kitchen. Kissing fiercely, stripping off our own and each other's clothes, and moving from the kitchen island's countertop to the wooden floor.

I stood up and pulled *Tomoz* up by her hands. We made our way toward the bedroom, stopping at the bar, then the formal living room, using whatever furniture and surfaces we could as we kissed and touched. Expensive ornaments crashed to the floor in our wake, but we didn't care—well, *she* didn't care. I winced more than once but couldn't bring myself to look. I had more pressing things on my mind.

As we entered the bedroom hallway, we found ourselves on the carpet floor in front of the dressing mirrors. We were kissing passionately and fondling each other. I pulled up her dress and put my hand in her panties, and began moving my fingers slowly in and out of her pussy.

The scene in the three mirrors and her incredible beauty made a breathtaking image. We would sit on the floor in front of these mirrors with *Tomoz* in her outfits many times. Like I said earlier, I had another better use for the fitting mirrors in the bedroom hallway.

After playing there together for a while, I stood up and held out my hand to pull her up. I guided her into the bedroom towards the bed.

The bed was high above the floor, and as we reached the edge, I turned *Tomoz* around so she faced the bed with me behind her.

I kicked her legs apart as she bent forward so I could enter her from behind. After a few minutes, I got her onto her knees on the bed so I could get deeper penetration. The more she moaned and enjoyed the sex, the more I was aroused.

I turned her over onto her back and began gently kissing and nibbling her thighs, moving towards her pussy. She moaned and writhed as I moved my mouth slowly over her swollen pussy lips. I breathed on her, teasing her to the point it was bordering on torture.

I read her—every shiver, every quiet gasp, the way her body leaned into my touch. She didn't need to say a word; I was already learning her desires, committing them to memory.

Every nuance of her sexual energy was being exposed for me to use in order to fulfill her sexual desires and fantasies.

I licked her and put my tongue over every inch of her pussy. I pushed my mouth onto her so she was entirely in my mouth. I put my tongue inside her and then withdrew before sucking her into my mouth again. As she writhed in ecstasy, *Tomoz* pulled my face into her pussy. She came over and over again. Then I fell to one side of her; *Tomoz* took my cock into her mouth as I put my fingers inside her again.

Finally, I sat up and pushed *Tomoz* back with her face looking up at mine. I kissed her passionately and knelt up between her legs. I put the tip of my cock in her pussy, then I entered her fully and began slowly thrusting my cock deep inside her.

As the passion began to build, my thrusts became faster, deeper, and stronger. As I came inside her, I let out an involuntary moan and fell limply onto her body. I moved to the side of her body, put my arm around her, and she placed her head on my chest. We lay there embraced as we slowly came back into our bodies, and our breathing came back to normal.

"Oh my God, that was amazing," *Tomoz* said.

"I'm glad to hear that," I replied, trying to sound humble.

During my childhood, I had been tormented about my penis size after being picked on in the showers. Hey, it was a freezing day.

They always pick on one kid; unfortunately, I was that kid. I tried to ignore them, but it really traumatized me.

This childhood humiliation had given me such an inferiority complex that I became an overachiever in the bedroom. One of my greatest fears was sexual inadequacy. As a result, my entire focus in bed was not just on satisfying my partner but on completely blowing her away. It's fascinating how childhood traumas can sometimes manifest as unexpected talents.

I had also developed incredible sexual stamina. For me, the foreplay was more enjoyable than the climax itself. Over time, I realized that I was also a voyeur.

There was no way I would sleep—I wanted to be with her all night. I went to the bar, opened another bottle of champagne, and brought it into the bedroom with two flutes. Through my doctor, I had access to Phendimetrazine, an amphetamine.

At my events, I spoke for eight or nine hours a day. My routine was relentless: I woke up at 5:00 a.m., meditated, worked out, and made a fresh vegetable and protein juice before heading to the ballroom at 7 a.m. to prepare. By 9 a.m., I was on stage, speaking until 7 p.m. Afterward, I often had meetings that sometimes stretched until 9 p.m. Then came dinner, and I'd finally get to bed around 11:00 p.m. I did this for three straight days.

Sometimes, when exhaustion hit—especially on the West Coast, where the three-hour time difference made it even harder—I used the pills to keep my energy up during events.

I showed the pill bottle to *Tomoz* and explained what they were. Without hesitation, she snatched it from my hands. She emptied some of the pills onto the small metal tray where I usually kept my keys on my night table.

She went to the kitchen, grabbed a spoon and a sharp knife, and began crushing the powder from about six pills. Once they were ground into a fine powder, she used the knife to refine it even further, spreading it into six neat lines. Then, she took a pen apart with practiced efficiency, fashioned a makeshift straw from the empty tube, and snorted the powder up her nose. The whole process took less than three minutes. She was fast.

I watched in shock and admiration—she was clearly no stranger to this.

After doing two massive lines, she passed me the tube. Without much hesitation, I snorted a line of the white powder.

I knew sharing the pills wasn't exactly the most responsible decision, but responsibility hadn't exactly been my strong suit. My past indulgences in recreational drugs made this feel like just another unwise but oddly natural moment of connection.

I started smoking cigarettes at nine. By eleven, I had moved on to alcohol—polishing off a bottle of whiskey my friend had stolen from his parents' drinks cabinet. To this day, I still can't drink or even stand the smell of whiskey.

At fourteen, I was already going to bars and nightclubs. By sixteen, I spent nights at Wigan Casino, an all-night dance club where they played Northern Soul music from midnight till 6 a.m. After that, we'd head downstairs to another club called the Beachcomber before catching the 10 a.m. train back to Blackpool. We used speed to keep us going, alert, and dancing until the sun came up.

I bought my first house at nineteen, and it quickly became the go-to hangout spot for my friends. We'd smoke weed, watch MTV videos, and lose ourselves in the haze of youth. I experimented with uppers and downers, dropped acid every so often, and dabbled in cocaine, eventually freebasing it. I had my fair share of experience with drugs. However, I hadn't really abused them or taken any recreational substances in a long time.

We collapsed onto the bed and *Tomoz* traced lazy patterns on my chest, her voice laced with nostalgia.

"LA was wild," she murmured, laughing. "I had my fair share of crazy nights."

I smirked. "Mine were less glamorous but just as reckless back in England."

For a while, we just talked—trading stories between kisses, the past bleeding into the present.

Then, out of nowhere, *Tomoz* flashed a wry smile. "So, what's in the room behind us?" Her question caught me off guard. She knew.

"The sex room," I said matter-of-factly.

A triumphant grin spread across her face. "I knew it," she said excitedly. Told ya.

"Really?" She could hardly contain her excitement.

"Yes, really," I said, still surprised. "How did you know?"

"I walked around the outside of the house and saw the blinds for that room drawn. I tried the door, and it was locked. I knew it had to be a sex room," *Tomoz* said.

She obviously had a sixth sense—and a very sexual mind—which made me very happy.

*Tomoz* leaped off the bed, landing gracefully near the locked door, and immediately began trying to open it. First of all, *Tomoz* —as we know—is extremely sexual, and she loved the fact that I was too. She was even more in love with me for having a sex room. That just turned her on like nothing else.

She also knew that stepping inside would give her a deeper look into my mind, revealing all my sexual triggers, giving her power and control over me. And in this environment, I was more than happy to hand over all the power and control. So, she was beyond excited to see what was inside—to know exactly what turned me on.

"Can I see?" she asked excitedly, jumping up and down like a giddy schoolgirl.

She knew I adored her playful side, and she wielded it like a weapon. This calculated charm offensive always left me defenseless.

I was only too happy to oblige.

*Tomoz* gasped as I opened the door to my sexual wonderland—a world unlike any other.

A large room with a 14-foot high ceiling, filled with mirrors that stretched endlessly, a maze of reflections, lingerie, and toys—a shrine to pleasure and power. A Black velvet wave-shaped lounge, with silk ties located strategically all over it, and a long vinyl flat bench dominated the center of the room.

Contrasted with the thick black and white pile carpet tiles in a chessboard pattern, gave the room a surreal, sensual, otherworldly vibe. It was a world I had created to escape, now transformed into a stage for *Tomoz* to enthrall and control me.

Speaking of a stage, there was an 8' x 8' mirrored platform with a polished mirrored pole in the room's right-hand corner. The walls were lined with 8-foot-high mirrors, so

the stage reflected from multiple angles. The stage was raised two feet off the ground, its sides also mirrored, amplifying every movement.

Of course, most of this had been used with Jules during our marriage.

Jules had been cautious, restrained—a woman shaped by fear and control. It took me a while to help her push past her inhibitions.

On the other hand, *Tomoz* was wild and unapologetic—a storm of energy I couldn't resist. She had zero inhibitions.

As she moved through the room, rifling through the sexy outfits on the shiny chrome clothing rack, the shoe rack, and the toys, I turned on the sound system. A deep electronic beat filled the air, vibrating through the space. The aromatherapy oils and fragrances slowly began to fill the air, all carefully chosen to enhance the sexual energy in the room. Everything was chosen and designed for optimum erotic pleasure and to enhance sensuality.

The music, lighting, decor, aromas, furniture, mirrored stage, sex swing, and so much more. All for one purpose. Sexual expression and fulfillment of desire.

*Tomoz* stepped onto the stage, grabbed the pole, and spun around effortlessly.

She moved like an experienced dancer, fluid and confident, using every move and pose she knew would drive me insane.

It was obvious she knew exactly how to work the pole.

As she danced on the stage, I couldn't tell if I was the audience or the prey, drawn further into her world with every seductive movement.

Finally, she walked off the stage and sauntered to the wave couch. She lay down, spreading her legs, waving me toward her.

We started all over again.

I kissed her body, nibbling and biting her nipples before moving down, teasing her mercilessly.

After we finished our little session, she smirked and said, "Well, you are a naughty boy."

*You have no idea*, I thought; *I am going to do sexually deviant, depraved things to you in this room*. Little did I know it would be the other way around. Well, for the most part.

She seemed to have a new respect for me, clearly turned on by what she had seen.

"I'm sure you've had many women in here," she said, that wry, sexy smile playing on her lips as she walked over to the clothing rack and browsed through the corsets and garter belts.

It was more of a question than a statement.

It's the kind of question that you should be read your miranda rights before answering because whatever you say can and will be used against you.

It was like she was assessing the situation, figuring out what she was dealing with.

Like in her mind, she was thinking, "What am I going to need to do to have you completely under my control?"

More importantly, "How do I devour you?"

"So, what do you think about it?" I said, changing the direction of the conversation.

"Oh my God, I love it," she gushed.

She picked out an outfit she liked—a latex, short-cut cinch corset that came down to her midriff and a latex garter belt. She chose black stockings with a back seam out of the black lacquered cabinet drawers at the back of the room and a pair of six-inch black patent open-toe platform shoes that, fortunately, fit her feet perfectly. The top of the cabinet had doors that swung open to reveal the toys and accessories. Everything you can imagine and ARE imagining right now. But more. Much more. Trust me.

I sat and watched her dress up for me. I was turned on beyond belief. She knew exactly how to move her body. She put each leg on the wave couch, pulled on the black-seamed stocking perfectly over her leg, and connected each garter to slightly stretch the stocking. She knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

As she put on the outfit, she moved to the beat of the electronic music. Once dressed, she moved back onto the mirrored stage. It was incredible how she moved and danced in those heels. After years of modeling, she knew exactly how to pose and be sexy. But even beyond that, she had a very strong, wild sexuality.

She used the pole very phallically and touched herself provocatively.

Standing tall, then bending over at the waist. She changed outfits and got back on the stage, now crouching in her heels, leather corset with buckles, seamed stockings, garter belt, and tight leather panties, with her legs apart. Wrapping one leg around the pole with the other leg held high above her head.

Now, it was *Tomoz* who was teasing me mercilessly. It wouldn't be long before I was taking photographs of her.

She loved being in front of the camera. She loved being the center of attention. It became foreplay for us. We both found it erotic and arousing—it got us ready to have sex.

I had an expensive Canon camera—far beyond my skill level. At first, I barely knew how to use it, but I picked it up quickly. *Tomoz*, on the other hand, was a natural. She

knew exactly how to handle a camera and coached me along the way. She was an incredible photographer in her own right.

Amphetamine didn't just keep us awake—it enhanced our stamina and heightened our sexual desire.

When exhaustion finally caught up with us, we'd retreat to the outside sofa by the fire pit overlooking the pool and lake, then play backgammon before heading back to the sex room to resume our sexual exploration of each other's minds and bodies. Those backgammon games weren't just a way to unwind; they were our social time. While we played, we talked about everything. *Tomoz* would ask about my life, and in return, she'd share stories from hers.

Have you ever had *Déjà vu*? Yes, so have I. Crazy people often do. Oh, get over yourself, I know you are crazy. You are reading this crazy book, aren't you? There then, proof. *Tomoz* gave me *Vu Déjà*. That is when you suddenly see something in an entirely new way. The only thing that has changed is your perception.

The way you see something you have been looking at for perhaps many years or even your whole life. *Tomoz* had a depth of wisdom that was very disconcerting and would often cause me to see things in new ways. She changed my beliefs and perceptions about many things I was previously sure about. As you will see very soon, *Tomoz* had a brilliant mind. I just needed to point it in the right direction. I mean, how hard could that be, right? You seem to be very unsure. You might need therapy. I certainly did. I just didn't know it yet.

We could talk for hours—partly because of the speed, of course, but also because we were eager to explore every part of each other, including or perhaps especially, our minds. And then there was *Tomoz's* insatiable curiosity. She wanted to learn everything about me so she could devour me.

She asked about my childhood with an intensity that was both captivating and unsettling, her questions probing deeper than I had expected. I answered because I wanted her to know me, to see me. But I couldn't shake the feeling that she was cataloging my every vulnerability.

I wanted to trust her and believe in her laughter's sincerity. But in the back of my mind, a quiet doubt lingered—was I just another fly in her trap about to be devoured?

The Venus Fly Trap was busily at work. I was sinking deeper and deeper into the depths of her intoxicating flower, completely oblivious to what was happening to me. This became our rhythm, the way we spent our time together.



*Tomoz* was an incredible model. She had worked hard at her craft. It is not as easy as most young girls who dream of being a model think. Even me. No, I'm not a girl and have never dreamed of being a model. Can you be serious for a minute, for fuck's sake? Jeeze.

I know being successful at anything in life does not come easy. People see me on stage and think, "I'm going to be a speaker." But they have no idea what it takes, and they are not prepared to pay their dues. *Tomoz* had paid her dues, had her trials and tribulations, and struggled and fought her way to the top. She had a competitive character the like of which I had never seen. She had been in the industry since she was a teenager, gracing the covers of countless magazines, including French and Italian Vogue.

We played backgammon, and then we played in the sex room for hours, often for days. Eventually, exhaustion took over, and we collapsed into bed, sleeping for an eternity. I was in heaven.

# Chapter Ten

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## Meet The Parents

My parents split their time between Sarasota and England, spending half the year in each. They were preparing to return to England for the summer.

I had arranged to go to dinner with them before they left. I invited Tomoz to join us. She was thrilled—excited to meet them. To her, this felt like a big step in our relationship. I mean, it had been three weeks now—what was I waiting for, right?

But inviting Tomoz wasn't some serious step in our relationship—I just wanted my parents to meet her before they returned to the U.K. for six months and to show her off.

My mum had a stroke back in 2009, which left her without the use of her left side, confining her to a wheelchair. But that never stopped her from living a full, active life. She was always up for doing anything or going anywhere that involved fun and adventure.

My parents were both disappointed that things didn't work out with Jules. They had been married for 64 years, and my father was the only man my mother had ever been with.

As I mentioned earlier when Jules and I were married, she would take my mother shopping every week while I played golf with my father—an attempt to build a better relationship with him. Unfortunately, it didn't work.

That had all gone by the wayside with Jules gone.

I made dinner reservations at the Ritz-Carlton. We dined on the patio. As the sun set, it cast a warm glow over the evening. The setting was perfect. We talked about everything—from politics to the cultural differences between America and the rest of the world. My parents are well-traveled, and the conversation flowed effortlessly.

*Tomoz* smiled warmly at my parents, and my mum's eyes softened. "You have such a lovely smile," she said, looking *Tomoz* kindly in the eyes, trying to make her feel at ease.

My dad nodded approvingly. "She seems to have a good head on her shoulders," he muttered.

*Tomoz* laughed, settling into the conversation as though she'd always been part of the family.

I sat there in shock. Having confronted an alcoholic before, I knew how quickly things could spiral out of control.

I didn't know how dangerous.

But I was about to find out.

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*Tomoz* laughed, settling into the conversation as though she'd always been part of the family. It was subtle, but I could feel their approval, even if they weren't saying it outright.

She was poised, confident, and well-spoken, dressed impeccably, with an impressive presence. Having lived all over the world and experienced many cultures, she had plenty to contribute to the conversation.

When Jules and I separated, my father remarked that I had made a mistake.

When *Tomoz* left the table to powder her nose during dinner, I couldn't hold back my excitement. I turned to my father and said, "If I had stayed with Jules, I would never have met *Tomoz*. So maybe it wasn't a mistake after all..."

He didn't respond.

We had a wonderful evening—talking, laughing, sharing stories, eating, and drinking.

As we made our way to the valet, we said our goodbyes. It would be the last time I saw them before they left, and as always, it was hard for me to see them go. Another six months would pass before I saw them again.

"Goodbye, *Tomoz*, it was very nice to meet you. I hope to see you again when we get back—if you can put up with Stephen for that long!" my mum teased, smiling from her wheelchair.

She reached out her hands to *Tomoz*, who took them gently. "Take care of him while I'm away. I worry about him—he doesn't know what he's doing half the time," she said, squeezing *Tomoz's* hands.

Everyone laughed. Except me.

My mum had a way of making people feel welcome and important.

"I'll keep him on the right path, Pat. Don't you worry," *Tomoz* assured her.

Really? I thought. *Tomoz*? Somehow, I doubted that. In fact, I sincerely hoped not.

And then they were gone. Gone parents.

A few days later, they returned to the U.K..

I wasn't speaking the following weekend, so I planned to spend the weekend with *Tomoz*. On Friday night, we returned to the Ritz for dinner. We had a great time. *Tomoz* was drinking her favorite sparkling rosé, a taste I had started to appreciate.

I've never been a big drinker—mainly for health reasons and because alcohol doesn't always agree with me. But I've never had a problem with others drinking.

However, I couldn't help but notice that *Tomoz* drank a lot.

I had dated an alcoholic—and married one. It was a nightmare. The promises to stop, the hidden empty bottles, the sudden shifts from sober to drunk, and the inevitable chaos that followed—it was devastating.

I hadn't been with *Tomoz* very long, but based on her recent behavior, I was beginning to feel a little concerned.

On the way home, we had the roof of the Bentley down. We were both a little tipsy and making out as I was driving. It was very intoxicating.

*Tomoz* was kissing me all over, and then she pulled down the zipper of my trousers, pulled out my already rock-hard cock, and went down on me.

I was still driving, trying not to swerve all over the road. This was not unusual. However, as we turned onto University Parkway—a three-lane highway more like a freeway—a giant truck pulled up alongside us. The cab was way above us, and the driver was watching *Tomoz* giving me a blowjob. He was smiling, giving me the thumbs-up.

I tapped *Tomoz* on her head. She looked up with an expression that clearly said, "*What do you want? Can't you see I'm busy enjoying myself?*"

I pointed at the truck driver, grinning at us. *Tomoz* just flashed him a smile and went right back down on me. She couldn't care less who was watching—so long as they were.

When we got home from the Ritz, the energy between us was still electric.

I had bought her some new latex outfits, stockings, shoes, and toys—mostly dildos of various styles and sizes, more collars, a strap-on mouth reverse dildo, lotions, and potions for *Tomoz* to use.

She loved it all and was more than happy to use and wear them. She liked sex rough. She would ask me to hit her. That was just not my thing. I was also afraid she would do the same thing Melania did to Tony, to me. Giving someone pain is the last thing I want to do, or that would turn me on. I like to give pleasure. *Tomoz* wanted me to treat her like a slut. I was happier for her to behave like a slut, but I did get into being commanding with her and treating her like a slut and dirty whore, which she loved.

I did enjoy tying her up—pulling her hair, holding her neck tight, using leg spreaders, and things of that nature. But nothing violent.

That night, she dressed up multiple times. I took photographs of her in each outfit. Between each change, we would step outside to the fire pit by the pool and play backgammon. After about an hour, *Tomoz* would slip back inside to change again. I never knew what she would come out wearing, but she had an incredible eye for style and detail. She never disappointed—in fact, she always exceeded my expectations.

It was a long night of sexual fantasies being fulfilled and losing at backgammon. We always sat outside on the sofa by the fire pit when we played backgammon. There was an overhanging ceiling, so we were covered, but we still had a clear, unobstructed view of the pool and the lake. It was a beautiful, tranquil, and relaxing scene.

We slept in late. I woke up around 9:30 a.m., a Saturday morning. A day that would live in infamy. A day I would remember for the rest of my life for all the wrong reasons.

*Tomoz* was still fast asleep. I got up and walked to the French doors, gazing out at the pool and the lake, overwhelmed with gratitude. At that moment, I had never been happier.

I mean, come on, right? The home, the cars, the life—the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on, still asleep in my bed behind me.

I was doing what I had always dreamed of—making a living doing what I loved and making lots of money doing it. My mission, vision, and purpose in life were all being fulfilled.

Who would have believed this would be my life? The little lonely boy from Blackpool, England—the one who was told he'd never amount to anything, who was even mocked for having a small dick—now living in one of the most beautiful places in the world, with one of the most gorgeous women in the world in my bed and, living my dream.

I stood there for a few minutes, taking it all in. My mum's words echoed in my mind—something she said when I called her from the Bentley dealer in Beverly Hills and asked if she thought I should buy the Bentley: *"Stephen, life is about moments. No matter*

*what happens, no one can ever take those moments away from you.*" Words I will never forget.

I often stopped to capture a moment, taking a mental photograph or recording a movie in my mind—something I could replay whenever I wanted to. It works. As we go through these events, I am playing back some those movies.

I walked over to the bed and looked down at *Tomoz*, still asleep. It was all just... mind-blowing to me. I kissed her forehead. She stirred, waved her hand in the air, and mumbled something that sounded like: *"Leave me the fuck alone!"*

I went into the kitchen to make myself a juice. I've made it a habit to have juice every morning.

After drinking my juice, I usually needed to go to the bathroom. Today was no different. I headed to the guest bathroom next to the kitchen.

While sitting on the toilet, I noticed the sink vanity door was slightly ajar. I saw something that at first confused me and then sent a jolt of trepidation through my entire body.

There, sitting on the shelf, sat a half-empty bottle of Captain Morgan's Rum.

I hadn't put it there. Why would I? My heart sank. *Tomoz* had taken it from the bar.

I had never even opened the bottle. She had drunk a significant amount—maybe half—and stashed it here, hidden, so she could return to it later without me knowing.

A sinking feeling settled in my chest. I had seen this before—the way the glass was never empty and the excuses for "just one more" always came too easily. This wasn't just casual drinking. It was a pattern. And I knew, from painful experience, exactly where that pattern led.

I sat there in shock. Having confronted an alcoholic before. I knew how quickly things could spiral out of control. And I knew that with *Tomoz*, it could turn dangerous.

I didn't know how dangerous.

But I was about to find out.

# Chapter Eleven

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## Baked Beans & Scrambled Eggs On Toast

I first called my psychic, Debra. Why? I have no idea! I just needed to tell someone. She was empathetic and told me I had to break up with *Tomoz*. That was definitely not the advice I was looking for.

Then I called Jerry. I know—poor guy. I asked him to come over, just in case things went sideways.

When he arrived, *Tomoz* was still asleep. Jerry and I went upstairs, stepped out onto the balcony, and closed the massive sliding doors behind us for privacy. We sank into two loungers overlooking the lake. It was a beautiful day and view.

“What should I say?” I asked. “I know I can’t date an alcoholic. Been there, done that.” I paused and thought for a minute.

“If I bring it up, she will go crazy.” By now, I had seen enough of *Tomoz*’s behavior and reactions to know she could be extremely difficult when things didn’t go her way.

Jerry, always nonchalant and matter-of-fact, shrugged. “I think you should just enjoy the weekend with her, take her home tomorrow, and be done with her,” Jerry said. “Nothing to be gained by confronting her.”

The right answers are often given to us, one way or another. Of course, we rarely listen.

I didn’t want to break up with *Tomoz*. What I wanted was for her to stop drinking. Then we could be together.



At least, that's what I kept telling myself.

We headed downstairs with no clear plan for handling the situation—just a heavy sense of trepidation hanging over us both.

A few weeks earlier, I arrived at Sarasota airport from one of my trips.. Gerard, one of the skycaps who helped with my bags each week, approached me.

"Mr. Edwards," he said, "would you do me a favor?"

"Of course," I replied.

He hesitated for a moment, then said, "My son is a very talented football player. He's been offered a scholarship at FSU."

"Wow, that's incredible," I said. "You must be so proud."

"Well, yes... but here's the problem." He sighed, rubbing his forehead. "He just told me he hates football and no longer wants to play. He's planning to give up his scholarship. Says he wants to be a mime."

Holy shit, I thought. That's a huge change.

Gerard was visibly stressed about the whole situation. "I just don't want him to ruin his future by making a rash decision."

I nodded, understanding his concern.

"I've talked to him about you before," Gerard continued. "I told him you're a very successful businessman. I even told him about that time you came by the airport in your Bentley and let us all sit in it."

I did do that. I loved sharing the joy of having the car with other people, especially kids, letting them sit in the driver's seat.

"He was impressed. He'll never listen to me, but I think he might listen to you. Would you talk to him?" Gerard asked.

Jeez, that's a lot of pressure, I thought... but he's such a great guy.

"What's your son's name?" I asked.

"James," he told me.

I didn't want to let him down or refuse to help, so I agreed—as long as he understood that I was only going to help James make the right decision for *himself*, not for his father or anyone else. Gerard agreed.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. *Who could that be?* I wondered.

When I opened the door, I had no idea who it was—until he politely introduced himself. And then, of course, I remembered.

I had arranged for James to come by that morning. I had completely forgotten.

This might be awkward, I thought, because *Tomoz* will be awake soon.

I sat James down at the breakfast table. He was, of course, very impressed by the house. The breakfast table was situated in the bay window, looking over the pool.

We had just started talking when *Tomoz* walked out, opened the French doors, and went out to the pool. She had overheard our conversation and knew she was not going to get my attention.

She walked to the edge of the pool, and with a slow, deliberate motion, *Tomoz* let the robe slip from her shoulders, the silky fabric pooling at her feet. Then, without a word, she strode toward the edge and dove naked into the pool. Water splashed up, catching the light like scattered diamonds before falling back in smooth ripples. James stiffened beside me, his jaw nearly unhinged. I could only stare as she surfaced, flicking her wet hair back with a satisfied smirk.

However, that wasn't enough for *Tomoz*. She got out of the pool and started walking around naked. She sauntered around the other side of the pool and dived in again, knowing, of course, that we had watched the whole thing.

So now my credibility as a conservative businessman giving a young guy life advice had just gone out the window—or maybe not! Anyway, I talked with James for a while. He appreciated me taking the time to speak with him and probably the show *Tomoz* had put on for us.

Here's the funny thing—he had come over to convince *me* to talk to his father! There was just no way he was going to play football. It just wasn't what he wanted to do.

"Mr. Edwards, I just don't want to play football anymore. It's too much pressure, and it's making me unhappy," he said.

"I need my father to understand that even though I *can* play football and *am* good at it, I just can't do it anymore."

He looked at me with pleading eyes. I could see how much it was breaking his heart to disappoint his father. He knew his dad was working hard as a skycap to give him the chance to have a better life. His father saw this scholarship as *his son's* ticket to the opportunities he never had.

"You see, the more I play, and my heart isn't in it, the worse the stress will get—and the more dangerous it becomes for me," he said, sounding helpless.

This was turning out to be a bad idea. But I understood. I *really* understood. I never fit into what my father expected me to be, either.

For most of my life, my father tried to convince me to do what he wanted me to do, to follow *his* path.

We spent the rest of the conversation talking about him becoming a MIME!

I gave him some ideas for marketing himself—creating promo videos, maybe even sending one to Tyler Perry.

As I walked him to the front door, I promised I'd talk to his father the next time I saw him. Not a conversation I was looking forward to.

After James left, Jerry was still on the phone, as usual, so I went back upstairs to grab my phone and the empty cups.

When I came back down, *Tomoz* was in the kitchen, sitting in the middle of the kitchen island trying to throw the leftovers of her meal into the waste disposal.

It just made me feel like she didn't respect the house. She didn't believe in taking care of things.

"Good morning, baby," I said as I reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Good morning," she said warily, eyeing Jerry with obvious disapproval. *Tomoz* didn't like me having other people around.

I started making scrambled eggs and baked beans on toast—English-style baked beans. Heinz. Important. You should try them, you can find them on the International aisle at Publix. It's one of the few English meals I still get to enjoy. Hard to appreciate until you've actually tried it. *Delicious*. You might want to write all that down. Jerry used to turn his nose up at it. But when he tried it, he was hooked.

As I made the scrambled eggs, beans, and toast, I casually brought up the Captain Morgan's rum bottle in the guest bathroom sink cabinet.

"Hey, babe, I found a bottle of Captain Morgan's rum in the vanity cupboard in the guest bathroom this morning. Any idea how it got there?" I asked nervously.

"No," *Tomoz* said flatly, already sounding annoyed.

"Well, I didn't put it there, and it wasn't there yesterday morning," I pressed.

"Why are you asking me?" *Tomoz* asked defiantly.

Whenever anyone attempted to hold *Tomoz* accountable for anything, she would undergo a three-step process: deny, deflect, and then justify. She had already denied it—now we were onto deflection.

"Why are you interrogating me?" she snapped.

I took a deep breath, trying to stay calm. "I'm asking because I want to understand," I said. But the conversation had already shifted into accusations.

“Well, it *feels* like an interrogation,” she shot back, her irritation growing.

“So why did you hide a bottle of Captain Morgan’s in the cupboard under the sink?”

I continued to press.

“Is it a crime to have a drink?” she snapped, her tone turning more defensive. “Why are you making such a big deal out of this?”

One thing about us both is that —we are *extremely* stubborn, strong-willed, and tenacious. The intensity of the conversation escalated quickly.

*Tomoz* was *not* going to back down.

“You’re being ridiculous. I’m calling my mother,” she threatened.

And just like that, she followed through with her threat and got on the phone with her mother, having the conversation in plain sight. She started telling her mother that I was being mean to her.

She said, “*He told me he thinks I have a drinking problem.*” Her voice was dripping with indignation.

“Mummy, you and I *both* know that’s a lie.”

Of course, Jerry and I weren’t part of the conversation, but she made sure we could hear every word—standing right in front of us as she spoke.

The whole thing started to make no sense. I wasn’t even sure her mother was actually on the other end of the line.

While she was *allegedly* on the phone with her mother, I leaned over to Jerry and whispered, “She’s going to try to bait me into an argument—and probably you too. Whatever you do, *don’t engage* her.”

“Okay,” he whispered back. “Got it.”

Finally, she put the phone down. And just as I predicted, she immediately tried to bait me into defending myself.

“My mother is *very* upset with you,” she said, her voice full of manufactured outrage.

“She thinks you’re being very mean and controlling,” she continued. “She said, “Why can’t he let you have a drink of his rum? It sounds like he is just showing off for his friend.”

She kept going, rambling on and on.

I did not respond.

So, she got louder and louder and angrier and angrier.

Then, she turned on Jerry.

“Did *you* put him up to this just because *you* don’t drink?” she accused, trying to put Jerry on the defensive.

“No! I have *nothing* to do with any of this,” Jerry stammered—falling right into her trap.

Jerry would get pulled in, and I’d remind him that this was precisely what *Tomoz* wanted—to drag him into the argument.

I continued making baked beans and scrambled eggs on toast. Trying to keep things civil, I asked *Tomoz* if she would like some.

“Ughh, absolutely not. Disgusting!” she scoffed, making a gagging gesture.

I placed the plate of baked beans and scrambled eggs on toast in front of Jerry and sat down at the table to eat mine. She then launched into a full-blown rant about how revolting scrambled eggs and beans on toast were—despite never having eaten scrambled eggs and baked beans on toast in her life. She was still trying to bait me, but I just ignored her. This infuriated her even more.

Without warning, she stormed over to the table, grabbed my plate, and dumped it in my lap.

I shot up, staring down at the mess of beans, eggs, and toast, sliding down my legs onto the floor.

“What the fuck!” I blurted in shock.

I won’t pretend to be the calmest, most composed person you’ll ever meet. You could say I’m quite the opposite.

But somehow, I managed to stay calm and not react. Perhaps because I knew that getting a rise out of me was exactly what *Tomoz* wanted. Not *that* kind of rise.

She just walked away, smug, like she’d won a prizefight, and was heading to her corner like she had just thrown the knockout blow.

Meanwhile, I had no choice but to get changed. I was pretty sure that was her plan—separate us so she could bait Jerry, who seemed like the easier target.

I rushed to the bedroom to swap clothes, my frustration mounting.

In my rush to get back in the kitchen I, of course, put my leg in the wrong side of my fresh pants and fell over onto the floor in frustration. This was not going well at all. I knew now that I should never have brought it up. Well, to be honest, I knew that from the start, but I was hoping that we could deal with this and move past it calmly. I mean, get *Tomoz* to agree to stop drinking and be the person I *wanted* her to be.

What do you call that? Oh yeah—controlling.

Fuck.

And yes, I know—delusional. But at the time, I was still under the spell, caught in the intoxicating nectar of the Venus Fly Trap. It was far worse than I realized at this point. My head was in her jaws, and the lid was about to come slamming down.

As I walked back into the kitchen, *Tomoz* was already arguing with Jerry. He had caved again.

He was still eating his baked beans and scrambled eggs on toast. I was jealous, but I knew making another plate was pointless—it would end up in the same place as the last one.

“You need to leave,” she shouted at Jerry. “This is between Stephen and me. You shouldn’t be here.”

She had a point. Under normal circumstances, I would have agreed. But these were *not* normal circumstances—I needed Jerry as a witness and, frankly, for my protection. There was no way I could be alone with *Tomoz* and make it through this.

She turned to me now, her voice sharp. “Get him out of here! This has nothing to do with him. You’re both ganging up on me.”

Again, there was some truth to that. However, I was more inclined to call for *reinforcements* than ask Jerry to leave.

Jerry got defensive again and engaged.

“I’m here because Stephen asked me to come over. If Stephen wants me to leave, I will leave.”

*Shut the fuck up, Jerry, I thought, she’s going to use that against me—against us.* I clenched my teeth.

I could see exactly what she was doing—trying to create a rift between Jerry and me, hoping he’d take the bait and walk out. If she got him to leave, there’d be no witnesses. Then she could really go batshit crazy on me. I knew that if Jerry left, all hell would break loose. I mean, it already had, but without him here, it would get even worse.

I ignored her, which was probably the better of two bad choices.

Glancing at Jerry, I put a finger to my lips, silently reminding him *not* to engage.

Her ranting and raving dragged on for another hour, escalating in intensity.

At some point, Jerry started recording her on his phone without her knowing. I didn’t know either—until later—but thank God he did.

“We need to get out of here,” I whispered to Jerry. “The longer we sit here, the worse this is going to get.”

“Let’s go work out. She might have calmed down by the time we get back,” I suggested.

We headed to my local gym, LA Fitness.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

As bad ideas often do....

# Chapter Twelve

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## “Get Out While You Can”

It was getting dark when we got back from the gym.

When we stepped inside the house, *Tomoz* was nowhere to be found. We searched every room, but she had vanished. The silence in the house made it all the more unsettling.

When she was a kid, *Tomoz* and her brother, Miles, played hide-and-seek—a lot. She could have gone pro, but according to her, a career-ending injury cut her dreams short. Even now, she was incredibly skilled at hiding and evading detection. I had already experienced it firsthand.

Whenever we argued, she would disappear—literally. I’d eventually go looking for her but never find her. She took great joy in the fact that she was impossible to track down.

I know what you’re thinking because I thought the same thing: How the hell does a 5-foot-11-inch woman hide so well?

Like many things about *Tomoz*, it was a complete mystery.

She could bend and twist her body in ways that didn’t seem humanly possible, squeezing into spaces no normal person could. One of her many unsettling talents.

When we first met, *Tomoz* had given me her father’s and brother’s phone numbers—“Just in case,” she said. At the time, I hadn’t realized it was a calculated move. She wanted me to reciprocate and give her my parents’ contact information, which she could use to manipulate and leverage against me when needed.

Now, I was at my wits’ end. I didn’t know what to do. Looking back, the answer seems obvious, but this was *then*. And back *then*, I was in the habit of having bad ideas and making terrible decisions.



That wasn't going to change anytime soon.

So, I decided to call her father.

I needed reinforcements. Perhaps he could help.

Chances were slim he'd even answer, I thought. I mean, he wouldn't recognize my number. If someone calls me and they're not in my contacts, I don't answer. But then I figured—what have I got to lose?

Whenever you do something based on *that* logic, you quickly find out you have a *lot* to lose.

I pulled up her father's number in my contacts and hit the call button.

To my surprise, he answered.

Now, I was *really* nervous.

"Hello," he said.

What the hell do I say? I mean, I'm dating his daughter, and this is the first time he's even *heard* about me.

Well, I made the call—I better step up, I told myself.

I took a deep breath, pulled myself together, and tried not to *sound* nervous. Something I had become very good at as a speaker. When you walk out on stage, you're *always* nervous. The first 100 times are the worst. But it never completely goes away. If it does, it's time to hang up your microphone.

"Hello, Mr. Kingston. My name is Stephen Edwards. I'm dating *Tomoz*, and I'm very concerned about her."

Silence.

"She's been drinking excessively, and I think she might be an alcoholic."

More silence.

"Did you know she's an alcoholic?"

To my surprise, he replied matter-of-factly, "Oh, yes."

I was stunned. *What? She is?*

Oh no. I didn't want to be right.

He *knew*. Why wasn't he doing something about it?

"I've put her into rehab numerous times. She checks in, then checks out a few days later. I've spent over \$100,000 on treatment programs for her. She will never change," he said—almost sympathetically. *For me*.

"She will destroy your life," he warned. "I can't even have her in my home anymore."

I was still reeling. This was *so* much worse than I had imagined. Thank God I called him.

“When she comes to stay with me, she’s an angel for the first few days,” he continued. “Then suddenly, she becomes very difficult, argumentative, and destructive. She starts making all kinds of ridiculous accusations.”

*That’s weird*, I thought. *I haven’t seen any of that...*

“Get out now while you still can,” he advised. “She will take everything you have. One guy in North Carolina almost went to jail for a long time. He was a nice guy.”

I was speechless.

“You need to get her out of your house and never let her back in again. If you do, you are a fool,” he concluded.

I thought about saying, “No, tell me how you really feel, and this time, don’t hold back.” But this did not seem like the right time to inject sarcasm into the conversation.

This was getting worse. A lot worse. It couldn’t possibly get any worse.

But it did anyway.

When I hung up the phone, for some reason, I felt like I had finally uncovered the truth—something *Tómoz* could no longer deny. The game was up.

She would have to face the truth, and then we could work through this together. Right?

You’re probably thinking I had lost my mind—and you’d be right. I had. Completely. I was deep in the jaws of The Venus Flytrap, and she was about to devour her prey—me!

I called *Tómoz* on her cellphone, ready to confront her with the damning information her father had provided and to coax her out of hiding. I thought I had the upper hand.

In reality? I was delusional.

I still had no idea where she was. When she answered my call, she was still angry and hostile.

“Look, I just talked to your father,” I said. “He told me he’s spent over \$100,000 on rehab and treatment for you. We need to sit down and talk about this.”

I thought I had played my trump card and won.

But when you corner a wild animal, the last thing it will do is lie down and obey. Of course, it will become even angrier and more aggressive.

No, I’m not saying *Tómoz* is a wild animal. That would be an insult to wild animals everywhere.

Kidding.

You know what I mean.

She felt cornered and ganged up on. And for good reason—she was.

Rather than having the trump card, I had just turned up the intensity of The Venus Flytrap. Now, she was about to bring the wrath of her spiky jaws down and devour me.

“Who are you to be calling my father? What gives you the fucking right to involve him?” she screamed.

“I was worried about you and—” I started, but she immediately cut me off. Apparently, that was a rhetorical question.

“He’s such a fucking liar.” She meant her father, of course. “He has never spent a dime on any treatment. He makes things up because he’s still so angry I told my mother he was cheating.”

She continued her tirade for another eight to ten minutes before hanging up.

Then she called back and went off for a few more minutes before hanging up again.

Then she texted me: “I am calling Jules and your parents.”

See? I told you it got worse. But I still had no idea what was coming next.

I couldn’t find *Tomoz*. She was out of control. I didn’t know what she would do next, but I had a sinking feeling it would be destructive in some way.

I suspected she might call the police and concoct some story to get me arrested. This was precisely why I had Jerry come over. It was also why I had been so determined not to get into an altercation with her.

So, I decided to call 911.

They told me someone had already called and that officers were on the way! This was precisely what I had feared.

Remember what I said? We create everything in our minds—our thoughts, words, and actions shape the energy around us.

The law of attraction. We create our reality. **All of it.** There are no victims—only volunteers.

But this was not the moment I wanted to be reminded of that. Or now, for that matter, so keep it to yourself; thank you anyway. I told you I *knew* a lot and *forgot* everything.

I was in total panic mode.

As the sheriffs pulled up, *Tomoz* ran out of the garage to meet them. I later found out she had been hiding there the whole time, curled up in the back of the Escalade.

Jerry and I sat inside, waiting for the inevitable knock on the door. We knew *Tomoz* was out there, spinning her story.

About 20 minutes later, the doorbell rang.

I opened the door to two sheriff's officers—one male, one female. The female officer came in **hot**. *Tomoz* had her fired up.

"She claims you locked her in the garage," the female officer snapped.

I gestured to the wide-open door. "Does that look locked to you?"

Silence.

But I could still see doubt lingering in their eyes.

"She told us you were both trying to rape her in the sex room," the female officer shot back.

"Hmmm. How did she get in the sex room?" I asked, trying to stay calm and ask logical questions.

The female officer barely reacted. "She also said that you guys are gay."

I'm not sure what that had to do with anything. I mean, I don't think that's illegal anymore. Probably not the best time to explore that with her.

"Officers, don't you think it's a little strange that two gay guys were trying to rape a woman?" I asked.

These two definitely weren't on the shortlist for the next detective opening.

It seems that when police respond to a domestic situation, they often want to take someone to jail to diffuse the situation. That is, not always—but usually, the guy.

They were clearly not convinced and were ready to arrest me, which was precisely what *Tomoz* was hoping for.

Jerry and I started explaining what really happened. I told them everything—the Captain Morgan's rum in the guest bathroom cupboard, calling Jerry to come over for this very reason, the scrambled eggs and beans (yes, that part got a strange look), the trip to the gym, *Tomoz* hiding, the whole thing.

Slowly but surely, the officers started coming around.

Well, one of them did.

The female officer still wasn't buying it.

Not a good sign.

The jaws of The Venus Fly Trap were beginning to close.

The female officer went back outside to ask *Tomoz* more questions. Meanwhile, another male officer entered the house, joining the one already inside.

We continued answering their questions, denying the ridiculous allegations, and pleading our case.

*Tomoz* had told them we had both held her against her will and tried to rape her in the sex room.

WTF.

The new officer repeated what the others had said. "She also said you are both gay."

I stared at him. "What? How does that even work? We're both gay, yet we were going to rape her?" I exclaimed, restating what should have been painfully obvious. Sure, we could have both been bisexual, but even then, the story was ridiculous.

"Yeah, I know. I thought that too," one of the officers admitted.

Finally, they were starting to see the cracks in her story. A sliver of light appeared between the spiky jaws of the Venus Fly Trap, and it began to open.

She must have been throwing out as many accusations as she could think of and didn't realize—or think the officers would recognize—that they made no sense.

"Look, I even recorded her going crazy!" Jerry said, his nerves starting to show.

"Did you ask her if you could record her?" one of the officers asked.

"No," Jerry admitted. "Does that matter?"

"Yes," the officer said. "That makes it inadmissible."

Jerry looked crushed. Then he said, "Well, can't you just listen to it?"

The officer hesitated. "Well, we're not supposed to, no," he said. He wasn't adamant, so Jerry pressed on. "Look, guys, this is serious. There's a lot on the line for us here. If you listen to this, I know it will save us all a lot of time and trouble..."

The officers looked at each other for about an hour. Well, it felt like an hour. It was maybe a few seconds. Then one of them finally said, "Okay, play it."

Hallelujah!

Even though the recording was inadmissible, Jerry played the clip he had secretly recorded of *Tomoz*'s ranting. As they listened, the picture became clearer. The two officers were almost convinced but still needed a way out.

Then the female officer returned, her demeanor noticeably different.

"She kept going on about how important her father is, how wealthy her family is—full of her own importance." The female officer did not like *Tomoz*.

"The longer she went on, you could tell she was a street girl," the officer continued. "She's rough, manipulative. I caught her lying to me more than once. She really had it in for you." She turned to look at me.

She was starting to lean toward the light side.

"You have an assistant?" she asked.

“Had,” I corrected. “I fired her this week.”

“Hmm... well, she’s not your friend. She’s the one who called us.”

That caught me off guard.

“She told us she got a call from this woman—what’s her name again?”

“*Tomoz*,” I said.

“*Tomoz*?” The officer raised an eyebrow. “Weird name. Anyway, this *Tomoz* told her that you had beaten her, that she was hiding from you, and asked her to call us. She said some pretty nasty things about you,” the officer explained as if justifying why they had come in so aggressively.

They were all starting to see the truth now.

“How did you meet her?” the female officer asked, referring to *Tomoz*.

“On the internet,” I admitted lamely.

They all rolled their eyes.

“Does she live here?” the male officer asked.

“No,” I said flatly.

“She says she does. She claims you convinced her to move out of her apartment to live with you,” he said.

“That’s simply not true,” I replied.

“Mind if we look around?” he asked.

“No, go right ahead,” I said, feeling powerless to say anything else.

After checking the bathroom, they returned to the living room.

One of the male officers spoke up. “Did you know that if there is as much as a toothbrush of theirs in the bathroom, a guest can claim residency? If they refuse to leave, you must go through the formal eviction process.”

My stomach dropped.

“If we had arrested you tonight,” he continued, “she could have filed a restraining order against you. That would have given her access to the entire house—your belongings, cars, furniture—everything. You wouldn’t have been able to return. It would have taken you about six months to get her out through eviction.”

Suddenly, it all clicked. *Tomoz* didn’t care if the charges were dropped later. All she needed was for me to be arrested, get a restraining order, and take over the house for six months.

“No, I had no idea!”

Now I knew. And it was far worse than I had ever imagined.

I was floored. I had been so close to losing my home, and I hadn't even realized it.

"She says you have a sex room back there," one of the male officers said. "You don't have to let us, but could we take a look? It would help us get a clearer picture of what happened."

Once again, I felt like I didn't have a choice. I didn't want to risk them changing their minds and hauling us off to jail.

"Sure," I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

I opened the door to the sex room. This was making me feel very uncomfortable. I mean, I wasn't in the habit of giving sex room tours. This was a private space—**my** space. And now, strangers were stepping inside, inspecting it. I felt violated. I know that might sound crazy, but it's true.

A moment later, one of the officers said as they returned. "We have seen enough. We're convinced you guys are telling the truth."

The other officer smirked. "Are you a real-life Christian Grey?" he asked, half-serious.

"No," I said quickly. I mean I don't have the same contracts and agreements he uses. Well, I thought not precisely the same, but I decided not to throw humor into the chaos.

Then he added, "You guys wait here. We'll talk to her again, and then we'll be back."

Jerry and I just stood there, staring at each other in shock. We were both emotionally and mentally drained. This had dragged on for over ten hours, and we still weren't entirely sure we were in the clear.

Then the doorbell rang.

I opened the door, and one of the officers stepped inside.

"We told her she needs to leave," he said. "She has a friend coming to pick her up." He paused, and said, "My advice? Never speak to this woman again."

As he opened the door to leave, he looked back at me and said, "If we have to come out here again, someone is going to jail."

It was over.

The feeling of relief was overwhelming. The stress of trying to get *Tomoz* to leave without ending up in jail, had been so intense. The pressure had been building for over ten hours.

Jerry and I looked at each other and suddenly started laughing. Not because any of it was funny but because the release of tension was just too much. The whole thing had been unbelievable.

It had been a harrowing experience—one I never wanted to go through again.

Turns out, it was just the first of many.

I didn't know that at that moment. But I would soon find out.

"Man, that was crazy!" Jerry exclaimed, finally letting out some of the pent-up energy.

"Bro, you saved my life!" I said, beyond grateful.

It had been a very close call. We talked and laughed about the whole episode.

"Listen, I gotta get out of here," he said, "Lia is going crazy. I was supposed to be there an hour ago."

Lia is Jerry's longtime girlfriend. They live and go everywhere together. Lia is from Panama, speaks very little English, and is extremely shy. Jerry learned Spanish in just three months so that he could talk to her.

Lia is eighteen years younger than Jerry and is, without a doubt, the love of his life.

But he will not marry her. He has a marriage phobia—I mean, really. He is terrified of the idea. But just like any actual phobia, there was no logical explanation for it.

Lia had tried everything to get him to marry her—including cheating on him to make him jealous.

It didn't matter.

He will never marry her or leave her.

"Yeah, get out of here. We can talk tomorrow," I said.

As Jerry walked out the door, I added, "Hey, thanks, man."

He smiled. "Always here for you, bro. You've always been there for me. I wouldn't be where I am without you."

It was true. I had put my life on the line for Jerry and helped him in more ways than I could count. Like I said, we were like brothers.

I held the door open as he made his way down the steps leading to the front of the house. At that moment, *Tomoz's* friend, Chanyce, had just pulled up, and *Tomoz* climbed into her car. The sheriffs were watching her, as was I, as they drove away.

And then, just like that—she was gone.

Relief washed over me. But mixed in with it was something else. Sadness.

*Tomoz* had given me her father's number—**just in case**, she'd said.

She never thought I'd use it.

The Venus Fly Trap was always one step ahead.

Yeah, you're right—four steps ahead.

This was her game—and she was damn good at it.



I knew I'd have to call my parents in the morning. That wouldn't be an easy conversation, but I was sure *Tomoz* would call them first, spinning her story, trying to shake them.

I went to bed with mixed emotions. Relief that I wasn't in jail. That I still had my home. But also sadness that things with *Tomoz* and I had ended this way.

Delusional.

Me, not *Tomoz*.

I was still under the spell of her nectar, still tangled in the jaws of the Venus Fly Trap.

I wasn't free yet.

Not even close.

Her grasp was stronger than I realized, and the battle was far from over. In fact...

It had barely begun.

# Chapter Thirteen

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## Late To Meet The Oracle

The next morning, I woke up with a pounding headache, the events of last night weighing heavily on my conscience. I was incredibly fortunate to have Jerry as a friend. I was so glad I had called him to come over. I knew *Tomoz* would be difficult and try to bait me into a physical confrontation so she could have me arrested.

Jerry's quick thinking—recording *Tomoz*—had saved me from a disastrous situation.

I had been naïve about the legal implications. If *Tomoz* had succeeded in provoking me into a physical confrontation, she could have obtained a restraining order, effectively barring me from my own home.

And because she was technically a guest, getting her out wouldn't have been simple. I would have needed to formally evict her—a process that could drag on for months.

It would have been a real-life *Gone Girl* scenario—me, locked out of my house while she sold off my possessions, completely protected by the legal system.

The courts wouldn't have seen me as a victim—just a problem.

All the while partying with her friends and God knows who in my mansion, driving around in my Bentley and Rolls-Royce—a harrowing picture in my mind.

Crazy? Yes. But that's the law.

This wasn't *Tomoz's* first rodeo. She knew how to work the system to her advantage.

I had dodged a bullet.

But now, I had to make that dreaded call to my parents.

My conservative, law-abiding parents were understandably shocked and disappointed in both of us. Their reaction stung more than I expected. They were now both worried and stressed, especially my mother.

Ughhhhh.

I needed to take my mind off everything.

So, I decided to head to the pub and watch some English football—or, as many Americans call it, a boring waste of time.

I mean, soccer.

The pub served a proper English breakfast made by a lovely lady from Newcastle, England. She co-owned the place with her husband, who was a miserable old git.

As I was driving, my phone lit up with Tomoz's name. I wasn't ready for another confrontation, so I let it ring.

Inside the pub, I tried to lose myself in the game and my full English breakfast. But my team's loss only added to my growing depression.

When I left, I checked my phone and saw *Tomoz* had left a voicemail. I listened, but instead of the angry tirade I expected, her voice was sweet and seductive— that familiar **nectar**—the one I already knew was my weakness.

*"Stephen, I'm so sorry for what happened," she purred. "I don't know what got into me. I think I was just so upset that you spoke to my father, and I just lost it. Please forgive me. Call me. Please?"*

I called her back like a moth to a flame—or a fly drifting toward a Venus Fly Trap. I told myself it was to give her a piece of my mind. But the moment she spoke, I was lost.

Her voice wasn't just sweet—it was hypnotic, wrapping around me like silk, coaxing me closer.

She answered immediately as if she'd been anxiously waiting. "Hi," she breathed.

"Hi," I responded, already falling under the spell of her voice.

"Stephen, I'm so sorry. Is there anything I can do to make this up to you?" She was masterful at this game, knowing exactly how to play her cards. When motivated, she could rival any top actress in performance.

*"Tomoz, there's just no way. How could I ever trust you again?"* I said, sounding resolved—though I was anything but.

Then why the fuck are you on the phone talking to her?

The thought flashed through my mind, but I pushed past it quickly. Thank God, right?

“When you told me you had called my father, I just lost it,” she continued, skillfully shifting the blame. “You can’t do that. (Now, it was all my fault. Genius.) My father is a terrible man. You have no idea—he’s a monster. He ruined my life. He had me committed to a mental institution when I was sixteen. He told the doctors I was crazy.”

Neither *Tomoz* nor her father ever explained exactly why she had been committed to the mental institution. I knew that if I questioned *Tomoz*, she would become defensive, aggressive, or lie. Probably all three. I didn’t want to ask her father either because he had made it clear he didn’t want to go into the details.

I listened as she wove her tale. I was helpless. Or hopeless. Actually, both.

“It was the most terrible experience of my life. He wanted to punish me for telling my mother he was gay. He wants to destroy me, and I knew he would fill your head with lies about me.” She deflected, denied, and justified—all in two sentences.

Like all skilled manipulators, she wove threads of truth into her narrative. Details I’d learn later would paint a different picture, but at that moment, doubt crept in. Maybe her father was the villain. Perhaps he was angry at her and trying to destroy her life. It made sense, right?

No. It was nonsense—but the *nectar* of her voice made everything cloudy.

I wandered through Target while on the phone with her, mechanically picking items off shelves. I didn’t need anything from Target—I had just drifted inside, absentmindedly while talking with *Tomoz*. Though I kept insisting we couldn’t be together, her persistent pleas wore down my resolve. With each passing minute, her voice eroded what little determination I had left to stay away.

Not that it really mattered. Deep down, I was already looking for a way to justify everything and be back with her again. Immediately, or if possible, sooner.

I started making demands—conditions she would have to meet for reconciliation.

“You need to stop drinking,” I insisted.

“Darling, I have no problem with drinking or not,” she responded smoothly.

She used *darling* on me when she wanted to sound serious. Her conviction was compelling, especially when I desperately wanted to believe her. The truth was, I didn’t want to accept that she was an alcoholic.

Simple as that.

So, I wanted to believe she wasn’t.

“*Tomoz*, you need help.”

I tried to convince her to get help and to go to AA meetings.

“No, I don’t need help.”

We went back and forth. Finally, she agreed to go to therapy together and said she would start attending AA meetings.

She knew exactly how to play it—give a little, promise much, with zero intention of following through on anything. She had inherited her father’s genius-level intelligence, and it showed in how skillfully she manipulated situations—and me.

Soon enough, we were back to calling each other *baby* and telling each other how crazy we were about one another. If this seems predictable, it was—but somehow still unbelievable.

Like a fly repeatedly drawn to a Venus Fly Trap, I kept returning—oblivious to the danger or perhaps in spite of it.

*Tomoz* was my drug of choice—intoxicating, irresistible, and dangerous.

She was more addictive than crack—though I’ve never tried crack, so I can’t make that comparison with certainty. But if you offered me crack or a night with *Tomoz*, I knew which one I’d smoke—I mean, choose.

How could I possibly forgive *Tomoz* so quickly? I mean, she had tried to get me arrested and steal my home. Why didn’t I make her at least earn my forgiveness—over weeks, if not months?

How many times can a fly escape the jaws of a Venus Fly Trap, oblivious to the danger, only to return again?

Get comfortable and read on. It’s gonna be a while—we’ve barely gotten started.

So, as crazy as it sounds, we were back together, more obsessed with each other than ever.

Think about it—if I had broken up with *Tomoz*, you wouldn’t be reading about our wild, insane adventures. And honestly? I wouldn’t change any of it for the world.

Like Charles Dickens said, “*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*” They were the times of our lives.

So, *Tomoz* and I began searching for a therapist we both liked. We had numerous issues beyond her attempt to get me arrested and take my house—arguments about drinking, smoking, and various other conflicts. At its core, it was a power struggle; we both wanted control.

*Tomoz* had agreed to go to therapy with me as part of our *make-up deal*. Of course, I thought *she* needed therapy. She, of course, thought it was me who needed therapy. Of course, we were both right.

We talked on the phone with a therapist we both liked—or rather, one we both thought we could sway to be on our side.

The therapist, a very kind, soft-spoken older lady, told us we needed to remain apart until she met with us. She instructed us to meet at her office at the appointed time and to arrive separately.

We agreed to follow through on our assignments and make our own way to her office.

Our appointment was set for 7 p.m.

On the evening of our appointment, I drove over the Skyway Bridge in my Bentley GTC.

We had agreed it was only fair to find a therapist close to where *Tomoz* lived. As I crossed the Skyway Bridge and got about 10 miles from St. Petersburg, the Bentley started sputtering.

*Hub?*

I glanced at the gas gauge and, to my horror, realized I had run out of gas.

“For fuck’s sake! How the hell did that happen?”

It seemed like a fair question to ask myself.

“Well, you forgot to put gas in the car, you fucking idiot,” I answered myself. Well, that was a bit harsh, I thought, but true.

So, I had to pull off to the side. It was a very *tight*, hard shoulder. Cars whizzed past at what felt like breakneck speeds.

They were all laughing at me.

Or at least, it *felt* that way.

*Now what do I do?*

You’re right—there was no one there. So, who was I talking to? Myself. Yes, I talk to myself. A lot. We’ve been through this already.

The only thing I could think of was to call *Tomoz*.

So, I did.

I told her I had run out of gas, which, of course, she found hilarious but tried not to laugh—only making my humiliation worse.

*Tomoz* was actually very sweet. She went to a gas station, bought a container, filled it with gas, took a cab, and brought it to me.

She arrived in a white taxi van, like an angel on a white horse.

The irony was not lost on me.

The taxi driver, mercifully professional, refrained from the obvious jokes. *Tomoz*, however, couldn't resist teasing.

"How did you not see you were low on gas?"

"Well, when you're rushing to meet your girlfriend to help *her* with *her* therapy, and you're running late, it's quite easy to miss something," I shot back defensively.

Her eyes widened, and she gave me a fierce look.

As I refueled the Bentley, the humiliation of a stalled luxury car weighed on me, amplified by the curious stares of passing motorists.

I got in and pressed the ignition button.

Nothing.

Again.

Still nothing.

*What the...?*

I glanced at the gas gauge—it hadn't even moved. Then it hit me. There still wasn't enough gas in the tank to start the car.

I gripped the top of the steering wheel, put my head down, and silently screamed.

However much gasoline was in that container, it was not enough to start the Bentley; another humbling lesson in opulence.

So, I asked the driver to return to the gas station, buy a five-gallon container, fill it with gas, and bring it back. He kindly agreed. I mean, I couldn't go anywhere, and he was pretty sure I wasn't about to run off and abandon the Bentley.

He left *Tomoz* with me—maybe thinking that if I did try to make a run for it, she'd slow me down. The irony? *Tomoz* can actually run really fast. Ask me how I know. That's right—you'll find out soon enough.

With the roof down, the wait was surprisingly bearable despite the Florida heat.

We found something to occupy us. No, not that—for once. We looked at the sky. No, really.

The Florida sky was a masterpiece, with divine rays streaming through the clouds—a scene I like to call "God Moments." With the roof down, we shared this rare, serene gift.

Yeah, a silver lining—and a moment I'll never forget. I know, hopeless romantic. *Tomoz* loved it, too. She rested her head on my shoulder as we watched the clouds move across the sky, creating all kinds of beautiful, fleeting scenes.

So there we were—sitting in a Bentley, stranded on the hard shoulder of the freeway, having run out of gas, cars flying by—completely mesmerized by the "God scene." We were both quite an anomaly.

While I was still in great danger, so was *Tomoz*. I was at risk of losing my freedom and my home. *On* the other hand, *Tomoz* was in danger of succumbing to my love and affection—the kind she had never experienced before, nor did she believe in. Or at least, she refused to admit she believed in it.

She truly believed she was unlovable. That men only wanted her for one thing. Because that had always been her experience.

Who would win this battle of light and darkness? First, we need to figure out which one of us was bringing the light and which one of us was bringing the darkness. You probably think you know. Maybe. But don't be so sure. The journey to find out had only just begun. We had a long way to go.

Finally, the taxi driver returned. I emptied the fresh five-gallon container into the gas tank as another stream of cars rushed past—some honking, others shouting obscenities.

I thanked and paid the driver. Then, we took off, heading to our 7 PM appointment with the therapist.

It was nearly 8 PM.

"Should we even go?" *Tomoz* asked, her tone suggesting she'd rather skip it and grab dinner.

I tried calling the therapist. No answer.

"Let's just check if she's still there," I proposed, though *Tomoz* seemed convinced we'd find an empty office.

We arrived at the therapist's office. It looked closed. Still, I tried the door anyway, and it opened.

I waved to *Tomoz*, and she hesitantly got out of the car and followed me inside.

We searched for her office number. I knocked on the door.

To our complete surprise, the therapist opened the door.

"We are so sorry we're late," I said. "We thought you would have left by now."

"Oh, I had to stay and finish some paperwork anyway. Come on in," she said kindly.

"Is everything okay?"

As we stepped inside her office, I explained what had happened.

"Oh dear," she said. "That must have been very stressful."

"Stephen and.... *Tomoz*, is it?" she asked as we followed her.



"Yes," I confirmed.

"*Tomoz*—that's such a pretty and unique name," the therapist said.

"Thank you," *Tomoz* replied. "It means 'tomorrow.' That's where I'm from—the future."

The therapist smiled. "Well, that's lovely. Now, sit down, both of you. I'll make us some tea."

She started brewing herbal tea, and suddenly, it felt like we were visiting Grandma's house. Her office wasn't sterile or clinical—it was warm, cozy, more like a welcoming living room than a therapist's office.

The entire evening felt surreal. From the moment I drove over the Skyway Bridge, it felt like I had stepped into another dimension. This meeting with 'Grandma' felt like Neo's first encounter with the Oracle in *The Matrix*.

As I said, we had spoken to her on the phone before, and we both liked her. She had even given us some assignments. *Tomoz* was supposed to attend an AA meeting every day. According to her, she had

I had completed my assignments. Which I had left at home. Or maybe the dog had eaten them. I forget which.

We were also instructed not to see each other before the session and to arrive separately. To be fair, we *intended* to—but circumstances had other plans.

Not seeing each other before the session? Yeah, that hadn't exactly worked out either. Oh, and we were one and a half hours late for our appointment.

But other than that, we had followed instructions *perfectly*.

The therapist forgave us, which was very nice of her. Then again, it would've been a bit hypocritical if she hadn't. I mean, therapists *are* big proponents of forgiveness, right?

She listened as we shared our stories—both talking over each other, hoping our version would be heard first so she'd take our side.

By the time we were done, our tea was cold, and our therapist looked... confused. Maybe even exhausted by the chaos.

"Well, that is all very interesting," she said finally. "From what you're both telling me, it sounds like you're struggling to communicate what you want from each other, and that's causing arguments and fights. Would that be a fair initial prognosis?"

We both turned to look at each other. Startled by how accurately she had distilled our chaotic ramblings, we spoke almost in sync:

"Yes."

The therapist nodded.

"Stephen, you want *Tomoz* to abstain from drinking alcohol because, in your opinion, she is an alcoholic. Is that correct?"

By Jove, I think she's got it! I knew she'd be on my side.

"Yes," I said confidently.

*Tomoz* frowned.

"And *Tomoz*, you feel that you don't really have a drinking problem, and Stephen is just trying to control you. Would you agree with that?"

Now *she* thought the therapist was on *her* side. Genius.

"That is *exactly* right," She said, her frown vanishing, replaced by a triumphant smile directed straight at me.

"Okay. Well, you guys are doing great so far. That helps me a lot."

As the Oracle spoke, I wanted to believe this was a turning point. But doubt gnawed at me. Could *Tomoz* really change? Could *I*?

Even as I nodded in agreement, a part of me wondered if we were both simply too broken to fix.

"Now, let me ask you both a very important question," she said, "the answer to which will determine whether we can move forward toward an amicable outcome."

We sat in silence, waiting for this all-important question.

"I can see you both care for each other very much—you can barely keep your hands or eyes off each other," she chuckled.

It was true. We smiled at each other and held hands even tighter.

"So, here's the question: To save your relationship and make it better, more harmonious, are you both willing to compromise your positions a little?"

"Yes," we both said without hesitation.

"Okay, good. I'm so happy to hear that because I'm excited to work with you both. You seem to have something special between you. You're both very strong characters, which is both a blessing and a curse."

She paused, then continued, "You're both used to getting your way and can be *very* stubborn."

We exchanged a glance. Yeah, she wasn't wrong.

"You both need to understand and accept that you *can't* always have your way. Relationships are about give and take—picking your battles."

She leaned in slightly. "From what you've told me, you're capable of doing that. *Tomoz*, you let Stephen take the lead in certain areas. And Stephen, you let *Tomoz* do things her way in others—even when you don't always like what she's doing."

"Is that fair to say?"

Holy shit, this little grandma is a powerhouse.

"Yes," we both said, completely mesmerized by the Oracle.

"So that brings us to the issue of alcohol."

She turned to me.

"Stephen, what makes you think *Tomoz* has a problem with alcohol?"

So, I explained the events that had led me to that conclusion. I didn't mention what her father had said—because that would have ended the session right then and there.

The Oracle nodded thoughtfully. "Based on your version of the story, Stephen, that seems like a reasonable assumption. Wouldn't you agree, *Tomoz*?"

*Tomoz* looked like she was about to argue but bit her lip. "I suppose so," she admitted.

The Oracle nodded again. "Stephen, can you see how that might feel controlling to *Tomoz*?"

"Yes, I can."

Because I did. I was controlling.

"Okay, *Tomoz*, now I need you to tell me why you believe you don't have a drinking problem."

*Tomoz* then shared her story, which was obviously bullshit.

Okay—kidding.

"You are both doing really well here. You're beginning to listen to each other. You don't have to agree, but the most important thing is that you both feel heard."

The Oracle was incredible.

"Now, this is where compromise comes in."

Well, up until now, she had been incredible.

"Stephen, this seems like a major issue for you—something you might not be able to accept. Is that true?"

Here comes the Oracle trap.

"YES!" I said firmly.

"So, you would break up with *Tomoz* rather than accept her drinking alcohol. Is that correct?"

Oh, the Oracle was good. I mean, I didn't want to make an ultimatum here, and of course, I definitely didn't want to lose *Tomoz*.

"Well, obviously, I don't want to lose *Tomoz*. At the same time, I'd need to see her making an effort to get this under control," I said, trying my best to compromise while still holding my ground.

"Okay, so *Tomoz*, would you be willing to make an effort to show Stephen that you're working toward having more control over your drinking?"

*Tomoz*, like me, bristled at being cornered. "Well, that depends," she hedged.

"On what specifically?" The Oracle pressed.

"On how he expects me to show him that I'm making an effort."

She needed more clarity—so she could devise ways to get out of complying.

"That's a fair question," the Oracle said, turning to me. "Stephen, what would *Tomoz* need to do to prove to you that she's making a concerted effort to control her drinking?"

"Well, she would need to stop drinking for a month," I said, thinking, that's *a big ask, but if you don't ask...*

Then, the Oracle turned to *Tomoz*.

"*Tomoz*, are you prepared to stop drinking for a month?"

*Tomoz* hesitated, her expression flickering between defiance and vulnerability. For a moment, I saw something unguarded—fear, maybe. Or the weight of a past she couldn't escape.

Then, as quickly as it disappeared, her confident mask returned.

"I'll reduce the amount I drink," she offered her voice firm but distant.

The Oracle turned back to me, coming in for the final close.

"Stephen, is that acceptable to you to get things moving along?"

In other words: *Take what you can get here. This is a stepping stone.*

"Yes," I said.

Pushing for more would be futile. And honestly, it was highly unlikely *Tomoz* would even follow through on what she'd already agreed to anyway.

But it gave me something—and helped me keep some dignity.

"Wonderful," the Oracle said. "We've come so far already. Let's celebrate this little victory and the fact that you two are working through these issues together."

Her words felt like a revelation. She saw through our chaos, distilling our tangled emotions into something almost manageable. For a moment, it felt like we had hope—an illusion we both clung to desperately.

The Oracle asked us to stand and embrace. As we rose, our eyes met, and then, almost instinctively, our heads fell onto each other's shoulders. We held on tightly.

Music filled the room, adding an unexpected warmth. In that moment, it felt like a fragile truce—temporary, but precious. Slowly, we swayed in a small circle, moving together in quiet understanding.

Finally, the Oracle had to break us apart, like a referee separating two prizefighters locked in an exhausted clinch.

While we were embracing, the Oracle had made more tea and placed it on the coffee table in front of our chairs.

"Okay, let's go through some communication exercises you can do at home to help you both feel heard."

So, the Oracle led us through some exercises.

You know, like one person talking while the other actively listens. Then the listener repeats what they heard, saying, "*What I thought I heard you say was...*"

And some other fucking stupid exercises like that.

Okay, I'm kidding.

"Okay, were you listening? So, repeat back what you thought you heard me say. See.

All I remember is that it somehow ended up with *Tomoz* curled up in my lap—all 5 feet 11 inches of this amazing creature. She had taken her shoes off.

Like I said earlier, *Tomoz* could make herself tiny or a giant.

Yes, like a chameleon. Okay, a chameleon changes color, not size, but you know what I mean. Stop nitpicking.

The Oracle, who had put up with our complete madness for almost an hour, finally laid down the law: we had to go home separately.

Which, of course, we did.

Okay, not a chance.

When we all said our goodbyes, it felt like leaving Grandma's house after a long visit. It was 9:45 p.m., and we were both starving.

*Tomoz* did well, but she was going through the motions. She was giving the whole therapy thing lip service.

She all but bolted out of there—and would never bring up therapy again.

We went for dinner downtown, on the main strip by the water, with Melania's supposed boyfriend, Tristan—the trust fund guy with the terrible stutter, whom Melania was siphoning money off mercilessly.

He was a super nice guy. Socially awkward and terribly insecure.

I mean, he lived in a completely unreal world. He had never worked a day in his life and never had to worry about money. So how could he possibly relate to anyone? He constantly tried to compensate for his lack of social skills and his terrible stutter, which made him self-conscious. But he didn't have a mean bone in his body. He was kind to everyone.

This is, of course, why Melania could take advantage of him.

She was pretending to be dating him while she was fucking anything that moved.

I know that sounds harsh. But she was cold, hard, and evil.

As you will soon discover.

So, we had a nice dinner with Tristan. Then *Tomoz* and I left separately—she went to her apartment, and I went home.

Did we?

Okay, now you're getting it.

# Chapter Fourteen

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## “Are You Seriously NOT Going To Fuck Me Tonight?”

After dinner, *Tómoz* said she wanted to show me the lovely homes on Shell Island. I’m sure she was trying to get me to consider marrying her and living in St. Petersburg. At the time, I thought she just wanted to show me nice houses so we could spend more time together. Maybe both.

Look, at no point in this book do I claim to be the sharpest tool in the shed. Just a tool.

We drove around for a while; it was getting late. Neither of us wanted the night to end. Then again, we never wanted any of our nights together to end. By now, we were starting to get hungry again.

When it’s late, where do you go to eat? For us, the answer was simple. We went to our favorite place—the same place we went the night we first met—Denny’s. This time, in St. Petersburg.

The restaurant was quiet again. The hostess stared at *Tómoz* in awe, as if she were a movie star or a supermodel.

I broke her gaze with a playful remark. “We were just passing by and saw the lights on. Do you have anything to eat here?” Like, I had no idea where we were.

It was somewhat believable because I’m English. She probably thought I genuinely didn’t know where I was or was just plain stupid. What she didn’t realize was that I am both.

“Oh yes,” she said. “We have a large menu. Would you like to look at it?” Still taking me seriously.

“No, thank you. I don’t like to order off a menu,” I replied in my best upper-class English accent.

“Oh... okay.” She looked confused now.

“I’d prefer to ask the chef to make me something special,” I continued. “I’d like scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, and two slices of wheat toast. Do you think he can pull that off?”

Finally, she caught on to my sarcasm and smiled.

“I’ll have to ask the chef. He doesn’t usually do special orders, but I’ll see what I can do,” she said, playing along.

“Can we sit down, please? My feet are killing me,” *Tomoz* interjected. She wasn’t a fan of our flirting.

The hostess caught the tone in *Tomoz*’s voice and quickly grabbed two menus. “Right this way, please.” She led us to a special booth—well, a booth anyway.

Then, she hurried back to the podium before *Tomoz* could eat her alive.

A moment later, our waitress arrived to take our order. She looked oddly familiar. Then it hit me—it was the same girl.

“Of course, I already have your order, sir. I’ll ask the chef if he can make your special request, though I feel pretty confident he’ll be able to pull that off,” she said, smiling at me. “Ma’am, what would you like to order?”

*Tomoz* looked at her like, ‘you better stop flirting with my boyfriend, or I will fucking rip your heart out’, and then ordered what she wanted to eat.

The hostess/waitress ran off to convince the chef to make my special order.

“Well, you both seem to have hit it off. Would you like me to get her phone number for you?” *Tomoz* said passive-aggressively.

I should have apologized and given *Tomoz* plenty of attention and reassurance. But for some reason, I couldn’t resist.

“She already gave it to me,” I teased. “Her number starts with 727, so she must live here in St. Petersburg, which is convenient. I mean, I can come here and fuck two girls with one cock... or is it kill two birds with one stone?”

“Very funny,” *Tomoz* said flatly. “If you don’t stop, you won’t have a cock to fuck anything with.”



The waitress arrived with our special orders. As she walked away and making sure *Tomoz* saw me, I made a phone sign with my fingers, put them to my mouth and ear, and mouthed, "Call me." She walked away smiling and probably thinking, "She is going to seriously bust his balls for doing that."

She must be psychic.

*Tomoz* started to eat her breakfast while pretending to be completely unmoved by my childish teasing, "You are such an idiot. First of all, that girl is still a child and would have absolutely no interest in an old man like you. Second of all, if you really want to fuck her, just say so, and I will go and pick her up; because you are too scared to do it, then we can all go to your house and fuck each other. Just say the word."

She knew I had no interest in threesomes; she was just being passive-aggressive. Although she really could do that in a nanosecond, don't believe me? Just wait.

Okay, enough. I'd had my fun, and now I'd been put firmly in my place.

"Baby, no woman could ever take your place. You are my princess. Now, pass the ketchup," I said with a grin.

*Tomoz* punched my leg under the table, which, surprisingly, seemed to put her in a better mood.

We had breakfast and bantered back and forth for a while.

"So, what I think I heard you say... is that you can't live without me, correct?" I teased.

*Tomoz* didn't miss a beat. "No. What I said was that I can't live *with* you," she shot back. "You're not listening."

"Hmmm, that's funny. It didn't seem that way when you were curled up in my lap, purring like a cat," I counter-retorted. You know what I mean.

"There was nowhere else to sit," *Tomoz* replied flatly.

This back-and-forth went on for a while until *Tomoz* finally capitulated, and I won.

What do you mean you don't believe me? Sounds like you might have trust issues. Lucky for you, I know a great therapist called the Oracle in St. Petersburg, Florida, and she opens late.

Finally, we got up to leave and pay the bill. Well, *the Princess* just walked out while I paid. She didn't wait for anyone.

I hurried to settle the bill and followed her outside. If I didn't catch up quickly, who knew what kind of trouble she could get into at 1 a.m. outside Denny's?

Of course, she was taking the opportunity to sneak a cigarette—something I'd never allow in my car or my house. She even smoked like a movie star. She'd take a few puffs,

then throw the rest away without even bothering to put it out. Because *who extinguishes a cigarette*—that doesn't look cool, right?

How she'd never accidentally burned down a building was a minor miracle.

I folded her into the car, and we drove off, cruising through the wealthy neighborhoods.

As we drove down the highway, we passed a Porsche dealership. *Tomoz* immediately wanted to pull in and check out the cars—or, more accurately, show me the one she wanted me to buy her.

I know I sound a little cynical, but I was quickly learning how *Tomoz* thinks.

The truth was, she constantly went back and forth between believing I genuinely cared for her and suspecting I was just using her for sex. I went back and forth between believing she cared for me and wondering if she only wanted my money and the freedom to do whatever she pleased.

Anyway, we both loved cars.

At night, barriers were set up at the Porsche dealership to keep people out. Of course, these did not apply to *us*.

We casually walked around the barriers like they weren't even there, then wandered onto the lot, checking out the new Porsches as well as all the used cars.

Then we walked over and looked through the showroom window. A used red Ferrari caught our eye. We both liked it. I even jotted down the price, thinking I might surprise her with it later.

Yeah, no.

To be honest, if I had the money, I just might have.

Finally, we walked back to my car, which I liked better. We got in and sat there with the roof down, talking and making out.

Then, two sheriffs in their SUVs pulled up. We had been spotted on the security cameras, and they were sent to check us out. That's exactly what they told us.

They walked up to the side of the Bentley, and we sat there chatting with them. They were very nice and friendly, and we cracked jokes with them.

As they looked around the Bentley, one of them said, "This is an amazing car."

I explained the whole Mansory body kit thing to them. They were clearly impressed and seemed to appreciate that we were down-to-earth and just chatting with them.

We talked about what it's like to be a sheriff in today's world—the challenges and the risks. I told them we appreciated what they did.

Then one of the officers grinned and said, "This thing looks like it's very fast."

He looked at me and asked, "Is it fast?"

Without missing a beat, I replied, "I have no idea." And we all laughed.

They asked where we were coming from.

"Denny's," we both said at the same time.

"Denny's?" one of them scoffed. "That place is terrible. Next time, go to Kristina's—it's way better." He gave us directions, and then we parted ways.

Tomoz and I exchanged looks, smiled, and started making out again. The excitement had made us both horny. Well, we were always horny.

Tomoz smirked. "Are you seriously not going to fuck me tonight?"

Straight to the point, as always. I didn't need further encouragement, and that question didn't need an answer.

I drove straight to the Vinoy Hotel, the Ritz-Carlton of St. Petersburg. On the way, I made a reservation. I booked a suite with a balcony. I also arranged for room service to have a bottle of Moët & Chandon Impérial Brut Champagne on ice waiting for us.

We checked in without any bags. Just the clothes we were standing in. The receptionist made it clear he disapproved of our obvious intentions.

"Do you have any bags, Mr. Edwards?" "No," I said simply and flatly.

"Oh, how about Mrs. Edwards? I assume it is Mrs. Edwards?"

"No," I said, a little more intensely.

He looked at my driver's license and said, "Oh, I see you live in Sarasota. I love Sarasota, and it's so close." Meaning: Why don't you just go home, where you might at least have a toothbrush?

"May I ask the reason for your stay, Mr. Edwards? Business or *pleasure*?"

This motherfucker was enjoying this little exercise in trying to make us feel guilty about coming to his hotel to have sex. In essence, he was saying, *We are not some rent-a-room-by-the-hour motel. We are a luxury hotel.* He didn't say that exactly, but it was strongly implied. Like, I'm not going to turn you away, but we'd rather you not come back and do this again.

I didn't take the bait. I stayed calm—well, calm enough not to snap his fucking head off, at least.

In my mind, I kept repeating: *In just a few minutes, I'll be in a beautiful suite, with champagne on ice, with this magnificent woman, having mad, passionate sex with her... and you, buddy, will still be standing here with your dick in your hand.*

When the interrogation finally ended, he launched into the standard spiel—where everything in the hotel was: the gym, the hair salon, the spa, the pool, the pool house, where to find the towels by the pool, the pool bar, the restaurant, the restaurant hours for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and—just in case we cared—room service hours. He made sure to remind us that, at this time of night, room service was closed.

I guess we must have gotten the champagne delivered just in time.

He kept droning on about other amenities he *knew* we wouldn't use.

"Well, thank you for joining us for the evening," he said. (It was 2 a.m.) "Enjoy your stay with us here at the Vinoy."

"Oh, I will," I thought to myself.

As we walked toward the elevator, *Tomoz*, of course, had to have the last word. She knew this guy would be watching her sashay away.

Halfway to the elevator, she glanced over her shoulder and blew him a slow, sexy kiss—just to let him know that she *knew* he was watching and that she was on her way upstairs, where I was going to fuck her brains out.

He broke his stare and scurried into the office. Brilliant.

But instead of just having sex, we *made love*—all over the room.

It felt different this time—softer, slower as if we were afraid of breaking something fragile between us.

She kissed me like she was searching for answers. And for once, I kissed her like I wanted to give them.

We had been through a lot together. It had already been a whirlwind.

We were both trying to find love and a safe place to be. I put on some love songs, including *our song*, All of Me, by John Legend. The lyrics were perfect for us—"You're crazy, and I'm out of my mind," for a start.

We held and caressed each other. We were still standing in the middle of the room as I gently kissed her lips, then her face, and slowly kissed down her body. As I pulled her gently to the floor, I began taking off her clothes. I continued kissing her body, her breasts—kissing, nibbling, caressing her face, pushing my hands through her hair, lightly tugging.

*Tomoz* just enjoyed it. Which was fine with me. I enjoyed giving her pleasure.

I slowly made my way down to her pussy and ignored it. I'll get back to her in a minute. She liked me to tease her.

I started kissing and licking the inside of her thighs. Then I went down her legs, calves, and all the way to her toes.

Then back up again, this time stopping at her pussy. She still had her panties on, so I kissed and licked her through them. Then, slowly, I began pulling them down and off completely.

Now I was sitting up, looking at her face. She looked at me like, For fuck's sake, will you just fuck me with your tongue, you bastard?

So, I put my mouth over her pussy and began gently blowing on her clit. She began moaning again.

Then, the slightest, gentlest touch of my tongue—licking around the outside walls of her pussy.

Putting my tongue deep inside her. Then taking it out and putting her entire pussy in my mouth. Sucking her juices.

This went on for a long time. She would orgasm, and I would start all over again.

Then, finally, we made love.

Afterward, we just lay on the floor next to each other, spent.

After a while, we got up and sat on the balcony. Of course, *Tomoz* had a cigarette while I opened the champagne. We took a few sips, she smoked half a cigarette, and then we headed to bed. We simply held each other and drifted off to sleep.

When I woke up, we were still in the same position—clinging to each other as if we never wanted to let go. I lay there for a while, watching her sleep, mesmerized by her beautiful face. What an amazing gift.

She stirred awake slowly.

Mornings weren't her favorite time of day—she could be very grumpy until she had her coffee.

I nudged her. "Breakfast is about to end. If we don't get down there ASAP, we'll have to wait an hour for room service."

That got her moving. In an instant, she went into hyper-speed and was ready in minutes.

We went down for breakfast and sat outside on the veranda, soaking in the morning sunshine.

The waiter came over and took our orders.

"What time does breakfast finish here in the restaurant?" *Tomoz* inquired suspiciously.

"Oh, you have plenty of time—breakfast doesn't finish for another hour," he replied politely.

*Tomoz* turned to me, narrowing her eyes. "You are such a liar!" she said, kicking me under the table.

I smirked. "Shut up and just be grateful we're here," I said, trying to shift her focus.

We reminisced about last night. Me running out of gas. Her coming to save me on her white horse. The clouds.

Arriving at the therapist an hour and a half late, and the Oracle still being there. The Oracle making us herbal tea. The fun we had with the exercises. *Tomoz* lying in my lap.

"You two have to go home separately."

Then we went to dinner together. Denny's. The sexy waitress. No, I didn't say that. "What I heard you say was..." The Porsche dealer. The Ferrari. The sheriffs.

"Is it fast?"

"Are you seriously not going to fuck me tonight?" That was something only *Tomoz* would say.

The guy at reception. *Tomoz's* blown kiss—classic. The lovemaking. Sleeping in each other's arms and so much more.

And now, here we are, having breakfast the next morning.

We laughed and relived the whole evening again. We were having the time of our lives. Literally.

Then, with impeccable timing, *Tomoz* asked to borrow the Escalade.

"Baby, I need something to get around in," she reasoned. "I hate depending on Melania for rides. Plus, how else will I get to AA meetings or that Orlando seminar you want me to go to this weekend?"

I know—poor *Tomoz*, right? No? Yeah, that's what I thought, too.

So I said, "Of course, baby." Because I just can't say no to her.

We went back to my house, and before I could change my mind, *Tomoz* left in her new Escalade. I knew exactly what she was doing, but I admired her for it.

Ask for what you want, and if at first you don't succeed—just take it.

I told you there was another story about a car.

This one had just begun. And it did not end well.

I know—you'd never have guessed that, right?

Hey, I was under her spell. The *nectar* was intoxicating, as any fly would tell you. Well, —if they ever got away, of course. And few did.

I was already deep inside the Venus Fly Trap, slowly being pulled further into her jaws.  
And just like that, we were back together. And that was the end of therapy.  
Like I said, the therapist was really good. That's why we called her the Oracle.  
The Oracle had worked her magic, though perhaps not quite as intended.  
Going to therapy had pushed us back together.  
But it had solved nothing.

I realized there was no way *Tomoz* would continue therapy, not even with the Oracle.  
She would constantly undermine the process at every turn until it became untenable.

Events were accelerating, with no signs of slowing down. Every day brought new developments, new complications, new ways for us to become even more entangled in each other's lives.

Looking back, I can see how each moment and each decision pulled us further down our path. The therapy session had given us a false sense of progress—made us believe we'd addressed our issues when, in reality, we had barely scratched the surface.

The Escalade would become another thread in our tangled web—another connection, another source of conflict.

Our relationship was like a high-speed train—thrilling, dangerous, and impossible to stop once in motion. Every step forward took us further from solid ground, yet we couldn't help ourselves.

The intensity of our connection. The depth of our feelings. They overshadowed all the warning signs.

Things were happening fast. Keep up.

Because they're not about to slow down anytime soon.

This would be a good time to use the bathroom if you need to. Hurry.

# Chapter Fifteen

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## “Don’t Call Me Crazy!”

I tried numerous times to get *Tomoz* into a rehab program. My first attempt was in Sarasota, at a rehab and recovery facility called First Step. She fought me tooth and nail, but finally, she agreed to go as an outpatient.

*Tomoz* was terrified of residential rehab programs—probably because of her past experiences. I have this habit of using the word “crazy” to describe all sorts of strange behaviors and events that are just strange. I would often say to *Tomoz*, “Are you crazy?” Or sometimes, “You’re crazy.” When I called her crazy, she would go crazy!

Maybe it was because her father put her in a psychiatric hospital when she was 16, or perhaps because she knew she really *was* crazy.

Either way, I stopped calling her crazy... just in case she went crazy.

The truth is, we are both crazy. However, I am proud of my crazy—which is itself a sign that you really are crazy.

Anyway, *Tomoz* finally agrees to go to outpatient rehab. During the intake of new patients, they have a group meeting. They all share their stories, opening up to get to know one another.

Having dated and married women with alcohol problems—and as a spiritual counselor—I had experienced many of these meetings.

*Tomoz*, however, completely disrupted the session by making snide comments about other people’s stories. Before long, it turned into a free-for-all and chaos. Then, in true *Tomoz* fashion, she stormed out. They wouldn’t let her back in after that. Well, that took care of that.

That was *Tomoz*. She’d put up a fight, eventually give in, and agree to do what I asked—only to make sure it didn’t work. That way, it wasn’t *her* fault when it all fell



apart. It was never *her* idea not to go through with something. She was more than willing—someone else messed up. What could she do? Genius.

The sad part was that she was only hurting herself, but she didn't care. Her philosophy was... well, she didn't really have one. For the most part, she just lived in the moment.

I told myself I'd done everything I could, but deep down, I knew it wasn't enough. Maybe I wanted to believe she'd save herself, or perhaps I was just too afraid to admit that I couldn't save her.

Looking back was painful for *Tomoz*. Thinking about the future was scary for her. In the present moment, she was terrified of being abandoned. So, alcohol, sex, and drugs became her only escape from her fears and pain.

Taking those things away from her meant forcing her to face her demons, her fears, and her pain.

Facing her demons was more than *Tomoz* could handle. —In her mind, if alcohol, drugs, and sex shortened her life, then so be it. To her, a life without them wasn't worth living. It was never about longevity—it was about escape.

I had a choice: let her go or accept her for who she was and try to break her falls as best I could. I couldn't let her go. It was as simple as that. I knew there would be consequences. All I could do was try to minimize them—if only in my mind.

At the same time, she craved love, affection, attention, and companionship—things she knew she could always get from me. But when I wasn't around, she would find them somewhere else. In her mind, she had no other choice.

Every Thursday, I left town for my three-day speaking event, which ran from Friday through Sunday. Then, I would fly home on Sunday or Monday, depending on where I was in the country and flight times. This was when *Tomoz* got lonely when she started feeling the pain, and when she had to find relief.

So, on Thursday, René drove me to the airport, and I flew off to Albany, New York. Meanwhile, *Tomoz* went to a three-day seminar in Orlando—Landmark Forum.

Wait... *Tomoz*? *Tomoz* and personal development? Not exactly a match.

But I was deeply invested in it.

As Dr. Phil would say, "*How's that working for you so far?*"

Up until now, pretty good. Actually, very good. You see, this was what I spoke about and tried to live my life by.

Now, did I have more work to do on myself? Absolutely. And, as you're starting to figure out, I still do. Yes, a lot.

It took me a long time to finally put myself out there and teach this stuff. For years, I thought I had to be *perfect* before teaching. Admirable and stupid.

I have worked with some of the most famous self-help gurus you can think of. And guess what?

That's right—none of them practice *everything* they teach.

That doesn't mean they shouldn't teach. There's an old saying: "We teach what we need to learn." And it's true.

It was only very recently that the wheels were starting to come off my own train.

Still, I wanted to help *Tomoz* in any way I could. I thought that maybe—just maybe—if she could develop the mental and emotional tools to cope with her demons, we could find another way forward.

Of course, she was not going to listen to *me*, so I had to get creative. That's how I convinced her to attend a Landmark Forum weekend event in Orlando.

And she actually went.

For the first day.

Well... the first *morning*, anyway.

I called her from my event in Albany to see how things were going. She said, "This is a waste of my time. I already know all this stupid stuff. I am *way* beyond this."

I was going to say, "*Well, you may know it, but are you actually using any of it?*" But I thought better of it.

I had tried.

"I have better things to do at home," she explained—though she didn't specify what these *better things* were.

Another failed attempt to help her.

What's the definition of insanity? People like to say it's doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result.

But that's not the *real* definition.

I'll get to that later.

In the meantime, pray for me.

And for *Tomoz*.

*Especially* for *Tomoz*.

# Chapter Sixteen

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## “Mission Accomplished”

I flew back from my event in Albany to Tampa airport on Sunday night. I had arranged for a limo to meet me at the airport and take me to pick up *Tomoz* at her apartment in St. Petersburg.

I called *Tomoz* on the way. She was drunk. She was in the bar at her apartments, chatting with some guy—probably one of the guys I met there on our first date.

“I’m on my way,” I told her.

She mumbled something incoherent and hung up.

A knot tightened in my stomach. Then she called me back. She was slurring her words. It sounded like she was in a bathroom. Then I heard a man’s voice. Was she in the men’s bathroom?

By the time I arrived, she was out of the bathroom, and there was no guy in sight. It was a relief, honestly, since the limo could only fit eleven people—there was no way we could’ve squeezed him in.

The limo driver dropped us off at my place.

As soon as we stepped inside, she shrugged off her coat and tossed it onto the couch. Her heels clicked against the floor like a metronome, counting down to something inevitable.

The air filled with her perfume, thick with anticipation.

“Hungry?” she asked, smirking as she poured herself a drink.

But dinner was never on the menu. And that was fine—*Tomoz* was never the kind to play house. And I was never the kind to want or ask her to.

It was time for us to do what we always did, what came naturally to us both. *Tomoz* was wild anyway, but alcohol? That just poured gasoline on the fire.

And what a fire it was.

A wild night... and day... and night again.

Of course, she wasn't drunk the whole time—we had other substances, remember?

The things we did to each other—well, mostly me to her...

What kind of things?

You don't wanna know. What?

Oh, you do?

Pervert.

If you think I'm going to describe what happened... then you picked the right book. If you don't want to know, skip to page #...

*Tomoz* emerged from the sex room in a black latex outfit that clung to her body, every inch of it designed to command attention. The corset's crisscross laces cinched her waist, her high heels added to her already towering presence, and the confidence in her stride was intoxicating.

Her hair was wild, and her eye makeup smudged just enough to make her look effortlessly rebellious.

The sexiest thing I had ever seen.

I'd set the mood—dim lighting, flickering candles casting shadows on the walls. A Delirium album hummed in the background, low and sensual. On the nightstand, beside the open door of the sex room, I'd crushed the speed pills on a mirror, neatly arranging straws beside the mirror.

I was still making final touches when *Tomoz* stepped out of the sex room, wearing the incredible black latex outfit and standing six feet five in her six-inch platform heels.

A sex goddess.

I was speechless. I stared, transfixed, as she slowly walked over to me, gliding effortlessly across the carpet in those six-inch heels. A miracle in itself. Most women struggle to walk on a smooth floor in heels that high—let alone on carpet.

She drank in the expression on my face. She knew she had me exactly where she wanted. Total control. Absolute power. And she loved it.

She walked right up to me and slid her hands slowly around my neck. With a slow, deliberate toss of her hair, she parted her lips and crashed them onto mine, devouring me. Whatever I'd been holding slipped from my fingers and hit the floor.

Then, *Tomoz* dropped to her knees. A wicked smile played on her lips as she ensured I was more than ready. Satisfied, she rose gracefully and sauntered over to the bed.

As she climbed onto the bed, she glanced over her shoulder and said, “Get the camera.”  
Holy fuck.

I grabbed the camera from the armchair by the window, my pulse hammering. When I turned back, there she was—standing tall on the bed, framed against the leather headboard, legs slightly parted.

I started taking photographs as she put on another incredible show.

I never gave her any suggestions on how to pose; she didn’t need them. She knew exactly what to do. Her movements, angles, and how she played to the camera were all effortless. She had poses I’d never seen before, ones I couldn’t have even imagined. No grooming was needed, no adjustments, no instructions. As a top model, she had developed an impeccable eye for every tiny detail. Everything had to be perfect.

Her stockings hugged her legs, the garters pulled taut, digging slightly into her flesh whenever she bent forward. The seams of her stockings were perfectly aligned—never a thread out of place.

Her corsets were always as tight as possible. She never took her shoes off—whether walking, dancing, or even on the bed, the heels remained a part of her, an extension of who she was. She changed them with each outfit, but they were a constant.

We’d spend days like this. Sex. Backgammon for hours, outfit and high heels on at all times. I never asked her to do that. She wanted to—she hated not being in her heels.

This was *Tomoz*’s world. I let her be herself, and she loved it. These were the moments when she felt free. Free to be herself. To express her sexuality without judgment or fear. To be worshipped. To be looked at, to be adored. To have my full, undivided attention.

She would often say, “I need this.”

She moved fluidly, shifting into breathtaking poses all over the bed, her body a masterpiece in motion. Then, just like that, she slid off the bed and walked into the sex room. She was ready to take it to the next level.

I followed, mesmerized, as the sex goddess made her way to the mirrored stage. She stepped onto it effortlessly, her six-inch heels clicking softly against the surface. She moved in them like they were second nature as if she were barefoot. I never saw her slip or trip in them—not once.

She would even dance in them, as she was about to do. She curled a hand around the stripper pole, her body arching as she began to spin—slow, controlled, intoxicating. One

leg extended elegantly to the side, the other bent closer to the pole. Her head tilted back, her lips slightly parted.

The room was a cathedral of reflections—eight-foot-high mirrors lining every wall, the mirrored stage gleaming. I could watch her from every angle. Which I did. So did *Tomoz*. She loved to look at herself; it turned her on.

The room wasn't just a backdrop—it was a manifestation of our shared chaos and need for control. Every element, from the mirrored stage to the relentless artificial lighting, reflected the duality of our connection: intoxicating yet suffocating, electrifying yet inescapable.

I managed to break free from my trance and lifted the camera. If you haven't realized already—I'm a voyeur. I couldn't wait to see these shots and to relive this moment frame by frame.

*Tomoz* always wanted to look at them with me.

She wanted them blown up, framed, and hung all over the house like pieces of art. She had no inhibitions about her body and no reservations about her sexuality. She didn't just like being looked at—she craved it. She never said, "Promise you won't show these to anyone." Like many women had told me.

If it weren't for my insecurities, she would have shown the pictures to anyone who wanted to see them. She was proud of them.

By now, *Tomoz* was posing again. Crouched right in front of me, a massive dildo in her mouth, her latex panties stretched even tighter against her skin. Her fingers moved slowly, touching herself, her eyes distant, lost in whatever fantasy had taken hold of her.

She was gone—completely immersed in her world.

She would sit on the edge of the stage, her six-inch heels planted firmly on the floor. She'd stick the dildo onto the mirrored stage, using the suction at the base to secure it and ride it for me.

Then, with a slow, deliberate grace, she left the stage and lay on the wave-shaped sex lounge. We used the rings and Velcro ties. *Tomoz* loved to be tied up.

It fascinated me how her submission, paradoxically, gave her control. In surrendering, she silenced her restless mind, trading chaos for peace in those moments.

Watching her, I wondered how we had become so entwined in this world of extremes. Was this freedom—or just another form of escape?

She once told me this was the only time her thoughts weren't racing, that giving herself over to me completely was her way of finding peace. A kind of therapy. Still, I couldn't help but feel complicit in her escape.

We lost any sense of time. Thick curtains smothered the windows, shutting out the outside world. No light. We never looked at the clock. It didn't matter. There was nowhere else we wanted to be—just the two of us, turning off our minds and the outside world.

We were literally in our own world of sexual freedom—just the two of us.

*Tomoz* would have been happy to bring in other people, but I wasn't into that, and she was okay with it being just the two of us, at least for now.

She moved through all kinds of positions, experimenting with the sex toys.

Next came the long black PVC rectangular bench. She loved sitting astride it, impaling herself on a dildo, fucking it slowly while I watched.

Then I began making love to her. I'd begin by giving her oral sex. For hours, I lost myself in the way her body responded. I loved making her orgasm. She seemed to like it, too.

When I was done, *Tomoz* was ready for a break. She'd reach for the jar of coconut oil, coating my cock and balls.

Then she would put a tight cock ring on me. The veins in my cock would grow bigger, pulsing with blood, making my cock even bigger and harder.

She would sit on the rectangular PVC bench in front of me, legs open, giving me a full view of her tight leather panties, stockings, garter belt, heels, and latex corset—the whole outfit. She would talk dirty to me.

*Tomoz* would take my cock in her right fist, holding it tight. "Look at me, baby. You like this?" she'd tease me, gesturing down her body with a slow, deliberate hand.

Then, she'd lift her bent right leg onto the PVC bench, the other foot planted firmly on the floor, giving me an even better view.

Slowly, she would start moving her fist up and down. "Baby, I want you to cum for me. I want you to cum all over me."

Her grip would tighten, the motion deliberate at first, then gradually increasing speed.

"I love the taste of cum in my mouth. I love the feel of cum on my face and my neck. I love to feel cum dripping out of my pussy and running down my legs. Baby, give it to me, please. Please, will you cum for me?"

We had been having sex for God knows how long, and I was already ready to fucking explode. My cum had been building and building.

"Come on, baby. I want you to cum for me." Her voice was a whisper, a command, a promise. "Give it to me. I'm begging you to shoot your cum in my mouth. Will you do that for me, baby? Please. I want to swallow it down my throat. I want as much as you can give me, baby. I want all your cum."

At this point, I wanted to cum so bad, but the cock ring is so fucking tight it's stopping me.

*Tomoz* knows that, of course. She smiles at me, teasing me.

"Baby, are you ready to cum?" She increases the speed of her fist, pumping up and down.

"Okay, baby. I want you to fucking explode all over your dirty whore. I am such a dirty slut. I love cum, baby. I fucking love it."

She yanks the cock ring off me. "Give it to me, baby. Please. I need it. I want to drink your cum."

My legs were shaking. I came so hard I couldn't breathe.

"That's it, baby. Oh yes." *Tomoz* caught as much as she could in her mouth and drank it down. She then licked it off her hand, took my cock in her mouth, and sucked the last drop down her throat.

It took me a minute to come back to reality and start breathing again.

"Baby, that was fucking amazing. Thank you," I said breathlessly.

"You are welcome." She smiled and licked her fingers one at a time.

I came so hard I could barely move for a while. She had a look on her face that said, *Mission Accomplished*—as if thinking, *Now I can get a break from this fucking sex maniac!*

Then we would go outside. I'd light the fire pit, and we'd sit on the sofa, each at our end, with the backgammon board between us. We would play for a long time.

The sharp edges of her voice softened, her posture loosened. For the first time that night, she wasn't performing—wasn't commanding or consuming. Just existing. And for a fleeting second, I wondered if this was the version of her I'd fallen for—the one who didn't need the chaos to feel alive.

Of course, we didn't always do all this in one session. Once we got started, we would usually keep going for days.

We would break things up into many sessions. And these were by no means the only things we did—or the only things *Tomoz* loved to perform.

She loved moving all over the house, dressed in her stunning outfits and heels, posing for me while I was taking photographs of her, and having sex with her.



With the Bentley and the Rolls, in the dining room, in the elevator, upstairs, in the bathroom—over the urinal—she loved getting up high, making me look up at her while I captured the moment.

We fucked in every bedroom, by the pool, on the beach bed, in the pool, in the toilet, in the shower, in the bath, in the jacuzzi—her holding the urinal while I fucked her from behind—everywhere.

She loved pulling out the black plastic sheet on the floor of the sex room so we could get messy.

I had four spray bottles and would fill them with pouring cream. She would sit back, open her mouth, stick out her tongue, and spray pouring cream all over it. She loved it. She loved the idea of having cum all over her. She would continue her performance, putting bigger and bigger dildoes inside her while sucking on another and sometimes giving hand jobs to two more. It was hard to believe she could fit some of them inside her pussy.

It would take her a while to slowly push them inside. It was painful for her, but somehow, the pain turned her on even more.

She loved it. She would use the wand vibrator to stimulate her clit while she got them inside of her. The bigger, the better. Mind-blowing.

All while covered in cum, with me spraying more on her.

It would be running down her face, her bare shoulders, her corset, her panties and stockings, and, of course, onto the black plastic sheet.

She also had a baby's bottle full of cream that she would love to suck on.

It wasn't long before we were doing videos, which we would watch together.

*Tomoz* was the groomer. She was way beyond my sexual experiences. My sexual preferences and experiences were very tame to *Tomoz*.

Occasionally *Tomoz* had me write slut and whore on her body with a black marker pen.

She would sometimes tie her hair back in a tight ponytail. She liked me to grab her ponytail, hold her face, tell her to open her mouth, and shove my cock deep in her mouth to the back of her throat, choking her.

She would hold out her tongue for me to spit on, then close her mouth, swallow, open her mouth again, and hold out her tongue over and over again. Like she was drinking down my cum.

These are just a few examples of the many things *Tomoz* enjoyed and encouraged me to do. She pushed me out of my comfort zone and into her world, taking me far

beyond where I had been before. She changed my understanding and enjoyment of sex and sexuality forever.

While we played backgammon, she loved sharing her sexual fantasies. One I remember involved a group of men sitting around a glass table while *Tomoz* was underneath, giving them blowjobs as they played cards.

Another was her lying on a bed, being gang-banged, with a viewing gallery above her where men watched and jacked off onto her body.

All of these things were a huge turn-on for me too.

There were some things *Tomoz* wanted to do that I wasn't into, and she was okay with that. We were already doing enough to help each other fulfill our fantasies. The rest, we could talk about—but not necessarily act on.

Occasionally, we did things the other didn't like.

One time, we were in the sex room, taking a break while I was adjusting the camera. *Tomoz* called her girlfriend on FaceTime, masturbating with a dildo and teasing her.

She could tell I didn't like it. So she simply said, "I'll call you later," and hung up. She had thought I might enjoy it, but after that, she never did it again—at least not in front of me.

*Tomoz* wanted to fly in one of her friends. She showed me a photo of her, she was very sexy. *Tomoz* wanted us to have a threesome.

She told me stories about how they had done this with other guys, describing how they would both take care of the guy before slipping into another room to take care of each other.

She really wanted this. But there was just no way I could do it. I have no interest in having sex with two women.

A woman having sex with multiple men is a huge turn-on for me—but not with a woman I am in a relationship with.

We can talk about it, we can pretend, but actually having other men have sex with my partner isn't for me. I've done that before, and it tore the relationship apart. Watching women have sex with each other doesn't do anything for me, either.

*Tomoz* once told me she had a boyfriend who stood over her in the shower and gave her a golden shower on her chest. That's not my thing.

In *Tomoz's* mind, I was a prude. She would tease me a little, but she accepted that wasn't going to be part of our sexual relationship.

Behind her wild exterior was a woman who thrived on control and exploration. Whether through hacking or creating virtual worlds on the internet, *Tomoz* found power in crafting realities where she held the reins.

In one of her virtual worlds, you created an avatar of yourself, then meet and had sex with other avatars.

She was also on a website called *Seeking an Arrangement*. I don't know if she was ever paid, but she would go to couples' homes and have sex. Who knows what they did? Maybe she was still on the site.

This was a whole new world for me—some of it was difficult to process and wrap my head around.

I was trying hard to look at myself and my judgments.

I began to realize that, deep down, I knew that many—if not all—of these ideas about sex and sexuality were already in people's minds. We were acting them out. I often thought about the movie *Eyes Wide Shut* with Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman.

The film explores themes of monogamy and sexuality. It also asks the question, what is the difference between vividly imagining something and experiencing it in physical reality?

Well, actually, quite a lot. It's even better in physical reality. You get to feel it all. You get to touch—one of the most powerful and important things we can give and receive. All your senses are engaged and heightened. It takes everything to another, more intense level.

So why don't we? Why do we keep all these sexual fantasies in our heads and never actually act on them?

Well, some of us do! But for the most part, secretly.

What stops us? We do. Our judgments. Society's judgments. Our insecurities.

Although those walls are slowly coming down.

My walls were slowly coming down. *Tomoz* got me think about and question all these things. I'm still working my way through this new sexual revolution. *Tomoz* was already there. Like she said, *Tomoz means tomorrow*. She is from the world of tomorrow.

I did things I never thought I would do. I had been too ashamed.

I even bought *Tomoz* a cool-looking butt plug—high-quality 304 steel, with a red semi-precious stone at the end sticking out of her butt. She would wear it all day—she told me she liked the feeling and the weight.

As I said, there were some things I wasn't ready for yet. But they were insignificant compared to what we **did** in our sexual relationship. We never wanted it to end.

This was our *Neverland*.

But it had to end. For reasons I haven't yet explained to you.

We both knew it couldn't last—not like this.

We were hurtling toward an end we couldn't yet name, but it was waiting for us.

Just out of reach.

# Chapter Seventeen

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## That Is Just Her Nature & Nature Always Takes Its Course

**W**e all have a light side to our nature, and we all have a dark side. Exploring BOTH sides of our nature—and to what degree—is our choice.

We don't have to explore all our fantasies in reality. For example, having multiple partners. I'm sure there are exceptions, but that usually doesn't turn out well.

I had done it in the past with a girlfriend. We were very much in love. We had a threesome—me, another guy, and my girlfriend.

It wasn't just the relationship that was destroyed—it was a part of me that fractured in the process. The scar in my heart felt raw every time I thought about what we'd done, the choices driven by lust. I realized it was something I never wanted to experience again. Not with her. Not with anyone.

I can fantasize about *Tomoz* being with multiple men—I love that—but actually doing it? That terrifies me.

Could I overcome that fear? Sure.

Am I going to?

Fuck no.

Other people have positive experiences—I get that. Whatever floats your boat.

I'm sure you've heard about swingers—married couples who get together and sleep with each other. It has always been more widespread than 'normal society' ever knew. But now, it's becoming more and more accepted.

They have parties where you can attend to observe if you want to. There are even specific labels for attendees based on their level of participation. For example, you're called a vanilla if you're there to just watch.

Some people say it improves their sex life. They talk about their experiences afterward and find that titillating, it turns them on. You can learn how to set boundaries—what to do and what **not** to do, to maintain your marriage.

I think it's fantastic, but it's just not for me.

I have too many insecurities. I'm too shy. I'm too selfish.

Let me share some of my selfish beliefs.

I have a gorgeous girlfriend. The chances of me finding a woman I'd rather fuck at a swinger party seem remote at best. I enjoy one-on-one sex. I have no desire to bring in other people. So, I would get little to no enjoyment from the experience.

I know—not very enlightened—but that is my truth. My point is that understanding yourself and your limitations is extremely important for both of you. If you're not truly ready or committed to doing something, don't do it. It will ruin your marriage or relationship. Look into it, discuss it, and think it through **very** carefully before actually doing it. Sometimes, it's best to keep it as a fantasy.

Of course, there are always exceptions to everything, but being a stripper at a strip club rarely makes your life better.

Being a porn star in real life may seem like it would be fun, and you might make good money for a while, but there are serious long-term negative consequences.

That said, you can be a stripper or pole dancer for your boyfriend, or a prostitute, or a porn star for him—but just for him. Pole dancing has become huge now. They even have pole dancing competitions. What these men and women can do on the pole is incredible, breathtaking, and beautiful. It's an art form.

Pole dancing also gives you an incredible workout. You get to move your body sensually and feel sexy, beautiful, and desired. And that's aside from turning on your man—or men—or your woman—or women—for that matter.

*Tomoz* loved dancing on the stripper pole. I loved watching her. It was excellent foreplay. *Tomoz* would be a stripper for me, which was enough for us both. I didn't want her to actually **be** a stripper.

Once you cross that line, you can never go back. It's out in the open forever. You no longer control your reputation or image, which could have serious long-term negative consequences.

Sometimes, *Tomoz* would ask me, "Do you think I would have made a good porn star?" I'd say, "You already are, baby. You're the sexiest porn star in the world. You're my porn star." She would smile with satisfaction.

Let her be a porn star for you. Let her experience that. Encourage her to let out all her sexual frustrations. Let her talk dirty for you. If she likes it, talk dirty for her. It often connects us with our animal nature. And yes, animals talk dirty to each other. I think.

You can go out and meet each other in a bar, a club, or a motel/hotel. You can act out your fantasies together.

The world doesn't need to know—unless you want them to.

We would role-play all the time. Sometimes, *Tomoz* would say, "Baby, I want you to imagine we're strangers in a bar. You see me, and you come over and try to pick me up."

I don't even go to bars. I'm pretty sure I've never picked up a woman in a bar. But hey, it's her fantasy.

For many guys—including me—trying to pick up a woman in a bar is their worst nightmare. I mean, what do you even say to a supermodel? But I would do my best.

I would tell myself, *She is already your girlfriend, for fuck's sake—you can't fuck it up!* That never worked, though. I was still very nervous. But that only made it even more fun.

*Tomoz* never made it easy on me. She explained that women like to see how you handle pressure and rejection and how confident you are. They want to know you'll work hard to get them.

I thanked her for telling me that—so I could pick up more women. That earned me a punch in the groin... and an hour of pouting silence. Maybe I do have masochistic tendencies.

Here's an example of one of our conversations. *Tomoz* would get dressed up in one of her outfits, then put on a dress, sit on a barstool at the downstairs bar in the house, and sip a drink.

I walked up to her.

"Excuse me, is that your drink?" I asked.

She replied, "Well, it *is* sitting on the bar in front of me... How did you figure that out?"

I smirked. "Well, it has the same beautiful red lipstick on the rim of the glass as on your gorgeous lips, so it was elementary, my dear... What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't." She paused and looked at me, challenging me. "My name is *Tomoz*."

"Very nice to meet you, *Tomoz*," I said as I sat on the barstool beside her. "Bartender, please give *Tomoz* here another glass of whatever she's drinking, and I'll take a gin and tonic."

Of course, there was no bartender. He had the night off. I hated gin. I told you—we were role-playing a fantasy. Well, a fantasy for her. My nightmare.

I continued, looking into her eyes. "*Tomoz*, that's a beautiful and unusual name. Does it mean something?"

She turned away from my gaze and, in her deep, sexy, demure voice, said, "Yes, it does." She paused again. "It means tomorrow. I am from the world of tomorrow—the future."

"That's very interesting. I've always wanted to have sex with a woman from the future." I smiled. "Do women from the future enjoy sex?"

"Very much," she said nonchalantly.

"That's a coincidence because I do too. So, let me ask you this, *Tomoz*—do you think you could fuck me into the future?" I challenged her.

She turned toward me, locked eyes with mine, and said, "I can fuck you into the next millennium."

I thought, '*she is way too good at this.*'

"I would like to experience that. When can we get started?" I said, matching her sexy stare.

"How soon can you get a room?" she asked, raising an eyebrow—a challenge.

"I was a little presumptuous—I already have a room waiting for us," I said, taking her hand and leading her to the sex room.

Hey, I can see your eyes rolling! I told you—I'm terrible at this.

I wasn't sure if I could pull it off, but seeing her flirt with me as though we'd just met was exhilarating. For those hours, we weren't bound by history—just two people indulging in the thrill of the unknown.

*Tomoz* found all of this titillating. It got her even more in the mood. For her, it was a form of foreplay. For me, it was uncomfortable—but worth it. I got better at it. And, well, I got laid every time.

What I'm saying is: be open to stepping outside your comfort zone. Explore what feels foreign and daring. Role-playing—becoming someone else for a while—can push you to explore parts of yourself you never knew existed. It's also a great way to create new and exciting sexual adventures.



Exploring our fantasies—our nature—with someone we trust, someone who doesn't judge us, someone who accepts us for who we are, even the darkness, is one of the most exhilarating, freeing experiences you can ever have.

*Tomoz* had no problem exploring her dark side. I did.

Like I said, she wanted me to blow up the photographs I took of her and frame them, covering the walls of the house. I thought she was joking. She wasn't. She was proud of them. She knew exactly how incredibly sexy and beautiful she looked.

She made me question why I didn't want to do that. I hesitated. There was nothing wrong with the photographs, so why not frame them and put them on display? I *should* have been proud to have such an incredibly sexy and beautiful girlfriend. *Tomoz* forced me to confront my insecurities, face them, and sometimes even overcome them.

I remember the night she acted out one of her fantasies—a private moment of trust and abandon. But afterward, she pulled away as if the intimacy had been too much. In moments like these, I realized her darkness wasn't a choice but a compulsion.

People say they want financial freedom, the home of their dreams, the perfect partner, or a myriad of other things.

What we are all truly searching for is the feeling of being **ALIVE**.

*Tomoz* and I made each other feel **ALIVE**.

There were nights when she clung to me, her words faltering as if she were fighting some internal battle. "*I don't know why I do this,*" she once whispered, her voice breaking. But the next day, she would tear it all down as if the vulnerability had burned her.

*Tomoz* found being in love—and being loved—difficult. As did I. But she found it. The tragedy was that she couldn't help destroying it. It was safer for her. It was her nature.

Like the time she convinced me to open my world completely to her, only to use every vulnerability I had shared against me in a moment of anger. She wasn't malicious—it was instinctual, like the jaws of a Venus Fly Trap snapping shut.

*Tomoz* was constantly pulling me in and pushing me away. Like when she lost control after I confronted her about having a drinking problem, not because she was in denial, but because she was terrified. Terrified of me leaving her. Or taking alcohol me away from her.

She would do things to destroy the relationship, but then she said and did everything she could to bring us back together.

This was her nature.

It was very difficult for me to understand this at the time. I wasn't ready to accept it. It was just too sad, too heartbreaking. I wasn't ready to feel that pain.

As I watched her tear down another piece of what we'd built, I realized her actions weren't personal. It was simply who she was—like the scorpion in the parable we've all heard many times.

The scorpion came across a wide, deep river.

*"How am I going to get across?"* he wondered.

Then, he spotted a frog sitting on a stone by the riverbank.

So the scorpion said, *"Mr. Frog, I need to get to the other side of the river. Would you carry me across on your back?"*

The frog hesitated. *"Why would I do that when I know that halfway across, you'll sting me, and I'll drown and die?"*

The scorpion replied, *"But Mr. Frog, why would I do that? If I did, you would die—but I would die too."*

The frog, being a kind and trusting creature, thought for a moment. Then he said, *"Okay, Mr. Scorpion, go ahead and jump on my back."*

As they made their way across the river, the frog paddled steadily, carrying the scorpion. But as they reached the halfway point, the scorpion suddenly stung him.

As the frog began to drown with the scorpion, he cried, *"Why did you do that? I'm going to die—but you're going to die too!"*

And the scorpion simply replied, *"Because I am a scorpion, and that's what scorpions do—they sting and kill frogs."*

That's the nature of scorpions.

It reminded me of how I kept trying to save *Tomoz*, knowing full well she'd sting me eventually. Each time, I thought, *This time will be different*. But it never was. And yet, I couldn't stop myself.

*Tomoz* wasn't cruel. She was true to herself in a way I couldn't fully grasp—like the scorpion, acting on instinct. Without malice, yet without truly understanding the damage left behind. I was the one left to pick up the pieces of a self I no longer recognized, wondering if I'd ever be able to untangle the lessons from the mess we had created.

The lyrics of Al Wilson's song *The Snake* are another perfect example of how we ultimately do what is in our nature:

*"On her way to work one morning,*

*Down the path alongside the lake,*

*A tender-hearted woman saw  
 A poor, half-frozen snake.  
 His pretty-colored skin  
 Had been all frosted with the dew..."*  
*"Oh well," she cried, "I'll take you in and I'll take care of you."  
 "Take me in, oh tender woman,  
 "Take me in, oh tender woman,  
 Take me in, for heaven's sake.  
 Take me in, oh tender woman," sighed the snake.  
 She wrapped him up all cozy in a curvature of silk,  
 Then, she laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk.  
 Now, she hurried home from work that night, as soon as she arrived  
 She found the pretty snake she'd taken in had been revived.  
 "Take me in, oh tender woman,  
 Take me in, for heaven's sake.  
 Take me in, oh tender woman," sighed the snake.  
 Now she clutched him to her bosom. "You're so beautiful," she cried, "But if I hadn't  
 brought you in, by now you might have died."  
 Now she stroked his pretty skin and then kissed and held him tight—  
 But instead of saying thanks, that snake gave her a vicious bite.  
 "Take me in, oh tender woman,  
 Take me in, for heaven's sake.  
 Take me in, oh tender woman," sighed the snake.  
 "I saved you!" cried the woman. "And you've bit me even —why?  
 You know your bite is poisonous, and now I'm going to die!"  
 "Oh, shut up, silly woman," said the reptile with a grin.  
 "You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in."*

Hearing those lyrics, I couldn't help but see myself as the enabler, ignoring the truth staring me in the face. Knowing her nature, I had let her in because part of me believed I could change her. Or worse, that I could endure her sting or bite.

*Tomoz* is the Venus Fly Trap. She attracts flies with her *nectar*, luring them in until they are completely under her spell. Then, just as they settle, she closes her jaws and devours them. That is her nature, and nature always takes its course.

# Chapter Eighteen

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## The New Sexual Revolution Has Already Begun. Are You In?

**I**n daily life, we wear different masks—parent, partner, professional. But in the bedroom, those masks can come off. For *Tomoz*, this was where she felt truly free. Some things aren't practical in everyday life and, in some cases, not even attractive. We need to feel like equals and be respected in the real world.

*Tomoz* would often say, "I like being submissive in the bedroom but not in everyday life. You can do anything you want to me in the bedroom, but you better not ever disrespect me in front of other people."

It amazed me how effortlessly she could switch—submitting completely behind closed doors yet commanding respect with an unshakable presence in public. It was as if she reserved her vulnerabilities for me alone.

Once, at a dinner party, someone made a dismissive joke about her career. She didn't hesitate—her sharp retort silenced the room. Yet later that night, she knelt before me in the bedroom, whispering her need to surrender. It was as if the power she wielded in public had to be balanced by private vulnerability.

At a fundamental level, it seems ingrained in our nature to want or want to be—a whore in the bedroom and a lady in the drawing room. Many would adamantly deny

this. Why? Perhaps shame. Perhaps they fear what people will think or say about them, of judgment.

Maybe they've been conditioned to believe it's wrong, even evil—that it is unnatural. Others might argue they don't want that. And maybe, for them, that's true. Maybe it is. But not for most.

I believe we need to change our attitudes about sexuality.

Take Ashley Madison, for example—a website designed for married individuals or those in committed relationships to seek extramarital affairs. It caters specifically to those looking to cheat on their partners. What does that tell us? Something is wrong. People aren't having their needs met in their marriages. or relationships.

A couple I worked with in counseling struggled with infidelity. When they finally confronted their issues, they realized the affair wasn't about lust but about unmet emotional needs. It was the most challenging conversation of their lives, but it saved their marriage. The website didn't tempt them—the emptiness they were trying to fill did.

I couldn't help but think of my marriage to Mandy—the years of stifled intimacy and unspoken resentment.

More people than ever are questioning the institution of marriage. For centuries, many have challenged the idea that humans are meant to be monogamous. Some argue that our nature is to have many partners.

I believe that's a personal decision. Most people crave adventure and excitement, passion, and sexual fulfillment. They need it.

And it's not just married couples. Millions of unmarried couples live together, many of whom are on Ashley Madison too! The statistics would shock you.

Ashley Madison isn't the only place where people meet to have affairs—not by a long shot. The point is, if you are married and not having an affair, get with the program!

No, that's not the point. So, what is the point?

Whether we're married or not, if we want our partners to stay in the relationship, we need to ensure we're fulfilling each other's needs.

Sex shapes our relationships more than we sometimes admit. I spent a decade in a relationship—and a marriage—where intimacy was an afterthought. Ten years of silence, distance, and unmet needs.

But when I finally broke free, I didn't just rediscover passion—I reclaimed a part of myself. With *Tomoz*, I found a connection that made those lost years feel like distant memories.

I love giving pleasure, and *Tomoz* loves receiving it. We were a perfect match. She loved being watched, and I'm a voyeur—another way we naturally aligned.

*Tomoz* taught me that most women would prefer three things before penis penetration.

- **Oral**
- **Fingers**
- **Toys/Dildos/Vibrators**

That has certainly been my experience. *Tomoz* would say, "I love that you don't mind me using toys. Most guys don't like it—it makes them feel insecure."

Not me. I love using toys on her and watching her use them on herself.

I love using my fingers to make her come—to make her squirt. I find it incredibly sexy, a huge turn-on for me. Giving her oral sex and feeling her come in my mouth was pure ecstasy.

These three things are incredible ways to satisfy women and prolong sex. This is why we could have sex for days. Women can come over and over again, while men usually need time to recover after climaxing. I would make *Tomoz* come multiple times until she was utterly exhausted. I could stay hard for hours without coming. Then, we would sit by the firepit—*Tomoz* still in her sexy outfit—playing backgammon and talking about our fantasies, teasing and tantalizing each other until we were ready to start all over again. Sex became our very own '*Dirty Hobby*.'

If your partner isn't getting it from you, guess what? Ashley Madison—or some other site—will find them someone who will. Or they'll spend hours watching porn instead.

Ladies, if he's watching porn online, what does that tell you?

That he's a sick bastard, right? NO!

He's trying to get something he's not getting from you. Instead of making him feel bad or shaming him, why not join him? Watch some porn together, and when you both get aroused, fuck the hell out of each other!

*Tomoz* and I talked porn to each other, shared our fantasies, and then fucked each other's brains out for days at a time.

*Tomoz* was my very own pornstar, and she loved it. She loved being a whore for me. She would be a slut, talking extremely dirty for me. The dirtier, the better.

I would be commanding for her, take control, tell her what to do, treat her like a whore, like a slut. And she loved it—craved it. Like I said, she would often tell me, "I need this." It was all just amazing.

It was a good thing my career forced me to leave and work hard. I wasn't addicted to sex. I didn't want to have sex with just anybody or anyone else. I was addicted to *Tomoz*.

She was my sex goddess. She was everything I had ever dreamed of.

And I had dreamed about her.

She was every woman to me.

You need to be a sex goddess for your man. And you need to be whatever the fuck your sex goddess wants you to be or do.

Think about it.

How many regular dating sites are out there? A lot. And plenty of married people are on those sites too.

What about the workplace? Tinder? The list of places goes on and on.

Cheating has never been easier, and people are taking advantage of the opportunities.

I know, I know—people have always cheated, and no matter what, they probably always will.

But you don't have to be one of them. You can save your marriage or relationship if it's not working—if you're willing to do whatever it takes. Well, at least something.

Judging and shaming don't work. If you refuse to change your mindset and attitude about these things, and you think divorce is the answer, you're deluding yourself.

Your current attitude and beliefs are what drew this relationship into your life in the first place. If you divorce your partner without changing, you'll attract the same type of person again—just in a different body.

Wherever you go, there you are.

Look at the Serenity Prayer:

*"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

It may not always work. It takes two. But at least make the effort.

If your partner refuses to change—if they're unwilling to do what's needed to reignite the passion in your marriage or relationship—then you need to ask yourself:

"Am I prepared to live like this for the rest of my life?"

*Tomoz* awakened parts of me I hadn't explored before. Some experiences thrilled me; others pushed me outside my comfort zone. She often mentioned threesomes and open relationships. While she embraced the idea, I wasn't ready, and that was a boundary I had to define for myself.

Just remember, if your partner refuses to do what it takes, you can stay in a sexless, loveless marriage, or you can leave. You can make that choice. You can make excuses like, *“I can’t divorce; it would be hard on the kids.”*

True, but staying in a loveless marriage is even worse. You are teaching them what a marriage is.

You cannot say you don’t have time.

You cannot blame it on the kids.

They will be the ones who suffer the most if either of you cheats. What does that teach them? That it’s okay to cheat? How will that affect their relationships and marriages?

No more excuses.

Are you going to let your relationship fall apart because you’re unwilling to step out of your comfort zone and try some crazy shit?

All because you weren’t prepared to wear a sexy outfit?

Gentlemen, you can do this .

Ladies, you probably buy your man’s underwear anyway—why not make some different choices?

Your partner wants adventure. They want an escape. A fantasy. We all do, to a greater or lesser degree.

Are they watching online porn? Okay—watch it together. It’s a great way to discover what you both like.

A lot of women enjoy a story—to become someone or something else, to suspend reality, to escape the day-to-day stresses of life.

A break from taking care of everyone except themselves.

But they can only do that for so long.

Women often find it harder than men to switch off their minds.

They also need to feel appreciated.

They need to feel sexy.

They need to feel like a woman.

Ladies, guys need to feel admired. When they are taken for granted or diminished in any way—especially by you—it damages their ego.

You can’t just ask your partner if they feel this way. That’s usually a waste of time and energy. No one wants to admit these things and risk pissing you off or making you feel like you’re not good enough.



Instead, figure it out by trying new things and staying open to each other—***no judgment***. That doesn't mean you have to do everything they want, but at least make an effort to meet their needs and keep things exciting.

Go on adventures together—even if it's just to a motel. Some people enjoy the thrill of risky sex, the kind where you might get caught. And if you do? So fucking what!

Let her dress up for you. If she wants you to dress up for her, do it. Role-play.

Explore each other's bodies with your hands, fingers, mouth, and tongue. Find each other's erogenous zones and exploit them. Find out what turns your partner on. Ask them about their fantasies. Create a safe place for them to share their deepest, darkest thoughts and dreams.

You don't have to agree to do anything. Just letting each other share is often enough. It's a form of intimacy—*into-me-see*. You will know each other on a deeper level and learn things about each other that no one else knows. It creates trust, the foundation of all great relationships.

Yes, it makes you vulnerable. Yet, it is our vulnerability that makes us lovable. Only when we are vulnerable can we truly love someone. It is our imperfection that draws us to each other, not our perfection.

There are some things that you may just feel too uncomfortable doing. You both may need to compromise.

Look, reigniting your passion will make everything better, especially your relationship with your kids. Grab your wife's ass in front of the kids. They will probably feign disgust, but they will like seeing you both being affectionate with each other. They will feel more secure knowing that you love each other.

Kiss and be affectionate toward each other in front of the kids. They will see that they can have a loving marriage when they are older. Tell each other that you love each other, demonstrate love, and appreciate each other. Build each other up and never put each other down.

Support each other 100%. If someone criticizes your partner, always stand by them and your family. You can express any disagreements privately—but never publicly or in front of the kids.

Never complain about your partner to others. If something bothers you, address it directly with them—privately. Venting to friends only makes things worse, and they may use it against you.

Be a team. Never undermine each other. Show your kids, friends, and family that you are a united front. This is crucial for children. Even if they don't like your decisions, they will feel more secure knowing you both stand together in a strong, committed marriage.

These foundational principles create a loving environment, allowing you to feel safe sharing your vulnerabilities without fear of judgment.

I wasn't immune to the fear of judgment. Sharing my darkest thoughts felt like standing naked in a spotlight, hoping not to be ridiculed. But with *Tomoz*, her acceptance made it worth the risk.

It's only considered a "dark side" because society chooses to judge it. But look around—sexuality is more accepted than ever. What people wear today, especially women, would have been deemed unacceptable by society not long ago. Yet, our sexuality continues to be expressed more freely. We are in the midst of another sexual revolution.

Take Burning Man, for example. Each year, the outfits get sexier and wilder. Search "Burning Man" on YouTube. You'll see men and women of all shapes and sizes embracing their sexuality, wearing stunningly bold outfits, body paint, tattoos, and jewelry.

It's incredible to witness this generation stepping into their sexual power.

You can't stop this revolution, so you may as well join in and enjoy it.

Remember, everything you do and say teaches your kids how to navigate the world and their relationships. Do you want them to have happy, loving, and lasting relationships? Then, show them how.

Young people today are more open to exploring their sexuality in all its forms. They are the future, and rather than judging them, we need to relate to them. As the world embraces the full spectrum of human desires, it's not just traditional relationships that are evolving—sexuality itself is being redefined, creating space for identities and expressions that once lived in the shadows.

I was reminded of this at a family gathering when someone made a snide remark about *Tomoz's* bold fashion choices. I caught the flicker of pain in her eyes, quickly masked by a sarcastic comeback. Moments like these revealed just how deeply ingrained societal judgment can be.

One night, I confessed a fantasy to *Tomoz* that I'd been too ashamed to share. She listened without flinching, and her calm acceptance made me feel truly seen in a way I never had before. It wasn't just arousing—it was healing.

We all need to embrace this sexual revolution. It may be challenging to wrap your head around all the pronouns and different genders, but resisting change is futile. This is the world we live in now, so try to understand what people are experiencing.

If you're looking for a place to start, here's a great movie that will likely be recognized as a groundbreaking film.

The movie *Close to You*, starring Elliot Page and Hilary Baack, offers a nuanced view of this evolving landscape—the challenges and the incredible gifts it brings. The film is beautifully done, with no explicit content, yet it powerfully captures how this revolution impacts an entire family. More than that, it's an extraordinary love story.

We owe it to our children to understand what they're going through. Their future and happiness are in our hands.

At first, this may feel uncomfortable. But here's another truth:

"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone."

I am not saying it will be easy, but I promise it will be worth it.

For me and *Tomoz*, our sexual relationship was everything we could have ever wished for—and then some.

The bottom line is that the new sexual revolution has already begun. Are you in?

Unfortunately, sex, like love, is sometimes just not enough.

You're probably thinking, "*Dear God, what does this guy want, for fuck's sake?! He had love, his dream woman, and the most incredible sex he could ever want or imagine! What an ungrateful asshole.*" Well, all those things are true—no denying it. However, I have not explained something to you—something that, at this point, I did not know. It would take a while for me to discover, and it happened quite by accident— as these things usually do.

That is, of course, if there's such a thing as an accident.

What I eventually discovered would change everything—and take the choice out of my hands.

But at this point, we were still having the time of our lives, caught up in the exhilarating game of cat and mouse—or fly and flytrap.

We thought we had reached the peak of our passion, but life has a way of throwing curveballs when you least expect them. What came next would change everything.

The wild games we were playing were about to get even crazier. Much crazier.

THAT IS JUST HER NATURE & NATURE ALWAYS TAKES ITS COURSE

We all have a light side to our nature, and we all have a dark side. Exploring both—and to what degree—is our choice.

We don't have to act out every fantasy. Sometimes, it's better left in the mind.

So while I could fantasize about Tomoz's world... living it?

That was different.

I knew my limits.

And that mattered.

Tomoz didn't have those same boundaries.

She lived on the edge—where control and chaos blurred together.

And I followed her there.

Because she made me feel alive.

That's the truth.

Not love.

Not logic.

Alive.

There were moments—quiet ones—where she would soften.

Moments where she seemed almost fragile.

Like she didn't understand herself.

"I don't know why I do this," she once said.

But the next day...

she would tear everything down again.

That was her pattern.

Pull me in.

Push me away.

Build something.

Then destroy it.

Not out of cruelty.

Out of instinct.

That was her nature.

And nature... always takes its course.

It reminded me of the story of the scorpion and the frog.

The scorpion asks for help crossing the river.

The frog hesitates—knowing the risk.

But believes logic will win.

Halfway across...

the scorpion stings him.

“Why?” the frog asks as they both begin to drown.

“Because it’s in my nature.”

That was Tomoz.

And if I’m honest...

that was me too.

Because I kept going back.

I kept believing this time would be different.

Even when I knew exactly how it would end.

Tomoz wasn’t evil.

She was simply being who she was.

And I was the one who chose to stay.

Like the woman in the story of the snake—

taking in something dangerous...

hoping it wouldn’t bite.

But it always does.

Because that's its nature.

And once you understand that...

you realize something painful:

You were never trapped.

You walked in willingly.

And stayed.

Even when you knew better.

# Chapter Nineteen

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## Deny, Deflect, Justify

One evening, we were sitting together on the loungers by the pool.

I was looking over the lake, watching the sunset, and *Tómoz* was reading *Vanity Fair*, sipping her glass of wine.

As she was looking at the magazine, she asked me, “Why do men want a girl to be a virgin?”

“Because women never forget their first.”

“Do you want a virgin?”

“Hell no.”

“Why?”

“I gave up on that dream a long time ago.”

“Dream? I’m your dream honey. Anyway good, because that was a long time ago.”

“You will never forget me anyway.”

“Oh, really, why is that?”

“You’ll find out.”

“Because you think you will be my last love?”

“Well, I’m not hoping I won’t be, but not because of that.”

“Just so you know I am not going to tattoo your name on my ass... Ok I’ll bite, why won’t I forget you, Dave?”

“Very funny, Doris, I love your sense of humor.”

“Let me tell you something, Mr. You’ll never forget me, let me tell you why.... Because if you ever call me Doris again, I will slap you so hard you will be back in the Stone Age, where you came from. Trust me, you will never forget me or my name ever again.”

“Ok, note to self: (as if writing the note down.) Doris... has... serious...anger... issues.”



"Yeah, you'd better write that down and commit it to memory. In the meantime, don't speak to me for an hour; you're really annoying me. Doris?, What kind of a name is DORIS?"

"What time is it now?"

"Time for you to get lost or shut up, you decide."

I said, "OK, Doris," as I bolted. She picked up her glass of wine and threw it at me as I ran away.

I should probably stay clear of her for at least two hours, I thought.

I never called her Doris again.

But she has never forgotten me, and she never will.

We did and said awful, terrible things to each other out of our hurt and pain. We have tended to focus on all the negative aspects of our relationship—our weaknesses and foibles. We are both insecure, immature, irrational, and irresponsible. These flaws created mayhem in our lives. They also created amazing adventures that made the havoc and mayhem worthwhile.

As crazy as things got, there were just as many incredible moments—we showered each other with love all the time. We wrote long texts every day, expressing how and why we loved each other. Not a single day passed without us saying, "I love you." We made each other laugh just as much as we made each other cry. I used to write her love notes and slip them into her shoes or clothes so they would fall out when she put them on. Sometimes, I'd tuck them into her folded clothes or bags, leaving little surprises for her to find.

*Tomoz* and I love-bombed each other constantly. Once, I wrote 100 sticky notes, each one listing something I loved about her, and stuck them all over her bathroom mirror. When she walked in and saw them, she put her hands over her mouth in shock. Then, she read each one, tears of gratitude streaming down her face. She carefully placed them along the outside frame of her mirror and would reread some every morning as she got ready.

About a month later, she did the same for me. She arranged the notes in the shape of a heart on my bathroom mirror. It had the same effect on me—I was utterly shocked. Overwhelmed with gratitude. These were the kinds of experiences we created for each other all the time.

We also loved listening to music together and shared many favorite songs, one of which was *Truly Madly Deeply* by Savage Garden.

From the very beginning of our relationship, I would buy *Tomoz* greeting cards or love cards—beautiful ones. They were like works of art. I wrote heartfelt poems inside them for her. Along with the poems, I filled the cards with memories of our recent moments together, writing in different directions, so she had to keep turning the cards to read each one. Sometimes, it was just a word or phrase—enough to bring back a special memory.

I would give her three or four, sometimes five or more, at a time—especially on holidays. Sometimes, I couldn't choose which I liked best, so I bought them all. I also had so much to say that one card was never enough. I would write in each one, filling them with my thoughts and memories. It often took quite some time, but I loved doing it. It was my way of expressing my feelings about her and capturing the incredible moments we shared. I enjoyed doing it.

*Tomoz*, of course, loved it. I always gave her the cards while we were in bed—for obvious reasons.

She would excitedly open each envelope, admiring the beautiful artwork on the front of the cards. I even had a special way of writing her name on the envelopes, which she always noticed. Then, she would hand me a card and say, "Read it to me." She loved listening to my English accent. Lying on her side beside me, she'd prop her head up with her hand, completely focused.

I would read aloud every word—every poem, every memory—turning the cards around as I followed the scattered notes, like navigating a maze. Each memory brought laughter, conversation, and nostalgia. It was our special ritual, a time just for us.

At the bottom of the inside right side of every card, I always signed off the same way, with the same message:

**I love you, Truly, Madly, Deeply** (*Our song*)

**4E4E X 23** (*Forever, For Eternity X 23—my magical number*)

**Stephen** (*My name*)

**XOXO**

We had so many little sayings and rituals, unique to just us. Our love was deep, and we expressed it in countless creative ways. There was never a dull moment. Every day felt like an adventure.

*Tomoz* had a knack for finding exactly what she wanted—money, drugs, secrets. No drawer, bag, or cupboard was off-limits. Her charm was disarming, her manipulations effortless, and before I even realized it, she had taken everything she needed—whether it was cash from my carry-on or a piece of my sanity.

For a while, I had no idea she had gone through everything in the house. Things most people consider private—to *Tomoz*, they were all hers to explore. She even read my journal.

I found out when she casually mentioned something I had written in my journal, but not something I had ever told her. After that, I started writing fictitious stories in my journal to mess with her.

**July 31st, 2014 – Thursday**

**Flying SRQ-ATL-ATL-Baltimore**

What a week! *Tomoz* has been impossible all week, and our time together has been a complete nightmare!

Ha ha, *Tomoz*, if you're reading this, it serves you right! Stop snooping in my journal—it's private! Go write your own. Love you.

What was I going to do? There was no point hiding my journal; she would find it anyway.

My journals were far more detailed than what I can share here. Maybe one day, I'll turn them into a book—a collection of my journals, poems, and letters I wrote to *Tomoz*.

Whenever I confronted *Tomoz* about something she had done, we would always go through a three-step process.

For example, when I found money missing from my carry-on bag, I asked her, "Baby, most of the money I left in my carry-on is missing. Do you know anything about it?"

She had left some of the money in the envelope, making it less obvious until you actually counted it. She was no rookie.

She replied, "No, I don't know anything about it. You must have spent it and forgotten."

First, she would deny it.

"I would remember if I had spent it, *Tomoz*," I pressed. "I don't even use cash anymore unless it's an emergency."

Then she said, "You want me to be here so you can fuck me all day and night, so I need some money."

Second, she would deflect responsibility—it was my fault.

"That's not true. Well, not completely true. You could have a job working with me. You could take care of the house, be my butler," I prodded her. You can imagine the look on her face.

"Well, I need some money. I mean, I need to buy things that make me look pretty for you, and I hate asking you for money," she argued.

Third, she would justify.

Deny, deflect, justify. You could never win your case.

Then I told myself, *It's only a relatively small amount of money; it's not worth arguing about.*

First, denial.

Then, *what do you expect if she has no money?* Second, deflect onto myself—it was my fault.

Lastly, I would tell myself, *"Of course, she needs money to buy things to look pretty, and she shouldn't have to ask me. That's demeaning."*

Third, justify her behavior.

Deny, deflect, justify!

I was doing the same thing.

Are you even surprised? She had been doing the same thing since we started seeing each other. And so had I.

Just a few days after *Tomoz* nearly got me arrested and stole my home.

I asked her if she could get me something I needed while I was away.

She said, "Well, I will need money to buy that for you." Which was, of course, fair. So, I wrote her a check and handed it to her.

Before I could even place it in her hand, Melania grabbed it, took out her phone, and banked it. Just like that. Like a pickpocket passing a wallet to their accomplice.

*Tomoz* never bought what I asked her to, and the money was gone, just like that.

She had learned these tricks after years of living moment to moment, man to man, surrounding herself with people like Melania—people from very different backgrounds than hers.

They were survivors from incredibly tough backgrounds. They knew how to exploit people, society, and the law. They had to—it was a means of survival, and *Tomoz* had learned well.

When we first met, *Tomoz* told me she had a friend who lived in St. Petersburg and implied that this friend had been there before *Tomoz* arrived.

I never met that friend.

She didn't exist.

*Tomoz* only met Melania after arriving in St. Petersburg. They met through Tristan, who lived in the same apartment building as *Tomoz*.

*Tomoz* was lonely, just like Tristan. Melania, the proverbial predator, quickly realized she could manipulate and control *Tomoz*. Until *Tomoz* met me, she went everywhere with Melania. In fact, Melania was the conduit between *Tomoz* and the outside world.

*Tomoz* didn't have a car. She was a great wingman—I mean, wingwoman—for Melania. *Tomoz* would meet and attract men and women for Melania to feed off.

Melania used that for her devious ends. That is how she got her claws into Tristan. Because he trusted *Tomoz*, Tristan assumed he could trust Melania. A terrible mistake.

Melania, Tony, and *Tomoz* were all fucking each other. It was a love—I mean, lust—triangle.

They were all incredibly good-looking, addicted to sex and drugs, and loved to party. Perfect.

Melania was the leader, the mastermind. She controlled each of them using fear, sex, and her sharp street instincts.

*Tomoz* was afraid that if she didn't do what Melania told her to, Melania would abandon her, leaving her alone and unable to leave her apartment.

Melania got Tony to physically abuse her. Then she turned around and got a restraining order against him. Tony, in turn, was afraid Melania would have him arrested again—either for breaking the restraining order or for physical abuse.

They also worked together as a team, conning anyone and everyone they met who had money, then splitting the bounty.

Later, when Tony had to go to court over the physical abuse charges Melania had filed, she testified against him. Why? No reason. Because that's what scorpions do.

He was facing a lengthy prison sentence. *Tomoz* had to testify on his behalf to save him. That was the end of *Tomoz*'s friendship with Melania.

*Tomoz* played the game as well as any man. She used them as they used her—quid pro quo, an eye for an eye.

With a carefully timed glance and a lingering touch, she knew exactly how to turn desire into leverage.

She lured men with her beauty and sexuality. To *Tomoz*, this was just part of the deal—an unspoken deal, but a deal nonetheless.

If you were prepared to make the trade, you had to live with the consequences.

I knew that. It just took me a minute to realize.

The truth is, I was prepared to make the deal and live with the consequences, at least for now.

As you can imagine, *Tomoz* did not like being told what to do or following rules. Not even her own.

Almost everything she did was far outside normal behavior. *Tomoz* had just one rule: that rules did not apply to her.

She would sunbathe topless anywhere. Well, anywhere *she* chose to sunbathe.

When she lived in LA, she would walk into a hotel, head to the pool, grab one of the poolside towels, claim a lounge, take off her top, and lay there topless, completely unbothered.

Now and then, she'd get up and swim in the pool.

She was not a guest of the hotel, but she *looked* like one. She looked like she belonged—like she was either rich or with her rich husband or boyfriend.

She had an air about her, a presence that said, *This is my world.*

Can you imagine the pool staff saying anything to her?

She would have cut them into pieces and devoured them.

Occasionally, it would happen.

"Excuse me, madam, are you staying at the hotel?"

"What?" She would glare at them. "Who are you, and what is your name?" A veiled threat.

Now, it took some hutzpah for them to push forward. But if they did, they might say something like, "Hello, my name is Joe Blow, and I apologize madam, but could I just get your last name and room number?"

That might continue, but she wasn't going to make it easy. She would make them feel like they would probably lose their job.

If they pushed further and went off to verify, she would simply get up and leave. Easy, simple, no consequences.

Anyway, topless sunbathing became a thing for her. She even petitioned the city of Los Angeles, getting them to change an ordinance that made it legal within city limits.

*Tomoz* was used to getting away with everything—and getting anything she wanted.

I mean, you have to admire her.

Look, Mike Tyson used to almost kill people and steal from everyone, yet most people love him. Despite everything he went through, he still found his way to becoming the world's heavyweight champion. Did he fuck up? Did he go to prison? Sure. But people love him—even some of the people he stole from!

We may not agree with some of the things people do, but we can admire the fact that they live life on their own terms. You might say, “Well, *Tomoz* is no Mike Tyson.” You might not want to put that to the test.

She enjoyed pissing people off. She loved it when men stared at her while their wives were right next to them.

The wife would glare at her. *Tomoz* would simply look at them with a knowing smile that said, *I win*.

She thought it was funny. I thought it was unkind and cruel. But she didn’t care what I thought either.

*Tomoz* had huge, rapid mood swings. She would go from being infatuated with me—love-bombing me—to hating me, accusing me of being mean to her, all within a few short hours. It was pretty startling. I never knew who I was going to wake up next to. The Angel of Light or the Angel of Darkness.

Her wild mood swings left me exhausted, but beneath my frustration was a pang of pity. Was this chaos her defense mechanism, a way to shield herself from something more profound? I wondered if loving her meant accepting the storm—or if it would eventually consume me.

We had a lot of explosive arguments. After one of these nuclear explosions, we would both retreat to assess the fallout.

After an argument, *Tomoz* would send me long texts. They became perfunctory, standard. They were very mean and spiteful. Mostly paranoid accusations stated as fact. Things like:

*"I hope that stupid bitch you're fucking is worth it."*

*"I can smell her on your clothes."*

*"That perfume she wears is disgusting."*

I could barely keep up with *Tomoz* sexually. There was no way I had the energy to fuck anyone else—and I didn’t want to.

She accused me of having prostitutes in every city. She kept me on the defensive while probably on *Seeking An Arrangement*, doing exactly what she accused me of!

That thought never even crossed my mind at the time. I was too busy defending myself from ICBMs.

She would twist things around, spinning them into some crazy, negative fantasy. And to be fair, a lot of what she said was also true—mostly about me being an asshole. The

best lies or accusations always have an element of truth. It makes it harder to separate fact from fiction.

A lot of it was projection. But there was *a lot* of it, and her texts were a mile long.

At first, I would respond and try to reason with her, but that just made things worse. I used to read the entire text and respond to each accusation.

She would then fire back with an even longer, meaner, and more spiteful message.

In the end, I realized I just needed to let her vent and let it go. After a few hours, she would calm down and text me, "I love you."

There's a great line in a Sarah Brightman song: "*Every ship you come across is not one you have to take.*" Sometimes, saying nothing is the best response.

Anyway, one Sunday evening, we were flying back to Sarasota together after one of our trips.

*Tomoz* was sitting backward, leaning against the seat in front of her with her legs stretched out on her seat. Why? I have no idea. It was *Tomoz*. She did everything *her* way, even sitting on a plane.

*Do not try this at home.* Unless, of course, you happen to have an airplane seat in your house.

That put pressure on the seat in front of her—or rather, behind her back. I'm sure it felt like when a kid starts kicking the back of your seat on a flight.

Very annoying.

I wasn't paying attention—not a good thing.

*Like* a child, *Tomoz* was going to get attention no matter what. Good or bad, she didn't care.

So, you can guess what happened.

Eventually, the guy in the seat in front of her turned around and asked her to stop.

He looked even more annoyed when he saw how she was sitting *backward*.

He was actually behind the rest of the passengers in his reaction. They were already pissed off with *Tomoz*.

Why? Several reasons.

Some were jealous of how beautiful she was.

And some because it was evident that *Tomoz* was a law unto herself and had no consideration for how her behavior affected others.

People were showing their disapproval.



When I looked up, I would catch people glaring at me like it was *my* fault. Like I was the parent who refused to make their child behave, letting them become a menace to everyone around them.

So, I handled it.

I stopped looking up.

She was like a naughty child. But when it's *your* child, you can be more lenient and more understanding. That's called being a *bad parent*.

You tell yourself, "*It's just not worth it. I don't need the aggravation right now.*" You're just too tired.

But she wasn't my child. She was of an age, unknown, but nevertheless a fully grown woman.

So, this guy—pretty aggressively—asks her to stop pushing her back into his seat. He also makes some comment about how the seat isn't meant to be sat in like that.

I thought, *Good for you, mister. She needed to hear that. And rather you than me.*

So, *Tomoz* apologized, turned around, and sat nicely in her seat with her seatbelt fastened for the rest of the flight.

Now, in a parallel universe, that might have happened.

But in this universe—I mean, *Tomoz's* universe—that would *never* happen.

Of course, *Tomoz* started arguing with the guy.

"*This is my seat, and I will sit in it how I like,*" she said defiantly. Total brat.

This was an exercise in how to turn a whole plane full of passengers against her—and, by extension, me.

They went back and forth a few times until he snapped his seat forward and then back again, throwing *Tomoz* off balance. She slipped down, practically disappearing below the seat.

Fortunately, she wasn't hurt physically, though her ego was bruised, which, to *Tomoz*, was far worse. She had an incredibly high threshold for physical pain. In fact, as you probably know by now, she kinda liked it. Actually, craved it. There's a reason for that—I'll explain later.

But looking foolish or having her ego attacked? Not so much.

Her tolerance for that was nonexistent. She just lit up. And now, I was in a predicament.

The guy was right—she shouldn't have been sitting like that, and it was disturbing him.

She was a total brat in how she handled it.

We can all agree on that, your honor. I was trying her case in my mind.

How was I supposed to defend my client—AKA my girlfriend/child?

That was about as far as I got before *Tomoz* pulled herself back up, fuming.

Now, to be fair, the guy was being an asshole too. When he pushed his chair forward like that, he knew she'd probably fall to the floor—and she could have gotten hurt. That's not okay.

I knew if I didn't do something right now, this was going to escalate. And if that happened, I'd have no choice but to step in, which would mean fighting with this guy, at least verbally and possibly physically.

So, I started helping her up and tried to turn her around so she'd be sitting in her seat the right way, which I somehow managed to do.

Of course, everyone was staring at us with complete disdain.

And that was that.

Yeah, no.

"Wow, real tough guy, shoving me like that," *Tomoz* sneered. She pressed her fingers against her temple, wincing dramatically. "Hope you feel big and strong now."

He shot back, "If you would just sit in your seat properly, then that wouldn't happen, now would it?"

*Tomoz, he has a point. Let's move on*, I thought.

But no.

"You just sit in your seat, big boy, and don't tell me what to do in mine. It's none of your business."

Those were fighting words.

Except it was going to be *me* doing the fighting.

I wondered—if I asked the flight attendant nicely, would she let me move to another seat?

As I reached for the call button, I realized two things:

One, *Tomoz* would never let me pass.

And two, she would torture me for the rest of my life in very mean and horrible ways.

Maybe that was a little dramatic. But maybe not.

Of course, I'm kidding. I would never leave her side.

Now, there was silence.

*Thank you, God.*

Unfortunately, it was the quiet before the storm.

Then, the guy jumped out of his seat into the aisle, flung open the overhead compartment, and glared at *Tomoz* with a look that was... well, *very* scary.

Like, *say one more word, and I will punch you in the mouth.*

That's a lot to put into a look, but he pulled it off.

Then, still staring at *Tomoz*, he slammed the overhead compartment shut.

*Very* aggressively.

I mean, it was a pretty clear signal that violence was his next step.

Now, I am not a fighter. I am a lover.

Well... maybe more of a sexual deviant, but that old quote just seemed to fit here.

Anyway, I don't like to fight—even verbally—if I can help it.

But of course, I have, and I will.

I have buttons, and a nuclear reaction can occur if they get pushed enough.

Like I said earlier, one of my buttons—one of my *red* buttons—is anyone being a bully.

Threatening me, my family, or *Tomoz*? *Yeah, no.*

I hate to generalize, which is a good thing to say right before generalizing, but most men have a natural protective instinct.

We're raised with the idea that we should take care of and protect our loved ones.

And, well... our sex slaves.

I mean, in a way, they're part of the family too, you know.

So, I calmly said to the guy—

Sorry, backup.

I *very aggressively* said to the guy, "Hey man, that is not okay. Do not threaten my girlfriend like that."

Yeah, I told him.

I put a big, fat line in the sand.

Which he went ahead and stepped right over.

I had just poured gasoline on his fire.

So, he came back at me with even more intensity.

"Oh yeah? And what are you gonna do?" he sneered like I was some kind of wimp.

This was the beginning.

You know how presidents say things like, "*If they hit us, we'll hit them 10X harder?*"

Yeah, well, I subscribe to that philosophy.

I should probably mention that I'm a black belt in Taekwondo and studied Bruce Lee's fighting style, Jeet Kune Do.

I had never lost a fight in my life.

I should also mention that I'd only ever had three fights.

Two were with boys half my age.

The third was with my sister—who, to this day, still debates the outcome.

I mean, who are you gonna believe, right?

Whatever.

Okay, kidding.

But I *am* a black belt.

It's just that my last fight was years ago.

So, none of that would be helpful if this turned physical.

My chances of winning were *extremely* low.

Sure, the guy was half my age, but at my age now, that's no longer an advantage.

And as you may know—or at least know someone who does—once you cross the threshold from being calm and collected, into anger, you leave rationality behind.

And if you say you've never been angry, chances are you lie about other things too.

Once you cross that line, it's no longer about logic. It's about winning.

Ego.

And as you've probably already realized... I don't have an ego.

Okay, I have a massive ego. Almost as big as *Tomoz's*.

But despite that, my primary motivation here wasn't ego. It was simple:

No one was going to threaten or frighten *Tomoz*.

Crossing that line is always dangerous.

Anger always comes from fear.

Of course, I don't actually believe it's a good philosophy for a country to say, "*Hit us, and we'll hit back 10X harder.*"

I mean... how's that working out for us so far, right?

And it's certainly not a good philosophy in everyday life.

But when it comes to protecting the people I love?

I would *die* for them.

I would jump in front of a bus for *Tomoz* if it meant saving her life.

So, if that meant fighting this guy, then so be it.

Suffice to say, we had now devolved into *men's stuff*.

Caveman stuff.

Although, in more recent times, I've noticed more and more women fighting—like, *really* beating the shit out of each other.

Women in MMA. Boxing. Street fights.

They're crazier than the men.

*Tougher too.*

Seriously. But this? This was primal.

We had resorted to our most basic animal instincts. I can't even remember what we said to each other. But you can probably imagine.

When I lose my temper, I can never remember much afterward. It's like I had an epileptic fit.

Ladies, you know what I mean. You've seen it plenty of times.

The flight attendants rushed over, telling us to stop. We didn't.

Then one of them turned to me and said, "If you do not sit down immediately, I will call the police, and they will meet you when you get off the plane."

I was flabbergasted. I said, "Me? That guy is the one who slammed his overhead compartment extremely aggressively!"

I might've added something about her not doing her job properly and how she should report him to the police, not me.

At which point, another flight attendant chimed in. "You two have been causing trouble since you got on the plane."

Meaning *Tomoz* and me. WTF?

You can guess what happened next.

"Look, this guy threatened my girlfriend. That is unacceptable, and *he* needs to be arrested when we get off this airplane!" I shouted.

They just stared at me like I was crazy.

"If you had been doing your job instead of hanging out behind that curtain, you would *know* that! So don't you dare say we've been causing trouble since we got on this plane! He needs to apologize to my girlfriend—*right now!*" I demanded.

The lead flight attendant didn't even hesitate.

"Sir, we are calling the police to meet you at the gate. You can explain all that to them. In the meantime, sit down and fasten your seatbelt."

I sat down.

And prepared myself to be arrested.

Now, *Tomoz* was looking at me, shaking her head. "Stephen, what are you doing? Why did you do that?" She sounded like my mother.

This was coming from *Tomoz*? Are you *fucking* serious right now? I was trying to protect you!

I was thinking it. But I didn't say it. Yet.

I started thinking about how to break open a window and throw her out.

But she's *five feet eleven fucking inches tall*, and it would take forever to get her through the window.

I probably had other very unproductive and evil thoughts about *Tomoz* during that 20-minute descent while also mentally preparing for my inevitable arrest, a night in jail, and thousands of dollars in attorney fees.

Finally, we landed.

Deplaning was horrible.

Everyone was looking at us like we'd committed some unspeakable crime against humanity.

"*Lock them up! Lock them up!*" They chanted.

Well, that's what they were chanting in my head as we walked down the aisle and off the plane.

As we stepped onto the gangway, the sheriff stood there, waiting.

The flight attendant pointed at us. "Them," she said. Then she turned and got back on the plane like she hadn't just ruined my life.

The sheriff looked at me. "Mr. Edwards?"

"Yes," I said, resigned to my fate.

"Come with me," he said, motioning toward the terminal.

Seemed like an appropriate *description* for what was about to happen to me.

Once we got off the jetway, he gestured toward some seats to the right. We hobbled over like a chain gang, took a seat, and waited for our sentencing.

The sheriff was surprisingly nice. Older guy. Experienced. Calm.

He asked, "So, what happened?"

We told him everything.

I explained that we were just innocent victims, just sitting there quietly when they called the police.

But for some reason, he didn't believe that.

I'm kidding.

Sort of.

*Tomoz* was still feeling victimized, but she admitted she could have handled it better.

I admitted I lost my temper.

The sheriff nodded. "Well, you were probably trying to protect her, right?"

"YES!" Finally, a man who understands!

"I get it," he said. "But you can't do that—especially on an airplane."

I sighed. "I know. It won't happen again."

"I hope not. Because next time, it won't be me meeting you. They might take you to jail and let the judge decide what to do with you."

Firm but kind.

He was showing me how to be better.

"Alright," he said. "I think we're done here. You both look exhausted. Go home and get some rest. And in the future—fly safe, stay in your seats, and remember, fighting on an airplane is never a good idea."

And just like that, he walked away.

I sat there, replaying everything in my head.

The anger. The embarrassment. The glares from other passengers.

All of it.

And I started wondering—had protecting her been worth it?

Had I let her pull me so far from my center that I had lost myself?

And then it hit me.

What if he had arrested me? What if *Tomoz* had then taken out a restraining order? That thought hadn't even crossed my mind until now.

I don't know if that was her plan.

But even if it wasn't intentional, it would've been the perfect opportunity for her to do what she always does—

Get me arrested. Get a restraining order. Take my home from me for six months.

Had I just escaped the Venus Fly Trap again?

I guess we'll never know.

We talked about the whole episode on the way home. Of course, *Tomoz* saw herself as the victim, which, to some degree, she was. By that, I mean she was just being herself.

She could never quite understand how, simply by being herself, she could cross other people's boundaries and cause conflict. It was a genuine blind spot for her. Unfortunately, she also didn't realize that this blind spot brought her a lot of heartache and pain.

She said, “Those people were just complete idiots.” She was still angry.

Now, I had a choice—agree with her or start World War III. She wasn’t ready to take any responsibility, at least not yet. At this moment, she needed validation, support, and understanding.

“I agree, baby. They were very unfair to you. Let’s not worry about that right now. Let’s get you home and fuck your brains out so you feel better, okay?”

“Yes, baby, I want you to fuck me hard. Can you do that for me?” she asked in her demure, sexy voice, looking at me with those big, brown, Bambi-like eyes.

That was not the response I expected. I guess she appreciated my support.

“Baby, I’m going to ruin you tonight—you won’t know what hit you.”

“That is exactly what I need right now. I need you to ruin me. Thank you, baby,” she said, suddenly happier.

No, thank you, I thought.

“Baby, I am going to rip your clothes off and fucking destroy you,” I added.

“Ohh, baby, I want you to treat me like the dirty whore I am. Will you do that for me?”

Now she was coming back.

I met her gaze, the weight of the moment settling between us.

“That’s what I live for,” I murmured.

And for once, the words felt like more than just charm—they felt like a promise.

She looked at me, rubbed her hands together, and let out a little squeal of excitement.

By the time we got home, we were both almost completely undressed, ready to destroy each other.

As you can imagine, that was quite a night.

Once again, we fell into a deep sleep in each other’s arms.

*In the stillness of the night, there was nothing but breath... and only the flow of ideas moving onward—like a river unburdened by banks.*

We needed the rest—to prepare for our next crazy adventure.



# Chapter Twenty

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## “But I Don’t Have Any Clothes”

*Tomoz* had many big plans to make money, all kinds of business ideas that required tons of investment. Some of her ideas were really good, so I decided to invest all the money I had in one of her schemes. I mean, what could go wrong, right? Kidding.

It sometimes amazed me that *Tomoz* wasn’t already making a lot of money. With her personality, fine upbringing, and high intelligence—not to mention her incredible beauty—she had so many amazing gifts. She could have done or been anything she wanted.

Then it hit me—she wasn’t chasing success for herself. She just wanted to impress her father, to earn his love. But nothing ever lasted because it was never truly what she wanted to do.

What did she want to do? Like her father said, party and have a rich guy take care of her while she did whatever she pleased. At least, that’s what she thought she wanted.

When she finally realized I would never invest my money in her schemes, she suggested she could do **René**’s job. Well, that would certainly get rid of one of her enemies.

*Tomoz* never liked me having **René** or Jerry around. They were witnesses—obstacles in her way. The more she could isolate me, the easier it was for her to take control.

I didn’t like leaving *Tomoz* at home each week or even in her apartment. That was way too long for me to be without her for a couple of reasons. First, the sex. Second, who knew what she would get up to? All kinds of images ran through my mind. There was no way *Tomoz* was going to pack and unpack my bags. She wanted to stay home while I was away, busting my ass—sitting by the pool by day and partying in my house by night.

Of course, there were probably all kinds of positive advantages to having *Tomoz* as my assistant, but somehow, I couldn't think of a single one. Of course, she pleaded her case, but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

However, I needed to come up with something she could do to keep her busy and help her start making her own money.

She could make great money as a sales consultant on the road with me. I had a sales team that sold advanced programs at the back of the ballroom. That way, we could travel together, and *Tomoz* could make good money for herself.

She needed a job because her father had made it clear—he would only pay for her apartment until she found one. He gave her three months, after which she was on her own.

*Tomoz* was running out of time and places in the house to find cash. So I told her, “You can come and work for me, on my team, as a sales consultant at the back of the room. You can make a nice salary.”

It seemed like a good idea at the time. You might be thinking I didn't think it through. Well, you'd be wrong—I did think it through. I saw all the things that could go wrong. I could see her being a major problem. A nightmare. And I still suggested it anyway.

She was the Venus Fly Trap, and I, as always, the helpless fly. When you're in the trap, you can't reason. You're beyond help—even your own. Especially your own!

*Tomoz* said, “As long as you're not my boss telling me what to do.”

“No, the team is separate, and you would have a manager,” I told her, trying to convince her it was a good idea.

Then she said, “But I don't have any clothes.” Always the great negotiator.

I had bought her plenty of nice clothes, and we had a fantastic time shopping together. I always joined her in the changing room when she tried things on, which she enjoyed almost as much as I did. The sales assistants didn't mind—they made a great sale and earned commission.

But while those clothes were very nice and she looked beautiful, they were casual and unsuitable for business purposes.

So, I decided to take her to Saks Fifth Avenue to buy her some professional outfits. She needed to look the part if she was coming on the road with me.

During the ride, she excitedly listed all the skirts and jackets she would need—sexy, tight, yet professional. The moment we stepped into the women's department, the drama

and the show began. Just by the way *Tomoz* walked, it was clear she was a fabulous diva, and the assistants lapped it up. They were practically squealing with delight.

She had all the salesgirls running around, picking out suits, jackets, and blouses—everything professional yet tight and sexy, just as she, and I, wanted. The girls loved it. They all wanted to look and be like *Tomoz* and have a rich guy buy them whatever they wanted—not that I ever told *Tomoz* she could have whatever she wanted.

She didn't need me to tell her anything; she just did it. What was I going to do—tell the assistants to put things back?

Trapped by the Venus Fly Trap again. I should've seen it coming—her pull was inevitable. Then again, I had plans of my own. A different kind of trap, a different kind of hunger. Sex, lies, and repercussions—par for the course.

She charmed the sales assistants effortlessly, her laughter echoing through the store like a siren's call. I watched from the sidelines, torn between admiration and unease. She was brilliant and magnetic, but there was always a cost to her brilliance. I couldn't decide whether I was her partner or pawn, and the uncertainty gnawed at me.

The next thing I knew, she was telling the assistants that we were having a party—and they were all invited!

I thought, *We are? I hope I'm invited!* She had a way of putting you in situations where you couldn't say anything—you just had to follow along.

So, we had a party.

When I finished paying, we left the store. I carried an armful of bags as we walked out while *Tomoz* blew kisses at her new besties.

*Tomoz* made fast friends—and lost them just as fast. No one stayed friends with her for very long. As you will see, many people came in and out of her life in a flash.

There were several reasons for that. First, *Tomoz* was constantly moving from city to city. Then, there were her extreme mood swings. She rarely stayed in touch with people unless she needed something.

Letting anyone get close to her was difficult. She felt insecure and often bragged about herself or her family, believing it would impress people and make them like her. Unfortunately, this had the opposite effect, creating the very thing she was terrified of—being abandoned—only reinforcing her belief that she was unlovable.

*Tomoz* felt she needed to be somebody—anybody but herself. She had no authentic self-identity. Instead, she tried to be the person she thought others wanted her to be. But

she could only maintain the façade for so long. Before anyone could discover the “real” *Tomoz*, she would either create an argument or simply disappear.

It all made her feel alone and abandoned, which meant that no matter what she did, she was always living her worst fear—self-destructing. Yes, there was a reason for all of it, and yes, I’ll explain later.

It was heartbreaking to watch. Naturally, this played right into my protective instincts, making me want to rescue, save, and fix her.

As we left the store, her laughter faded, and for a moment, her shoulders slumped. She looked vulnerable, almost fragile.

“Let’s just go home,” she murmured, avoiding my gaze.

It was rare to see her mask slip, and when it did, I couldn’t help but feel protective, even as I questioned what lay beneath it.

The shopping spree was over—at least for now. Of course, the salesgirls all had her number and would call incessantly to sell her more merchandise.

That was Tuesday. *Tomoz* had told the girls at Saks that the party was happening tomorrow—and she had given them all my address.

I thought to myself, *Okay then, we’re having a party*. There was no stopping this now, even if I wanted to. I just needed to remember to let security at the gate know that several beautiful young women would be arriving at my house tomorrow night for a party.

*That’ll give them something to talk about!* I thought. Then another thought followed: No one is going to show up on such short notice.

But they did. About 30 people.

*Tomoz* made no effort to do anything for the party other than invite people.

I invited some friends. They were surprised by the last-minute invitation, but as always, they showed up for me. **René** appeared with an armful of supplies, his calm efficiency starkly contrasting with the chaos swirling around him.

“You’d think we were hosting royalty,” he quipped, handing me a bottle of wine.

I smiled, grateful for his steadiness—even as I wondered how long he could endure *Tomoz’s* whirlwind.

He managed to pull things together—hors d’oeuvres, the bar, the essentials—so it wasn’t so bad.

Everyone started arriving around 6:30 p.m. They all loved the house, of course. *Tomoz* was having the time of her life, showing them around what was now, apparently, *our* home. And they followed her like an entourage.

About half an hour after everyone else had arrived, the doorbell rang.

I opened the front door, and a young Black woman walked right past me—no hello, nothing—straight into the house.

She was pissed.

“I am so pissed,” she snapped. See? Told you.

“I’ve been sitting at the security gate for 20 minutes—they wouldn’t let me in. They said no one named *Tómoz* is listed as an owner of any house.”

Well, that was true.

“I told them she was living here with some guy. I don’t know his name.”

That would be me, I thought.

She kept going, ignoring me entirely.

“I told them you were having a party. Then they realized I was one of the guests who were already arriving. And when they finally let me through, the directions they gave me got me lost.”

I thought, *Well, everyone else managed to get here just fine*. But I decided that was probably not the best way to calm this bitch down.

By this time, *Tómoz* had come to see what all the commotion was about.

*Tómoz* beamed. “Chanyce, you made it! I’m so glad you’re here. Come on in.”

Chanyce started to calm down and followed *Tómoz* out to the patio.

*Nice to meet you, too*, I thought.

So, I guess this was Chanyce —AKA Hell on Heels. Turns out she had been given a one-night pass to leave the local mental hospital. I should have checked her pass at the door. I was far from convinced that any mental institution would ever let her out—even for one evening.

Chanyce was *Tómoz*’s hairdresser.

Although, during all our time together, *Tómoz* never once got her hair done by Chanyce.

I understood.

There was no way I would have let her near my hair with scissors either.

People started to relax after a few drinks, some hors d’oeuvres, and introductions.

As the evening wore on, we all sat around the fire pit and pool, sipping drinks and watching the sunset over the lake and golf course.

*Tómoz* flitted from guest to guest, holding court like a queen. She had a way of commanding attention, effortlessly drawing people in with her wit and charm. But beneath

the surface, there was a darkness. I wondered if anyone else saw it or if they, too, were blinded by her light.

*Tomoz* and I played and teased each other. She'd toss out some rude remark to make me chase her. She'd squeal in excitement, feigning an attempt to run away, wanting to be caught and conquered.

Well... caught, anyway.

She was never going to be conquered. At least not in public.

Then, we tumbled onto the ground by the pool and started making out in front of our audience. We all joked, laughed, and had a great time.

Dusk had barely settled when most people left. I was a little tipsy.

Of course, *Tomoz* was wasted. Tony and Melania slipped inside.

I was pretty sure they were heading to the bedroom where they'd had sex the other night.

As the last guest left, I stood in the quiet aftermath, staring at the remnants of the party. *Tomoz* had seamlessly woven herself into my life, leaving me both exhilarated and uneasy. She was a force of nature, and I couldn't tell whether I was weathering her storm or being swept away by it.

Outside, *Tomoz* and I sat together, lost in each other, our kisses growing heated. She dropped to her knees in front of me, unzipped my jeans, and took me into her mouth.

Unbelievable. I had the urge to capture this moment on my iPhone. *Tomoz* didn't care—if anything, she played to the camera. So, I took photographs on my iPhone while she worked her magic. Then, for some reason, I was unable to take pictures anymore...

When she was done milking me dry, she collapsed onto the couch, her makeup smudged, her energy drained.

"Do you ever feel like none of this matters?" she asked, staring at the lake. I glimpsed the woman behind the performance for a moment, and it broke my heart.

We went back inside. Tony and Melania were nowhere to be seen. The party was over. Exhausted, we crawled into bed, letting the night fade into quiet.

A whirlwind of thoughts swirled in my mind as I drifted toward sleep. *This is crazy. What the hell is going on? What am I doing? Am I losing myself?*

But before I could find the answers, I was already lost—deep in dreams of *Tomoz*, where the questions and answers no longer mattered.

# Chapter Twenty-One

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## She's Mad, But She's Magic

The next morning, we packed for Tampa to go to my next speaking engagement. *Tomoz* asked me, in her deep, sexy voice and with her Bambi brown eyes, if she could drive the Bentley, and I would drive the Rolls.

What was I going to say? *No*? And risk a three-hour argument, followed by her pouting and saying, “*I’m not going then!*” like a brat?

See, I can justify doing anything for her. So, of course, I said *OK*.

We raced the whole way. She’s a damn good driver, so she gave me a real run for my money. She might have even beaten me, just like she did at Backgammon.

As I followed her down the highway, watching the Bentley glide effortlessly ahead, I couldn’t help but marvel at how she had taken over my life. She was intoxicating—always one step ahead, impossible to predict.

And yet, I couldn’t resist.

We were both fiercely competitive. I would never *let* her win, and she wouldn’t have wanted me to. So, given that I’m the one telling this story, it’s fair to assume that I won.

We arrived at the J.W. Marriott together—her in the Bentley with the roof down, of course, and me in the Rolls. It felt like a scene straight out of a movie or in front of the casino in Monte Carlo. Of course, we pretended not to notice, like it was just another day in Richville.

*Tomoz* sashayed through the hotel like she owned the place. At reception, she grabbed the key card and headed straight to the room while I stayed behind to finish checking in.

She was not good at waiting for anyone or anything. She would say things like, “*Why do you need me here?*” or “*You can handle this on your own, can’t you?*”—and then she’d be gone.

By the time I reached the room, the bags had already been delivered. *Tomoz* had raided the minibar and was lounging outside, drink in one hand, cigarette in the other.

We hadn’t had sex all day, so we were both horny as hell. We both got undressed, had sexy *time*, then—for some reason—we decided to find a store that sold sex toys. I know— weird, right? Have you been paying attention?

So, we took the Bentley to a local sex shop called *Giggles* to pick up some goodies.

We cruised along I-275 through downtown Tampa with the roof down. It was a beautiful evening; the city bathed in the golden hues of a setting sun.

*Tomoz* sat beside me, her beautiful hair flowing in the evening breeze. Another perfect moment, another memory to treasure. How was I this lucky? I mean, *come on!*

I laughed at how crazy this was—I mean, really laughed. We were both rocking our cool, sexy sunglasses. *Tomoz* had on one of her fabulous short summer dresses. She liked me to wear silk shirts, unbuttoned about halfway down. We looked like a drug dealer and his sexy moll. Hilarious.

As we approached our exit at Ashley Street, I noticed a police car. I made sure to slow down to 65 mph, keeping below the speed limit. It felt like we were going backwards.

Driving a Bentley GTC Convertible at 65 mph isn’t easy—it could stall. I know it’s a tough life. I cruised past the police car, flashing the officer a friendly smile as I went by. The next thing I knew, the lights on the police car flicked on, and the officer pulled me over. What?

So, I eased onto the shoulder. The officer walked up to my side of the car.

“Did you know you were speeding, sir?”

Speeding? I thought. Are you kidding? I had made sure I was only doing 65 mph.

“No, I didn’t realize, officer. I thought I was only doing 65 mph?” I said, genuinely confused.

“You were, sir, but this is a 55-mph zone since we’re in the downtown area.”

“55 mph? You have got to be kidding,” I said. “You’re pulling me over for going 10 mph over the speed limit? I thought you were allowed to be 10 mph over anyway.”

He started writing the ticket. I wanted to say, *Shouldn’t you be arresting real criminals, like burglars or murderers, instead of harassing good, law-abiding citizens?*



OK, you'll be glad to know I didn't say any of that. I hate it when people say that kind of shit. I do respect the police—I think they have one of the most difficult and dangerous jobs you can imagine. The people who complain about them are often the first to call when they need help. Unless you're in the Mafia, of course—then it's different.

Are there some bad cops? Of course. They, like any criminals, should be brought to justice. However, the vast majority of police officers are doing an incredible job for society.

It would be the wild, wild west without the PO-PO. They leave their homes and families every day and put their lives on the line for us.

It makes me angry when protesters throw things at the police, scream in their faces, and the officers have to stand there and take it. I mean, they have nothing to do with whatever those people are protesting about. It's disgusting. In many ways, society has come apart. I'll also admit that my views have changed—I've become more conservative in some of my opinions and beliefs as I've gotten older.

When I was young, I hated the police. Seeing a police car, my stomach would turn. I always thought they were coming to arrest me for drug possession or something else I had done. I was a nightmare. I got into a lot of trouble. Some pretty heavy stuff.

Like *Tomoz*, I had been a rebel without a cause when I was younger. *Tomoz* still was. Over time, after facing some very tough consequences—stories that will be the focus of future books—I had mellowed out and left behind a life of crime and punishment.

When I came to America, I put all that behind me.

Now, having said all that, when the officer told me the speed limit and the amount of the infraction, I did think it was a little harsh to pull me over. I had never seen such a low-speed limit on the freeway. Then again, I never read the speed limit signs anyway, so how would I know?

I've learned to put myself in the other person's shoes in situations like this. And honestly, this whole scene felt like déjà vu. Almost the exact same thing happened to me 20 years ago—going in the opposite direction on the same freeway. Back then, I was driving a convertible 911 Porsche Carrera. I wasn't paying attention and overtook a police car while doing 85 mph.

He pulled me over, and I took the off-ramp to stop. It was dark, and he got suspicious. The roof was down, and as he came alongside the car, he shined his flashlight on the interior. That's when he quickly spotted the butt of a gun sticking out from the lid of the driver's door compartment. I know me with a gun? Ridiculous right? There is a crazy story behind it. But that's a story for another time. It was all legal—I had a carry license.

But it was dark, and he didn't know any of that, so he put me in the back of his car while he continued his investigation.

Plastic seats, by the way. Yeah, I'm sure you know—you've probably been in one yourself. Stop judging.

Anyway, I was angry and felt like a total victim.

It was then, watching the officer do his job, that I had an epiphany. Every day, he left his family and put his life on the line for us, never knowing if he would return home. Now, *that* is what I call a hero. When he let me out of the car, I apologized for putting him through that traumatizing situation. I had a newfound respect for law enforcement.

And now here I was—driving down the freeway, in traffic, in a Bentley, rooftop down, drop-dead gorgeous girl in the passenger seat, my shirt open, sunglasses on, looking like a drug dealer, speeding, and smiling at the police officer like a cocky fucking asshole. I was *asking* to get pulled over!

The officer had just told me I was doing 65 in a 55 zone. I wasn't about to get nit-picky about the speed or act cocky. I was in the wrong.

I apologized and said, "I was enjoying the evening with my girlfriend and hadn't noticed the 55 mph signs, officer. My fault."

He could tell I wasn't drunk or on drugs, that I was being honest and genuine, which I was.

He was very friendly and professional, asked me about the car, told me to slow down, and went on his way. When you treat people with genuine respect and appreciation, it tends to be reciprocated.

*Tomoz* and I continued our adventure to the sex store. We found some new fun items to pleasure each other with and headed back to the hotel to enjoy them. We were just insatiable.

The next morning—Friday—I went down to the ballroom to speak for the day. *Tomoz* refused to get out of bed that early.

Jerry drove out to watch me speak. Like *Tomoz*, I had told him I might be able to get him a job on my sales team. Jerry and *Tomoz* were there to observe me and potentially join my team.

*Tomoz*, of course, came down late. She sashayed into the ballroom of course causing a huge distraction which she loved to do.

Total disruption. The whole show annoyed the team, which, of course, was precisely what she wanted.

Then she watched me for maybe an hour and left. And that was that. Later, she explained, “This is just not for me, baby.”

*Tomoz* had promised not to drink all day. So, being true to her word, she sat at the bar all day... getting drunk.

At the end of the day, I told Jerry, “Let’s go out to the Blue Martini tonight.” It was a cool nightclub at the International Mall nearby.

Jerry doesn’t drink, but he does go to nightclubs.

“I don’t want to be a third wheel,” he said weakly.

“What are you talking about?” I asked. “It’s *Tomoz*, for God’s sake. She won’t mind. Besides, I don’t want to be alone with her in a nightclub—anything could happen!”

He laughed and agreed. I stepped out of the ballroom to call *Tomoz* and let her know our plan.

I had no idea where she was, but the background noise was loud, and she was slurring. This wasn’t the time to hold her accountable for breaking her promise. I told her where we were going and that she needed to get ready fast. Before I could finish speaking, she squealed excitedly and hung up.

I wrapped things up with the team in the ballroom and headed up to the suite.

Another thing I had to admire about *Tomoz* —she could pull herself together and get ready faster than any woman I had ever known and still look absolutely stunning. When it suited her.

And tonight, it suited her. She was so excited to hit the town that she was ready by the time I walked into our room.

I jumped in the shower and got ready. At the same time, she sat on the balcony, while once again she was having a cigarette and quietly raiding the minibar—or so she thought.

I put on one of my cool outfits. It was cool back then. Now, it would look ridiculous, so I won’t describe it.

OK, fine, I will.

A Masatomo black pinstripe jacket—the bottom third was leather, and the pinstripes were the designer’s name repeated over and over. Black Tom Ford jeans. A cool belt and Black python ankle-length boots.

Jerry just wore what he had on, so he was ready in no time. *Tomoz* and I headed down and met him in the lobby.

I had called the valet from the room, so by the time we got downstairs, the Rolls was already pulled up to the front of the hotel. Off we went.

On the way, *Tomoz* called the Blue Martini, reserved a table, and ordered a bottle of Belvedere vodka. I rarely drank, but when I did, I drank vodka—and I preferred Chopin.

That's why *Tomoz* made sure to order the vodka she wanted. She always ensured she got what she wanted—ahead of the game. Or at least ahead of me.

Funny how those things never bothered me. It was another of the many things I admired about her. She knew exactly what she wanted and was brilliant at getting it—while making it seem like it was your idea.

Like if I had said, "Why did you order Belvedere? You know I like Chopin," she would have just smiled and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot. If you want, I can call back for you, baby."

Of course, I would just accept what she had ordered and drop it. But if I actually said, "Yes, sweetheart, would you call back and ask them to change it to Chopin?" she would reply, "Of course, baby." And she would.

But somehow, she wouldn't be able to get through to anyone. Or she'd pretend to call, having a whole conversation—with no one.

When we got to the table, there would be a bottle of Belvedere Vodka.

"Oh my God, baby, I told them to change it."

Then, she would pretend to scan the room, looking for someone to fix the "mistake." If I didn't say, "Don't bother," she'd sigh dramatically and say, "Oh, never mind, I need a drink," as she popped the bottle open.

If I wanted Chopin, I'd have to order another bottle. You see? Brilliant. Like I said—her philosophy was: don't ask for permission, do it.

We pulled up to the front of the mall, and the valet took the car. The place was buzzing with tourists and locals heading out for Friday night.

We stepped out of the Rolls looking like movie stars.

Well—at least *Tomoz* did.

Jerry and I? We looked like movie stars *by association* with *Tomoz*.

If it had just been Jerry and me getting out of the Rolls, no one would have given us much of a glance. I mean, they might have noticed the Rolls—but not *us*.

OK, that's not entirely true. Jerry and I were very handsome and *could* have easily been movie stars. I'd been told many times that I had movie-star looks.

But nothing compared to *Tomoz*.

*Tomoz* towered above everyone on her six-inch stilts. She knew how to walk like a supermodel—so she did. She sashayed toward the entrance of the Blue Martini, and the crowd instinctively parted, admiring her as she passed.

She strode right past the people lined up to get in and went straight inside the Blue Martini without so much as a glance at anyone. Total congruency. The doormen didn't question it—they just pulled back the velvet rope and let her in. It was obvious she was a VIP. They *wanted* her in there.

She was a man magnet.

Jerry and I just followed behind, looking like her sidekicks.

This was *Tomoz's* world. She knew exactly what to do, who to talk to, and how to get anyone—or anything—she wanted.

A line of coke? Ecstasy? Molly? A girl? A guy? *Anything*.

That might sound exaggerated, but it's the truth. *Tomoz's* abilities went beyond what most people could comprehend.

She could hypnotize people—literally.

And if that sounds unbelievable now, just wait.

She continued to sashay into the VIP section.

A waitress led us to our table, where the bottle of Belvedere vodka was waiting. She asked what we'd like with it.

I ordered Kahlúa—I enjoyed a Black Russian.

*Tomoz* didn't want anything. "*What a waste, putting anything in it,*" she would say.

And now here I was, joining her. Encouraging her drinking. She was pulling me deeper and deeper into her world. I was sinking further into the depths of the Venus Fly Trap.

Sometimes, I felt guilty—like I was giving up on her. But I had to accept the truth her father had told me from the beginning. "*Stephen, she will never change.*"

I had tried. He had tried—far longer than I. And I knew there were only two options: let her go or join her.

We danced.

I've loved to dance since I was a teenager back in England, and—though I say it myself—I'm very good. I won all kinds of dance competitions. I have natural rhythm.

Most guys avoid dancing, which, to me, is just plain stupid. Women *love* a man who can move—it's an easy way to get close, to be sexy without trying too hard.

But no, they'd rather stand in a corner and complain about being single.

*Tomoz* showed off, soaking up all the attention. And I enjoyed watching her—she always put on a fabulous show.

After we'd danced our asses off and returned to our table, *Tomoz* turned to Jerry.

"Is there a girl here you like?" she asked.

Jerry gestured over his shoulder at a very young, pretty waitress.

"I'll go get her for you," *Tomoz* said.

Like I said—anything you wanted.

Before Jerry could say another word, she got up and walked straight over to the waitress.

Jerry was stunned. He hadn't expected her to *actually* do it. He looked nervous—but he didn't try to stop her either.

We watched as *Tomoz* started chatting with the waitress. Within seconds, she had her under her spell—smiling, leaning in, completely captivated by this gorgeous creature talking to her.

We had no idea what they were saying, but a few minutes later, they both walked over to our table.

*Tomoz* was a great wingman. She had an incredible ability to meet people and get them to do whatever she wanted.

Apparently, the Venus Fly Trap *nectar* worked on both men and women.

I didn't know it then, but *Tomoz* is bisexual—which made her even more skilled at picking up both men and women. She understood how to get into *everyone's* psyche.

She could meet a young girl in the bathroom, and by the time they walked out, they were besties. That's no exaggeration. And as you'll see soon, I mean that literally.

She was brilliant at everything she did—manipulative, magnetic. Like I said, *Tomoz* was a chameleon.

She could transform herself into *exactly* the person you couldn't help but have an immediate connection with. Ultra charming, ultra-confident. She would ask you a few questions, and before you knew it, you were in a straitjacket—helping *her* buckle you up.

At that time, I still had no idea what she was capable of.

I was about to find out very soon. I guarantee.

And trust me, you won't be disappointed. You'll be *amazed*.

Jerry, meanwhile, was happy—completely absorbed in his conversation with the waitress. Just as *Tomoz* intended.

With him occupied, she turned to me and grinned.

"Let's go have some real fun."

A short ride in the Rolls later, we entered *The Doll House, a high-end strip club*.

*Tomoz* was into strip clubs. At first, I thought she was just saying that to impress me. She wasn't.

Just like when she made out with Melania in the back of the Rolls—I assumed she did it because she thought I'd like the idea of two girls making out. I was wrong on both counts.

*Tomoz*, being bisexual, *genuinely* loved watching the girls and flirting with them.

After spending an hour at *The Doll House*, we headed back to the hotel to release our pent-up sexual energy and have crazy, deviant sex.

Our suite was nice, although I have little recollection of it. All my focus and attention were completely devoted to *Tomoz*.

I *do* remember there was a balcony with a table and chairs.

I only remember that because we fucked on the table.

It was also where we would sit, and *Tomoz* would smoke between sessions.

I ordered champagne, even though we didn't need it. Eventually, we found ourselves on the floor, writhing around. We came to a stop with my fingers in her pussy.

I used my magical fingers to bring her to orgasm, feeling her body writhe at my touch. Noticing what made her moan, bite her lip, or throw her head back in ecstasy.

Soon, she started squirting, which is a turn-on for me because it tells me I'm doing good! We sat on the floor with her legs open and my fingers working her for literally hours. I lost count of how many times she orgasmed. I kept moving my fingers, feeling her completely at the will and command of my digits.

Moving them together, then separately. Slowly, gently, and then pushing harder and faster until she came again. Putting more fingers inside her. Making her feel she was being fucked by two cocks. Then three. I soon realized the more, the better. I would come to know that the bigger, the better.

The carpet was drenched. After hours of doing this, I knew she had to be dehydrated. I made her drink water even though she just wanted more sex. She drank from the bottle, and her body just soaked it up.

I don't remember what time we finally collapsed from our mutual sexual depravity.

We never even made it to the bed.

At 7 a.m., I dragged myself into the shower, dressed, and went down to the ballroom for the second day of the three-day event. It was all a blur.

It was also the beginning of the end.

Don't worry—there was still a long journey ahead of us.

That night, I took the team out for dinner. We found a great spot in Ybor City. The place was lively; it was Saturday night. We ate, drank, and then enjoyed the energy of Ybor City.

There were many bars, and the street was packed with people hopping from bar to bar, drinking in the intoxicating atmosphere.

The team left early, as I should have.

But, of course, *Tomoz* didn't want to leave. So we stayed for a while.

Then we went back to the hotel and fucked each other's brains out until the wee hours *again*.

The next day—Sunday—was the final day of the event.

It was a disaster.

We had a terrible result.

Not sure why? Kidding. I mean what did I expect?

The team didn't say much, but of course, they knew.

It was my fault.

And it cost them sales. Cost them commission.

It cost me too, of course.

I wasn't just losing my mind—I was losing focus on my business.

Like I said, it was the beginning of the end.

*Tomoz* needed *constant* attention, for *Tomoz*, being alone was the *one* thing she couldn't handle.

Sunday night, we went for a drive around Tampa in the Bentley. We had the roof down and the music blasting.

There's something romantic about driving through a city at night. Something *magical*.

You know what I mean.

Later, we went to *Ocean Prime* restaurant. It was almost empty, so we had the place pretty much to ourselves.

Sometimes, it felt like we had the *whole world* to ourselves. We were literally in our own world.

People could see it.

We were *oblivious* to anything or anyone else.



When people approached us, it was as if they were breaking through our invisible bubble. We didn't mind; in fact, we enjoyed interacting with people. You could tell they were slightly in awe of what they saw going on between us.

We had a beautiful, romantic dinner overlooking the city.

We finally returned to our suite and indulged in each other until about 4:30 a.m. By then, *Tomoz* was starving, so she ordered a full breakfast from room service.

Before it even arrived, we passed out.

A knock on the door woke us at 6:30 a.m.—room service with our breakfast. Apparently, 6:30 a.m. was the earliest they served, so that worked out.

Exhausted, we decided to stay another night at the J.W. Marriott instead of driving back home Monday morning.

That afternoon, we took a drive to downtown Ybor City. Sitting at a cool little coffee shop, we sipped our coffee and admired the view—mostly of each other. We relived—and laughed about our adventure together over the wild weekend.

Racing each other to the J.W. Marriott (me winning the race—we debated that, of course). Getting pulled over by the police, having fun playing with the toys in the sex store, and enjoying playing with them back at the hotel. *Tomoz* striding into *The Blue Martini* like she owned the place. Picking up a girlfriend for Jerry. *The Doll House*, *Tomoz* flirting with the strippers. Sex in the suite. *Tomoz* squirting for hours, *destroying* the room. Our night out in Ybor City. Driving the Bentley through downtown at night with the roof down and music blasting. Our romantic dinner at *Ocean Prime*, practically having the restaurant to ourselves.

It was hard to believe we had done so much in just three days—while I still managed to run my event, and *Tomoz* had her own adventures at the bar during the day.

We had a fantastic time. And we weren't done yet.

Now, think about this—none of it would have happened if I had broken up with *Tomoz*. See what I mean?

After reminiscing about our wild weekend, we strolled down Main Street, weaving through thrift stores packed with secondhand clothes and quirky knick-knacks. We enjoyed watching each other try on all kinds of old ridiculous outfits and hats, being goofy, and making each other laugh.

Later, we decided to check out 'Channel Side'. We walked hand in hand along the waterside before making our way back to the hotel.

That night, we ate dinner at *Ocean Prime* again. We had such a great time there the night before; it just made sense. The valet guys were happy to see us—me for the tip and *Tomoz* for the eye candy.

*Tomoz* would always get out of the car very elegantly, ensuring not to show the valet guys what they hoped to see. Not an easy feat for her.

The next morning, we raced home. Well, *I* raced home. *Tomoz* drove off somewhere else. She arrived at the house about an hour after I got back. Who knows where she went? Anyway, it didn't matter; I won.

We had the time of our lives again. I learned so much from *Tomoz*. It's true: She's Mad, But She's Magic.

So, by now, we were practically living together, although nothing had been made official.

Not that *Tomoz* needed an official invite. Like she had told everyone already, this was *her* house. She lived in it like she owned the place. When anyone came over, there was no doubt that this was *Tomoz's* home.

I was just the lucky guest.

Had I already lost my home?

I was still under the influence of the *nectar*, under the magical spell of The Venus Fly Trap.

Had I lost myself?

# Chapter Twenty-Two

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## “I Need This”

Like I said, when I would bring *Tomoz* to the house for one of our three-day sex extravaganzas, she would often say, “I need this.”

She needed the charge of being photographed, of having deviant sex, of being desired, of being the center of my attention, of feeling free and alive.

It gave her the perfect stage to use her skills as a model, to be sexy, to be watched. She thrived on the focus of the camera, imagining all the men looking at her, beguiled by her, sexually aroused by her. Then, having sex and being pleased.

She was not so concerned about pleasuring me, but I was in ecstasy too. It was not easy for me to come. It sounds weird. It was like I would hold off for so long; I would go past the point of being able to come easily or through intercourse. I needed to stop worrying about pleasing her and allow myself to be pleased.

So, *Tomoz* always made sure I got a happy ending. At that point, it was the only way I could cum.

By then, we were both exhausted. We played backgammon for hours. We were very competitive, keeping score, always on speed, so we could really concentrate well. After three days? Not so much.

That’s when *Tomoz* would turn into Medusa. I tried to make a rule that we *had* to get some sleep after two days max. *Tomoz* agreed but never did. She just wanted to keep going, hoping it would never end.

We were pretty evenly matched, which was just as well. Sometimes, she would squeal with joy when she won. *Tomoz* hated losing and was a terrible loser.

When I would win, I would stay quiet for obvious reasons. Inside, I was squealing though.

Our conversations were always interesting—sometimes enlightening, always varied.

While we were playing backgammon, and as our time together was coming to an end, she would ask me leading questions.

*"Do you think I'd make a good mother?"*

Now, you know where this is leading. What do you think? Would *Tomoz* make a good mother?

Hell NO! Who would be taking care of the kids? *Me!*

She would love them, sure, and *try* to be there for them, but her happiness and doing whatever she wanted would always come before the needs of our children. So, I told her that.

Of course, I didn't tell her that, though she probably already knew. Having children would just be a way for her to trap me and get what she wanted.

This was a setup. A trap.

No matter how I answered, I was *totally fucked*.

If I didn't answer? *Totally fucked*.

The jaws of the Venus Fly Trap were open, just waiting for me to fall in.

So, which answer was the best option? Yes—lie my ass off. This was a *basises*. *Basises* is a word that will be explained later.

"You would make a wonderful mother, baby, and we will have beautiful children," I said, feeling the prickles of her jaws around my neck.

"Thank you, baby. You will make an amazing father; they will adore you," she said, playing to my ego.

I could see two beautiful children by our side—a little girl and a little boy. I could see us all playing and laughing together. It was an incredible vision of a happy, healthy family. This was what I had always wanted and dreamed of. It was very compelling.

I could be a great father. I love children. I'm still a big kid—I've never really grown up. As you can probably tell, I still live in a fairy tale. Whenever I went to parties where there were couples with their kids, I always ended up playing with the kids. I'd have them all running around the house and garden, laughing and screaming as they chased me. I'd throw them around, let them jump on the beds, or leap off tables into my arms. It was pure chaos—which, of course, they all loved. Naturally, one or more of them would end up crying. Then, I'd hand them back, leave, and go home.

I have two incredible nieces whom I love dearly. I did the exact same thing with them when they were kids. We'd have food fights in restaurants. I took them skydiving and

brought them to New York for the first time. We always had a blast. After I'd worn them out, I'd leave them crying for my sister to calm down and put them to bed. She would shoot me a fierce look and say, "Thanks very much."

That's not parenting. That's being a fun uncle.

I had a terrible childhood, and I don't know if I'm healed enough to be a father. What if I pass it on? What if I screw up the way I was screwed up? The thought sent a chill down my spine.

Then, I had another vision— *Tomoz* and I arguing, her storming out the door and leaving us all behind, of her going missing for days. The children wondering where their mummy was, feeling abandoned. There was no way I could risk doing that to my children.

*Tomoz* continued, "Baby, I want to have your children."

"That would be amazing. How many children do you think we should have?" I said. Don't judge. What would you say? Exactly.

"At least two. A boy and a girl. What names do you think we should give them?"

She wanted me to *see* them in my mind. I already had—and I had already given them names a long time ago.

"Yes, a boy and a girl would be perfect. I think we should call the boy Satori and the girl Namaste," I said. Listen, this was ten years ago—it seemed like a good idea back then.

"Well, we can talk about that. But baby, we need to get started right now. My biological clock is ticking. Can we have a baby?"

"I agree, baby. If we're going to have children, we need to have them soon. That's why we need to get our shit together first—so we can give them a safe, stable home to grow up in," I said, trying to talk reason into her madness.

"I know, that's very important. But we can work on that while I'm pregnant, baby. It won't take nine months to get things on track," she replied. Now, *she* was trying to talk reason into *my* madness.

"I agree, baby. We can have all that done in just a few months, so let's get it sorted first, and then we can start a family," I said, knowing full well this wasn't going to end well. Are you nervous? You should be.

"You think I'm stupid, don't you?" she accused.

I thought, *Far from it. You're running rings around me, and you know it.*

Fortunately, I bit my tongue, even though I knew it would only make my response sound silly.

“No, baby, I don’t think you’re stupid. We both know you’re extremely intelligent,” I said. Great answer, right? And true, by the way.

“Then why are you treating me like I am stupid? You’re just trying to put this off to get what you want without committing to me. That’s not fair, Stephen. I’m giving you the best years I have left. My time to have children will be gone, and then you’re going to leave me on the shelf.”

“You need to step up and be a man.” *Tomoz’s* voice was firm, her eyes locking onto mine like she was daring me to argue. “You can’t be a child forever, Stephen. You are not Peter Pan.” She let out a dry laugh, shaking her head. “I hate to burst your bubble, but you’re not Benjamin Button either; you’re not getting any younger.”

“Where are you going to find another woman like me? You’ll never find another woman like me. You tell me I’m everything you’ve ever wanted. Was that just something you said to get me into bed? Just like every other guy?” She sighed, her voice softer now. “I can’t keep waiting for you to grow up, Stephen. You need to show me you’re committed to me, not just say it.”

She gave me her Bambi-eyed, sexy, demure look.

I truly wanted to say, “*OK, let’s do it. Let’s get pregnant. We’ll figure the rest out later.*” But I couldn’t.

If she could prove to me that she could stop doing drugs and alcohol, if she could show me that she could be stable and not have these crazy outbursts of total madness, I would marry her and have children with her in a heartbeat. That would be a dream come true. But not until then.

“Baby, here’s my commitment to you: if we can get stable and stop these destructive fights, I promise you—I’ll marry you and start a family. But we have to fix that first,” I said, feeling pretty good about myself for coming up with such a logical, reasonable answer.

Unfortunately, that feeling didn’t last long.

*Tomoz* fired back. “What does that even mean? Nothing. That’s about as clear as your English fog. It’s a way not to make any commitment to me, and you know it. We’ll stop fighting and acting out once we *both* have what we want—not just what *you* want. You want me but won’t commit to me.”

She continued, “It will never work, Stephen. I can keep it together for a while, but when I think about it—when I see that you’re just using me—it makes me sad. Then depressed. Then angry. And that anger turns into rage. That’s when I have to act out.”

She threw her hands up.

"I can't leave you, so my only option is to act out—destroy something, go on a binge, drink myself into oblivion. And that gives me the false confidence to hurt you, so *you* feel *my* pain," she said, looking at me with pleading eyes.

"You can stop it all if you just show me you're committed. If you won't marry me, then give me a baby."

"You say *I* need to get my shit together, but it's *YOU* who needs to get *YOUR* shit together," she said, her frustration growing.

It all made sense. A lot of what she was saying was true. She wore me down. It all sounded amazing. It was what I wanted—so badly. I got so close to saying *OK*.

Then I felt this giant hand grabbing the back of my shirt, pulling me up and out of the jaws of the Venus Fly Trap just before they snapped shut.

"Baby, I *have* made a commitment to you—I just did again. *You* need to show *me* that *you* are committed. You've already promised to do these things anyway. I need *you* to follow through on *your* commitment," I said, standing my ground.

The hand on the back of my shirt let go.

I could see the wheels in her mind grinding as she tried to come up with something to convince me to change my mind. She decided to regroup and come at it another way later.

"Well, I will try my best, but you need to stop being so hard on me. I'll probably mess up, but you can't break up with me. *OK?*" she capitulated—for now.

"OK, baby," I said. *Phew*.

"Promise?" she pushed.

"Yes, baby, I promise," I capitulated. She had to have the last word.

We continued playing backgammon, and I made absolutely sure I lost.

I know what I said. First, shut the fuck up. Second, rules are made to be broken—especially when your freedom and life are in danger. Third... well, there is no third.

We would be up for days. *Literally*. *Slowly* but surely, the effects of the speed would wear off, becoming less and less potent.

At first, we'd feel happy, kind, and caring.

After three days? Not so much. Like I said, *Tomorrow* would turn into Medusa.

"Baby, we need to get some sleep. We agreed, remember?" I would say.

She would respond, "I'm not tired. I don't want to sleep."

I did try tying her down and gagging her, hoping she would eventually fall asleep, but it didn't work very well; in fact, it only made her even worse.

I'm kidding.

But what could I do? I couldn't sleep either. Who knows what she might get up to while I was asleep?

So, it would always end with her becoming annoyed and angry, and often, it would build into rage. Usually, because she was exhausted—and because I still hadn't asked her to marry me.

Like I said, she would start thinking, *He got what he wanted, but when am I going to get what I want? He's the same as all the other guys—he just wants to use me.*

Once she started thinking that way, it just spiraled down from there. She'd get angrier and angrier.

She would say things like, "If you're just going to have me come here, fuck me for three days, and then send me home, I want to get paid. Why don't you just pay me \$1,500 per month, and I'll be your whore?"

It was a very tempting deal.

Do you have any idea how much money that would save me?

I'm kidding.

She was implying that she was open to being a prostitute. She knew that would piss me off. But what would she do if I said, "OK, deal"?

She would have gone crazy. She would've said what she had so many times before: "*See? I knew it. You are never going to commit to me. All you want is a prostitute—like the ones you have in every city you go to. FUCK YOU!*"

Or some version of that.

This was yet another reason why I felt like I couldn't say *anything*. I knew that whatever I said, she would use it against me.

And the truth was, some of what she was thinking *was* true, so I couldn't blame her for feeling that way. That's what made it so difficult to get her to calm down.

I had to make sure she didn't provoke me into a physical confrontation, get the police involved, and take over the house.

It was a delicate process—lots of shouting, pouting, and then consoling her before she finally settled down. I had to give her a lot of reassurance.

But somehow, it usually worked out.

You might still be wondering, *how on earth did he put up with all this? There's no way this happened. This can't be true. No one could be that stupid.*

But it did. It is. And I was. I was completely infatuated with her—utterly co-dependent, addicted to her. I was truly, madly, deeply in love.



The lows were as crushing as the highs were exhilarating—and that’s addictive too. I was willing to endure the lows to experience the highs. That had always been the pattern of my life.

It’s a reflection of me being bipolar. Many people diagnosed with bipolar disorder refuse to take medication to stabilize their moods because they don’t want to give up the highs. So, we tolerate the deep depressions and look forward to the highs.

This story tends to focus on the chaos, the destructive behavior, and the negative consequences. As you will see, this is just the tip of the iceberg. But as you’ll read here and in future books, there were countless incidents of madness and mayhem. There was a price to pay, and I paid it in full.

Yet, it was worth paying the price. Because along with all of the madness, chaos, and mayhem, there were also many, many wonderful moments—times when there was no drama—just incredible memories I will treasure for the rest of my life. As you will see.

When *Tomoz* left, I watched her get in the limo, her body elegantly slipping onto the leather seat, followed by those gorgeous, sky-high legs. She would often flash me and laugh naughtily.

Then, as I closed her door and walked back to the house’s front steps, she would wave at me with a sad smile—like she wished she wasn’t leaving.

I would smile back. Sometimes, just as the limo was pulling away, she would ask Wes, the driver, to wait. Then, she would get out of the limo, run over to me, wrap her hands around my neck, and give me a long, romantic kiss. After she finished devouring me, she would slip back into the limo and blow me kisses as it disappeared down the road.

I wished she wasn’t leaving. But at the same time, I was relieved. It was a strange feeling.

I would watch her leave, that familiar, wistful ache settling in my chest. But soon enough, the house would fall silent, and in that silence, the emptiness would creep in—just as familiar as her presence.

As the limo disappeared into the distance, I couldn’t help but wonder: Would I ever see her again?

# Chapter Twenty-Three

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## “He Stole My Phone!”

The following weekend, we traveled to Long Island for another event. Once again, we talked about her drinking. I told *Tomoz* I needed to focus on my business—I was bleeding money from being too distracted, and she was getting a little crazy again.

“Look,” I said, “we’re both on a downward spiral right now. Can we agree to stay off alcohol for the next two months? And maybe you go back to AA?”

*Tomoz* said, “Of course, baby. You’re right. I have no problem with that.”

I felt like saying, *Who are you, and what have you done with my girlfriend?*—But I thought better of it. I took the deal and ran.

With *Tomoz* agreeing, I felt so much better. There was no bar in the hotel, and we only left the hotel once all weekend, which made things easier. We took the team to a nice Italian restaurant, and nobody drank alcohol. The team were all Mormons, so they never drank anyway—at least not in public.

Still, *Tomoz* was a major distraction in the ballroom. She *tried* to be helpful, like making me a juice in the morning, but she forgot to put the lid on the juicer. The hotel staff had to come clean up the mess, which was splattered all over the room, the walls, and the carpet.

It was yet another confirmation that *Tomoz* would be a disaster at being any help—which, of course, was precisely what she wanted me to realize. If she didn’t want to do something, she would do it so badly and make such a mess that you’d never ask her to do it again. That way, it became *your* idea that she didn’t do it ever again.

Genius.

It was exasperating and somehow funny at the same time. She lived completely in her own fantasy world. Sometimes, she was like a caricature. I can’t explain it, but even when

she was being a brat, even when I knew she was being manipulative, or when she said or did mean, hurtful things—I still loved her. So annoying.

We flew back on Monday, and *Tomoz* invited her friend Chanyce—a.k.a *Hell on Heels*—to join us for the evening.

We sat around talking, and to my surprise, Chanyce was actually very nice and calm. She even apologized for how she had acted when she first arrived at the party.

Turns out, we really hit it off. We were having a great conversation, and then—at some point— *Tomoz* sneaked away. I had no idea where she had gone. Maybe her mother called? Or Melania?

Then suddenly, Chanyce got a phone call. There had been a death in the family, and she had to leave. Chanyce excused herself and left.

And *Tomoz*? Where the hell was she?

She finally came outside—wasted. I found out later that she had gone upstairs to the bar and had been drinking. I didn't bring it up that night. I mean, what was the point? Plus, if things went sideways, I didn't have anyone there with me.

I was deeply disappointed. We sat outside by the pool on the loveseat and talked—well, she slurred incomprehensibly, with me occasionally nodding and gazing out over the pool at the lake.

It was surreal. Sitting beside this beautiful woman while, at the same time, feeling completely alone. Eventually, she just keeled over and fell asleep in my lap. That actually made things easier—I no longer had to worry about getting into a fight with her while she was drunk.

As I sat there, stroking her hair, her head resting in my lap, I thought, *This is your life now. Is this what you want? It will never get better. Are you sure you really want to do this for the rest of your life?*

I carry a really good therapist around in my head. Unfortunately, I rarely listen to her.

*"Maybe not for the rest of my life, no. She's not Miss Right; she's just Miss Right Now,"*

I told the mobile therapist in my head. But I was getting closer to letting *Tomoz* go. It would be tough, but I could do it. Right?

Look, unless you have something positive to say, don't say anything, okay? I'm very fragile at this point.

She woke up groggy around 2 a.m., and I took her to bed.

I couldn't sleep. Instead, I sat in the armchair in the bedroom, staring at the view, reflecting on how we got here. From finding *The One* on the website...

The high-handed typist. *Me, me, me.*

*"Favorite flower?"*

*"Bird of Paradise."*

*"Mine too! A bit expensive, though. What's your second favorite?"*

*"Venus Fly Trap."*

Our first date—the dinner, backgammon, and making out in the Rolls. Everyone in the restaurant could see. Denny's. Then, all the chaos. *This is MY house, and YOU need to leave!*

So, so much in such a short time. So much joy. So much pain. I knew it couldn't last forever, but I wasn't ready to lose her yet.

The following weekend, I went to Phoenix. *Tomoz* stayed at her apartment so she could hang out with Melania.

When I arrived back in Tampa, I picked *Tomoz* up in the limo on my way to Sarasota. She was drunk.

By now, I had completely caved on the no-drinking rule. I just asked that she not drink to excess. I have to admit—she was even sexier when she was a little drunk. Our sex went to another level.

The next night, I had arranged for us to go to dinner with a friend who had lived in Singapore and had been in charge of the Asian division of Ernst & Young, one of the largest accounting firms in the world.

We met at one of my events in Fort Lauderdale. Bob Whitman and his wife, Elaine, lived in Miramar Country Club—an upscale community about two hours away. As you can imagine, he was very conservative and proper.

*Tomoz* was supposed to come with me, but at the last minute, she said she wasn't feeling well—knowing full well I'd have to go and leave her alone at the house with all the alcohol.

I spent a very awkward evening as the third wheel with Bob and Elaine. They were extremely polite and said they understood. They are wonderful people.

I drove the two hours home, wondering what I would find when I arrived.

*Tomoz* did not disappoint.

There she was, outside by the pool, on the phone with her mother—wasted.

After she finished her conversation, she got into the pool. I got in with her, but I still felt alone. When you're with someone who's really drunk, and you're not, you exist in two completely different realities—until one of you sobers up or you join them by getting drunk.

I thought of the movie *When a Man Loves a Woman* with Meg Ryan and Andy Garcia. Ryan is an alcoholic, and Garcia is her devoted lover. He realizes she lives in a different world—a world he can't meet her in. At one point, he finally has to let her go.

Deep down, I knew I had to let *Tomoz* go. There was no future with her—only more of this. More chaos. More pain.

The following morning, we were sitting around the house. *Tomoz* was being difficult again.

I called Jerry and asked him to come over. I told him what had happened the night before and that I had finally decided—it was time for her to leave. It was over.

How on earth was I going to pull this off without her calling the police and getting myself arrested? I had no idea.

*Tomoz* decided to go buy some cigarettes in the Escalade. I decided this was my opportunity to get her out of the house.

I watched her drive off, then went into the kitchen. Jerry was sitting at the breakfast bar, engrossed in his phone as usual. Frederic was either folding my underwear—his signature four folds—or loading the dishwasher. I can't remember which.

"Hey guys, I need your help—quickly," I said urgently. "We need to get all of her stuff into the Rolls and out of here before she gets back from the store."

They both just stared at me blankly.

"Guys, come on! We don't have much time. Frederic, grab all her toiletries from the bathroom—go!"

He immediately put down my underwear (or the dishes) and sprinted down the hallway towards the bathroom.

I turned to Jerry, who by now had fully grasped what I was doing—and he looked terrified. He knew he was about to play a significant role in this, and *Tomoz* would go crazy. I mean, freak out.

"Jerry, quick, come on! Let's get all her clothes out of the closet and into the car."

And just like that, it was chaos.

The three of us—Jerry, **René**, and me—frantically ran through the house, grabbing her clothes, makeup, toiletries, and everything else. Clothes and hangers flew everywhere, bumping into each other—it looked like an *SNL* comedy sketch.

We were terrified she'd come back before we were done. Every second felt like a gamble.

We had to clear everything—every last item—so that if the police came, nothing of hers would be left in the house—not a single trace.

We threw the last of her things into the Rolls.

“Get in the car and drive away,” I told Jerry.

“To where?” he asked.

“How the fuck do I know? Just *away from here!*” I said frantically.

Suddenly, I saw *Tomoz* pulling up in the Escalade. *Shit.*

I walked out to meet her as she stopped the car. Without hesitation, I opened the passenger door and got in.

“What are you doing?” she asked, eyes narrowing. She immediately knew something was going on.

“I’m going to drive you back to St. Petersburg,” I said.

“Why?” she demanded.

I started to explain and then realized that was a rhetorical question—she already knew *exactly* why.

When she realized I was serious, she, of course, went crazy. She shouted, “This is *my* house! I *live* here! You can’t just keep throwing me out whenever the fuck it suits you!” she screamed. “You’re fucking crazy! I’m calling the police!”

Exactly what I had expected, but also precisely what I hoped to avoid.

I tried to grab her phone from her. *Big mistake.*

She was too quick for me and too strong.

At this point, I thought they should open a police station here in the community *just for us.*

When she had finished ordering another crazy scene for the neighbors—one they could gossip about with righteous indignation—she finally put her phone down.

I grabbed it.

Why? I have no fucking idea. I panicked. I was so stressed out I just *reacted.*

She glared at me.

*Tomoz* had made some excellent points. And honestly? She was right about a lot.

It *wasn’t* fair to keep doing this. It was just wrong to keep throwing her out whenever it suited me. This whole thing had turned into a twisted game of power and control. *We* had turned it into that. Both of us are trying to keep the upper hand. Both of us trying to win.

But there were no winners here. Two people tearing each other apart, feeding each other’s worst fears.

At this point, it wasn’t even about love—it was a matter of survival for both of us.

We both had everything to lose in the next few minutes or hours, depending on how this latest episode of *Cops and Robbers* played out.

*Tomoz* was frantic.

She jumped out of the car and ran to the front door, yanking at the handles trying to get into the house. Of course, they were locked.

From the office window, Jerry watched. She spotted him and started pleading with him through the glass.

He just stood there looking at her with his arms spread, saying, "What can I do?"

She wasn't giving up. She circled the house, checking for another way in.

Meanwhile, I realized keeping her phone was a bad idea. The police were already on the way, but I didn't need her calling God-knows-who.

So, I slid her phone back onto the passenger seat of the Escalade.

*Tomoz* returned from her search for a place to break in. She came over to me, and we talked.

Well, *she* shouted obscenities, and *I* tried to calm her down without success.

"Give me my phone!" she screamed.

"I don't have it," I said flatly. Which, at this point, was both completely accurate and a lie.

"Yes, you do!" she shrieked.

"No, I don't," I continued to lie. I don't usually lie. Well... only when I need to. Yes, on a strict *need-to-lie* basis. And this was one of those *basises*. (That's my word, by the way. A completely valid term for justifying when one absolutely must bend the truth.)

*Tomoz* stormed off. She plopped down on the curb, arms crossed, eyes blazing, waiting for the Sheriff to arrive.

She was certain I'd have no choice but to let her back in, convinced she could play her cards just right and get me arrested. The Venus Fly Trap would snap shut. She'd have my house, my cars, everything, and then suck the life out of me.

I called Jerry.

"What the *hell* are you doing?" I barked.

"I... uh... I don't know where to go," he stammered.

"I TOLD YOU TO DRIVE AWAY!" I snapped.

"Where *to*?" he asked again.

"I DON'T KNOW! JUST *LEAVE*!"

Jerry panicked. He couldn't figure out how to put the Rolls in drive.

This was officially turning into a scene from a *Three Stooges* movie.

It sounds funny now but at the time? Not so much.

We were all afraid of this woman and what she might do. It was incredible how *Tomoz* could put the fear of God into everyone around her.

Even my psychic Debra, (hey, I thought we were past this. Everyone should have one)—was terrified of *Tomoz*.

I once took *Tomoz* over to Debra's house for a reading. I lay on a massage mat in one of the back bedrooms while Debra read Tarot cards for *Tomoz*.

When I came out, Debra was visibly shaken. She pulled me aside and whispered, "Get her out of your life. Now."

She saged her house for two days after we left. To this day, she says she still has nightmares about *Tomoz*.

So, considering all that, I did what nobody else would do—nothing.

Debra later referred me to another psychic in LA. She said she was the psychic to the stars. I paid her to do a reading for *Tomoz*. Afterward, I asked her what she thought.

The psychic sighed and said, "She spent most of the hour telling me how amazing she is. She's just not ready to do the work."

And that was? All together now—THAT.

Meanwhile, back in my actual crisis, Jerry was still sitting in the damn Rolls.

I explained how to put the car in drive. Finally, the garage door opened, and he sped away.

Thank God. This was stressing me out.

I was ready to throw up. The police would be here any second, and based on past experiences, this could go either way.

I had to play this very cool.

*Tomoz* had no idea what we had pulled off while she was gone. We moved so fast. You would never believe we could do all that in the 30 minutes she was gone. Honestly, I wasn't sure we could do it. I think God was on our side. Okay, kidding—but it was a miracle we managed to pull it off.

As Jerry drove down the street, he passed the patrol cars heading toward the house. The whole thing felt surreal.

The first patrol car pulled into the circular driveway as *Tomoz* rushed to meet them. Of course, she wanted to control the narrative.



I hung back, trying to look cool and calm while, inside, I was burning hot and freaking out. Years of speaking on stage while my life was in crisis had given me the skills to *appear* in control externally, even when the reality was something else entirely.

These two officers seemed much calmer this time than the others who showed up last time. It was so nice that we were getting to meet the entire Sheriff's Department.

I stayed back while *Tomoz* delivered her version of events. She pleaded her case. "I live here. All my belongings are here. He won't let me into the house, and he stole my phone."

Of course, the officers knew she had the phone just minutes ago—after all, she was the one who called the police.

"Where was your phone when you last had it?" one of the officers asked.

"It was on the passenger seat of the car," she said, pointing at the Escalade.

She knew it wasn't there. And she knew they'd realize I had taken it.

One of the officers opened the car's passenger door—and there was her phone, sitting right on the passenger seat. He held it up.

"Is this your phone?" he asked.

Her mouth fell open, but no words came out. For the first time, she looked unsure. And just like that, her credibility started to crack.

She snatched the phone from his hand and launched back into her accusations about me.

"This is my home! This is where I live! All my belongings are here—go and look! He's crazy and violent! He beat me!" she cried, shoving her arm toward them, where she had somehow managed to make it bleed.

For some reason, the officers didn't seem convinced. At least, not yet.

One of them turned to me. "Does she live here?" he asked.

"No, officer," I said. Same basises.

"She says all her things are here. Can we take a look inside the house?"

Now, I knew I didn't have to let them in, but of course, I wanted to.

"Sure, come in," I said calmly.

The Venus Fly Trap couldn't believe it. "He is going to let them in the house? What an idiot. Now I've got you," she thought. The Venus Fly Trap was sure she was about to devour her prey—me.

She turned to me and gave me an evil smile. Well, she smiled anyway.

I led them inside and started showing them around the house.

One of the officers sat down on the couch, talking to me and keeping me occupied, while the other discreetly looked around. She checked drawers and cupboards without me watching over her shoulder. I was nervous—what if we had left something behind?

“This isn’t the first time we’ve been here, is it?” the officer on the couch asked.

“No, not exactly.” The whole situation was humiliating.

“Look,” he said, lowering his voice, “this girl is bad news. When we were driving down the street to get here, I saw her digging her nails into her arm, dragging them across her skin, hard, to make it look like you had abused her. She wanted us to find her like that, raw and red, so we’d take her side without question.”

My stomach twisted. She wasn’t just lying—she was staging a scene, twisting reality to fit her story.

But this time, she had miscalculated. They saw through it.

Still, I felt sick. It hurt knowing she was so determined to get me arrested, to send me to jail. Then again, I had just thrown her out of her home. What did she have to lose?

She wanted to show me. She wanted to win.

All’s fair in love and war.

“You need to stop letting her in your house,” he warned.

I let out a sigh of relief. They believed me. Thank God. I wasn’t going to jail.

“I know, I know,” I said sheepishly.

“She says you beat her?” Before I could respond, he continued, “Look, I’ve seen it all,” he said.

He knew about the sex room. Of course, he did.

“I know some of these girls like it rough,” he added. “Just be careful.”

I know, I was shocked too! Holy shit. Of course, he would never admit he said that, but it was further proof that God really *was* on my side. Kidding.

I guess we were officially the talk of the local sheriff’s department. Fame at last.

The other officer returned. “Nothing here,” she said, scratching her head, glancing at me like she knew *Tomoz’s* stuff had been here until very recently—probably within the last hour.

Meanwhile, *Tomoz* stood in the driveway, arms folded, looking smug—confident they would come out with me in handcuffs and hand her the keys to my house.

Instead, the officers casually walked outside, talking to me like it was no big deal.

“Well, thanks for letting us look around. Obviously, she doesn’t live here. Sorry for any inconvenience,” the male officer said.

*Tomoz* looked like she had seen a ghost.

No, not the Rolls-Royce kind—a *real* ghost. If that makes any sense.

The officers turned to her. “None of your things are in there,” He said. “You need to leave.”

She was absolutely stunned. How the hell...?

She remonstrated, argued, and pleaded—but they said there was nothing they could do.

“Look,” the officer finally said, his patience wearing thin, “this is private property. Mr. Edwards wants you to leave. Right now, you’re trespassing. You need to go if you don’t want to be arrested.”

*Tomoz* was furious. She stormed off, plopped down on the curb, and pulled out her phone. She called her friend Chanyce—a.k.a Hell on Heels.

She sat there, seething until Chanyce arrived. When they finally left, I swear I could see steam coming out of the car windows as they sped away.

Once *Tomoz* was gone, the sheriffs left too.

**René** turned to me. “I need to leave,” he said, already halfway out the door. “Can I take the rest of the day off?”

“Sure,” I said. “But finish folding my underwear first.”

I don’t think he heard me. He bolted. Maybe he was scared of what I’d ask him to do next.

Now I had a real problem. How the hell does he fold my underwear four times? I had grown to like it.

I sighed and went back inside, collapsing onto the family room sofa.

Just as I lay down, my phone rang.

Jerry.

I had completely forgotten about him.

Jerry was freaking out.

“What the fuck is going on?” he blurted. “I’m driving around Sarasota with a car full of stolen women’s clothes, in a fucking Rolls-Royce that I don’t even own—risking my life! What if *Tomoz* called the police and told them I stole her stuff and took off in the Rolls? I called my friend—who used to be a sheriff. He told me I could be in big trouble if I got pulled over. He told me to ditch the car and—”

I cut him off before he had an emotional breakdown—or a heart attack.

“Just calm down,” I said, exhausted. “She’s gone. You can come back now. Just leave the car in a parking lot and get an Uber back here. We don’t want her stuff back here in case she does call the police, and they come looking for it.”

“What? How the hell did you pull that off?” He sounded like he was finally breathing again.

“Just get back here, and I’ll explain everything. The sheriffs are gone,” I said, hanging up before he could ask more questions.

I let my phone drop onto my chest and sank back into the sofa.

What the fuck just happened?

Once again, I had acted on impulse. I just threw her out—again.

What did I expect?

Was I losing my mind? That was a rhetorical question.

I *know* I had completely lost my mind.

Thanks for the support though.

Did I really want to be done with her?

Or was this just payback for breaking her promise? For getting drunk again?

Maybe both.

What had I done?

*Well, you basically threw her out on the street. That’s not right. She doesn’t deserve that. I thought in my head.*

Now I’m feeling guilty.

But at this point, I’m committed to the process. I mean, I *can*’t just call her up and say, “Okay, you can come back now.”

For now, I was just relieved things hadn’t gotten worse than they did.

Jerry came bursting through the front door.

“Bro, that was crazy! You have no idea what I just went through! I was so fucking freaked out. I didn’t know what to do—I didn’t want to let you down, but I got paranoid. I was sure she had called the police and that I would get pulled over any second. I was about to dump the Rolls in the Walmart parking lot,” he said, collapsing into the armchair next to the sofa.

He looked at me, eyes wide. “Are you okay? You look pale.”

I sat up, trying to pull myself together. “Have you looked in the mirror?” I shot back. “You look like you were pulled through a hedge backwards.” His hair was a complete mess from him running his hands through it while he was stressed out, driving around

town with stolen women's clothes—precisely the way you'd expect any criminal on the run from the police in a Rolls-Royce would.

Jerry walked over to the mirror above the fireplace in the formal sitting room and started trying to straighten his hair.

I got up from the sofa in the family room, walked into the formal sitting room, and sat on the couch, watching Jerry make an even bigger mess of his hair.

"To answer your question—no, I am not okay. How could I be?" I said, exasperated.

"Bro, you have got to stop doing this to yourself. And me! You just walked into the kitchen, mid-coffee, and said, 'Hey Jerry, go steal all her clothes, toss them in the Rolls, and drive off.'"

"Who does that? You get something in your head, don't think it through, and everything goes fucking crazy. What were you even thinking? Why couldn't you break up with her like a normal person?" he said, equally exasperated.

I looked at him like *he* was now the one being crazy.

"Really? Have you forgotten who we're dealing with here? But I get your point. I felt angry that she had betrayed my trust again, and I needed her to be gone. You're right—I panicked. I shouldn't have done it. At least, not like that. Now I feel guilty and stupid."

I paused and looked at him.

"I'm sorry for pulling you into this again," I said.

"Bro, when she was looking at me from outside the window, begging me to let her in—it was sad. She looked desperate. I felt bad for her," he said.

"I know. It was really messed up. I don't know what I'm going to do. We have to get her stuff back to her before she calls the police, and they come looking for it," I said.

We were only temporarily out of the jaws of the Venus Fly Trap. We still had to get her stuff back to her—and that could get sticky.

Jerry came up with an idea. "Lia's brother, Jose, is a cab driver. We can have him take her stuff to her."

It was a great idea. The next day, Jerry and I went to the parking lot, took all the stuff out of the Rolls, packed it into old suitcases, and loaded it into Jose's cab.

**René** was MIA—probably still recovering from yesterday's trauma. I hope he comes back soon; my underwear folding is hopeless.

Jose called *Tomoz* to let her know he was on his way with her stuff. They arranged to meet at Chanyce's hair salon.

*Tomoz* was waiting—spitting feathers—ready to ask questions and gather evidence that I had stolen her belongings.

As soon as Jose arrived, she demanded, “Who gave you these cases?”

“I have no idea. I was just told to pick them up,” Jose said. “They were in a parking lot where they told me to get them. I never saw anyone.”

She didn’t believe him for a second, but she also knew there was nothing she could do.

He told me later that she was utterly baffled, angry, and frustrated.

I had escaped the Venus Fly Trap again!

And that was it. I never saw or heard from *Tomoz* again.

Of course, this wasn’t the end—the games had barely begun.

Yes, *Tomoz* had acted out, but so had I. I should never have done what I did. It was mean. When she returned to the house, and I told her it was over, she went into shock. She had no clothes and no home. She was terrified. She was losing everything and was about to be abandoned—her worst fear.

She was furious with me and wanted to hurt me just as much as I had hurt her. To her, it must have felt like I had just discarded her like an old toy. How could I do that to her?

I had no idea that I was still under the spell of the Venus Fly Trap or that I was far from being free from her jaws.

This wasn’t the end of us—just the end of another chapter in the story.

Guess what happens next. You will never guess what happens. You will just have to read the next chapter.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

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## “I Would Like To Marry You In That Dress”

When **René** told me about the prestigious butler training program in France that he wanted to attend, I knew I couldn’t stand in his way. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and though I hated to lose him, I wished him well.

His absence left a gap I needed to fill quickly. What would become of my underwear? I asked around. No, not about my underwear. Jerry suggested his friend Josh—a capable, resourceful man with a proven track record of handling... delicate tasks. After a brief meeting, no pun intended, I knew he was the right fit. Josh was hired.

*Tómoz* never once broke up with me. I, on the other hand, ended things repeatedly—each time hoping to regain some control. It was a weak tactic, a predictable cycle I had fallen into my entire life.

It all stemmed from my insecurity and childhood trauma. I would get scared and overwhelmed, convinced the problem was unsolvable and permanent. The only way I knew how to deal with it was to push the person away.

As I mentioned earlier, whenever we broke up, *Tómoz* would send me long, mean, and spiteful texts. She would threaten to talk to my parents or the people I worked with.

She’d pout, smack my arm—not hard, just enough to say, “I’m mad.”

As if I didn’t already know.

“Are we done?” I would ask.

She would then hit me again. Message received.

She would verbally abuse me and, of course, pull her favorite move—calling the police to have me arrested. Nothing too bad.

I wanted a beautiful, sexy girl on my arm—someone to play with and have crazy sex on tap. She wanted a rich husband who would let her do whatever she wanted—someone to play with, give her all the attention she craved, and have crazy sex.

We were the perfect match. If only we could control each other.

I would get angry and fearful and tell her to leave. She would get angry and fearful and try to get me arrested—so I had to leave.

We were both just trying to protect ourselves. I wanted to change *Tomoz*, to mold her into the version of her that I wanted her to be, instead of accepting her for who she was. On the other hand, she just wanted someone to love her for who she was.

Of course, after *Tomoz* drove away—smoke practically pouring from the car windows—remorse set in. The way she left—fast, reckless—made my stomach twist. She didn't want to go, and I didn't want her to leave, but I was too damn stubborn to stop her. And I sure as hell wasn't going to be the first to call. She knew that. We both did.

She had always been the stronger one, the one in control.

So, as usual, she called.

Hearing her voice now, I exhaled, relieved.

"Hi," she said—her favorite opening line, mine too.

And just like that, she had me.

Her voice, smooth as silk, wrapped around me, and all I could say back was, "Hi."

"That was quite a move you pulled on me," she teased, her voice light.

But I wasn't taking the bait—I'd fallen into enough traps already.

I cleared my throat. "Where are you?"

"At my apartment," she answered.

I hesitated, unsure how to keep the conversation going. "What are you doing?"

She laughed softly. "I'm calling you silly." She always called me that—mostly when I was being silly.

"I mean, you would never call me, would you?" she admonished.

"No," I said, embarrassed.

"Why?"

She was used to men chasing her and couldn't understand why I would never chase her.

"I don't know why. I'm afraid, I guess," I admitted—though what I really wanted to say was, "*Because I'm a weak, insecure asshole.*"

"Afraid of what?" She sounded confused.



"Well... you," I admitted. She could get anything out of me. She could have been an interrogator for the CIA.

"Me?" she said, feigning shock.

"Afraid you won't pick up the phone or, if you do, you'll be angry with me and tell me it's over. Stuff like that."

This was not a comfortable conversation for me.

"Have I ever done that?" she asked.

"I guess not." I was starting to sound like a five-year-old. Which, unfortunately, she liked.

"Look, you can't just throw me away when you don't get your way, Stephen."

I thought, "I'm sorry, who made you my mother?"

Then, I answered my own question.

I did.

I put her in that role.

As hard as it might be to believe, *Tomoz* somehow justified her drinking again—and, of course, we got back together.

Fool me once; shame on you. Fool me twice; shame on me. After three, four, or five times? You should be locked up for your own protection.

Somehow, she convinced me it was my fault. *My fault?* Why? Fucked if I know. Who cares. Though I hate to admit it, I was just as much to blame as she was. Well... maybe 60/40.

I went to pick up *Tomoz* three days later. Sorry, I mean, three *minutes* later.

I drove over to her apartment in the Bentley, and the second she saw me, she came running out of the building and jumped into my arms. We held each other so tightly we could barely breathe. She rested her head on my shoulder, her body shaking as she let out all her pent-up emotions.

It was like a dry sob. *Tomoz* hated crying—she avoided it at all costs. She never wanted to appear weak.

I just held her, my arms wrapped tightly around her back. Neither of us could let go.

Finally, we had to move aside to let some tenants pass, and we reluctantly pulled apart.

I gently took her hand, and we walked to the car. I opened the door for her, and she slowly slid into the seat. Letting her go—even for a few seconds—felt like torture.

Her eyes followed me as I walked around the car.

The moment I got back in the car, we embraced and kissed.

If all this seems like too much—first, shut the fuck up. Second, we had just *almost* lost each other. It had been traumatizing for both of us. We never wanted to leave each other's side again. That's how it felt for both of us. Our greatest fear is to be abandoned. Like I said, we were mirrors of each other.

We were both relieved and happy—very happy.

We drove back to the house with the roof down. *Tomoz* lay her head on my shoulder and slipped her hand into my pants, which I thought was a nice touch.

For the next couple of days, we did nothing but kiss, hold each other, make love, sit by the pool, eat together in the kitchen, play backgammon, and talk. Just the two of us.

We shut off our phones. No one was allowed to come by.

We cocooned.

We never left each other's side. Sometimes, we would just be together in the same room—on our computers, watching TV, or simply sitting quietly. We just wanted to be near each other. To feel close to each other.

We wanted to be so close that we were inside each other.

We wanted to know what the other was thinking and how the other truly felt.

We craved assurance. We needed certainty.

Of course, the truth is you can only find those things within yourself.

But we did our best.

We were living together now. *Tomoz* started to feel safe—we *both* did.

We were living in an incredible home. Yet, the emotional turmoil we were constantly going through was a sharp contrast to the tranquil setting. Proof of the old adage: Money can't buy love or happiness.

At the same time, we were very blessed to have this beautiful safe haven.

We were sitting by the pool, *Tomoz* was flipping through a magazine. She found some dresses she loved and showed me. One, in particular, caught her eye—an amazing Monarch Butterfly dress.

She knew I had a strong affinity for the Monarch Butterfly.

"I would like to marry you in that dress," she said.

That touched my heart. I would have loved nothing more than to marry *Tomoz*, have a family, and live happily ever after.

But that dream felt out of reach.

I felt like I wanted to cry. So, as usual, I used humor to deflect my emotions and feelings.

"Babe, I would not look good in that dress—it would show my thick ankles."

She didn't hesitate.

*Smack.* Magazine to my shoulder.

I dodged the next one, but she was on me, swinging mercilessly.

"Abuse!" I yelled, running.

She kept hitting, but we were laughing. As I ran away, she chased me, and the blows rained down mercilessly. The bruises were terrible.

By the time she finished beating me like a dog, the magazine was in tatters.

We ended up on the bedroom floor, laughing hysterically.

*Tomoz* managed to salvage the picture of the Monarch Butterfly dress and posted it on my bathroom mirror.

I'll never forget that dress.

She made me laugh while making her point loud and clear.

We were in love again. Hard to believe.

She started talking about the wedding—where it would be, who would be there.

"I want you to meet Daddy." She said, looking at my face, searching for a reaction.

I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to burst her bubble. At the same time, I didn't want to promise her anything I wouldn't follow through on.

So, I said, "Baby, I would love to meet him."

Which was true.

She was so excited—she squealed and clapped her hands together like a teenage girl who had just been picked as prom queen.

Before I could change my mind, she immediately called her father.

He picked up, and *Tomoz* started gushing. I could barely understand half of what she was saying.

By the time she hung up, her father had agreed to come to Sarasota out to meet me—in one of his Souped up, renovated classic cars.

This was getting intense.

But I was happy because she was happy.

And who knows? If we could just keep it together...

A few days later, her father drove out to see us with his partner.

We met them at a restaurant on St. Armands Circle

It felt like I was about to meet the President. Or God—I'm not sure which.

The they arrived in a completely over the top classic car. I am not sure what make it was, may be a Chevrolet, from the 1920's? Anyway it was totally tricked out. Sky Blue

with a Cream Convertible top, with huge Chrome exhausts lining each side, It had been tuned up, and you could hear it's throaty roar a mile away.

Her father parked the piece of art right outside the restaurant in a no parking zone. He was not taking any chances getting it scratched or damaged. The ticket would be worth it.

*Tomoz* and I walked out of the restaurant to greet them. They stepped out of the car looking like Bonnie and Clyde.

It was all quite something—very impressive.

The Rolls, was parked in a normal parking spot down the road.

He definitely made his point.

I mean, he could have just driven here in one of his Ferraris.

Kidding.

Mr. Kingston was very nice—yet still intimidating. He was easy to talk to and clearly happy to see his daughter.

His partner, Rosetta, was according to *Tomoz*, the woman she found her father cheating on his mother with. Rosetta was very calm and relaxed. They balance each other out nicely.

We went for lunch at a casual restaurant called 'Shore' on St. Armands Circle. We sat and talked for three hours.

*Tomoz* was beaming.

Rosetta and *Tomoz* got on very well. They were almost like sisters—competing for their parents' attention, yet they seemed to care about each other.

Her father loved the dynamic because it put him at the center, in the power position.

"So, how are you, Rosetta?" *Tomoz* asked him as she reached across the table and took hold of Rosetta's hands in hers.

"I am doing well, *Tomoz*. Thank you for asking," she replied, then added, "I'm happy that you have found this handsome man who seems to adore you."

I could see he meant it.

She had a wonderful energy—kind, calm, and caring.

"I know. He seems to be willing to put up with me." She smiled and looked at me.

"Well, if your father doesn't hurry up and put a ring on me, you might have some competition girl!" Rosetta teased with a wink and a smile.

"He won't let me out of the bedroom Rosetta so you have no chance!"

Typical *Tomoz* —straight to the raw.

We all burst out laughing. Well, all of us *except* her father.

We turned to look at him, silently asking: *What the fuck is wrong with you?*

Then, after making sure all eyes were on him, he laughed.

Classic. Had to grab the attention first.

It was interesting watching him with Rosetta. He was so uptight, while Rosetta was effortlessly relaxed. Somehow, Rosetta seemed to soften her father and make him happy. They made a nice couple.

We kept chatting, everyone catching up, and *Tomoz* made sure to include me as much as possible. But, of course, she couldn't resist asking awkward questions.

"So, what do you think of my Father?" she asked, putting me on the spot and loving it.

I smirked. "Well, I don't know much about him yet, but he seems to have a nice girlfriend," I said, winking at Rosetta.

Then, without missing a beat, I added, "I mean, if I were to ever cheat on you, I'd definitely consider Rosetta to be my first choice."

Everyone cracked up.

Except *Tomoz*.

"Oh, he is cute *and* funny," Rosetta said, still laughing.

Even her father found it funny—primarily because of *Tomoz's* reaction.

"All I can say is, you better not fall asleep before I do tonight, or your ass will be mine," *Tomoz* warned, and we all burst into laughter.

The mood was much more relaxed now. Mr. Kingston was starting to enjoy his visit—the wine seemed to help. Rosetta struck me as the kind of woman who could enjoy herself wherever she went.

We talked about her father's love of Classic cars and the types of cars he owned. He was passionate about them and came alive when he spoke about collecting them.

They had recently been involved in a pretty harrowing car crash.

They had both genuinely believed they were going to be killed. It was a harrowing experience for them both—one that made them realize how fragile life is and how important it is to make the most of every day.

Then Rosetta said, "Yeah, I decided right then and there that I was going to retire and enjoy the rest of my days."

Mr. Kingston looked at me and said dryly, "She hasn't worked a day in his life for more than 30 years."

We all laughed. Except Rosetta.

Rosetta shot back, “What do you mean? Living with you is a full-time job!” Then we all laughed.

*Tomoz* excused herself to go powder her nose at the appropriate time so that her father and I could talk about *her* and *us*.

Once she was out of sight and earshot, her father said, “She seems very happy.” His tone was casual, almost indifferent. “I haven’t seen her like this in a long time.”

I wasn’t sure what to say. I mean, I didn’t want to say, “Yeah, we are having a great time,” like I’m having a great time fucking your daughter.

I also didn’t want to say, “Yes, we are very much in love.” That might freak him out even more. We had barely known each other for two months. He’s a very wealthy man—he might think I was after his money.

A tough situation.

So, I just said, “Well, as you know, it hasn’t been easy for either of us, but right now, we’re happy.”

“She seems to care for you.” His tone made it sound like a question—like was he asking if I cared for *Tomoz*.

“I think we both care for each other,” I replied.

“She speaks very highly of you,” he said. Again, it felt like he was asking a question, as in, “*What does she see in you?*”

“I’m happy to hear that.” I was doing my best to stay straightforward and honest.

He was wary, as any father would be—and should be, especially in his position, with all his money and a daughter as gorgeous as *Tomoz*. He knew exactly what most men wanted from her and how vulnerable she was to their attention.

“I remember you calling me and me telling you to get her out of your house and your life. It seems you don’t take advice very well.” He smiled wryly, letting me know he hadn’t forgotten and was very curious about what happened.

“No, I must admit, I’m not very good at taking advice. And, well, things pretty much went exactly as you said they would.”

He studied me even more closely now but just sat silently, waiting for me to continue. So, I did.

“We’ve definitely had some tough battles, and there have been some very scary moments for us both.”

I wasn't doing very well here. I was sweating it right now. Trying to walk the fine line between respecting her father and *Tomoz* while staying as close to the truth as possible. *No basises yet.*

"But we've worked through things—and we're still working through things, just like any couple."

Although, of course, we were in no way like *any* other couple.

"Well, that's good," he said—though he clearly didn't fully believe any of it. Still, he respected me for being polite and at least *trying* to be honest.

He seemed ready to let me off the hook. *Thank God.*

Across the table, Rosetta smiled at me and gently clapped her hands together subtly, just enough that her father wouldn't notice. A silent good job. It made me feel a little better.

"I'd like you to call me every so often and let me know how she's doing," he said, his tone more like a boss delegating a task than a father making a request. "She rarely calls me, and when she does, I can never get a word of truth out of her."

It was easy to see where she got her presence, strong will, and unshakable belief that she could have whatever she wanted.

"Of course, I'd be happy to do that."

And that was it. I gave him what he came for—a way into his daughter's life.

*Tomoz* returned to the table, not a trace of powder on her nose.

"What did you guys talk about?" she teased.

"Mostly cars," I teased back. "We were just about to talk about you, but you're here now...."

She pretended not to find that funny.

We sat and talked for a few more minutes before her father finally said, "Well, we have to get back." So, we all got up and left.

We walked them out to the workk of art, and they drove way to, —well, they never said where they were going.

I stood beside *Tomoz* on the street and put my arm around her shoulder. She let her head rest on my shoulder as they drove off into the distance.

*Tomoz* missed her father terribly. All she wanted was for him to be proud of her. She believed that for him to be proud of her, she needed to be financially successful. The truth is, he couldn't care less about any of that.

Like so many fathers, he was terrible at communicating with his daughter. The tragedy is he loved her very much, but not in the way she needed him to. *Tomoz* never *felt* it.

As we walked back to the Rolls, she glanced over her shoulder one last time. Then we drove home in silence.

By the time we pulled into the driveway, she had shaken off any sadness and was back to her usual self again.

"So, what did you think of him?" She was eager to know. She was leaning on the kitchen island with both hands under her chin, looking at me with those big brown Bambi eyes. Very cute.

"I like him and I think he likes me," I said—maybe a little too confidently for her liking.

"Really? What makes you think that he likes you?" She asked, her tone laced with concern. She didn't want us to like each other too much and start talking behind her back.

"Well, the fact that he offered to teach me how to show me his car collection was a big indication." I teased.

Her eyes widened, and her head snapped toward me before she realized I was joking.

"Very funny," she said sarcastically. "So, you guys seemed to be scheming about something. What were you talking about?" She was dying to know.

"We were putting a plan together so that if you start misbehaving again, we can kidnap you, put you into rehab, and get you sober."

She punched me hard on the arm.

"Fuck you!"

I laughed—then winced in pain. "That hurt!"

*Tomoz* rarely had sympathy, and this was not a time to expect any.

"Tell me what you were talking about right now, or I will hit you somewhere else."

I could tell she wasn't joking. That was more encouragement than I needed.

"Okay, okay, calm the fuck down, for God's sake!" I said, still holding my arm in pain. "I'll tell you. But you can't tell your father I told you."

Now, she was excited. "Of course not. I would never say anything."

I noticed her nose seemed to get longer.

"Well, he told me he had never seen you so crazy about a guy before and that you're obviously madly in love with me."

Her face tightened, and she started balling her fist, eyes locking onto my crotch.

"If you don't tell me right now, I swear to God I will bust your balls!"



“Okay, okay!” I surrendered. “He did say you looked happy. That’s the truth. I told him we care about each other. I mean, he already knew what happened when I called him.”

Her face started to relax—a little.

I continued, “So, I just said we’ve been through a lot, but we’ve worked through most of it, and we’re working on the rest. He asked me to call him occasionally and let him know how you’re doing. He worries about you. And that’s it. That’s the truth.”

*Tomoz* wasn’t entirely convinced. “What did he say about me?”

“He’s not stupid *Tomoz*. He knows you’re fucking crazy. He told me that if you gave me any trouble again, I should slit your throat and bury you at the bottom of the garden—just to let him know roughly where so they can find your body, and we can split the money from the life insurance policy he took out on you.”

“I hate you.” She said it flatly. And in that moment, I think she meant it.

“Look, it was all very innocuous.” I continued. “There was nothing negative said about you by either of us. He loves you. And, for what it’s worth, I think you’re kinda cute.” I smiled and kissed her forehead.

“I don’t want you talking to him.” There it was. The fear, the jealousy—what we might say about her to each other.

“Okay, well, if you promise to call him more often and let him know what’s going on in your life, then I won’t need to.”

“Whatever. If I find out you’re talking to each other, I’m going to be very mad.” She pouted.

At least I was able to be honest with her. No basises.

“I think it went pretty well, don’t you?” I said, steering the interrogation in another direction.

Silence. She was thinking.

“He really did say he hadn’t seen you this happy in a long, long time. Is that true?”

She wasn’t going to admit to that, but she took that in.

I continued, “He was happy that you seemed happy.”

No verbal reaction. But I saw that land too.

“How do you feel it went?” I asked, shifting the focus away from myself.

“I just wanted you to meet him. It was important to me.” Her voice was softer now, but she still walked off into the bedroom, pouting.

Her emotional walls were skyscraper-high, solid, unshakable. But there were cracks. And I saw them.

She hesitated in the doorway, her back to me. For a moment, I thought she might turn around and say something. But then, without a word, she stepped inside the master bedroom.

I followed.

She was lying on top of the bed, staring through the French doors at the pool and the lake beyond. The setting sun reflected off the water, bathing the room in a soft, golden glow.

I slipped onto the bed beside her. Neither of us spoke.

Then, slowly, I reached out and gently took her hand in mine.

“I’m glad I met your father. It meant the world to me that you introduced me to him. Thank you.”

*Tomoz* didn’t respond with words. Instead, she rolled on top of me, pinning my hands above my head, her eyes dark with intent.

She kissed me—slow at first, teasing, nibbling my lips before thrusting her tongue into my mouth, taking exactly what she wanted.

She straddled me, holding me down and taking advantage of my mouth for quite some time before I pushed her off me, rolled on top of her, and switched positions. Which was not easy to do. She is 5ft 11 inches tall!

But I was committed.

I held her arms above her head with one hand. At the same time, I ran the fingers of my other hand through her hair, down her face, and body; Then I put one hand under her chin and pushed her head upwards with my other hand, pushing down on her shoulder to completely bare her neck to me. I kissed and licked her neck, using my tongue to push deeper. She moaned deeply. She loved me having sex with her neck.

I tried not to leave love bites on her neck, but sometimes I got carried away. This was one of those times. *Don’t ask for permission; just take what you want.*

After caressing and making love to her neck, I moved on to fondling her breasts, teasing her nipples, licking and sucking her stomach and her inner thighs before finally reaching her pussy.

I moved up her body again, caressing with my hand, kissing her passionately, all the while exploring every nuance of her mouth and lips. She was writhing beneath me. She kept her hands over her head as I pulled her blouse off with both hands.

Then we were both pulling at each other and ripping our own and each other’s clothes off. We were both down to our underwear in seconds.

I put the music on, then got back on the bed and began ravishing her again, kissing every inch of her naked body. Biting, nibbling, touching, holding her. Owning her, taking her, making her mine. Mind, body, and spirit.

I moved her all around the bed. Using the pillows to prop her up, then to raise up her lower body. I teased her with my fingers, with my tongue, and my cock.

I told her she was mine, I told her that I owned her, I told her what to do, I told her how to do it, I told her she was everything I ever wanted, I told her she was my whore, I told her she was my slut, I told her to spread her legs, wider, I told her to put her fingers in her pussy, then in her mouth. I told her to put her fingers in her pussy and at the same time, I fucked her with my cock; I told her to put her fingers in her mouth while she sucked my cock, and I told her to tell me she was a dirty whore. I told her she was safe; I told her that I loved her.

She loved it as much as I did. She felt free, she felt adored, she felt she was the object of my desire, she felt owned, she felt like a real woman, she felt no need to be in control, she felt lost in her mind, body, and soul, she felt safe.

We were lost in each other and our passions. We were on a magical journey to bliss. When we got there, we just died in each other's arms. We were in Heaven.

Do they have sex in Heaven? Well, we did, that's for sure.

This was the time of our lives. This was as good as it gets.

We had it all for a brief moment in time. No one can ever take that away from us. Memories to treasure for a lifetime.

We tried to hold on to each other, but the tighter you hold anything, the more it slips away. This is the way of nature. Everything comes and goes. Nothing is forever. NO THING.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Like the mandalas Tibetan Buddhists create from colored sand, our time together felt beautiful yet fleeting. We could only hold on to the moment for so long before it slipped through our fingers, as all things do.

No regrets.

When you truly love someone, you have to let them go. That is the hardest part. It very often takes a long time to finally let go. That journey can be very painful. The pain is necessary.

Here is a powerful parable that sums it up:

A man was sitting in his deck chair in his garden one spring day. He noticed a butterfly struggling to break out of its cocoon. Its body was too big to get through the tiny slit. He decided to help the butterfly by opening the slit with a razor blade.

The butterfly got out of the cocoon, but its body was deformed. It wiggled around for a couple of minutes and then died.

Pushing its body through that tiny slit was necessary to push the blood into its wings so it could fly and be a butterfly. Although it was painful for the butterfly, it was necessary. It's just an inevitable process. It's got to happen that way. Sometimes, we want to help people in pain, to solve the problem for them, but in doing so, we enable or weaken them.

Pain is necessary for us to grow and become who we are. In the end, only love remains.

# Chapter Twenty-Five

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## I Put My Head In My Hands. We Are So Fucked.

One evening, after dinner, we came home.

Things between *Tomoz* and I had gotten tense again. She wasn't going to AA meetings and was drinking a lot.

I was trying the active listening techniques: "What I heard you say is..." But what I heard her say was exactly correct—I just didn't like what I heard!

We went to bed. Sex was apparently out of the question, so no trips to heaven tonight.

When we got into bed, we both gravitated to our own sides. Neither of us could sleep because of the unresolved issues.

So, we sat up and argued, which didn't help. Then we went back to trying to sleep. We repeated this process three or four times before we were so exhausted that we just passed out.

I'm not sure what time it was when I woke up—maybe two hours later. I couldn't sleep. *Tomoz* was still sound asleep. I decided not to wake her.

I had to get up and go to the kitchen.

I sat there, staring at nothing, trying to make sense of *Tomoz*.

I was torn—admiring how she moved through life, fearless, reckless, never second-guessing. She was often wrong but never in doubt. She never hesitated, never slowed down. I wasn't sure if I was in awe of her or just exhausted.

Now I was fully awake, so I called Jerry to see what he was doing. He was with Josh, so I told them to come over so we could hang out.

“Be quiet when you come in,” I said. “*Tomoz* is asleep. If she wakes up, it’s all over. She is not in a good mood.”

Jerry and Josh didn’t need reminding. They knew better than to mess with her when she was in a mood.

Jerry thought about it and said, “Dude, why don’t you just come over here?”

I had no idea where they were, but I said, “Not happening. If she wakes up and I’m missing, she will burn this place down. Just come over.”

“Fine.” He groaned like I was dragging him to his execution. He had no idea how close that would be.

“I’ll leave the back door open. Just take your shoes off and sneak in. I’ll be upstairs. Hurry.”

Josh and Jerry had known each other for some time. Jerry had recommended Josh for the position as my assistant, and he had turned out to be perfect.

Josh had learned to navigate the chaos of my life. When I was home, it was a whirlwind—disorganized and unpredictable.

Whatever I needed him to do something, he was Johnny-on-the-spot—always reliable.

He never wanted to do any of it and would kick and fight to get out of it. Still, eventually, he would capitulate and get it done—though he always made sure I knew it was under protest. But Josh never let me down.

Josh had his routines, always holed up by the stairs, glued to his computer for hours. He only moved if I asked for something—maybe a juice or a quick errand. But it wasn’t just me; *Tomoz* would send him off to buy cigarettes, even when I told him not to. It was like he couldn’t say no to her.

He picked up my dry cleaning and ran basic errands.

He arranged for contractors to come and fix things when necessary and generally kept the house safe and everything functional. Then there were the *special missions* I asked him to perform—missions that often put him in harm’s way.

Josh had a tough childhood. His mother was pregnant with him when his father left and never returned. Josh never met his real father. His mother later married an army vet.

Unfortunately, his stepfather had PTSD. He was extremely emotionally and physically abusive to Josh. His stepfather hated him simply for not being his child and resented

having to raise another man's son. This, of course, caused Josh to shut down emotionally. He was terrified of conflict. He preferred to be alone, staying in the shadows.

His role working for me allowed him to do both. He spent most of his time alone, preparing me for my trips.

I would text him from the bedroom, asking him to bring me juice or pick up a sandwich. He made my bed every day and ensured all the laundry was done. It was always nice to come home to a tidy home. Josh also came on adventures with Jerry and me—as you will soon see.

I would sit in the kitchen, sharing my escapades with *Tomoz*, while Josh listened, which only added to his fear of her. He would just shake his head. He was terrified of *Tomoz*, and *Tomoz* hated having Josh around. She would tell him to leave or not come over when we were alone. This stressed him out. It was like having two parents, both telling you to do opposite things and never being able to say anything. *Tomoz* would promise to stop smoking, then I'd catch her with a new pack of cigarettes. She never bought them when she was with me.

"Where did you get them from?" I would ask her.

"Josh got them for me." She threw him under the bus without hesitation.

When I confronted Josh, he looked like a deer caught in the headlights. *Tomoz* loved getting him in trouble as much as possible.

Josh would raise his hands and say, "I am more afraid of her than you. What was I supposed to do?"

*Tomoz* made his life hell whenever she could, hoping he would quit. I know—poor Josh.

She didn't like Jerry and Josh being in the house during the day, let alone at 2 a.m. If she found them in the house, I am not exactly sure what she would do, but it wouldn't be good.

I should have told her the truth. I know that now. But I didn't. Why? Because, somewhere deep down, I was terrified of losing her. I wanted to keep her happy, even if it meant neglecting my own needs. I've always felt like her happiness was my responsibility—like I was the one who had to hold it all together.

I left all the lights off and went upstairs, making sure I was as quiet as possible, so I wouldn't wake *Tomoz*. Then I thought, *WTF, this is my house*. I was behaving like a burglar, sneaking around to avoid getting caught.

I would rather get arrested by the police than get caught by *Tomoz*, I thought.

So, I went upstairs and sat on the balcony, enjoying the view of the moonlit lake and golf course. The colored lights in the pool were rotating. It was peaceful.

Josh and Jerry came through the balcony doors and sat down. After a few minutes we were beginning to get loud, so I said, "Let's hit the movie theater."

We settled into the leather recliner armchairs and started watching a movie.

Jerry said, "Dude, this is way too loud."

"Projection room, then," I said.

We were running out of places to get further away. It was like that Key & Peele sketch where the characters were afraid their wives would hear what they were saying—they kept getting further and further away from their wives until they ended up in outer space.

So now, we were in the projection room—no chairs, just sitting on the floor. We sat there, talking and laughing like mischievous schoolboys.

Then we heard her downstairs in the kitchen. We froze.

"Let me handle this. I'll get her to bed. You two stay here."

I sounded like 007 on a mission.

"We'll have to sleep in the spare room, which is on your way out. So let me get her to sleep, and I'll let you know when to come down and leave."

That sounded more like *Mission Impossible*.

I left Jerry and Josh cowering in fear and went downstairs to deal with *Tomoz*.

As I reached the bottom of the stairs, the kitchen lights were on. I saw her rummaging through the cupboards. She had knocked a flute of champagne over when she woke up and was looking for something to clean up the mess on the bed.

"Hey, babe, what are you doing?"

"Where were you?" she asked, sounding annoyed.

"I didn't want to wake you, so I was fixing something in the movie theater." Baiseses. *Need-to-lie basis*, remember.

"Where's the cleaning stuff?" She asked frustrated.

My assumption was correct. She had no idea where to find the cleaning stuff, she was looking in the cupboards where we kept the dishes.

"Listen, it's late. We both need to get to sleep. Let's sleep in the spare room and deal with this in the morning," I said, yawning.

Sold. She walked straight into the spare room, fell into bed, and pulled the duvet over her head.



I turned off the kitchen lights, followed her into the spare bedroom, got into bed with her, and curled up in my usual corner.

*Tomoz* always stretched out her body, claiming at least 80% of the King-size bed. Of course, I couldn't fall asleep—there were two burglars upstairs that I had to help escape—alive.

It was taking forever for *Tomoz* to fall asleep. Jerry and Josh must be getting antsy, I thought.

Suddenly, *Tomoz* jumped out of bed and went into the kitchen.

This is getting crazy, I thought as I got up and followed her.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She ignored me.

"Babe, we need to sleep," I implored.

As I walked up behind her, she suddenly froze. She had heard a noise from upstairs.

She looked up, and—lo and behold—two faces were staring down through the ornamental bars of the banister at the top of the staircase.

Jerry and Josh had crawled along the floor and were now lying there, peeking over, trying to figure out when it was safe to make their escape.

Unfortunately, there would be no escape.

"What the fuck are you two doing?" *Tomoz's* voice sliced through the silence. "Get down here. *Now.*"

I put my head in my hands. We are so fucked.

Jerry and Josh bolted down the stairs like their lives depended on it—which, at that moment, they probably did.

With the push of one switch *Tomoz* turned all the house lights on.

She stood at the bottom of the staircase, waiting. As they meekly descended the last few steps, she pointed to the front door and shouted, "Get out! Get out of my house!"

Without a word, they walked quickly, one behind the other, heads down, through the kitchen, into the hallway, and straight out the front door.

Unfuckingbelievable. I wasn't sure if I should just sign the deed to the house over to her now or wait till morning. "*This is MY house!*" And she meant it.

As I watched *Tomoz* assert control over the house, shouting at Jerry and Josh, I was torn—admiring her unapologetic confidence and ability to take charge, yet frustrated and alienated by her complete disregard for my space.

I felt caught in the tension of both wanting to be close to her and resenting the power dynamic that made me feel like an outsider in my own home. She dismissed them effortlessly like she owned the place. Like she owned *us*.

This was no time to argue with this bitch—I mean, *Tomoz*.

Then she just waltzed into the bedroom, shut the door, and went to bed.

Thank God there was another spare room with a ready-made bed.

And that, as they say, was that.

Of course, it's funny now, but back then, it was scary. But once again, she did have a point. I should have just told her what was going on. She needed to feel safe and that this was *her* home.

I also wanted her to feel safe and to know this was her home.

Not that she needed my permission anyway.

She would always say, "Don't ask for permission—ask for forgiveness."

But her real motto?

"Don't ask for permission—don't ask for anything, just take whatever you want."

I mean, you have to admire her for it. And I did.

I thought, "We need a break. Let's go to Vegas." I mean, what could possibly go wrong in Vegas, right?

## Chapter Twenty-Six

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# What Happens In Vegas May Scar You For Life.

We needed a break and to spend some time together having fun. I had an event in Las Vegas and wanted to take *Tomoz* with me. After the event, we could stay at the fabulous Wynn Suites and enjoy a few days and nights in Vegas together.

*Tomoz* loved the idea. She was jumping up and down, doing her exaggerated girly dance—the one she knew I loved to see her do. It always made me happy when she was happy.

“There’s one condition,” I said.

*Tomoz’s* face fell. She hated conditions or being told what to do.

“Look, babe, I need to be focused right now. My numbers have been terrible. I need this to be a great event, which means I’ve got to get plenty of sleep. I need to get to bed early—no going out until after the event when we get to the Wynn. Okay?”

“Of course, baby,” she agreed.

We arrived in Vegas and took a limo to the hotel. Since the event was at the Embassy Suites, right behind the Wynn, we decided to stay there. Jerry, who had recently joined my team (much to *Tomoz’s* chagrin), was already waiting for us. After checking in, we went up to our rooms.

It was about 10 p.m. I started unpacking while *Tomoz* took a shower.

*Tomoz* came out of the bathroom and slipped into one of her nice dresses.

I was about to jump into bed when I saw her. I stared, trying to hold it together. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to see some friends at the Bellagio,” she said, as if it were no big deal—as if she had already told me.

My heart sank. “*Tomoz*, we talked about this. I need to get to sleep early. You agreed we weren’t going out until after the event.”

“Well, you get to sleep, baby. I’ll be quiet when I come in,” she said, putting the final touches on her appearance.

I was fucking furious. She knew she would wake me when she came in. She also knew that if I woke up, it was almost impossible for me to get back to sleep. But I wasn’t about to have a knockdown fight with her and risk the police showing up and arresting me.

So, I said, “Okay, babe, have a nice time.”

She said, “Thanks, babe.” Then she kissed me on the cheek, opened the door, and was gone. *Gone Girl*.

Normally, I’d be panicking if my girlfriend were out alone in Vegas. But *Tomoz*? She wasn’t a normal girlfriend. I wasn’t worried about her—I was worried about everyone else she might run into.

This was *Tomoz*’s world. She owned it.

As soon as she left, I started packing my suitcases. Once everything was packed, I left.

I went down the hall and knocked on Jerry’s door. He opened the door, looked down at my bags, then back up at me and said, “What’s going on?”

I said, “Let me in. I’m staying with you!”

I did the event and never saw *Tomoz* all weekend—except once. I was looking over the balcony, down at the buffet breakfast area below. And there she was, getting her breakfast.

I missed her. I wanted to go down, make up, and put everything behind us. But I forced myself to stay focused on the event.

She did her own thing—which, of course, turned into quite the adventure.

*Tomoz* would go to the complimentary drinks and food social event each evening. Making sure to make the most of the free drinks. According to the manager, on one evening she got into an altercation with another guest. I’m not exactly sure what it was all about but it got really heated and eventually security was called and *Tomoz* demanded that this guy was told to leave. Some of the other guests got involved and told security that *Tomoz* was the one causing trouble. Instead of backing down, not something *Tomoz* does, she started arguing with all the guests. Now the manager comes to see what is going on. And

guess who is asked to leave? Yep, she tells the manager HE needs to leave. Anywas finally Tomoz leaves on her own terms.

Apparently, this was just one of several incidents leading up to her being ejected from the premises. After the altercation in the lounge, she was banned from returning there.

So, she started trying to order food from room service—using my credit card.

Except it wasn't *my* credit card on file. The room was booked and paid for with the company's credit card, which was only authorized for the room—no additional charges allowed. I hadn't left a personal credit card on file.

So, *Tomoz* argued with the lady taking room service orders.

She was using profane language and called her a "stupid old cow." The manager wouldn't repeat everything she said exactly, but we can all imagine, right?

There was nothing the poor woman at room service could do. There was simply no way to charge anything to the room.

The lady was so upset that she had to be taken to the emergency room. Well, the manager made it sound like she should have been.

Anyway, *Tomoz* called down to reception and told them I'd bring them a credit card as soon as I finished the event at the end of the day.

"In the meantime, send up my order," she commanded.

And, of course, they did. She always found a way.

I had no idea any of this was going on. I just thought she was out partying all weekend. But *Tomoz* was so pissed that I left her on her own—she was never going to ask me for anything; she was just going to take it.

At the end of the weekend, I packed my bags, went to the airport with Jerry, and flew back to Sarasota—without *Tomoz*. I left her there at the hotel.

I knew that was bad, but I was pissed at her too!

The whole weekend had been stressful. Was she going to come into the ballroom and make a scene? I had no idea what she would do or say.

There was no way I was going to go and blow money staying at the Wynn and risk getting arrested.

It might seem harsh, but I had to teach her a lesson.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

Yes, I feel guilty now. Looking back, it was a terrible thing to do to her.

Tough love.

So, on Monday, the front desk called *Tomoz* and told her I had checked out without paying for her room service charges.

Then she called me. I let it go to voicemail—I wanted to gauge her mood before speaking to her.

By this time, I was already back in Sarasota, Florida.

I listened to her message: “Baby, you left me here! I have no money or food. Please call me back, baby.”

Okay, she sounded like she might be somewhat reasonable if I called her back. So, I did. She answered immediately. “Hi.”

I said nothing. The nectar was starting to wear off. A little.

“Baby, I am so sorry about the weekend. You were right—I shouldn’t have gone out and been so inconsiderate of you,” she conceded.

“Well, you ruined the whole weekend, and now we don’t get to spend the rest of the week at the Wynn and enjoy Vegas,” I admonished.

“I know, baby. I realize that now.” She was really working me.

“Baby, I’m truly sorry, but I’m here alone with no money or food. I need your help,” she pleaded.

Somehow, I didn’t feel sorry for her—or at least, I didn’t want her to know I did.

“Well, you’re going to have to figure it out, *Tomoz*. I’m already back in Sarasota.”

“Baby, please. Baby, can you call and get me some food? I’m starving. I haven’t eaten in 24 hours,” she begged.

Ughhh, she gets me every time. And, of course, I wanted to be gotten.

“Okay,” I caved. “I’ll get you some food.”

She said “Thank you baby, hurry please.” and hung up.

So, I called a food delivery place and placed an order.

“When the driver arrives, someone will need to be there with the credit card,” the lady told me.

“Well, I can give you the credit card number right now,” I offered.

“I’m sorry, sir. The person whose name is on the credit card has to be present with the card,” she said.

I argued up and down to no avail. For fuck’s sake! Now I’m stressing, trying to get food to her.

Then the Embassy Suites called me.

“Hello, Mr. Edwards. This is Mr. Johnson. I’m the manager at the Embassy Suites in Las Vegas.”

“Yes, hello,” I said, hoping he could help me.

He was not very friendly, to say the least. That’s when I found out about all the shenanigans that had been going on.

They had been sending her food. They delivered food to her at 11:30 a.m. and again at 1:30 p.m. today. It was the same thing both times—steak salad and two glasses of wine.

She lied to me! “I’m starving, baby. Please get me some food,” she said.

There’s a good reason she lied. She is a fucking liar!

But joking aside, there is a reason she lied so much—as you will find out.

She had been very rude to the staff and other guests. The manager told me about the altercation in the lounge with security. He had demanded that she leave, but she refused.

One evening, she went to the bar for free drinks and got into an altercation with another guest. The manager was called to handle the situation, and the guest claimed that threw his drink at him. It was very confusing. I mean this did not sound like *Tomoz*.

As I listened to the manager recount her antics, my frustration boiled over. I wanted to be angry at her—at her lies, her recklessness—but part of me couldn’t shake the guilt. Had I set her up to fail by leaving? Or was this just another consequence of enabling her?

“The reason I’m calling you, Mr. Edwards, is that I will have to call the police if she doesn’t leave the hotel immediately,” he said. He didn’t want to, but he was giving me a heads-up.

“I’ll have her leave, Mr. Johnson. I apologize for all the trouble and thank you for letting me know all this. I had no idea. I’ll call reception and provide my credit card to settle the bill.”

He hung up.

She had lied to me—not just about not having food, but about so much more. I was disappointed, hurt, and angry.

After I called the hotel and paid the bill, I called her back and told her the food delivery service wouldn’t take my credit card.

Of course, she didn’t believe me. Now, in her mind, *I* was the one lying to her, but I wasn’t going to save her.

She was disappointed, hurt, and angry.

The mirror never goes away until you smash it.

Finally, she had to leave.

*Tomoz* had no money. She was literally on the street.

This was nothing new to *Tomoz*. For all her blue-blood upbringing, she was also a street hustler.

Once again, I was torn between my love for her and my self-preservation. I was aware I was in grave danger of falling fatally into the jaws of The Venus Fly Trap and never coming out again.

At the same time, her nectar was incredibly potent.

For all her flaws, *Tomoz* had a way of making me feel like I owed her something—loyalty, love, forgiveness. And maybe I did. But at what cost?

Every time I gave in, I felt a little more lost.

Later, when I went back and read my journals, it was there for me to see—the constant back-and-forth, realizing I needed to let her go, and then the justification for staying in. Madness.

It was like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*, writing the same thing over and over again—the insanity was right there on the pages of my journals.

She had to call her mother for money, asking her to send it through Western Union.

Her mother was living on social security with *Tomoz*'s grandmother, so she could only send a little.

She didn't call her father—who was almost a billionaire—because she didn't want him to know we were fighting in case he called me, and I told him what was really going on.

Her mother didn't have my phone number.

Always three steps ahead.

She called a cab and paid the driver when she got to Western Union.

Of course, she had missed her flight. But she called the airline and somehow convinced them to book her on a flight at 6 a.m. the next day.

She had nowhere to stay and only a few dollars left, so she had to sleep at the airport.

*Tomoz* called me from the airport. There was no way I was going to answer.

But somehow, I did.

"I am coming home, baby," she said.

"When?" I wanted her home.

"I have a flight at 6 a.m." She sounded exhausted.

Now I felt sorry for her. She had been through a tough few days too.

"What time does it land?" I asked.

"I don't know." She didn't care at this point.



“Well, find out,” I said, a little frustrated. Like, I need to know so I can pick you up.

“Okay, hang on,” she said, annoyed, as she went to check the screens.

She kept me waiting because I had been harsh.

Finally, she came back to the phone, about an hour later, and told me what time the plane would land.

Okay, two minutes later, but it *felt* like an hour.

“I’ll pick you up,” I said. I wanted to support her, and honestly, I couldn’t wait to see her.

“You will? Oh, baby, that would be amazing. Thank you.” She sounded tired but grateful.

We were always so up and down. Super highs and super lows. Just like our personalities. We were creating all the drama and *loving* all of it.

No victims—only volunteers.

We were exhausted from fighting, trying to win and control each other.

We just needed to be in each other’s arms.

And that was it.

We were back.

I stayed on the phone with her all night, talking and laughing at ourselves and each other.

She told me about her escapades at the hotel—from *her* point of view, which, of course, was a completely different version.

Apparently, none of it was *her* fault after all.

She told me how it felt returning to an empty room, how she’d missed me all weekend, waiting and hoping I’d come back.

But she knew I needed to focus and didn’t want to interfere.

To be fair, she *could* have—but didn’t.

So, she waited.

She was sure I would return after the event.

She never thought I would leave her alone in Las Vegas with no money.

When she left to go out that first night, she just needed to get away for a while.

There were no friends at The Bellagio.

She only had enough for *one* drink, and she came back an hour later—

But I was gone.

As she recounted her side of the story, my heart softened.

Despite everything, I couldn't help but feel responsible for her pain.

"I'm so sorry, baby," I said. "I'll make it up to you."

"You better," she murmured weakly.

I told her how *I* felt when she left—betrayed, used, and abandoned—when all I needed was her support and understanding.

Neither of us said, "*What I thought I heard you say was...*"

But we managed to get through it anyway.

"Okay, baby, I have to go. I didn't realize they were boarding. They just called my name—I think I'm the last one to get on the plane. I'll see you soon. Kisses."

And just like that, she was gone.

Gone Girl.

Fortunately, she was gone to fly back home to me.

*Very* fortunately.

After our wonderful peaceful vacation we were more than ready to be home together and relax. Unfortunately that was not about to happen. What was about to happen was the worst thing you could imagine.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven

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## “Holy Shit Man. Your'e Fucked”

*T*omoz liked to cook for me once in a while. Steak and poached eggs was her favorite thing to cook. She would use seasoning—I had no idea exactly what—but it was always delicious.

She was a great cook when she wanted to be—though that wasn’t often.

Which was fine by me.

I didn’t want her in the kitchen.

I wanted her in the bedroom.

I always enjoyed watching her move around the kitchen when she did cook. She knew I was watching her, and she’d dance around for me as she cooked.

We loved going to Whole Foods together.

She’d stand on the back of the shopping cart, and I’d push her, sending her flying through the store with her arms wide open—like Kate Winslet in *Titanic*.

After shopping for food, we would pick some items from the food bar and sit outside on one of the bench tables to eat.

These were the times we brought *some* normalcy—some balance—into our lives.

When you do it once in a while, it’s fun.

Neither of us wanted our lives to be mundane, routine, or predictable.

We were both adrenaline junkies, always chasing the next thrill, always trying to pull the most out of every moment.

*Tomoz* loved to entertain.

We’d throw little get-togethers.

I remember when the World Cup was on TV—we all sat around watching the final together.

*Tomoz* loved being one of the boys, drinking beer from the bottle, and cheering on her team.

Which was *whichever* team happened to be winning at that moment.

She loved to wind me up, pointing out which guy she fancied—his butt, his hair, his legs—to make me jealous.

So, I always did my best to pretend I wasn't.

But I was.

And she knew it.

Damn.

She didn't like it when I did it to her, though.

If I so much as commented on how cute, pretty, or sexy a girl was—on TV or in a magazine—she would immediately tear her down.

"Her? Are you kidding? She's ugly. Look at her short legs. And her hair is full of product. She looks terrible."

Or she would get up and stand right in front of me so I could no longer see the girl, blocking my view completely. Then she'd do something dramatic—like jumping into my lap—forcing my attention away from the girl and focusing back on *her*.

She always had to win.

Then there were the times that *weren't* so much fun.

One morning, Jerry and I were upstairs talking about *Tomoz*. I can't remember exactly what we were saying, but she overheard—and *did not* like something that was said.

By the time we came downstairs, she was already in a bad mood.

She started being mean to Jerry and me.

We both tried to bring her back around, but she wasn't having it.

Finally, Jerry gave up and left.

I went into the family room and started watching TV.

*Bad move.*

*Tomoz* marched in, stood in front of the screen—

And turned the TV off.

"What were you guys talking about up there?"

She wasn't asking. She was *accusing*.

Neither of us liked being put on the defensive.

“Were you listening to us?” Back to you, darling.

“I heard you say that I’m crazy. Why do you keep saying that?”

She was visibly upset.

“Baby, I mean it in a fun way, not in the real sense,” I tried to explain.

Well, it all went sideways from there.

She mentioned something about Jules being unable to handle me and that Jules thought I was crazy.

What?

I sat up.

“Jules? You’ve been talking to Jules?”

Silence.

“How the fuck did that happen?”

Of course. She’d gotten into my phone and found Jules’s number.

“Well, she had a lot to say, let me tell you.”

She was heading down a dangerous road.

It was a massive shock to me. Why had Jules never even mentioned she’d been talking to *Tomoz* about me?

I felt betrayed—by both of them.

The last time I spoke to Jules, she was upset because she thought I had posted a picture of *Tomoz* wearing one of her dresses that she had left behind in the closet on Facebook.

Short. Tight.

Of course, even shorter and tighter on *Tomoz*.

Actually, I didn’t post the picture.

*Tomoz* did.

Knowing damn well, Jules would see it.

I was furious with both of them.

Storming out of the family room, I marched into the master bedroom, slammed the doors shut, and locked them behind me.

Then I called Jules.

We’d grown distant as we went through the divorce, but she answered immediately.

“Hey, what’s up?” she said casually.

“Well, I am glad you asked. I’m really disappointed, Jules. I can’t believe you’ve been talking to *Tomoz*. Why didn’t you tell me?”

A pause.

“She just keeps calling me,” Jules admitted. “I didn’t want to say anything—I didn’t want to cause trouble.”

I could tell she felt bad.

Jules, the quiet, gentle spirit, would be easy for *Tomoz* to manipulate.

“What did you two even talk about?” I asked.

Jules hesitated. Then, reluctantly, she told me some of the things *Tomoz* had said.

“She said I didn’t know how to handle you, but *she* does.”

I could hear the sting in Jules’s voice.

Then she added, “She’s batshit crazy.” So, I knew she really had been talking to *Tomoz*.

Jules went on. “She’s been telling me all about your relationship. She has been backstabbing you—a lot.” That didn’t surprise me. *Tomoz* saw every woman as a potential threat. Especially Jules.

She was always paranoid we’d get back together. She’d do anything to make sure that never happened.

But *Tomoz* was smart. She’d never say anything bad about Jules to me—because she knew I’d defend her.

“Well, hopefully, you’ve been defending *me*,” I said, half-joking.

Jules let out a soft laugh. “Oh yeah, sure.”

We talked for a while.

It was *good* to hear her voice. It brought back a lot of good memories—the kind that felt safe, warm, and *real*.

When we finally hung up, I exhaled. The anger had settled *just a little*.

Then—CRACK.

The double doors leading to the master suite burst open.

*Tomoz* crashed through them.

The lock snapped. One of the tall doors split down the middle.

Holy shit.

She charged into the bedroom.

“Who are you talking to? Jules?” Her voice cracked—half accusation, half desperation.

“You fucking bastard.”

She was screaming in my face.

“You leave me out there while you’re in here, with the door locked, talking to her? Are you fucking kidding me?”

Her eyes burned with fury, but I saw the hurt beneath it.

Then her voice dropped.

“You’re getting back with her.”

A cold certainty settled over her features.

“I knew it.”

She took a step closer.

“That is *not* going to happen, Stephen.”

A beat.

Then, quietly, “She told me she doesn’t love you anymore. So get over her.”

That last part hit differently.

She stared at me with a look of pure hatred. She had never looked at me like that before.

I stood frozen by the fireplace, staring, words failing me.

The weight of it all pressed down, overwhelming. I shut down. Again.

What could I say? It was just too much. *Tomoz* destroyed everything—my work, relationships, the house, everything.

I fell to my knees, gripping my head in my hands.

And then I shouted.

“Why are you doing this to me?” It was like a plea for help.

*Tomoz* stood over me.

There was darkness all around her. It seemed like she had made herself bigger somehow—towering over me like the Wicked Witch of the East. She looked like a sadistic siren.

It was surreal.

Then she said it—her voice sharp, cutting through the air.

“I am going to call her right now and tell her what you just did to me in Vegas.”

Then—she stormed out of the bedroom, back into the house.

My stomach dropped.

Oh, fuck no.

Jules.

Hopefully, she wouldn’t answer.

But *Tomoz* would leave a message—nasty, venomous, terrifying.

Jules would blame me. Quite rightly.

I was drowning in the chaos. It was just overwhelming, and I was shutting down emotionally. I was starting to feel numb.

After a few minutes, I pulled myself together and went to find *Tomoz*. She was nowhere to be found, so I went back into the bedroom and tried to put the double bedroom doors

back together again. I managed to get them to close. I was standing on the bedroom side of the doors, trying to get the lock to work.—

CRASH.

*Tomoz* came flying through the doors again, knocking me to the floor.

She stood over me, breathing fast, eyes wild.

“You are not locking me out of here again,” she screamed. I guess she thought I was trying to lock her out.

I barely had time to react before she turned on her heels.

“I will come back here whenever the fuck I want.”

And with that, she stomped back into the house.

I wish I could say I kept my cool.

But I didn’t.

I came out of the bedroom, all guns blazing.

I lost my temper—not for the first time by any stretch of the imagination.

*Tomoz* was on the sofa in the formal sitting room, arms folded tight, staring out of the French doors.

My anger surged like a tidal wave—unstoppable, all-consuming.

But even as I shouted, a voice inside me hated the person I was becoming.

The person she brought out in me.

“You know what? You **are** fucking crazy. You are the craziest fucking bitch I have ever met!”

I was inches from her face, shouting.

“No. You’re fucking crazy,” she shot back, eyes blazing.

And that was it. I snapped.

I lost complete control of my emotions and shouted.

“Your’e ruining my life. Your’e destroying everything. Just get out of my life and leave me the fuck alone!”

The words ripped out of me too fast to stop.

“I’ve had enough! I don’t love you. I don’t want you anywhere near me ever again. Get the fuck out!”

And then—the worst thing. The thing I knew would cut her deep.

“And I’m going to get back with Jules.”

Silence.

A second stretched into an eternity.



I felt it the moment it left my mouth—the damage.

Not one of my best moments, for sure. Not by a fucking mile.

Of course, I didn't mean a word of it. We never do when we're that mad.

But the other person doesn't know that.

To them, it feels like you've always thought those things.

And now—they know the truth.

Later, you want to shove those words back down your own throat.

So do they.

You wish you had never said them.

So do they.

But I did.

And I could never take them back.

*Tomoz* grabbed her phone. Her voice shook, but her words were sharp as a knife.

"You are *scaring* me. I'm calling the police."

Oh, fuck no.

I went to grab the phone from her. Bad idea. Really bad idea.

As I tried to grab the phone from her, she pulled her arm away, and my elbow caught her in the eye with a glancing blow.

I immediately reached out to her as she fell backward onto the sofa. "Oh my God, *Tomoz*, I am so sorry." I was devastated.

She ran to one of the downstairs spare bedrooms and locked the door. She stayed in there for a long time.

When she finally emerged, her eye was already swelling. Darkening.

A shiner. A fucking black eye.

She glared at me, fury and something more profound—something colder—burning in her gaze.

"Look what you did to me!" she screamed.

My chest felt like it was caving in.

"I'm sorry, baby. It was an accident. You know that. You know I would never hit you. I would never hurt you."

It was the truth.

But the truth didn't matter anymore.

Her expression hardened.

“No, it wasn’t. You tried to grab my phone. And when you couldn’t get it, you hit me,” she accused.

My blood went cold.

That was it.

That was her story for when the police arrived.

I saw it in her eyes.

And I knew—I was fucked.

Well, that’s it, I guess. She won. I’m going to jail—so say goodbye to the house, the cars, everything.

I just sat there in shock. I only had myself to blame, so I resigned myself to my fate. I’d have to tell them the truth and let the chips fall where they may. I’d be out of jail tomorrow and go stay at Jerry’s.

In fact, let me call him right now and tell him to come over so I have a witness in case things get bad again and she tries to accuse me of doing other stuff I didn’t do.

I called Jerry.

“Hey, man, I need you here right now,” I said.

“What happened?” he asked, concerned.

“I’ll tell you when you get here.” The curiosity would get him here faster.

*Tomoz* went into the master bedroom, put on her bathing suit, went outside, and got in the pool. She stood on one side by the edge, staring into space with an umbrella, wearing her sunglasses. She looked so cute.

Jerry arrived, and we sat in the formal sitting room. I told him what happened.

“Holy shit, man, your’e fucked.” Jerry was shocked. His blunt honesty was like a punch to the gut.

“You think?” I shot back, half-joking. But deep down, I knew he was right. There was no easy way out of this mess.

“What you gonna do?” he asked, shaking his head.

“Well, I was thinking you could drive me to the airport, and I’d fly to Argentina,” I said, masking my feelings with sarcasm and humor.

“Argentina?” Jerry was confused. He often said, “I never know when you’re serious or joking.”

“I’m joking!” I said, shaking my head. “I mean, what can I do? If I leave, it’ll look like I’m guilty. If I stay, it’ll look like I’m guilty.” I despaired.

“So, you gonna stay or go?” he asked.

“Stay. I’m going to tell the truth and see who they believe,” I said, feeling defeated. I knew I had fallen fatally into the jaws of The Venus Fly Trap. It was inevitable. Now, I had to accept my fate.

“I hate to tell you this, bro, but there’s no way they’ll believe you. They’ll arrest you, put you up for the night, then put you in front of a judge in the morning. After that, you’ll have to convince another judge in court later.”

“I know, you’re right.” What could I say?

I thought about giving Jerry power of attorney and having him live in the house with Lia so he could watch over my stuff—keep *Tomoz* from selling everything or ruining it. But that would be putting him and Lia in danger. Who knows who *Tomoz* would bring over to the house? I was grasping at straws.

We had been sitting there for quite a while. I was staring at the—well, I don’t remember what I was staring at—I was just staring.

Finally, Jerry said, “Listen, man, things look pretty calm here. I gotta go. I left Lia at home, and she needs me to take her to her mom’s. Call me if you need me, okay?”

He left, shaking his head.

All kinds of thoughts ran through my mind, but the hardest thing for me to accept was that I was finally going to lose *Tomoz*.

She stood in the pool at the edge, the umbrella casting shadows over her face, her sunglasses hiding whatever emotions her eyes might reveal. There was a quiet sadness in her posture as if she were trying to shield herself from more than just the sun.

Then it started to rain—torrential like it can only do in Florida. She just stood there, watching the raindrops bounce off the water in the pool.

I wanted to go to her, to pull her close and promise things would get better—but I couldn’t move, trapped by my guilt and fear.

So, I just sat there, all alone, while *Tomoz* stood in the pool with her umbrella, watching the rain, all alone.

I knew she didn’t believe I had intentionally hit her. She was more than capable of hurting herself to create that bruise. But I also knew that the things I had said hurt her far more than any physical pain ever could.

Things I could never take back. For me to be on the phone with Jules while she was locked out was more than she could bear. She had always been terrified that Jules and I might get back together.

Jules and I were always on the phone talking about the details of the divorce. *Tomoz* thought that because of our argument and me finding out about her calls with Jules, I might break up with her and run into Jules's arms.

There was no way that could have ever happened, but how could *Tomoz* know that? So, she went into a rage.

It doesn't make what she did right, but it doesn't make it all her fault either.

She stayed in and around the pool all day and into the evening. I moved aimlessly through the house, trying to find things to do—anything to take my mind off everything that had just happened.

Occasionally, I would press my face against the window, watching her, hoping she would look back at me—hoping for some reconnection. But she never did. She knew I was there but wouldn't look at me.

As I wandered from room to room, I caught glimpses of *Tomoz*—swimming, standing in the pool, or lying on a lounge, flipping through a magazine.

We were both heartbroken.

She did not call the police. Instead, she took photographs of her eye and showed them to everyone—except the police. Now, she had her "put me in jail" card ready to play whenever she needed it. Genius.

She didn't want to leave me. She just needed to be sure I wouldn't break up with her and throw her out.

And she was getting everything she wanted. She did whatever she pleased, and I let her get away with it.

Why would she call the police, take all my stuff, and cut herself off? She could do that anytime now.

Once again, I was caught in the jaws of The Venus Fly Trap.

There was no escape.

She would devour me later—when she was ready.

But she wasn't ready yet.

I was beginning to wonder—did she really care about me? Could we actually make it work?

She could have taken everything and gotten rid of me.

Sure, she had her put me in jail card now. But she could also find another guy in no time. Maybe she truly did want to settle down and try to make it work.

I could talk myself into anything to keep her.

She was probably asking herself similar questions.

I felt like *Tomoz* abandoned me when she went out that first night in Vegas, and she felt like I abandoned her when I left the room and went to stay with Jerry.

So, she was hurt and angry, and so was I.

She thought I should have returned to our room and made up with her. I thought she should have come and apologized to me.

Mirrors.

Tit for tat. The rest was just fallout—us both acting out of our pain.

We convinced ourselves we were hurt by each other. But was it really hurt? Or just pride?

The more we clung to our grievances, the harder it became to see each other clearly—like mirrors reflecting only what we wanted to see.

Hurt turned to anger. We both became victims.

We went back and forth, fighting to win.

We might win a battle, but in the end, we both lost the war and each other.

Looking back, I realize every fight was a step closer to the inevitable. Like a house of cards, each argument brought us closer to collapse.

But at that moment, neither of us wanted to be the first to let go.

It was just another nail—or nails—in the coffin.

You may have noticed how things were escalating. We had inadvertently crossed the line into something physical.

That was a devastating experience for both of us.

Unfortunately, it was only a small indication of what was about to happen. Since Vegas did not quite work out as planned, I thought we should take a luxury penthouse cruise to Bermuda. I mean there is no way to fuck that up, right?

# Chapter Twenty-Eight

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## ‘Spectacles, Testicles, Wallet & Watch’

About a year ago, before we broke up, Jules and I had booked and paid for a 7-day cruise to Bermuda with Celebrity Cruise Lines for the end of June.

We had booked the penthouse suite, which was half of the ship's top deck.

I didn't want to waste the cruise, so I asked *Tomoz* if she wanted to take a seven-day trip to Bermuda with me.

We were sitting together on the upstairs balcony.

“Baby, are you serious?” she asked, shocked.

“Yeah, I'm joking. How funny is that?” I said sarcastically.

She smacked me with her magazine.

“I'm just surprised,” she said. “You are such a smartass.” Then she added, “What brought this on?”

Just what I wanted to avoid.

If I told her I had initially booked the cruise for Jules and me, it would ruin the whole trip for her.

“Well, we were both disappointed about missing our vacation at the Wynn in Vegas,” I said. “I thought a cruise would be good for both of us. I've always wanted to go to Bermuda, and when I saw this cruise, I figured you might like it.”

That was all true.

Okay, maybe there were some *basises*.

“Baby, oh my God, I am so excited! I can't wait. When? From where? What cruise line? Baby, I have nothing to wear!”

I sat down and showed her all the details.

We had the penthouse suite. We would have our own 24/7 butler. All the food and alcohol we could want. Fine dining in the suite. Breakfast and lunch, if we wanted it. Our own kitchen and wine cellar.

We would have dinner with the captain. A special tour of the ship with one of the officers. We could eat outside at the table on our huge deck.

I showed her pictures and the layout of the suite. She was blown away.

“Baby, this is amazing. I can’t believe it.”

“Now, as far as you having no clothes is concerned, I have great news.”

“Really? What, baby?” she gushed.

“You’re not going to need any. You can stay in the suite with me, and we can have sex for seven days. How perfect is that?” I said, completely straight-faced.

“Very funny.” She rolled her eyes. “Baby, at the very least, I will need a dress for dinner with the captain. Don’t you want him to see you have a beautiful, well-dressed, fabulous wife?” she asked demurely.

“Not really. I’m not buying a dress just so you can impress him,” I teased, knowing full well I was going to buy her a new dress.

She knew it, too. But she played the game.

With a dramatic pout, she walked out of the family room and into the bedroom.

Of course, I followed her.

She was lying flat on the bed, hands folded on her tummy, staring out the window, completely ignoring me.

I climbed onto the bed, pulled my legs up, and lay next to her.

“So, you don’t want to go then?” I teased. I know—I can’t help myself.

She flipped onto her side, looked at me, and said,

“Why are you being so mean to me?”

“I am taking you on a seven-day penthouse cruise to Bermuda, and I am being mean? What am I missing here?” I said.

I mean, she was being a brat.

“Of course, I’m grateful, baby. I want to look nice for you,” she said demurely, hitting me with those Bambi’s eyes—*as usual*.

Okay, it was time to cave, even though I had caved from the start.

“So, where are we going to get this new dress?” I asked, smiling at her.

“Really? Oh, baby, thank you!” She beamed, kissing me on the lips.

“Baby, I’m going to look fabulous for *you*, not the captain. I want you to be proud of me.”

She was so happy.

I loved seeing her happy. I was good at making her *unhappy*, so my heart would explode with love when I saw her feeling excited and happy.

“Can we go now?” she asked quickly, not wanting to risk an argument that could make me change my mind.

“No, baby, we can’t go now,” I said.

The smile fell off her face.

“Why not? We’re not doing anything right now.” She looked confused. I *rarely* said no to her.

“Because I think it’s only fair that I get to take advantage of you, and you show me your appreciation,” I teased.

“Oh, baby, I *promise* you, I will take good care of you when we get back. I’m just going to get ready—it’ll take me five minutes. Let’s go, baby! And don’t forget—spectacles, testicles, wallet, and watch.”

She always said that when we left the house. Cute.

We headed to the International Mall in Tampa to find her a dress. They had more expensive shops there—*Tomoz* liked that.

We spent the day picking out the perfect dress, along with all the accessories she absolutely needed. Apparently, there were other outfits that were also mandatory.

I teased her, pretending it was costing way too much—men tend to do that. But the truth is, we love spoiling our princesses. Most guys don’t enjoy shopping with their girlfriends, but I loved it. We had so much fun, and let’s be real—women love being spoiled. Why not?

*Tomoz* loved imagining herself in these outfits, picturing extravagant social settings where everyone admired and desired her.

“This one for the captain’s dinner,” she said, holding up a red dress.

“And this is for the show.” Another outfit, another plan.

“Something casual for the day...” She paused, glancing at the growing pile in her arms.

I thought, I hope she runs out of places we will go soon.

But it was worth every penny.

I loved seeing her happy and watching her try things on. I also loved watching her take them *off* in the changing room.



Some stores don't allow you to go back to the fitting rooms with your girlfriend, but I just went back there anyway. What were they going to do—throw me out? We had an absolute blast.

So, *Tómoz* walked out of The International Mall carrying all her bags.

Sorry, I meant— *Tómoz* walked out of The International Mall, with me carrying all her bags.

So now, we were going on a cruise.

Our penthouse suite dripped with luxury—polished floors, a wine cellar stocked to the brim, and a private patio stretching toward the endless ocean. The kind of place that made you forget reality for a while.

It was everything you'd expect from a top-tier cruise experience—the perfect stage for our chaos.

We also had our own butler 24/7, whom we put to very good use.

*Tómoz* made me agree that since we were on vacation, I couldn't put any restrictions on her drinking. Well, she told me I had agreed, although I had no recollection of ever doing so.

Once the ship reached international waters, they opened the casino. We had dinner in our suite, where the butler set up the table and served the meal like we were at the Ritz-Carlton. *Tómoz* ordered a bottle of wine. Of course, I don't drink wine, as she well knew. So, naturally, she drank the whole bottle—because it would be a shame to waste any.

After dinner, we walked around the ship, soaking in the atmosphere. She towered over me. I'm not exactly short, but she stood at 6'5" in her six-inch heels, which made me look short next to her. As always, *Tómoz* was the center of attention—loving every second of it.

The dancers from the show were at the bar and *Tómoz* started talking to them. We sat at the bar and had a few drinks. Well, *Tómoz* had a few—I had one. They were all friendly, and we chatted for quite a while.

Then they had to go get dressed and do their show. Before heading off to perform, one of the girls said, "Let's all get together after the show." We both agreed.

When we got to the casino, *Tómoz* was in high spirits—ready to party. Gambling, however? Not exactly her strong suit.

We sat at the blackjack table. It was the only game I knew how to play in a casino. I asked the croupier to put \$1,000 on my room, and he gave us the chips. I gave half to *Tomoz*, and we started betting.

She was just throwing chips down without even looking at her cards. Within minutes, she had blown through all her chips and started using mine.

"Baby, try to be more careful. At least look at your cards first," I said, frustration creeping into my voice. Another really bad idea.

"Don't tell me how to gamble." She was already annoyed.

"Do you even know how to play?" I was on a roll with my bad ideas.

"How much have you won?" she challenged, signaling the waitress for another drink.

"Well, right now, with your help and very advanced 'don't look at your cards' strategy, we're down about \$450," I said, my frustration growing.

"Oh, okay. I need some more chips," she told the croupier.

"How many would you like?" he asked.

"Give me a thousand dollars," she said. "Put it on room..." She turned to me. "What's our room number, baby?"

Without a word, I tossed our room card onto the table.

"Thank you, sir," the croupier said, obviously noticing the key was for the penthouse suite.

We played for a while. Well, I played, and *Tomoz* continued throwing chips away. She was making it obvious she'd had too much to drink. Her words were slurred, her movements were sloppy, and her carefree betting was starting to make the other players at the table uncomfortable.

I don't like it when she acts like a brat—which, of course, she *loves* to do.

"*Tomoz*, come on, play properly. At this rate, we'll end up washing dishes to pay for our room," I said, trying to reason with her, though my frustration was seeping through.

She rolled her eyes. "Every time I try to have fun, you act like an *asshole*," she slurred, wobbling as she turned away. She attempted to storm off, but it was more of a stagger.

I sighed, handed the remaining chips back to the croupier, and had him credit the balance back to our room account. Then I went after her.

But she was *gone*. Disappeared, just like she always did. I searched the ship, but she was nowhere to be found. *Gone Girl*.

Finally, I gave up and went back to our suite. Then, a sinking feeling hit me. *Tomoz* had her own key card, meaning she could charge *anything* to our room.

I turned on the TV, pulled up the account, and *watched* in real time as she started racking up charges.

Casino chips. Drinks. More drinks. More chips.

Within minutes, she had blown through \$5,000.

Retribution was always expected—and usually very painful.

She finally decided I had paid enough and called the room. I picked up the phone. *Tomoz* said, “Hi,” which was very unfair. Before I could launch into an uncontrollable tirade, she continued,

“Baby, I’ve been looking all over for you. What are you doing in the room? Come down here. I’m with the girls—they want to see you. We’re having a great time.”

I decided to save my tirade for a later time.

They were on a lower deck at a very cool bar with a patio overlooking the ship’s bow. The guys from the show had joined us by then, which was a good thing. We partied well into the night.

*Tomoz* invited them back to our suite, but they told us guest rooms were off-limits to any staff or performers, which made sense.

By the time we got back to the room, we were exhausted. The sun was already coming up when we finally made it to bed.

The next day, I brought up the charges she had put on the room.

“Baby, I tried to find you, and I couldn’t. I just didn’t think to call the room until later,” she said. “I was so disappointed in myself for not using my chips properly. So, I thought I could win your money back. Unfortunately, I’m not good at gambling, as you rightly pointed out. I kept trying to win it back, but things went from bad to worse. Finally, I gave up. But I did my best, baby.”

Fight or forget it?

I mean, I couldn’t get the money back. If I were too hard on her, she’d do it again.

And I couldn’t break up with her—we were on a cruise.

Trapped by The Venus Fly Trap again.

As I said, we had a butler who would bring us anything we wanted—drinks, champagne, fine dining or casual, breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

So, I picked up the phone and asked the butler to bring us breakfast.

And that, as they say?

Exactly.

One evening, we had dinner with the captain. He was extremely handsome—probably in his fifties—and South American. His short, perfectly groomed salt-and-pepper hair, dark tan, and immaculate white captain’s uniform made him look like he had just stepped off the red carpet at a blockbuster naval movie premiere.

*Tomoz*’s charm was on full display as she angled for the captain’s attention, her laughter a little too loud, her gaze lingering just a little too long. It was also her way of testing me. But instead of jealousy, all I felt was exhaustion.

Would it always be like this?

The captain handled *Tomoz* perfectly, refusing to be drawn into her sensual, sexy advances. He sidestepped her innuendos with practiced ease and gave me almost all his attention. The whole ship of guests was watching him—he knew better.

He was a genuinely nice man, devoted to his wife and kids. We had a great conversation, which just compounded *Tomoz*’s frustration. She wasn’t used to being ignored or handled.

As you would expect from a penthouse suite, our suite was beautifully appointed. It had a full kitchen with a fridge, a wine cellar, a dining table, and a family room with a built-in entertainment unit and a massive big-screen TV. Two bedrooms, a stunning bathroom, a walk-in shower, and a luxurious tub.

Sliding doors led out to an extended patio that stretched to the end of the deck. A staircase descended to the lower deck, with a locked private door. Only we could open that door, and the ship’s captain and the crew.

Just outside the sliding doors was a large, round glass table where we could enjoy breakfast, afternoon drinks, or evening delights.

Guests on the deck above had a clear view of our penthouse patio, though we were never really aware of the people up there—well, at least before tonight.

After dinner with the captain, we returned to the penthouse for evening delights.

“Baby, I had such a nice time tonight. The captain was very nice,” *Tomoz* said as we walked into the suite.

“Yes, I could tell you liked him,” I replied, a small tinge of jealousy creeping into my voice.

“He is very handsome,” she teased. “But I’m here with you, and you get to fuck this all night.”

She stepped back, throwing her arms down the front of her body.

She then opened the patio doors and walked outside. I followed her outside onto the deck. *Tomoz* was lifting her dress and lying down on the glass dining table with her legs open.

"Baby, come here and fuck me, please." She looked at me with those pleading brown eyes and with her dress pulled up over her breasts, which were now outside of her bra, and her legs were open wide.

I took hold of both her legs and pulled her closer to the edge of the table, pulled her panties to one side, and put my fingers inside her pussy. She let out an involuntary moan. She was already wet.

I pushed my fingers deeper inside her and moved them around.

"Oh yes, baby, deeper, harder." She begged.

Then I pushed them in and out slowly. "Open your legs wider," I told her. She was only too happy to obey. "Baby, will you please fuck me hard. I want it hard tonight, baby. I want you to make her throb, baby."

I began thrusting my fingers in and out of her pussy. Deep and hard, feeling my hand hit bone. She was in ecstasy.

I continued to finger fuck her as I pushed my hand down on her chest to pin her on her back and went down on her with my mouth. I started licking and sucking her thighs and pussy. Licking her clit while I pounded her pussy with my fingers."

"Baby, I need you to fuck me with your cock." I had teased her enough.

I pulled my pants down, took out my cock, and rubbed it on the inside of her thighs. She raised her butt up, held her legs over her head, and said, "Fuck me, baby, fuck me, please. I want your cock inside me. I want your cum inside me."

I put the tip of my cock inside her. Then took it out. Then again. She was moaning loudly. She put her legs down on the edge of the table and started to thrust her pussy onto my cock. I began thrusting in time.

Her thighs began to shake, so I knew she was close to coming.

"Oh my God, baby, don't stop, don't stop." She was gone. "Yes, yes, fuck me, I want your cum."

I was so turned on now, "Baby, I want your pussy to suck the cum out of my cock. I want to fill you up so my cum is dripping out of your pussy down your legs." She loved me talking dirty to her.

The whole bottom half of her body began to shudder as she came hard. I managed to wait before I came. She loved it when I came; it made her feel desired and in control.

She grabbed for my neck and then pulled herself up so that she was holding me tight with her arms around my neck. Her body would shudder every 20 seconds or so, like she was having aftershocks from coming so hard. We had gotten a little crazy; we were both drunk and very horny. Yes, it was a typical night. Suddenly, I became aware of people talking. I looked up.

Lost in our passion, we hadn't noticed the crowd gathering on the balcony above. Their laughter and cheers shattered the moment, bringing reality crashing down.

Embarrassment should have followed, but *Tomoz* seemed to revel in the attention. At the same time, I wrestled with the sheer absurdity of it all.

Then the room phone started ringing. They were trying to tell us to STOP.

Down below, the crew had begun unlocking the gate at the bottom of the stairs and were about to come up to stop the show.

I started to get up to see what was going on. *Tomoz* raised a hand as if to say, *I got this.*" Truth is, she would handle it much better than I could.

She slipped into her robe and strode to the top of the stairs—not to apologize, but to warn them. If they dared to enter without her permission, she would report them. Or sue them—not sure which, probably both.

Anyway, they retreated with their tails between their legs. The crowd dispersed, and the show was over—for now.

It had been quite a spectacle. Some people loved every second of it; others were probably traumatized. *Tomoz*, of course, was convinced they all enjoyed it. And, if they hadn't, why had they kept watching? She had a point.

The whole incident became the talk of the ship. The captain even mentioned it in his morning update over the loudspeaker system. He was subtle, of course, but everyone knew exactly what he was referring to.

I can't say this was something I ever intended. Public displays of sexual behavior aren't my thing. But by the time I realized what was happening, it was too late. *Tomoz*, on the other hand, loved it. The fact that the entire ship now knew she'd been fucked on a glass table? That just made it even better for her.

And, if I'm being honest, we did enjoy ourselves. And it was pretty damn funny.

We finally docked in Bermuda—a stunning island colonized by the English in, well a long time ago. It had a unique blend of British and American influences.

Non-residents cannot own, rent, or drive four-wheeled vehicles in Bermuda, so we rented scooters and tore around the island. We had a fantastic dinner at Ascot's in Hamilton.

*Tomoz* and I loved playing Putt-Putt Golf, and Bermuda had an incredible course. Of course, *Tomoz* cheated constantly, and as a result, she won. There will forever be a big asterisk next to her name when she's inducted into the Putt-Putt Golf Hall of Fame. She has no one to blame but herself.

As always, they were the worst of times; they were the best of times. *Tomoz* played up a lot of the time. We had some awful arguments—mostly because she was always wasted, and I wasn't. When she drank too much, she became confrontational, saying things she normally wouldn't. The paranoia kicked in, too.

She would trap me—yes, Venus Fly Trap me—into arguments.

"Why do you fuck other women?" she would ask.

See what I mean? I felt like I was in a straitjacket. The only way out was to go along with the madness.

You might think *Tomoz* knew I wasn't fucking other women. She didn't. Her paranoia was so intense that she believed her accusations.

"I only fuck other women when I *need* to baby. On a need to fuck other women basis," I said nonchalantly.

You see, that wasn't the reaction she wanted. She wanted to put me on the defensive, scrambling for an explanation, so she could verbally beat the shit out of me. But she knew she wasn't getting to me when I went along with it.

Getting me annoyed was her way of proving to herself she could control me.

"You're such a faggot," she spat, her voice sharp enough to cut. "If I catch you fucking her, I'll kill her. And you."

She leaned in closer, eyes dark with something beyond anger—something raw. Something dangerous.

"Give me her number," she demanded. "I'm calling her. I'm telling her everything."

"Sure baby, its 1-800 I fuck your boyfriend." I smirked, "You already have it anyway. You got it when you broke into my phone and stole all my contacts."

She changed tacks, "Why am I not enough for you?" she angrily demanded to know.

That one I had no answer for. She was more than I could ever want. But if I tried to tell her that, she would just come at me with something more vile and hateful.

It was best to agree with her, go with it, and pretend I was giving credence to what she was saying, even if I was sarcastic.

So, I ignored that.

"I have seen pictures of her. She's fucking ugly," she shouted.

I just followed along. "Yeah, that is why she is still on the covers of major magazines," I shouted back.

"How much do you pay her?" Then, "Why do you pay her, but you won't pay me?"

"Well, that is easy. She is worth it." Well, if you can say ridiculous things, so can I!

"Baby, do you think I would have made a good porn star?" This time, she said it like she was daring me to say yes or no.

There is no good answer to that question, and she knew it. If I said nothing, then in her mind, that was the answer she didn't want. Yes, would be the wrong answer. She would say, "You think I would make a good porn star? What kind of boyfriend would say that to his girlfriend?"

No, would also be the wrong answer. She would say, "What, you don't think I am sexy enough? For fuck's sake, how dirty do you want me to be, you fucking ungrateful bastard?"

I would be able to control myself for a while. But my patience would run out.

Then I would say things like:

"Why do you have to ruin everything?" "Why can't you just have a few drinks, like normal people?"

Or "You just destroy everything and everyone in your path. You had it so good, and now you have destroyed it." That was a nasty one because it threatened us being over and her being abandoned.

I said things like, "When you do this, you embarrass yourself."

"You look like a cheap prostitute."

"Pull yourself together and stop behaving like a child." Those things were like water off a duck's back to *Tomoz*.

These arguments were loud, and not only the other passengers but even butler looked more traumatized than usual.

I was just as much to blame as *Tomoz* was.

In the end, the butler told us that if we didn't stop arguing and being a disturbance, they would have us arrested when the ship got back to port. For real!



By the time we got home from the trip, we needed a vacation to get over the vacation. You are probably asking, “How do you mess up a 7-day Penthouse Cruise to Bermuda?” I just told you how we did it. Keep up.

We were still arguing after we got off the ship and all the way home. Even when we were arguing, we could have stopped at any time, jumped on each other, and fucked each other’s brains out.

Our relationship was a beautiful disaster—equal parts love and chaos. We thrived on the highs and barely survived the lows, but neither of us could walk away. Dysfunctional didn’t even begin to describe it.

However bad the argument was, we were still crazy about each other. And I mean *crazy*. Just don’t tell *Tomoz*. We always calmed down and forgave each other. *Eventually*. When we arrived home she was still pouting about things I said during our recent fights.

I was putting some jewelry away in my wardrobe when I saw the Patek Philippe box with the Twenty-4 women’s watch in 18K rose gold with a bronze-colored face inside. I had bought it for Jules, but we broke up before I gave it to her. I had paid \$22,000 for it. I had completely forgotten about it.

It would never be used, so I figured it would make a nice gift for *Tomoz*.

I thought maybe offering to give it to her if she stopped drinking—or at least stopped acting out—might motivate her.

“*Tomoz*, I want to show you something,” I said, standing in my closet.

She was sitting on the bed, on her computer.

“So, show me,” she said.

She knew I wanted her to come to the closet to see what I wanted to show her, but with *Tomoz*, it was always about control.

“Baby, come here, please. You’re going to like this.” I could be a good negotiator, too.

She rolled her eyes, reluctantly closed her computer, got off the bed, and made the long six-foot walk from the bed to my closet.

How do I know? Because I know *Tomoz*! Also, I heard her sigh, slam the lid of her computer, and drag her feet along the carpet—just to make sure I knew I was putting her out. And yes, I had measured the distance from the bed to my closet.

She walked into my closet.

“What?”

She was not in a good mood. She stood in the doorway. I was four feet inside, holding the box in my hand.

“Come here, look at this.”

I held up the box.

She looked at me like, *You are really pushing it, Mr.*

She stood in front of me rather than cozing up next to me.

“Never mind,” I said, putting the box back in the drawer.

It was a very, *very* dysfunctional relationship. I know *you* know that. I just needed you to know that *I* know.

“Stephen, you dragged me in here. Show me what you want to show me,” she said impatiently.

“Well, it’s a very nice gift for you, and you have a terrible attitude, so I don’t feel like giving it to you right now,” I said, pouting myself.

Now, she was interested.

“Okay, I’m sorry. Now, what is it? Show me.”

She saw the box. She came up beside me, put her hand on my shoulder, and finally cozied up to me so she could see better.

*That’s more like it*, I thought. Not too much to expect for a \$22,000 gift.

I opened the lid of the box and showed her the watch. The Patek Philippe Twenty-4 is a very well-known and sought-after timepiece.

The 18-carat gold bracelet just falls onto the wrist—light yet sturdy. The bezel and face are set with diamonds. It is *stunning*.

*Tomoz* looked at the watch and put her hand over her mouth like she couldn’t breathe.

Then she looked at me.

“Baby, it’s beautiful. Why? I mean, why did you buy that for me?”

“I want you to have it, *Tomoz*. But I want you to stop drinking for a month before I give it to you. Can you do that for me?”

She *hates* conditions.

“If you’re going to give me something, give it to me. Don’t make me do something to get it. That’s not a gift.”

She was upset. She walked out of the closet, took the long walk back to the bed, and opened her computer.

I put the box back in the drawer, walked out of the closet, and sat next to her on the bed.

She shut the lid of her computer so I couldn’t see what she was looking at and asked,

“Is that real gold? Is that a real Patek?”

She was skeptical.

“Of course. Do you think I’d get you a knockoff?”

“How much was it?” she inquired.

“Baby, that’s rude. You can’t ask me that.”

“Well, if you’re going to tell me I have to stop drinking for a month to get this so-called gift, then I need to know what my not drinking for a month is worth to you,” she said defiantly.

“\$22,000,” I said.

“So, you’re trying to tell me that you went out and bought me a \$22,000 watch in the hope that I would stop drinking for a month?”

She saw my face. She knew I was hiding something.

“I knew it. I knew there was no way you bought that watch for me. It’s not even my style,” she said, suspicious.

Don’t ask me why, but I couldn’t lie to her.

I told her I had bought it for Jules.

She looked at me, her mouth dropped open, and her shoulders slumped. She couldn’t believe it.

“Oh my God, Stephen, you seriously think I’m going to wear a watch you bought for Jules? So every time I look at the fucking thing, I think of Jules? And when you see me wearing it, you think of Jules? Are you out of your mind?”

She was distraught now.

She jumped off the bed and ran out of the bedroom. As she reached the hallway, she turned back and shouted,

“You just want Jules back in your life! Why do you do these things to me? I don’t deserve this. I hate you!”

And she stormed off.

So, you’re telling me you don’t want it then? I thought but didn’t say it.

How do you fuck that up?

Well, first of all, by being cheap. At the very least, I should have sold the damn thing and bought her the watch she actually wanted.

Second of all, it was thoughtless of me. Of course, she would feel that way.

Third of all, now I needed to fix this.

I was going to pay.

I went to try and find her.

Finally, I gave up.

I went outside to sit by the pool and firepit on the sofa overlooking the lake.

Lo and behold, there she was—sitting on the jetty, staring out at the water.

I got up, walked down the garden to the jetty, and sat down beside her.

“Baby, I am so sorry. That was very insensitive of me. I wasn’t thinking. I’ll buy you the watch you want. No strings attached.”

I put my arm around her shoulder. She let her head fall into its home.

She said quietly, “You don’t need to buy me a watch. I don’t even want a watch. And I certainly don’t want to have to do something to get one. Baby, you have got to stop forcing your expectations on me. I am trying. You’re just so impatient. You have to let me do it in my own time, in my own way—when I’m ready.”

She was still staring out at the lake.

She was, of course, right.

“I don’t want to hear about Jules anymore. She needs to be gone from your life, Stephen. And don’t you dare give me anything of hers ever again.”

“Okay, baby, I won’t. I promise,” I said.

We sat there in silence for a while as the sun started to set.

Finally, we went back inside—into the bedroom, onto the bed—and snuggled.

We lay there together in the dark and eventually fell asleep.

Every structure that I had built around my life was crumbling around me. I was learning some powerful and important lessons. *In life, we cling too tightly to structure, but truth often lives in only the flow of ideas moving onward—free, unfiltered, and alive.* Things finally calmed down.

We fell back in love again.

Everything was perfect.

For about three days—maybe less.

Then the madness and mayhem reached a whole new level, way beyond anything that had happened so far.

Are you having fun yet?

Okay, well, hang on to your panties or underpants.

It’s about to get even *wilder*.

So buckle up—because things would only get crazier from here.

We didn’t know it yet, but the storm we had created was only just brewing.

# Chapter Twenty-Nine

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## “You Always Say You Love Me, But Why Do You Love Me?”

*Tomoz* was a paradox. One minute, she was confident and self-assured about her beauty and sexual prowess. The next, she was insecure and needed assurance that she was still beautiful and sexy.

We were in the bathroom. I had just gotten out of the shower, and *Tomoz* was applying her makeup in front of the mirror. There was something undeniably sexy about how she did it—then again, everything she did was sexy.

“I just don’t feel pretty enough for you, baby,” she said.

I looked at her like she was crazy. Then I remembered—she *is* crazy.

“Baby, you take my breath away whenever I look at you. Sometimes, I stare at you in awe and think it’s unfair that all that beauty was given to just one woman.”

It was true. That’s exactly how I felt.

She looked somewhat appeased but then asked, “I hope you’re not just saying that to make me feel better.”

“Well, I may have overstated it a little bit,” I teased.

She shot me a look just to be sure I was joking.

“Baby, please don’t ever say that in front of other women,” I said. “Any woman would give anything to look like you—to have men stare at them the way they stare at you. How would they feel hearing you say you don’t feel pretty? First of all, they’d be thinking, if she doesn’t feel pretty, what does that make me? Second of all, they’d hate you for not appreciating the gift they wish they had been given.”

I tried to make her understand.

She kept applying her makeup in silence, refusing to listen. It wasn’t defiance—it was habit. She would fall into self doubt and need assurance from whomever was around her. She needed attention, to be admired by men and women alike.

Then, she would complain that her girlfriends would use her, steal from her, and then fall out with her. It was very sad.

When she finished getting ready, I took her to the Ritz-Carlton, and we had a fabulous evening.

The next day, I had to leave for another event. My next trip was to Baltimore.

*Tomoz* stayed home. She wasn’t happy, but I couldn’t take her with me. It was too dangerous. Of course, she acted out.

On the first day, I got a call from the landscaper. He told me she was sitting on the balcony, drinking beer and throwing the empty bottles into the bushes below. He was annoyed because he had to pick them all up. I told him to leave them. Later, I asked Josh to collect the bottles and put them in the trash.

It was a nightmare for him. The branches cut him up, and he was so annoyed he kept telling me she could pick them up herself next time because he was never doing it again.

I just prayed there would be no ‘next time.’

Then, on Saturday night, when I called her, she said she was tired.

She told me she was going to get ready for bed and then call her mother, so if I couldn’t reach her later, she was either on the phone with her mother or had fallen asleep.

Of course, these were both setups for me not being able to reach her when she was out on the town.

She was texting me and sent me a picture. She was in the bathroom, getting ready for bed—a little piece of evidence to prove her case later.

But I noticed an open beer bottle behind her. She didn’t realize it was visible in the photograph.

She was obviously getting ready to go out. It was Saturday night.

An hour later, I called her.

“I know you’re going out,” I said.

She denied, denied, denied.

“Okay, if you’re not going out, send me another picture. Right now.”

She came up with a stream of excuses, but none of them worked. Finally, she sent me a picture—taken in total darkness. Even in the dark, I could see her makeup. And, of course, it was very sexy.

I had no problem with her going out. Well, that’s not entirely true. Actually, it’s completely untrue. I *hated* her going out on her own. I mean, what do you think is going to happen? Exactly.

Yes, I know—that’s terrible. But there you are.

Although more than anything, I hated her lying to me.

So, I decided to teach her a lesson.

Yeah, another really bad idea.

Josh had already done some special operations for me, so I sent Josh to the house to see what she was up to.

So, Josh went over to the house. By now it was 9:30 pm. Time to hit the town.

Josh went around the back of the house and entered through the French doors. *Tomoz* we getting ready to leave out the front door. Josh made a noise as he closed the french doors behind him. She turned and saw a figure behind her in the dark. Suffice to say she freaked out. She eventually realized it was Josh. She was furious. She was caught red-handed—getting ready to go out. All dolled up and ready for action.

After she got over her shock and horror, she quickly got rid of Josh.

Now, *Tomoz* was *really* pissed off—and about to teach *me* a lesson.

I didn’t know this then, but she spent the rest of the night on a dating website.

Yes, the *same one* where she met me.

Who could blame her?

I could—but that would be a waste of time and energy.

Just like that, she found a wealthy guy who owned a horse ranch in Gainesville, Florida—about 180 miles away.

He arranged for his ranch hand to pick up *Tomoz* and take her to his horse ranch on Monday morning before I got back.

I mean, holy shit, how she managed to pull that off in just a couple of hours was fucking incredible.

When I arrived home on Monday around 1 p.m., Josh was in the kitchen, cleaning up.

I sat down at the breakfast island.

“Do you want a juice?” Josh asked.

“Yes, please—make it a double,” I said, trying to bring some humor to the whole situation.

“So, she’s gone, huh?” I asked.

I already knew the answer.

“Yeah, the guy from the ranch came by and picked her up about an hour ago,” Josh said.

“She left that box for you. Said it was a watch you gave her but that she didn’t want it.”

He nodded toward the Patek Philippe box on the counter.

She must have taken it out of the drawer in my closet.

I picked up the box and opened it to look at the watch.

NO WATCH!

Oh, dear God.

Josh hadn’t bothered to open the box.

Why would he?

At first, I was frantic, then angry, and then I just... accepted it.

I figured it was karma—for not giving it to Jules and then trying to give it to *Tomoz*.

Once she arrived, she immediately sent me pictures of her new place at *The Ranch* in Gainesville.

One was her looking in the mirror and giving me the middle finger.

She was still pissed.

She sent me long texts, calling me terrible names and telling me she was going to do unspeakable things to me.

Slowly, the texts and threats became less abusive, and she started working her way back.

She sent me many pictures of —her new ranch bungalow, the train (yes, the ranch had a fucking miniature train you could ride around the estate on!), and the main house, which was basically a mansion. I had to admit, it was impressive.

And really annoying.

Of course, she was trying to make me jealous.

Which didn’t work.

Well—of course, it worked, but I pretended it didn’t.

Then she called to rub it in.

“Baby, I am *so* happy here. There are horses, and Reggie has been so nice to me.”



I told her I was *very* happy for her.

It was perfect.

She loved horses.

Couldn't have worked out better.

Which was absolutely not true.

"Thank you for leaving me the watch box, baby. That was a nice touch," I said sarcastically.

"Well, what do you expect? You were an asshole for sending Josh over. He really scared me," she retorted.

"Yeah, well, you can keep the watch. Sell it so you have some money."

"Thank you, baby."

That's not what she wanted.

She wanted me to be pissed off.

This was a very expensive way to not give her what she wanted.

Ego is a very destructive—and sometimes a very expensive luxury.

"Looks like a pretty impressive place, this horse ranch. Thanks for the pictures, by the way. I've started a picture board."

The jealousy was pouring out of me. I couldn't hide it.

*Tomoz* just ignored it.

"Yes, we're going riding tomorrow. Reggie mentioned he has a business proposal to discuss," she said nonchalantly—as if she didn't know how much that would eat away at me.

My grip on the phone tightened.

"Sounds great," I managed to say, though I was seething inside.

I hated how easily she could play me.

But even more?

I hated how much I cared.

He has a business proposal? I fucking bet he does! I thought.

That better be the only proposal he makes.

But out loud, I said, "Yeah, that sounds exciting."

Then, with a touch of bitterness, "Seems like you've finally found a really great guy."

I thought to myself, I'll give it three days.

She went on her ride with him.

I think they also took the horses out for a run or gallop—whatever the hell horses do.

Okay, some of my jealousy slipping out there.

But what was I supposed to think?

Yes, you're right, precisely that.

*Tomoz* knew her being there with this fucking Reggie guy was driving me crazy.

Or should I say—even crazier?

She called me after they had finished galloping around the ranch together—which I thought was nice of her. NOT.

She was excited. Things were going well. Reggie had tried to have his way with her, but she had fended him off. I was so proud of her. I mean really?

I was freaking out. This guy was extremely wealthy and could give her a lifestyle I couldn't. She could have and do whatever she wanted. So, I had nothing to worry about.

I just wanted her home so I could strangle her—then make love to her. Or maybe that needed to be the other way around? Of course, she was loving every minute of this.

They had planned a follow-up meeting at the mansion the following day.

"Sounds amazing," I said through gritted teeth. She was torturing me, and she knew it.

"I wish you could be here to see everything," she said in her sexy, demure voice. I could feel the energy building up in my body, ready to explode.

"Yes, I would love to meet this guy. He sounds really nice," I said, trying to contain myself.

"How are you?" she asked, hoping I would say something like, "I miss you," or "When are you coming home?"

"Great," I told her, "I've been getting a lot done." Yes on a need to lie basis.

Actually, I had done nothing but miss her.

"Okay, baby, I have to go. He's calling me," she said, rushing off the phone.

Oh, now you are really pissing me off, I thought.

Later that evening, she called me. She was giving the female ranch staff some kind of motivational seminar. She told them all to say "Hi" to me, which they did, but somehow, it wasn't quite the same as when *Tomoz* said, "Hi."

*Tomoz* had been drinking, and she was slurring her words. It was pretty entertaining until, all of a sudden, the line went dead. Maybe she fell off the stage—I'm not sure.

She called me the next day after their "Business Meeting." Apparently, he owned a resort on some island and wanted *Tomoz* to manage it for him. He would pay her a good salary, and of course, she would have her own suite at the resort hotel.

It all sounded wonderful. I mean, it was definitely a step up from just being an escort. She would be his personal prostitute. She was definitely on an upward trajectory.

"I think it is going to be amazing," I said—which is almost the same thing.

"I'm thinking I might come to see you this afternoon," she said like it was just something she was considering doing after riding with ranch dude.

"But baby, you won't call the police and have me arrested for taking the watch, will you?" She was really worried.

"Yeah, I should probably call them back and tell them not to come," I said, teasing her.

"Baby, I know you're mad... but you wouldn't have me arrested, would you?" she asked, needing reassurance. The irony was not lost on me.

"Baby, it never even crossed my mind. Don't be silly."

It really had never even entered my mind.

"Okay, then I'm coming to see you," she said, still a little wary.

"Really? Well, I guess I should tidy up a bit then. We had a pretty wild party here last night. The guys wanted to celebrate that you were gone. The place is a mess. God only knows what they were all doing in the sex room all night," I teased with an edge.

"Look, I am trying to be nice here, Stephen," she said, noting my sarcasm. "I know you didn't have a sex party last night. Stop being silly," she admonished me.

I thought, *Mum, get off the phone and put Tomoz back on, please.*

But I said sarcastically, "How are you going to get here? Do they even have Greyhound buses in the middle of nowhere, or should I arrange a horse and carriage?"

I mean, the ranch was nearly 200 miles away—how was she going to get here?

"Baby, I would walk a thousand miles just to see you," she shot back sarcastically without missing a beat. "Fortunately, I don't have to," she continued. "Reggie has loaned me a car to get around in," she added dryly. She had made her point.

"Okay, well, I will be here viewing my estate until you arrive, darling. Do you have any idea what time you might arrive? I'll put the kettle on and make us a pot of tea," I said in a very upper-class, aristocratic English voice.

"I'll call you when I'm on my way. I'll be there as soon as I can," she said and hung up.

She was very quick, which wasn't surprising—because he had loaned her a Mercedes SL55 AMG. WTF!

She called me as she was arriving at the back gate so I could let her in.

I drove out to the gates, where she was waiting—very impatiently. She got out of her car, which was obviously hers now, left the door open and the engine running, and ran

over to the Rolls. She jumped into the passenger seat, dove into my arms, and started kissing me.

It was just the start of a truly amazing day.

She followed me through the gates in her SL55. Amazing.

When we got into the house, we went into the kitchen.

“Would you like some tea, darling?” I asked, putting the kettle on.

She was sitting on one of the high stools by the kitchen island on the other side from me. She opened her bag and slid the Patek Philippe watch onto the counter.

“Here,” she said.

She never wanted the watch and never intended to sell it. She just wanted to hurt me. To punish me for hurting her—again.

I walked around the kitchen island to her side. I pulled her up off the stool and put my arms around her neck. I kissed her forehead and said, “Thank you, baby. That means the world to me.”

Before I could say another word, she pulled me to her and kissed me passionately.

And we were back.

Before *Tomoz* arrived, I had been drinking green juice, so my breath was, well, green. *Tomoz* hated that, so I went to the bathroom to clean my teeth and freshen my mouth.

*Tomoz* lay on the floor outside the bathroom, watching me—her head propped up in her hands under her chin.

Very cute.

She knows I love it when she does that.

When I had finished, I went and sat down on the carpet next to her, and we made out.

“I’m hungry,” she said.

“Okay, Princess, let’s get you something to eat. There’s a KFC at the end of the street.”

“Very funny. I didn’t drive 200 miles to eat at KFC, so you had better do better than that.” She said, feigning indignance. She knew I was teasing her and would never take her to KFC.

So, I took her to the Ritz for lunch in the Rolls. I didn’t tell her I was taking her to the Ritz. As I pulled into the drive-through at McDonald’s, she turned, looked at me, and punched me on the shoulder. “Don’t you dare pull up to that window.”

“What? You said you didn’t want KFC.” I had to tease her a bit; I mean, how she put KFC down was unacceptable.

“Fine, I’ll have a milkshake and head back to the Ranch. Reggie will buy me dinner.”

Ow! She knew how to stab me in the heart.

"You want Chocolate or Vanilla?" I know I can't stop sometimes. She is just so much fun to tease. And now she deserved it, at least in my mind.

"Whichever one you think will look the best all over your head."

Always the last word.

By now, I was stuck in the drive-through line. When I got to the speaker to order, the young attendant said, "Welcome to McDonald's. Can I take your order?"

"Yes, is the milkshake machine working today?" *Tomoz* looked at me. Her eyes were wide and wild, like you better be fucking kidding me right now.

"No, I'm sorry it's broken right now." The young girl said.

It was one of the few things you could rely on in this world. The milkshake machine at McDonald's is always broken.

"When will it be fixed?" Now, she folded her hands tightly and looked out the passenger window at the wall.

"I am not sure, maybe never." The girl said, laughing.

"Damn, I was looking forward to wearing a chocolate milkshake."

"Excuse me? She was confused.

"Never mind, I guess I need to go to Dairy Queen. Thanks anyway."

I pulled through past the window out of the lot and onto the highway.

"Do you really think this is funny?" *Tomoz* pouted. "Why are you being mean to me?"

"What? You think you are above KFC and McDonald's now?"

"YES! I just drove 200 miles to see you, you asshole. I think I deserve to eat somewhere better than KFC or McDonald's."

"Okay, well, we are running out of options." I paused, "I have an idea. I know where we can go." I said, like I had just thought of somewhere we could eat.

"Where?"

"You'll see."

She looked apprehensive, hoping the teasing was over.

As we pulled into the Ritz valet parking, she said, "I should think so; why you couldn't just bring me here in the first place without all the ridiculousness is beyond me."

"Stop moaning, be grateful you are eating at the Ritz, and kiss me," I said as I pulled up and leaned in towards her.

"No, I am not kissing you," she raised her hand, blocking me. "You should be begging me for forgiveness. Then I might consider letting *you* kiss me."

Eric, the valet, came and opened my door. “Welcome back, Mr. Edwards.”

It felt like my second home.

The other valet opened *Tomoz*’s car door. As usual, she elegantly folded herself out of the car and touched the sky. She sashayed through the front doors, held open for her, and into the lobby. A vision to behold. God, I love that woman, I thought. Now, I needed to get to work to gain her forgiveness. I made a fuss of her, holding her chair, telling her how happy I was to see her and how stunning she looked. Job done. Now, let’s eat. Okay, I’m kidding; every word was true. No basises.

We sat outside on the veranda overlooking the water. *Tomoz* had fried green tomatoes, and I had my favorite grouper sandwich.

On the way back, we stopped at her storage unit to get some things for her. She was upset about how **René** had packed her things when he had moved them there. She vented about what a snake he was. They were never friends, and **René** was very passive-aggressive. He was terrified of *Tomoz*.

We made out in the car on the way home, and by the time we reached the house, we were already half undressed. The other half came off as we entered the house.

We spent the rest of the afternoon going back and forth between the bed and the pool. We made love on the floor, by the fireplace, and in the pool.

We never talked about what happened over the weekend. There was simply no point—or need.

She asked me who the English upper-class twit on the phone was and where the tea and biscuits were.

I told her I had decided to give the butler the afternoon off so we could fuck each other’s brains out without him disturbing us.

*Tomoz* concurred that this was a good decision.

She was wearing a beautiful, flowered dress—that is until she got inside the front door of the house.

We both spent the day in our underwear or by the pool, naked.

I opened a bottle of Champagne—well, it ended up being three. We sat and played our favorite love songs while we made out.

John Legend’s *All of Me*, Savage Garden’s *Truly Madly Deeply*, Ellie Goulding’s *Love Me Like You Do*, Christina Perri’s *A Thousand Years*—that kind of stuff.

We could talk for hours. With or without drugs.

She would ask me questions incessantly.

She always wanted to know what I was thinking. Perhaps because she knew I was mostly thinking about her.

Sometimes, it would be a simple question like, “Do you love me?”

I would answer, “Love? That’s a bit strong.”

She would respond by punching my arm. Hard.

Then she asked me, “You always say you love me, but why do you love me?”

That may sound innocuous, but trust me, that question is as loaded as a double-barreled shotgun.

It wasn’t a hard question to answer. I mean, she was the most gorgeous woman I had ever seen. Truly. But that’s not why you fall in love with someone. That’s why you fall in lust with them.

I did that in the beginning.

So now, without mentioning her physical attributes, I explained in great detail why I loved her—like in our song, *Truly Madly Deeply*.

We were on the bed. She lay in front of me again, her hands under her chin, looking at me with those big, beautiful brown eyes.

I told her I loved her elegance and strength, how she listened to me, and even how she rolled her eyes.

I told her I loved her self-confidence, her insecurities, her intelligence, her presence, her million different smiles, her patience—yes, she caught that one too—that of course got and eye roll, the way she would just run up to me, jump into my arms, and start kissing me. I love how she would put her head on my shoulder and would hold my arm. I loved how she would spoon me and fall asleep in my arms. I loved how she would cook me breakfast and dance around the kitchen.

I loved the way she blew me kisses, how she loved to laugh and talk, and how I could tell her anything—except that she was crazy.

That earned me a punch on my leg and a fierce stare, but it was worth it.

I told her I just loved being with her. I loved the way she held my hand, how she made me feel, how she missed me when I was gone, and how being with her felt like home.

There were many more reasons I told her why I loved her.

By the time I had finished, she was beaming, savoring each word.

Somehow, she resisted asking, “So why don’t you just marry me then?”

I don't like to talk badly about people—which is always a good thing to say before you talk badly about someone—but this guy Reggie was a complete dick. His name should have been Dickie, not Reggie.

Dickie, back at the ranch, thought his impressive mansion, horses, cars, and money would get *Tomoz* to drop her panties. There was no way that was going to happen. At least, I hoped not. In any case, she was coming home to me—of that, I was sure.

Dickie was the kind of guy who thought money could buy anything—respect, loyalty, even *Tomoz*. I couldn't help but laugh at his arrogance, but a small part of me wondered if he might succeed where I had failed.

Breaking up and making up had become our pattern—a toxic dance neither of us seemed willing to quit. It was thrilling, heartbreaking, and utterly unsustainable. Still, in those moments, it felt like we couldn't live without each other.

The day was like a dream. Then, of course, *Tomoz* had to leave.

I walked her out to her new car. I never ceased to be amazed by what she could pull off. To her, it was nothing.

She knew life is a game of illusions and played it better than anyone. The car, the ranch, the attention—it was all temporary, and she didn't care. What mattered to her was the thrill of the moment.

She blew me kisses as she sped away. She was gone again.

Though this time, I knew I would be seeing her again—very soon.



# Chapter Thirty

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## Truly, Madly, Deeply

*T*omoz called me from the ranch the next day. “I want you to come and see me,” she said excitedly.

“How is that going to work? Does he have a triple-sized bed?” I asked, meaning, how will we all sleep in the same bed? I was still very jealous.

“Very funny.” I could see her rolling her eyes. “I told you, nothing is going on here.”

Now I was rolling my eyes.

“Reggie is going away for a few days, so you can come over,” she said. “He leaves this afternoon, so get your ass over here so we can go to dinner together. There’s a nice restaurant near here I want you to take me to,” she demanded.

“What are you wearing?” I asked, wanting to know what I should wear. Another insecurity of mine. When I was a kid, money was scarce. My mother bought me school clothes that would last me my entire educational life.

I had shorts that came down to my knees and a Parker overcoat that came down to the ground. There was a hood with a fur rim. I looked like the grim reaper.

The other kids were merciless. They teased me relentlessly. When I would complain to my mother, she would say, “You will grow into them.” I know for sure that Parker overcoat would still be too big for me today. So as soon as I could afford to, I bought my own school clothes. I was determined to ensure that no one ever laughed at me again for what I wore. I always looked immaculate. When I asked *Tomoz* what *she* was wearing, it went right over her head.

“I’ll wear whatever you want me to wear, baby. Just get yourself here—hurry.” She hung up.

Now, I was thinking about what I wanted her to wear tonight.

Yeah, I know that was exactly what she wanted me to be thinking.

So, I quickly got ready. I had Josh pack an overnight bag, jumped in the Rolls, and took off. In no time, I was flying down the I-75 freeway. It was a three-hour drive, but I was almost there in two hours and ten minutes. *Almost.*

Suddenly, I caught sight of flashing headlights in my rearview mirror—along with blue lights. *Fuck.*

He pulled me over and walked up to my window. I already had all my documents ready, including my driver's license, which I had a sinking feeling I might have to kiss goodbye. I wasn't sure what he clocked me at, but I knew I had sometimes hit 120–130 mph. And I also knew he could take me straight to jail.

“Good afternoon, sir,” he said, his frustration barely contained.

“Good afternoon, officer,” I replied respectfully.

“Do you have a good reason why you were driving so fast?” he asked, wanting to hear my excuses before he handed me a ticket or took me straight to jail.

I decided to throw myself at his feet and hope for mercy.

“There is no good reason for driving that fast, officer,” I admitted flatly.

He nodded slightly as if thinking, “That was a good, well-rehearsed answer.”

“Let me see your ID and insurance,” he demanded.

“You were going 115 mph. That is extremely reckless. You could have killed not only yourself but many other people,” he continued. “It just takes one moment for someone to change lanes in front of you. What if that car was full of kids? How would that feel? Well, you wouldn't even know—because you'd be dead too. I've seen it happen many times,” he admonished me.

“You're right, officer. It was reckless. I apologize—it won't happen again.” It was a wake-up call.

“Wait here,” he said before returning to his car with the flashy lights.

When he returned, he handed me a ticket. “Slow down,” he warned. “If I catch you speeding again, I will take you to jail.”

He was more than fair with me. He could have arrested me on the spot. So, even though I got a ticket, I was grateful.

By now, instead of being early, I was late.

I arrived at the ranch gates. *Tomoz* had given me the secret code, so I punched it into the keypad, and the massive gates swung open.

I had to admit—the estate was impressive. Sprawling gardens, towering columns, and an effortless kind of luxury.

Following her directions, I made my way to her bungalow, knocked on the door, and stepped inside.

“Where have you been?” she demanded, clearly stressed.

“Well, it’s nice to see you too,” I said sarcastically, as I do sometimes.

“Baby, we need to leave now. Every horse owner in town is out tonight, and the restaurant was down to one table. I had to pull some serious strings to get it. If we don’t get there soon, someone else will,” she said, scurrying around.

I went over to kiss her. She pushed me away.

“Baby, I’ll kiss you in the car. I’ll even give you a blow job, but we have to go.”

She was the best negotiator ever. I just hoped she didn’t negotiate like that with anyone else.

So, we sped off to the restaurant—doing the speed limit.

“What is wrong with you, for God’s sake? Go fast like you always do.”

She loved it when I drove fast. It turned her on.

“Well, I’m glad you asked because now I can explain why it took me so long to get here,” I said as I put my foot down—following orders. My license wasn’t worth the fight. I was probably going to lose it anyway.

“You got a ticket for doing 115 mph?” she said. “I told you to get here quickly.” She teased.

“Yes, and because of that, I think it’s only fair we split the fine,” I said, teasing back.

“Okay, baby, just add it to my bill,” she quipped.

“You know I charge 10% plus the vig,” I said. “That’s weekly.”

“Shut up and drive,” she said, trying to keep me focused on getting to the restaurant before we lost our reservation.

Then she asked, “What is the vig?”

“I’m not exactly sure,” I admitted, “but gangsters always say that.”

“So, are you my sexy gangster boyfriend now?” she asked in her super-sexy voice. “I always wanted to date a gangster.” She teased.

“Well, if you don’t start giving me a blow job like you promised, you’re gonna be sleeping with the fishes tonight,” I said in the best New York accent I could muster. I think I sounded more Australian, so I don’t think my point came across quite as well.

“Baby, we’re almost there now, and it takes forever for you to cum. We don’t have time, and I don’t want you to be half-baked while we eat dinner.”

“I’ll give you one when we get back. I have a sexy outfit picked out for you.”

Like I said, the best negotiator ever.

Dinner was nice, but the stress of driving so fast, getting a ticket, and then having to rush to the restaurant was beginning to take its toll. Plus, eating a big meal didn’t help.

Then *Tomoz* started talking about the ranch, this guy Reggie, and riding with him. Apparently, Reggie owns an island in the Caribbean, and now she was talking about moving to his fucking island in the middle of who knows where to manage his resort.

“You’ll have to come out and see me. I saw pictures of the resort—it looks fabulous,” she gushed.

“Yeah, I’ll get right on booking my tickets,” I said dryly.

“Really, baby?” she said, sounding frustrated. “Come on, don’t be like that. I’m excited about this. You said you wanted me to get a job. Now I have one, and you’re still not happy. I don’t know what to do anymore.”

All that just frustrated me even more. Why? Because she had a fucking point, for Christ’s sake—keep up.

I was just not in the mood.

“Okay, well, let’s start with not working for some rich guy who just wants to fuck you,” I said.

“Oh, and you don’t?”

Touché. She was kicking my ass with my own words and behavior. Totally unfair.

“Why can’t you believe he thinks I’d do a good job managing the property? Is that so hard for you to believe?”

She was hurt and angry. Never a good combination.

“Fuck you,” she muttered under her breath, trying to hold back her rage.

Then we started to argue. It got louder. More obnoxious. People were staring. We were causing a scene.

So, we left the restaurant in a cloud of smoke.

The drive back to the ranch was silent. We were both lost in thought.

I entered the code, and the massive iron gates opened. We wound our way up the winding road toward the bungalow.

The ranch sprawled across acres of beautiful fields and towering trees—perfect for riding. To the right of the main house stood the 20+ stables, but calling the main house

a “house” was an insult. It was a massive two-story mansion with towering white pillars flanking the grand entrance and enormous double glass doors.

The lawns and hedges were flawlessly manicured. We could still smell the freshly cut grass even with the windows up and the air conditioning blasting. There was even a croquet lawn. And did I mention the train? A fucking train. I mean, who has a fucking train running through their estate? Oh, right—Reggie does.

The winding roads were lined with towering trees, their branches stretching across the road as if reaching for each other. It was undeniably beautiful. Three-rail white fences enclosed the 68 acres that made up the ranch.

We pulled around to the eight bungalows used by the ranch manager and a couple of other employees. The rest were for guests or sex slaves that Reggie found online recently.

As we pulled into the parking spot, I was talking to myself again.

Did I believe she was capable of managing a resort? No doubt in my mind. But not without learning how to manage a resort first. The idea that Reggie would hand her the keys to a resort without her having any idea what it takes was just ludicrous.

Not to mention the fact that she doesn’t even want to work in the first place. She would lose interest in no time flat.

Do you think I kept that thought to myself? Yeah, no. I said it. Pretty much. I know—another really bad decision. Yes, I was jealous. No, I did not want her to go. And yes, I was tired and irritated.

I know there is no excuse, and I deserved everything that was about to come my way. And trust me—it was a lot.

*Tomoz* had also been thinking about this and was smoldering on our drive back. She got out of the Rolls before I could get there to open her door. As she got out she slammed the door—which she knew would annoy the hell out of me. She stormed into the bungalow, nearly removing the door from its hinges.

By now, she had worked herself up into a fury with my kind help. I followed, about four steps behind. She threw her handbag down on the sofa as she spun around to face me, eyes blazing.

“Well, I guess we’ll see,” she said, her voice clipped, her expression set. I had never seen a single line on her forehead before, so I knew either her Botox was wearing off or I was about to face a cat 5 hurricane.

“Well, Reggie is confident I can do it. He believes in me.” She was angry and hurt. Her words were a dagger aimed straight at my ego. She wanted to hurt me and make me jealous. She managed both.

Then, the real attack began. “What do you even know about running a business, anyway?” she snapped.

And me? I already knew this wasn’t going to end well. Whatever I said from this point forward would be used to nail me to my cross. So, I thought, WTF. If I was already going to get burned, I might as well light the match myself.

“Well, just FYI, the reason you were sitting in a Rolls-Royce a few minutes ago after spending the evening at a fine dining restaurant is a small tribute to my business acumen,” I fired back.

Yes, a huge mistake.

“You think you are successful? Please. You are barely a millionaire. My father could buy you a thousand times over.” She could be ruthless. It was true, though.

“I wasn’t comparing myself to your father, *Tomoz*. I was comparing myself to you.” I was digging my own hole that she would shortly bury me in.

“Really? Okay, let’s compare, Mr. Big. I have had a successful modeling career in Paris, Miami, and Brazil. I have appeared on multiple top magazine covers, including *Italian* and *French Vogue*. So, fuck you and the horse you rode in on. What have you done?”

The horse reference was not lost on me.

I think I saw another deep line on her forehead. I also saw some very intense facial expressions I had never seen before and hoped I would never see again.

So, best to shut the fuck up now, right? Well, like I said, I was jealous, angry, and tired. I was past the point of being in control of my emotions.

“Hmmm. That was a long time ago, *Tomoz*. What have you done in the past ten years? Got addicted to alcohol, cocaine and doing nothing but find rich men to take care of you? What do you call that?” I took another shot across her bow.

“Yes, I have wasted my time on fucking faggots like you. You are all the fucking same. Assholes. Only interested in one thing. You’re like little boys who need their balls emptied.” She made a direct hit on my starboard side.

She continued her tirade. “You think a car impresses me? Do you think your money impresses me? I grew up with real wealth, Stephen—something you will never have. You are so small-time.” My ship was beginning to sink.

“I am not trying to impress you, *Tomoz*. You were the one who asked me what I knew about running a business. I was trying to impress upon you that I do happen to know a little about running a business, that’s all.” I reasoned with her.

“Your’e afraid I will make more money than you, and then I won’t need you anymore.” She wanted nothing to do with peace negotiations at this point. It was an all-out war, and she would accept nothing less than my complete, unconditional surrender and reparations for my terrible treatment of her.

There were so many things I could have said at this point. Things that, at the very least, could have lowered the intensity and brought some calm to the situation. In hindsight, I can think of many; at the time, I couldn’t think of any.

So, I said, “You will always need me, *Tomoz*, or someone like me. You are no longer capable of taking care of yourself, and you are certainly not capable of running a fucking multi-million-dollar resort. This guy—Dickie, whatever his name is—has no intention of letting you do that anyway. He just wants to, as you said, empty his balls in you.”

As the final nail in my coffin was hammered into place, I knew the only place I was about to go was my grave.

“If you believe that, why did you come anyway?” She always made such good points when we were having an argument. Dead and buried.

By this time, we had gotten louder and even more obnoxious.

I was going to pay for my perceived lack of belief in her—which wasn’t true, but truth was not something *Tomoz* wanted to hear right now. She only wanted to hear what she wanted to hear.

I hated hurting her feelings. Hated it. Which just made me even angrier at myself. I tried to tell her that I truly did believe in her.

You know when people shout at the TV screen like they expect the person on the screen to hear them? It was like that. She couldn’t hear me.

“You just came here so you could fuck me and leave me. You’re jealous of Reggie because he’s the real deal, and you’re a fucking wannabe. You don’t want me, but you don’t want him to have me, either. You are such a child.”

She was shouting now. She was on a roll. The dam had burst, and I was about to be drowned by the tidal wave of anger *Tomoz* had been holding down deep inside her.

“You treat me like a hooker—except you don’t even pay me. You are so cheap; you make me sick.”

She was so hurt but used her anger instead of tears.

Well, I just spent a small fortune getting here. That speeding ticket was going to be very expensive, I thought, but I wasn't about to throw any more gasoline on her fire.

I was wrong, I know. I should never have said those things. I mean, who wants their partner to burst their balloon, to cast doubt on their dreams?

I knew trying to reason with her at this point was futile, so I said, "I'll just go and sleep in the spare room."

That made her even more furious. Leave her alone? Her worst fear?

As I entered the spare room, she followed me, guns a-blazing.

"Oh no, you are not. You are going to stay here, and we are going to hash this out. Whenever things get tough, you just run away. Stop being such a pussy and be a man," she said. And once again, she was right. I do run away.

I knew I had fucked up. I couldn't handle it anymore. I couldn't take a whole night of this. I knew it would be hours before she calmed down.

I decided to leave and go home. I had to leave but knew I was in for a serious fight.

Before I could leave, there was a knock on the door. The ranch manager and one of the female staff had come to the bungalow to see what all the disturbance was about.

I sat in the living room with my head in my hands while *Tomoz* explained that I was fucking crazy, that it had nothing to do with them, and that they needed to fuck off. They finally left.

This would be reported to Reggie in the morning—maybe even to the police tonight.

I grabbed my bag and started to leave.

When she saw me walking out the door, her body completely deflated.

"Baby, don't leave me, please," she pleaded.

Hearing her so afraid and feeling let down by me broke my heart.

It stopped me in my tracks. I had walked out the front door; *Tomoz* was now standing outside on the stoop.

I put my bag down and walked over to her. I took her head in my hands and kissed her forehead. She immediately wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled me to her. She held me so tightly I could barely breathe.

Her body started sobbing.

We just held each other. And held each other. And held each other some more. In silence.

Slowly, very slowly, she started to come back into her body.

So, I gently lowered her down onto the step of the stoop.



I put my arm around her, and she let her head fall onto my shoulder.

"I'm sorry for being such an asshole, baby," I said.

Her head was pressed against my shoulder. She nodded in agreement that, yes, I had been an asshole.

There weren't many times *Tomoz* agreed with anything I said, so I took that as a small victory.

"I want you to know something," I said. "I do believe in you, baby. I am your biggest cheerleader. I am also your biggest protector. I know you can do anything you set your mind to—like you're modeling and horse riding, anything. I also know men want you for their selfish agendas and promise you anything to get what they want from you."

She nodded in agreement again.

"I don't believe you really want to be with this Dickie guy."

"Reggie," she corrected me.

Don't push it right now, I thought.

"I know you wanted me to be jealous and come out here to claim you and take you home."

She nodded again.

"Well, I *am* jealous, and I *am* here to claim you. You are mine, and I don't want any other man or woman to have you."

She needed to hear me say it.

"Okay," she said in a whisper.

"I'm here. Please don't push me away. I don't want to go. Is it okay if I just stay here with you?" I told her and asked her at the same time.

She nodded again. Then she swung her legs across mine and sat in my lap.

She was sitting sideways on me. Then she put her arms around my neck and let her head rest on my chest.

Her breathing started to steady, and she slowly melted into me, holding onto me for dear life.

I thought *if only we could keep it this way*.

Moments like these made all the madness and mayhem worthwhile.

I looked down—her breathing was calm now, her body relaxed. She looked so peaceful. I had my girl back.

I rocked her like that for 10–15 minutes. We were both exhausted.

Finally, I took her inside. I lay her on the bed and snuggled up behind her. I wrapped my arms around her, and she grasped my hands tightly.

“I love you,” I whispered in her ear.

She snuggled even closer, holding onto me. Then we fell asleep in each other’s arms.

I woke up early. I had to leave to get back and prepare for my next trip.

Gently, I woke her and let her know I was leaving.

I kissed her forehead.

She whispered, “Don’t leave,” then drifted back to sleep.

On the way home, I started thinking about the speeding ticket.

Of course, I deserved it.

A friend from California came to visit me about a year ago. Her name was Jaia.

She drove across the country from LA, stopping to see other friends in different cities along the way. She has a BMW M3, which is a very fast car. She got five speeding tickets on her journey. She paid an attorney to get her out of all of them.

So later, I called her and asked if that attorney might know an attorney in Florida who could do the same thing for me. She called him, and he knew an attorney who did the same thing in Tampa.

I hired him, and he got me off the ticket. How? I have no idea. But his fee was \$1,800.

I know that is totally unfair. No, not his fee. The fact that you can pay to get out of a ticket.

I got off cheap. I could have gone to jail. I could have lost my license. My insurance would have at least doubled with a conviction for driving 115 mph.

The system is created for the wealthy. Simple as that. It’s not right, I know. But that is reality.

The news of the previous evening’s events got back to Reggie.

The following day, the job offer disappeared. He needed the car and the bungalow. He had some business associates coming into town. So, she had to leave.

*Tomoz* didn’t even bat an eye. She just called me, told me what happened, and told me I needed to come and pick her up. Simple as ordering pie.

Of course, I went into ‘Rescue, Save, and Fix’ mode and drove over to pick her up.

As I took the 3-hour drive to go and pick her up, I thought about what had happened over the past few days. How she had so quickly found another guy—in just a couple of hours—a guy much richer than me. She got him to give her a bungalow and a Mercedes

500SL AMG and offered her a job as his private prostitute (kidding, I am still very jealous), I mean, as the manager of his resort.

She could have just left me in the dust and lived an extraordinary life with this Dickie guy. But she didn't.

I realized she really did want to be with me.

In the beginning, I was just another mark—a rich guy she could take down, use, abuse, and take everything away from.

In the beginning, we were both in danger. I was in danger of losing everything I had spent my whole life building. *Tomoz* was in danger of falling in love with me.

*Tomoz* no longer wanted to take me down. She had fallen in love with me. She didn't want to be with anyone else.

She had shown me that she had the ability and power to leave me anytime she wanted. She didn't need me; she wanted to be with me. That realization brought me to tears.

Of course, I drove at breakneck speed. I prayed the police officer who pulled me over wasn't on duty. If he was, I was going to jail. Fortunately, he wasn't, and I arrived at the ranch safely.

When I arrived at her bungalow, she came running out to meet me. This time, I rode in on the white horse—the white Rolls Royce—just like she did in the white taxi when I ran out of gas on the Skyway Bridge, which seemed so long ago.

I got out of the car, and she ran and jumped into my arms.

"What took you so fucking long? I thought you weren't coming," she said, holding me tight, with her legs curled up behind her and her arms around my neck.

"Well, I had to stop and pick up a few things, and I was hungry, so I stopped and had some lunch," I teased.

"Oh, stop! Why can't you just be nice to me, tell me you love me and that you'll never let me leave you again?" she whined.

"Listen, Doris," I would sometimes call her Doris when she was being silly, "the next time you scare me like this, if you ever do—which you better not—I swear to God, I will... well, I don't know what I'll do, but it will be drastic, and you won't like it," I threatened weakly.

"Oh, wow, now I want you to do it to me, baby," she teased.

"Seriously, baby, you scared the shit out of me. Please don't put me through that again. You have no idea how painful and annoying that drive is." I swear, I start saying something loving, and then my sarcasm slips out. I can't help it.

We were now walking to the bungalow. “Every time you start to say something nice, you always spoil it,” she pouted.

“I know. It’s a terrible habit. I’m sorry,” I said sincerely. I took her by the hand and turned her toward me. “Listen, babe, I love you, and I know you love me too. I never want to go through this again. I realize I’ve never trusted you, and that’s caused a lot of problems between us. You’ve proven to me that I can trust you and that you really do want to be with me—not for the money, but because you truly love me—and that means everything to me,” I said earnestly.

“Well, love is a strong word...” she said, trailing off.

“See, now you’re doing it!” I said incredulously.

“Well, it’s time you took some of your own medicine. So now you know how it feels, Mr. Edwards,” she laughed as she skipped into the bungalow.

I walked in behind her. She was finishing putting her bags together.

“Do you have any idea how many wealthy guys are on that website?” she asked me. Now she was on a roll. She wanted to make sure I knew that she could do this again at the drop of a hat.

I didn’t want to think about it or have her tell me, so I tried to change the subject. “Which bags are ready for me to put in the car?” I asked.

“None of them.” As she sat down on the sofa, she said, “Come here and sit next to me.”

I got the distinct feeling I was going to get more of my own medicine—and that it was going to taste awful.

I sat down next to her, ready to have her jam the spoon in my mouth. I was facing straight ahead.

“Look at me, baby,” she said, shaking my arm. I turned toward her with my puppy eyes—or what I hoped looked like puppy eyes—hoping for some mercy.

“I really do want to be with you. I hope you do see that now. I don’t need you, Stephen, or anyone else for that matter. I’ve taken care of myself since I was 16.”

“Yes, I intended to take everything away from you in the beginning. But the longer we were together, the more I fell in love with you. We began to fall in love with each other. Now it’s different. You have to start believing in us. I need you to let me be who I am.”

“You will not like all of it, but you know you love most of it. I will never be a housewife; I will never be normal, Stephen. I know I am a handful. That will never change. Yes, I need you to be strong with me, and you are. But you will never control me, Stephen. You’ve got to let me be wild and free sometimes. Can you do that?” she told, and asked me.

"I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I'm gonna do my best, baby." And I meant it. I knew I needed to let her be who she is. I also knew it would be tough for me.

Like I've said before, I'm very insecure. *Tomoz* made me feel even more insecure, not because of what she did so much, but because of how she looked. She's so beautiful; I was terrified some other guy would sweep her off her feet and steal her from me. She could have any guy she wanted. That was never the question. The real problem? I wasn't sure I'd ever be enough for her.

"You better do your best. Okay, let's go home. I haven't had sex since yesterday, and I'm horny as hell. I need you to fuck my brains out."

I started to grab her bags, and then I realized, "Wait a minute, we didn't have sex yesterday!" I shouted.

She ran out to the car laughing. "It took you long enough to figure that out!" She shouted back at me.

"Very funny. Wait till I get you home and spank your ass!" I said, laughing.

"Oh, please, baby, I want you to spank me hard. I've been a very, very naughty girl." She was laughing even harder now.

I put the bags in the car, then I folded *Tomoz* into her seat.

We spent the drive home reliving everything that happened. Her pretending she was going to bed and talking with her mother. The dark picture with her wearing her makeup, Josh coming to the house. Her throwing him out. Her finding Dickie on the online dating site. Her ranting texts, the picture of her giving me the middle finger, Dickie's ranch, the fucking stupid train.

Her coming back to the house in a Mercedes 55SL AMG. Giving me back the Patek Philippe watch, which she stole in the first place! Going to McDonald's, then the Ritz for lunch. Making love all over the house when we got back. Me telling her all the things I love about her. Me going to the ranch, the dinner, my jealousy, the ranch hand, and the maid coming over to the bungalow, her telling them it was none of their business and to fuck off.

It had only been a few days!

After we had finished the review, we were getting close to home. I said to her, "I remember you promising that you would give me a blow job to get me in the car when we went to dinner. Then you reneged on the promise. I think you still owe me one."

"I don't owe you anything, Mr. I don't want you to come yet. So, as long as you don't mind me teasing you the whole way home, I'll be happy to suck your cock until you can't take it anymore so you're rock hard and ready to fuck my brains out when we get home."

"You drive a hard bargain, my dear," I said, emphasizing the words "drive" and "hard."

She just rolled her eyes, pulled the zipper of my pants down, and took my cock in her mouth.

Somehow, the drive always went faster when she gave me a blow job. Weird.

I was rock hard when we arrived home, as she promised I would be. "Let's get you inside," she said. "Inside me, I mean. I need you inside me, baby." She looked at me with pleading eyes.

I never stood a chance, ever. She had me long ago at "Hi."

I took *Tomoz* by the hand and walked slowly into the master bedroom. It was hard to believe she was home again. It was overwhelming. As we reached the edge of the bed, I put my hand on her shoulder, turned her towards me, and kissed her passionately. I wanted her to feel how much I loved her. I pressed my lips onto hers. She pushed back, showing me that my love was reciprocated.

We fell onto the bed together, still locked in our kiss. I began taking her clothes off very slowly. She lay there, just letting me do whatever I wanted. She wanted me to take control. She needed me to own her. To let her feel free. To no longer need to think. She needed to escape the demons in her mind, even if only for a short while.

As she lay there before me, totally naked, she spread her arms and legs out, giving herself to me completely. "Baby, I want you to destroy me, please. I need you to take away all the pain, baby. I want you to use me, I need you to fuck me until I can't take any more and then keep fucking me. When you've finished with me, I want to know I've been fucked. I mean, really fucked," she said like she was ordering dinner from the waiter.

I sat in front of her, looking into her pleading eyes, letting her wait. She looked at me, like, "What are you thinking? And what are you going to do?"

I just sat there staring at her in silence, keeping her in anticipation. She was about to say something when I flipped her over onto her stomach. She let out a little gasp of surprise. "Wait there," I commanded. "Don't move."

I got off the bed and went to the bathroom to get some towels and the coconut oil. She had a bad reaction to regular massage oil, especially if I put it inside her. Organic virgin coconut oil is hypoallergenic, safe, and natural. I went back into the bedroom. *Tomoz* was lying exactly where and how I had left her. I put on some music. Delerium.

I made her roll on her side and put the towels underneath her. Then I climbed onto the bed and sat across her lower back. I started dripping the coconut oil on her back. Drip by drip. Then, I gently began rubbing it into the folds of her skin. Kneading her back muscles, her arms, and her neck. Pushing my hands deep into her. Her eyes were closed, letting out occasional little moans.

I give an amazing massage. I have been told I have very healing hands and energy. I did this for at least 30 minutes. Her back was completely oiled up. Then I got off her back and started on her legs. First her feet, then her ankles, her calves, and behind her knees. Then her thighs and to the top of her legs, gradually getting closer and closer to her pussy.

The anticipation was killing her. She knew it was coming. Now I was gently touching her pussy from behind, driving her crazy. I pulled her apart with the fingers of my left hand. She could feel my breath as I gently breathed into her pussy. I put two of my right-hand fingers dripping with coconut oil inside her. She was moaning louder now. I began thrusting my fingers in and out, in and out to the beat of the music. I massaged her butt at the same time. Then I took two fingers from both hands and began fucking her with four fingers at the same time.

Then I alternated. Putting two fingers inside her, and as I pulled them out, I thrust the other two inside her. As her legs were beginning to shake, I pulled her up onto her knees, spread them apart, grabbed a large handful of coconut oil, and smeared it all over her ass and pussy, so it was dripping down in between her buttocks, her pussy and down her thighs. I was making love to her entire body, inch by inch. Touching her gently, then forcefully. I caressed her and then took her and dominated her, pushing her hard into the bed and giving her a strong, deep massage.

Then I began massaging her pussy. By now, she was completely drenched in coconut oil and was totally gone.

I let her stay there, unable to move, while I went into the sex room and got her two favorite toys.

When I came back, she was still there with her ass up in the air waiting for me to finish her. It was going to be a while. I got behind her and began gently massaging her pussy again. She was now pushing back against my hands, wanting it harder and deeper. I resisted her trying to get me to move faster and harder. Teasing her mercilessly.

Her juices were mixed with the coconut oil. It was very erotic.

As I was fingering her pussy with three fingers from my left hand, I picked up the black dildo with the handle on the bottom and put the tip close to her pussy. She didn't know it was there. Yet.

As I continued to finger her, I suddenly thrust the dildo inside her pussy. She let out a gasp of sheer ecstasy.

Now it was easier to fuck her hard with the handle of the dildo to thrust the black cock deep and hard inside her.

The constant rhythm of me pounding her was just too much. Her legs began to shake. I just kept going. Harder and harder, deeper and deeper. Her body started to convulse. I just kept going. She came. Then came again. I just kept going. She collapsed onto her face. I flipped her over.

"Open your mouth," I commanded her. Her eyes were wide, and she looked afraid, moving her head from side to side.

"I said open your mouth," I said sternly. She stopped moving her head from side to side and opened her mouth. I put the black cock, with the handle, in her mouth. "Now suck that," I said.

She began sucking. I took her other favorite black cock and put it in her pussy. Her eyes opened even wider. Then I sat across her waist and began dripping coconut oil all over her chest, her breasts, her stomach, and her neck. I did the same thing I did to her back. Gently caressed her and then pushed my hands deep into her flesh and muscles, paying extra attention to her breasts and nipples.

She was breathing heavily through her nose because the black cock filled her mouth. I oiled her arms, her neck, and her torso. Her neck is one of her erogenous zones. She could literally come when I would hold her tightly by her neck. She loved it when I pushed my cock into her neck and then in her mouth, back and forth. Then I got off her and started on the front of her legs.

She was still lying there with one black dildo in her mouth and the other one deep in her pussy.

Her eyes were closed again. She was lost now. The pain was gone, and she was free. This is what she wanted.

I started at her feet again and worked my way up to her pussy. Her entire body was now drenched in coconut oil. I took the big black dildo out of her pussy and used it to push her pussy wide open. I began filling her with coconut oil until it was pouring out of her and down her thighs and legs. I filled her up more. Then suddenly, I thrust the big black



dildo back inside her again. The coconut oil came gushing out of her pussy. I sat next to her side so I could thrust the dildo deep in her pussy while I simultaneously thrust the other dildo in her mouth in and out.

She was thrashing her legs, and her eyes were getting wider and wider. I just kept going; there would be no mercy.

Her whole body began convulsing again. I kept going. She was shaking her head no more. I kept going. She tried to sit up to stop me. I pushed her back down and kept going.

Finally, she pushed herself up. I took the dildo out of her mouth, and she started gasping for air. "Baby, I can't take anymore. Dear God, please. You have to stop, baby, please." She pleaded.

"Baby, you said, "Baby, I want you to destroy me, please. I need you fuck me until I can't take anymore, and then keep fucking me. When you have finished with me, I want to know I have been fucked. I mean, really fucked." "I am just doing what you asked me to do," I said, smiling.

"I know what I asked you to do, but I didn't mean it literally!"

She started to get her breath back. "Jesus Christ, I thought I was going to have a heart attack. What is wrong with you? You are fucking sexual monster!"

"Thank you, I think? Or maybe I should apologize? Monster? What is wrong with you? I can't believe I messed up so badly. Jeez," I teased.

Then I started laughing. Then she started laughing. She sat up in front of me with her legs tucked underneath her, like in the lotus position, took my hands in hers, and looked at me intensely.

"Baby, I need you to know what you just did to me, but I don't even know how to begin to describe it." She paused and drew a breath; she was still a little breathless. When she caught her breath, she continued. "When you started to massage me, it felt good, but it was pretty normal. Then, as you continued, the way you touched and caressed every inch of my body, I felt completely enveloped by your love."

"I literally had a full-body orgasm, my body was convulsing, and I lost control of all my bodily functions. It was like my brain exploded, and fireworks were exploding throughout my entire body. At one point, I couldn't breathe, and I am pretty sure I lost consciousness. It was like all my bodily circuits were blown out; I couldn't take it anymore."

"I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Seriously, I was out there. I had all kinds of indescribable, amazing visions. I saw myself surrounded by this incredible, intense, bright

light. It was like the light was alive, speaking to me, telling me that I was safe and loved, that we were meant to be together. Baby, was that an angel or just me talking to myself?"

"Yes," I said flatly.

"What do you mean 'Yes'? Which one was it?" she asked, confused.

"Both," I said. Now she was really confused.

"Baby, please don't go into some spiritual enlightenment class right now. Just answer me in human speak," she said, needing a more grounded explanation.

"It means you speak to yourself when you stand on the stage, you are the audience, and yes, you are the sage," I explained. I know—not a very grounded explanation.

"What?" She was now even more confused. "What does that even mean?"

"That, my dear, was some Soultry that came through me many years ago. It means there is only one person in the room. You. You are everything and everyone. You are the universe and everything in it. So yes, that was an angel speaking to you, and yes, you were also talking to yourself—it is the same thing, baby," I said in an Indian accent.

"Okay, Deepak Edwards, I have no idea what you are talking about. That all just sounded crazy." Then she continued, "Well, anyway, it was fucking incredible." She looked down and shook her head like she was trying to wrap her head around what had just happened.

Then she looked up at me again and said, "The coconut oil felt like your cum all over me. Baby, that was intense. What you did is not normal. Seriously, you are a sexual savant."

"Well, that sounds better than being a sexual monster," I said, feeling better about my performance. I mean, monster? WTF?

"That is the best way I can explain it all. Baby, that was—well, it was beyond words. Who taught you how to do that?" She was blown away.

Now, there was a door wide open for me to walk through and say something hilarious but extremely self-destructive at the same time.

I managed to resist the temptation and tell the truth. "You want to know the truth?" I asked her.

"Now, I am not sure," she said, afraid of what I might tell her.

"The truth is, you just bring that out of me, baby. No one taught me how to do that. I swear to God, *Tomoz*, I have never done that for another woman in my life. I just followed your body, your movement, and my intuition. That's how I was able to do all that. There was no script or premeditated thought.

I didn't know what I would do when I started or throughout the whole experience. It just all came to me as I was going along. It was as though I was being guided. It was my soul showing you how much I love you in a way your mind, body, and spirit could truly understand. With everything that has happened over the last few days, our feelings and emotions for each other are heightened, and I let mine all out on you just now."

*Tomoz* looked at me like she had never looked at me before. She was speechless. Tears began to well up in her eyes. We were both sitting up in front of each other. She opened her arms, leaned forward, and put them behind my neck. Then she just collapsed into me, shaking her head. It was all overwhelming for both of us.

*Tomoz* had never been in a relationship like this before. She had numbed her feelings. She was afraid to feel emotionally vulnerable. She had been hurt by men all her life. To her, it was always just sex—no feeling or emotion. Like eating a meal, it was just something she needed to do, but once it was over, she just took her body, took a shower, and got back on with her day, like washing the dishes after a meal.

Now she knew she had more. She had a partner with whom she could be vulnerable yet safe. That was the weight that had been lifted off her shoulders. She had wanted this all her life but had stopped believing it was possible for her because of how she looked. How crazy is that? Her beauty had truly become a curse for her.

Every woman thinks they want to look like *Tomoz*, that their life would be so much easier. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. *Tomoz* felt that every man just wanted to fuck her and leave her. That she was not worthy of love. In my own way, from my own experiences, I felt exactly the same way. Now, we both knew differently. Finally, we felt loved and lovable. That was the shift we both felt.

There was nothing to say. I pulled her over and fell onto my side. She was now lying beside me with her arms still around my neck. We fell asleep in each other's arms, like we had done so many times before. But this time, it was different. Something had changed; everything had shifted.

When I woke up, *Tomoz* was pouring coconut oil on my chest. When she saw my eyes open, she smiled. "I hope I'm not disturbing you, baby," she purred.

I just shook my head no. *Tomoz* proceeded to do what I had done to her for me. When she had me rock hard, she mounted me and rode me to heaven. I wanted to just stay there. With her. Forever. For eternity. X23. Maybe we will get there someday.

Delerium was still playing over the speakers. The words fit perfectly. Isn't that always the way it is when you are in love?

We were both exhausted and covered in baby oil. Despite the towels, so was the bed. We didn't care; we just lay together, staring at the ceiling.

"Baby, what just happened?" she said, turning her face to look at mine.

"You feel it, too?" I asked her.

"Yes. I don't know what it is, but I feel different. Like a huge weight has been lifted off me," she said, a little confused.

"I feel the same way, like the tension between us has been lifted," I replied.

"Yes, exactly," she said, turning on her side and looking at me.

"Baby, is this real? Or is this just us being overly emotional in the moment?" she said nervously.

"Both. It is real, baby, AND we are being overly emotional. We have been through so much together, and the thought of losing each other almost manifested right before us. Now we're back together, and all that pent-up emotion is just flooding out of us." I tried to explain the unexplainable. You know how guys like their girls to think they can explain everything, but they really can't. Every woman knows that.

Then I said, "It's up to us now, baby. We have a chance at a whole new beginning." I turned on my side and looked into her eyes. Then I continued, "What happened over the past week was a huge wake-up call for me. Baby, I thought I might lose you. I have never felt so scared. And I have been through some scary shit in my life."

"Like what?" She was dying to know.

"One day, I will tell you, baby, but not right now. I don't want to live through all that pain again right now, and it would take too long. But I will tell you, I promise."

"When?" She didn't want to wait another minute.

"Baby, please just let it go for now. Let's focus on us and our future and not worry about the past—any of it. The only thing that matters right now is you and me and what we are going to do with our lives together."

"Okay, baby. So, what are we going to do with our lives together? Tell me—I am dying to know." Her eyes were lit up.

"So, here's the plan. We have sex three times a day; you make me breakfast, lunch, and dinner; you live in the sex room, and you are my submissive sex slave. How does that sound?" I teased.

Without missing a beat, she came back with, "Baby, we are pretty much doing all that already. Except for the cooking part, which will never happen. What else?" she asked coyly.

“True dat,” I said, knowing I was never gonna get away with that. “Baby, I just got you back. Can we just enjoy being with each other for a few days before we start talking about the future?” I could barely think straight after what we just did to each other.

“Okay, baby, whatever you say. I am just so happy right now. I never want this to end, that’s all. I want to know that this is how you really feel—that I am safe, that you will never let me go, ever again,” she said quietly, needing some certainty.

“I don’t know how else to say it, *Tómoz* —I’m yours,” I breathed. “For better or worse, through every storm, I’d rather be lost with you than safe without you.”

She turned on her back and smiled. “Okay then, I was just checking.”

I grabbed her by the waist and pulled her on her side again. “That is all you have to say after I lay out my heart to you?” I asked her, like, for fuck’s sake, give me something.

“Yes, baby. I mean, what do you want me to say?” She teased me even more, trying to get me to say it.

“Why are you being so mean to me? Why can’t you just be nice to me?” I said, doing my caricature impression of her.

“I don’t talk like that. And yes, that is exactly what you do to me,” she said, pouting a little and teasing a lot.

“Okay, never mind,” I said, feigning a pout.

“Baby, I have already shown you that I love you more than any woman has ever loved you or ever will. I have fucking chased you till I am exhausted. You keep running away.” She paused.

Then she continued, “I have been everything you could ever wish for in a woman and then some. I have shown you that I will do anything for you. So don’t pretend that you don’t know I love you more than anything in the world.”

“You know I am yours and could never love anyone like I love you. There, was that enough?” She had laid her heart out for me, in her way, with a little protection at the end. She always had to have the last word and —on her terms.

Yes, that was enough for me. For now. Although I knew that enough is never enough. We always want more. I wanted it all, and so did *Tómoz*. We didn’t realize we already had it all.

I turned onto my back and smiled. “Okay then, I was just checking,” I said, back to teasing her.

She reached out with her right hand and slapped my stomach, making me lurch up, holding my belly. I made the most of it, but, as usual, I got no sympathy.

“So now that you have it all figured out, what ARE we going to do?” she asked.

“How about we get some sleep so I have enough energy to fuck your brains out three times tomorrow?” I said, being serious and joking at the same time.

We both got under the sheets and pulled the duvet over us.

“Okay, baby, I need to recharge my batteries too. Sleep well,” she said, yawning. Then, as she was drifting off, she added, “It’s been another crazy day, baby.”

She turned onto her side, pulled her legs up, and snuggled into her pillow. Within minutes, she was out.

“Good night, baby. Sleep tight,” I whispered as I turned off the lights, though I don’t think she even heard me.

As I drifted off to sleep, I thought: If I hadn’t gone to get her back, she really would have been *Gone Girl*. I had almost lost her. The relief was overwhelming. I said a quiet prayer of gratitude.

*I stopped editing, stopped judging—there was only the flow of ideas moving onward, and I let them take me wherever they wanted to go.*

It was a new beginning for us. The very next day, we started our new life together—and we lived happily ever after.

### **The End.**

Just as I’ve always wanted to start a book about my life with, “*This is a true story*,” I’ve always dreamed of ending my life story with, “*And we lived happily ever after.*”

Maybe one day I will.

But not yet. Not now.

So, this is *NOT* the end?

Not even close.

This is barely the beginning of this crazy, magical mystery ride.

This is just where our journey pauses—for now.

But there is so much more to come.

This is only the end of the first book in *The Venus Fly Trap Saga*.

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# Epilogue

When I first decided to write the Venus Fly Trap I thought I would be able to get the whole story into one short book. Not even close. Book 1 is really just the introduction. There is so much, much more to the story.

So what's in the next book? More sex, a lot more sex. Does anyone go to jail? Yes. Do you guys get engaged? Yes. Do you guys get married? Ok, enough questions for now. Let me just tell you this: The Venus Fly Trap 2: Enough Is Never Enough, is even crazier, more exciting, and more amazing than, The Venus Fly Trap: Sex, Lies, and Repercussions, which hopefully exceeded your expectations. It certainly exceeded mine.

So, who brought the light, and who brought the darkness to the relationship?

That's for you to decide. Of course, each of us, in our own way, brought both. We showed each other the best of ourselves—and the worst. There were moments of sheer joy and moments of utter chaos. The best of times. The worst of times. But no matter what, we had the time of our lives.

I'd like to say something in my defense, but unfortunately, I can't think of anything I could possibly say that could amount to any kind of defense. My behavior was very often indefensible.

The truth is, there is nothing really to defend.

Nothing to forgive.

Not for either of us.

We were just being human. Human beings. We were doing the best we could with the resources we had available to us at the time. Perhaps we could have just used having more resources. We both knew better. But what you know and what you do, logic and reason, have no relationship with each other when powerful emotions like fear, jealousy, insecurity, and of course love are added to the equation. We lost our minds. Literally.

Like I said in the beginning—we are both deeply flawed.

But it is those flaws that made us who we are. It was those flaws that pulled us together like powerful, irresistible magnets—flaws that helped us to understand each other and created all those crazy, ridiculous, dangerous, terrifying, hilarious, miraculous, and magical moments that were the times of our lives.

I wouldn't change a thing. Well, maybe I'd win more games of backgammon...

This book is dedicated to *Tómoz*, the most beautiful, amazing, CRAZY woman I have ever met—and the love of my life. I love you Truly, Madly, Deeply, 4E4E X23.

In *The Venus Fly Trap 2, Enough Is Never Enough*, you'll find the answers to all your questions. The drama intensifies beyond belief, with twists and turns that will keep you hooked as we fight for our very survival—and for the undeniable love that *Tómoz* and I undoubtedly share.

Oh, earlier in the book, I promised to share some Soultry with you. This particular Soultry is perfect for this moment in the story of *The Venus Fly Trap*.

First, let me explain Soultry and how it differs from poetry. Poetry is crafted with deep thought in the mind, combined with emotion. Poetry has many purposes and can be used to explain many kinds of life experiences.

Soultry, however, is written purely from the soul. It flows from the unconscious mind, completely devoid of conscious thought.

You simply do not know the next word you will write. It's a little disconcerting and takes faith to just let go and let the pen or the keyboard take over.

When you write the first thing that flows from your heart to your mind, it is called automatic writing. Then, the energy builds inside you. It becomes a vibration. You can feel the rhythm and rhyme rising up within you.

The higher the vibration, the faster the rhythm and rhyme become. What you write comes from deep within your soul.

The level of vibration you experience determines the depth of the Soultry. It is like you reach varying levels of consciousness each time you come to write. Your body becomes a vessel for this energy, vibration, or consciousness to express itself through you.

Soultry flows from the heart in a stream of consciousness from your higher power. It is a divine message from your higher self, reminding you of who you really are and the spiritual truths that shape and govern the human experience.

There is a certain cadence to the rhythm and rhyme, and it often pours out of you for hours—just as it has done for me many times.



You've probably heard the saying that we are not humans having a spiritual experience; rather, we are spirits having a human experience. It is that spirit that longs to express itself, flowing through you as you write.

Unlike poetry, Soultry has only one purpose: to awaken our spirit and open our hearts to a new world.

This new world will be birthed from our hearts, not our minds. It is our hearts and intuition that will guide us into the new world we are creating right now.

We are transitioning from a patriarchal-driven society to a matriarchal-driven society and world. This is why the women's empowerment movement is so important—and why men must honor the divine feminine, both in women and within themselves.

To a large extent, this is what *Tomoz* and I were trying to come to grips with. *Tomoz* is an incredibly powerful woman who has stepped into her own power. That power was often difficult for her to control or fully understand. In many ways, she was like a superhero learning to navigate her superhero powers.

Before I met *Tomoz*, I thought I had it all together—that I could handle anything and everything. But being with her forced me to confront and accept things I never could have imagined. She taught me more than any of the great teachers and mentors I was privileged to learn from.

*Tomoz* really is from tomorrow—the future. She pushed me beyond belief. She quite literally got me out of my mind and into my heart.

She gave me one of the greatest gifts of all. She taught me how to be—how to be who I really am, by being who she really is. She taught me by example.

She never let anyone control her. She could have had all the money and possessions everyone dreams of, but she would never compromise who she was for any of it. Now, that takes tremendous courage.

Yes, she has flaws—some of which you have yet to see. But no matter what, she stayed true to herself and her inherent nature.

The challenge and opportunity for all genders is to remain true to themselves and their intrinsic nature. The divide—the once rigid line between men and women, between genders—is disappearing. Soon, it will no longer exist.

*Tomoz* knew this. She accepted everyone, regardless of their gender or sexual preference. As do I.

Men can still remain masculine, and women can still remain feminine. Or not. Or anything in between. It is all about staying true to your own truth and allowing the space

and grace for others to do the same. It is the divine feminine within us that will nurture us all back to our true nature.

We all have both masculine and feminine energy within us. It is time to honor both.

*Tomoz* would sometimes be the masculine energy in our relationship, and I would be the more feminine energy. And sometimes vice versa. We ebbed and flowed. And, yes, there were times when we both tried to hold the masculine energy—which led to some of the hilarity and madness you just read about.

But in the end, love always brought us back together. We always forgave each other for our trespasses against each other.

Throughout the book, I would say that we were mirrors of each other. And it is true.

There is a beautiful and wise Mayan greeting: In Lak'ech Ala K'in, which means, "I am you, you are me, we are one." We are all simply reflections of each other.

When this sacred greeting is exchanged, it is always accompanied by a gesture—placing a hand over the heart. This greeting reminds both people that we are far more than our human bodies; we are part of the divine oneness that connects us all. It is very similar to the Sanskrit greeting *Namaste*.

Some men are in for a tough ride as they begin to lose the dominance they have held over women in nearly every aspect of the human experience. That time is over.

This transformation will be confusing and challenging for many. But this transformation is inevitable, just like the caterpillar transforming into the monarch butterfly.

Soultry comes from completely letting go and finding yourself in a deep state of bliss.

"Follow your bliss.

If you do follow your bliss,  
you put yourself on a kind of track  
that has been there all the while waiting for you,  
and the life you ought to be living  
is the one you are living."

"When you can see that, you begin to meet people  
who are in the field of your bliss, and they open doors for you.  
I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open  
where you didn't know they were going to be. If you follow your bliss,  
doors will open for you that wouldn't have opened for anyone else."

— Joseph Campbell

As I wrote Soultry, there were moments when I would find myself sitting on the floor or lying in bed, uncontrollably crying tears of joy—overcome by what I can only describe as a state of bliss.

The truth is, there are no words to fully capture that feeling. Just as there are no words that can truly define or explain love. You have to experience it for yourself—just as you cannot truly know God until you have your own experience of her.

Of course, God has no gender. But God does have an agenda.

After my Satori experience, I tried to be perfect—or at least what I thought was perfect. I didn't realize I already was.

We all are.

"It is not the perfection we love about someone. Who would want to be with someone who is perfect? How boring would that be? No, it is the imperfection that we love about other people."

— Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By*

What I really needed to do, as I said at the beginning of this book, was to embrace my own imperfection and love myself, foibles, frailties, and all. They are not a curse but a gift.

So are yours.

Love yourself—all of you. Truly, Madly, Deeply.

And finally, here is some Soultry called 'Make It Your Dream'

**Enjoy.**

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# Soultry: 'Make It Your Dream'

*D*on't push too hard—you just might fall.  
Being good isn't enough; you must give it your all.  
Unless they need something, they never seem to call,  
So we protect ourselves by building a wall.

—

*But take down all the walls, and what do you see?  
That people are really just like you and like me.  
When we can love each other, it sets us all free—  
Because what I do for you, I also do for me.*

—

*We are beginning to balance the left and the right,  
The male and the female, the day and the night.  
We are coming to realize that we all have second sight,  
That inside each one of us shines the brightest light.*

—

*We are remembering that we need to give and to take,  
That nothing is real—reality is just something we make.  
Life is never against us; it all happens for our sake,  
And life exists in all things, even a snowflake.*

—

*Everything outside of us is only pretend.  
Life never began, and of course, it will never end.  
You may not like the truth, but it is really your best friend,*

*And you are creating yours with every thought that you send.*

—

*You are love, light, and energy, with a creative force.*

*Your thoughts, words, and actions determine your course.*

*So align yourself with what you know to be true,*

*That the world you live in is a reflection of you.*

—

*So what do you see when you look outside?*

*Does it remind you of what you feel inside?*

*Are people against you, or are they on your side?*

*Is your mind closed down, or is your heart open wide?*

—

*Do you give love freely, or are you caught up in pride?*

*Can we see who you are, or do you stay home and hide?*

*Who really knows you? In whom do you confide?*

*Have you come here to watch—or enjoy the ride?*

—

*You may not have done it, but have you ever really tried?*

*How you live is your choice, so you must decide,*

*Whether you struggle through life, or whether you glide*

*Will you stay in one place, or will you travel far and wide?*

—

*Do you believe you can do it, or that you always fail?*

*Do you wonder what's out there, or do you set sail?*

*Would you rather watch TV or would you rather save a whale?*

*Do you believe in miracles—that life is a fairy tale?*

—

*Well, I believe in all great things, and I believe in you.*

*I know that once you decide, there is nothing that you can't do.*

*So jump off your mountain and dive into the stream—*

*Live your life to the full, make it your dream.*

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# About the Author

## About the Author

Stephen Paul Edwards is an international speaker, business development strategist, and author.

His work explores the intersection of relationships, power, emotion, and human behavior—unfiltered and unapologetic.

The Venus Fly Trap is his debut memoir series, blending raw confession, psychological insight, and dark romance.

For more, visit: [VFT23.com](http://VFT23.com)

**Dr. Stephen Paul Edwards** is an international speaker, investor, and a PhD in Spiritual Counseling, known for his bold insights on the mind-body-spirit connection and the transformative power of love. Originally from Blackpool, UK, he moved to Florida in 1989 to begin a journey that would become a wild, lifelong adventure of self-discovery, passion, and personal growth.

His memoir, *The Venus Fly Trap*, is a fearless, funny, and brutally honest exploration of the messy beauty of love, lust, heartbreak, and healing. This true story doesn't shy

away from the madness—it embraces it. With biting wit and profound vulnerability, Dr. Stephen challenges the fears and social masks that keep us small, encouraging readers to shed their shame, accept their flaws, and revel in the glorious chaos of being human.

Through his words, Dr. Stephen offers more than just a story—he provides permission. Permission to fall hard, to make mistakes, to lose yourself, and to finally come home to who you really are. His journey is a raw reminder that while love can be a battlefield, the greatest act of courage is often learning to love yourself enough to walk away or to love with reckless abandon.

If you're ready to laugh, cry, cringe a little, challenge everything you believe, and come out feeling a little more whole, this is your invitation.

Please visit our website: [VFT23.com](http://VFT23.com)