

LAND OF THE LOSERS



LAND OF THE LOSERS

A Collection of Essays by
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To Josh, who revamped the website and organized my original rantings,
to Kevin, for getting the ball rolling,
and to Mark, for his diligent proofreading of the final manuscript.

A Word from the Author

This is a non-fiction book, but names and places have been changed to protect the innocent, the debased, and the foolhardy. As for myself, throughout these pages I go by the moniker “Niceguy.” It is not the name I would have chosen, but the description was so frequently applied to me that I decided to accept it anyway. This pseudonym is not a boast or a brag – I really would have preferred something else, but the universe plays peculiar tricks on us all...

This book is intended to be read by the kind of man who might see a bit of himself reflected back in the writing. Nevertheless, if you are not that kind of reader, then perhaps you will gain some insight into the mind of someone you know – another “Nice Guy.”

It is likely that one of the most common criticisms directed at this book will be that I am somehow ensnared by a sense of “entitlement,” as if I am incapable of knowing the difference between feeling owed something and being in pain. I do not need someone else to tell me what my life is really like, despite the general consensus that men are unqualified to talk about what happens to them and how they feel about it.

I am not a saint, nor am I the personification of evil. If you prick me, I bleed regular blood, as opposed to poison or honey. You shouldn’t expect to find a hero or a villain in these pages, but rather a man who is fallible and imperfect, presenting you with an honest retrospective on his life and experiences.

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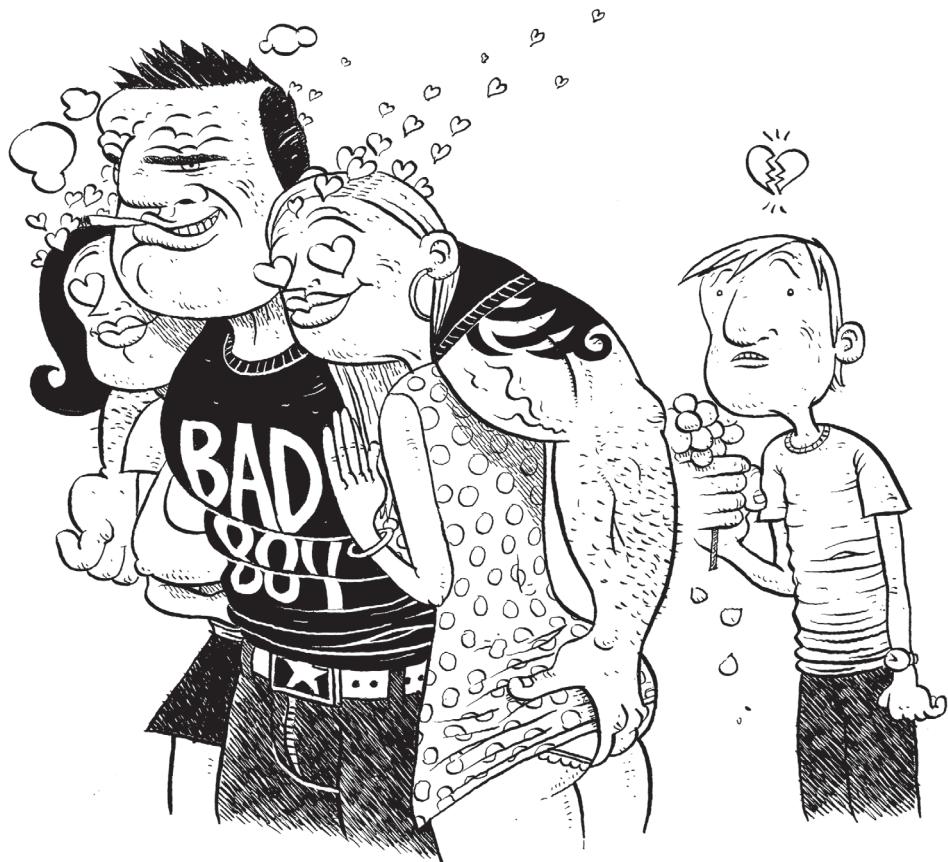
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Chapter 1

Land of the Losers



About Me

Call me Niceguy.

I like to think of myself as a decent human being. I buy drinks for my friends when we go out. I help others when they're going through tough times. I treat animals kindly. If I could jump off the page right now, I'd go and make you a big bowl of popcorn just so we could sit down and enjoy it together. In short, I'm the kind of guy that others refer to as "nice."

I'm a white American male who is in fairly good shape, with brown hair and blue eyes. I'm well educated and have an advanced degree from one of the world's highest-rated universities. I speak several languages fairly proficiently, I have a good job, and I make a very decent amount of money.

I live and work in the city of Michinoshī, Japan. Here, I pursue my career in languages, and do my best to gain the full experience of life in a foreign country. That's not the real story, though. The real story is the tale of the myriad reasons I left my home country for life abroad, and that's what this book is about.

The Disposable Nice Guy

Women back home often asked me to fix their computers, prepare their taxes, help move their furniture, or assist them with their homework. They'd ask me to pick them up when they'd missed the last bus, they'd ask me to loan them money when they were in a jam, and they'd ask me to bring snacks in the middle of the night. And since I'm nice, I was always happy to help. Unfortunately, none of the women I put myself out for were ever interested in reciprocating. Help was suddenly unavailable whenever I was the one who needed it.

"Oh, you're such a good *friend!*!" I'd hear each time I was exploited. This wouldn't bother me so much except for the fact that refusing requests to be exploited was always met with a wall of disapproval.

Here's my beef: guys like me were brought up to believe that if we always tried our best and were beacons of kindness and generosity in a world filled with thugs and cads, we would inevitably find a girl who would love us and accept us for who we were. Instead, those traits seemed to disqualify me from any sort of romantic arrangement, and I'm pretty

sure I'm not alone here. Whenever I'd ask a woman out, she'd inevitably tell me that I was far too much like a brother to her or that she didn't want to spoil our friendship. Such rejections were always followed with sincere assurances that when I eventually found a girlfriend, she would be so lucky to have a guy like me. Yes, a woman of grace and understanding was just around the corner, merely awaiting my displays of affection to fall right into my arms.

Well that's a myth. A fraud. A big damn lie. Now that I live in exile from my native culture, I can see that dating and romance in the West is a heavily skewed affair. It sees love and romance almost strictly in terms of what the female wants. What the female expects. What the female *demands*. The male is mere fodder. He needs to step up to the plate and work hard, and he needs to change to suit his woman's needs. She, on the other hand, should just be herself, no matter how horrible or deceitful that may be.

Why I Write

While I like to add a humorous twist to my writing, what I discuss isn't entirely for amusement. This means that some of the things I'm going to say in this book aren't particularly pleasant, but I believe they should be said nonetheless. I bring this up because I actually have a larger purpose in mind – not only am I telling a story that I hope is entertaining, I'm also trying to provide a critical frame of reference for readers of this book to ask fundamental questions about their own lives and their romantic entanglements.

For me, a particular moment of clarity came during my experiences as a student in Taiwan. I was exposed to women who didn't seem to approach romantic relationships as an exercise in grabbing as much free stuff as possible. Instead, they actually seemed to act as if men mattered in some way. Most seemed willing to make an effort to please the person they claimed to love. By contrast, I've found that *huge* numbers of women in the U.S. are casually dismissive of the men in their lives, perhaps because they believe it to be somehow empowering. Worse yet, they have trouble recognizing their ugly behavior for what it is. How two such polar opposites could exist on the same planet began to intrigue me, and I started searching for the source of this dichotomy.

I therefore invite you to follow my writings and decide for yourself where the line between sanity, decency, misogyny, and self-respect should be drawn. For me, this is the story of a caring and rational human being who woke up and discovered that the inmates had taken over the asylum, but for all I know I'm just another geek-turned-psychopath. Read. Enjoy.

Exhibit A: My Sister

My older sister is a heck of a woman. She's a doctor. She's a mother. She is, in many ways, what a lot of modern women aspire to be. She's also a cold, hard bitch.

Now, you might be thinking that I'm only saying that because she's my sibling. Frankly... no. If she wasn't my sibling, she'd *still* be a bitch. That's not just my opinion, either – it's also the not-so-secret opinion of some of my sister's so-called "friends."

My sister married a Nice Guy. I generally like her husband, but his interests don't match mine, so we don't really talk much. He's got a decent job in the financial sector. He's very kind, and he treats her well. Intellectually, he's not the brightest penny in the pouch, but I know he has a good heart and he loves his kids and my sister. He's also a really good dad. However, you know things *have* been bad for him at home when my relatives *openly* feel sorry for him. Which they do.

I know for a fact that my sister didn't date much in high school. In fact, she met her husband there. I'd estimate that she could count her number of boyfriends on one hand. That fact largely reflects positively on her, I suppose. So is my brother-in-law proof positive that I've simply been going about things all wrong in the dating world?

No. You see, what I've neglected to mention until now is that my brother-in-law inherited a metric *fuckton* of money from his father. It would be rude to ask exactly how much, but I believe it's well into the realm of several million dollars. His dad was a big-time chemical company executive when he was alive, and he died when my brother-in-law was quite young. I've seen his childhood house, and it's clear that the family was absolutely *loaded* – stained glass windows and Persian rugs up the wazoo!

At the wedding reception, I overheard a few of my sister's "friends" talking quietly amongst themselves at the next table. "Why is she marrying him again? She could have done better. He's a bit funny-looking," they gossiped. "Have you seen his bank book?" someone piped up snidely, eliciting a chuckle from the group. *Ahhh*, now it made sense!

My sister's Nice Guy is exactly the type of man who would give her anything she asked for. All she has to do is snap her fingers and hubby jumps to attention. I've seen this in action, and I really feel sorry for the man; her whim is his errand for the day. If he does something

wrong by accident, she berates him mercilessly in her most spine-decalcifying tone. When this happens, I can almost *hear* his balls shrivelling up and receding into his body cavity. Poor guy. That's definitely *not* the kind of husband I ever want to be.

I Can't Marry My House

If my sister loves her husband, you can be damn sure it's been made a little bit easier by that big gob of cash he inherited. She was still in medical school when they got married, so hubby bought her books and all the things that medical students usually need to get *jobs* to pay for. Plus, she got a house in a gated community about ten times larger than the one we grew up in, a luxury car and trips to Europe. Not to mention enough interest-free loans to start her own medical practice. No sir, not a bad deal at all – she sure is on Easy Street.

Now I'm waiting to see where my sister's marriage will end up. Just as the spider swallows the fly and the fox devours the hare, I'm wondering if she'll engage in that quintessentially American activity of self-righteously blowing up her marriage only to skilfully retain the kids, cash and prizes to ensure that her "happiness" shall continue to come first at all costs.

Me? I have to work for every penny I earn. I can't just marry my house, and there is no chance I can just fuck my way to Easy Street.

Exhibit B: My Cousin

My cousin is the opposite of everything I've ever tried to achieve. He has little to no education, has never held a decent job, has been in jail on several occasions, and supplements his income by selling drugs. He looks like a thug. He dresses like a thug. He talks like a thug... and women can't get enough of his cock.

I'll admit, he's had very few good role models in his life – his dad was a cheating, lying drunkard who divorced his wife for his mistress, and then cheated on his mistress. His social group consists of no-goodniks, shiftless bums and petty criminals. Still, he seems to relish wallowing in the gutters of society, so I find little point in pitying him, and oddly enough we get along reasonably well. So, what does all this have to do with the premise of this book?

A Christmas Story

Back when I was 22, my aunt and cousin visited my parents, my sister and I for Christmas. They lived in a town about an hour away from my mom and dad's house, so they didn't come over very often. My mother, who loves to host these kinds of events, went around busily preparing her house, making it all squeaky-clean and orderly for when the guests arrived.

I spotted a wrapped present labeled "Kara" under the Christmas tree and asked who it was for.

"Oh," my mother smiled. "Your cousin is bringing his girlfriend."

I sighed. I hadn't managed to meet anybody special that year. I was in my first semester of grad school at one of the world's best universities, and this had apparently conferred upon me the romantic allure of a wet dog. My cousin didn't even have a regular job, but this seemed to be no obstacle to his dating success. Boy, that made me feel pathetic. I didn't really feel like meeting Kara.

So, a few hours later, my aunt, my cousin and Kara showed up. My mouth dropped open at the sight of her. She was... radiant. She had a pretty face, the exact kind of curly brown hair

that I like, and was barely over 5 foot 2 inches tall. She was a gorgeous, petite little goddess, and she had the body of a porn star. Now I was jealous.

My cousin is noticeably taller than me. In fact, he's a bit intimidating at first, and boy was I feeling inadequate. Mentally, I started reviewing all the possible flaws I might have. I became depressed as I silently listed them off.

We started socializing. Kara hit it off with my sister straight away. Since my sister is very willing to say none-too-flattering things about men, this provides an automatic route for women to bond with her. She started talking to Kara about what impolite pigs guys were and got a laugh. With my sister making her feel more and more comfortable, she eventually started to talk about herself and came across as a really sweet girl. My cousin, however, was totally unimpressed, and rolled his eyes as he grumbled, "Don't you ever shut up? Geez, you talk so much."

I was aghast. In that moment I wished society would bring back dueling so that I could slap my cousin across the face with a glove and say "Sir! You have insulted the dignity of this young lady! I challenge you to sabers at dawn!" Well, I would need a saber for that, but you know what I mean.

"Oh, *very* nice. Very classy," my sister chastised my cousin. "Kara, why are you even with him?" I'd silently asked myself the same question the instant I saw her. Kara just shrugged and giggled as if his behavior was perfectly acceptable. She really seemed to like him.

The Ghost of Christmas Present

It was time for gifts. I knew what I wanted for Christmas: I wanted a girlfriend. I got a clock radio. I don't remember what my mom got for Kara, but it was exactly the kind of sensible, useful present she was always good at picking. What present did my cousin bring for his girlfriend? Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

It gets better. My mother had a little basket of small presents to hand around; this was her favorite Christmas game. They were random, unlabeled gifts. Each of us was allowed to take one present and examine it. We could try to try to guess what it was, and if we wanted it, we could unwrap it. If we didn't, we could put it back and try again. Each of us picked one box. I got dental floss.

My cousin opened his random gift and looked inside. It was a set of decorative scented soaps in the shape of seashells – very feminine. "Screw this," he groaned, dropping the

obviously girlie soaps. He sat back in the couch with his arms crossed to make it clear that he didn't care for the present.

"Moron! Give the soap to your girl! Women like things like that!" I screamed at him in my head.

"You know, if you don't like the soap, you could always give it to Kara," my sister said pointedly. She picked up the discarded present and did just that.

I wanted to drag Kara aside and shake some sense into her. "How can you stand being with him?!" I wanted to yell. "He has no future! No education! He's broke! He'll cheat on you! He's an idiot! He's one of those little monkeys at the zoo that masturbates in full view of the public! You deserve SO MUCH BETTER!"

My cousin never did give Kara so much as a second thought, much less a Christmas present. Not long after that, in a shocking turn of events, he cheated on her. She forgave him, and then he cheated on her again. By the end of it all, I was starting to wonder if she enjoyed degrading herself or if she had a serious self-esteem problem. Regardless, I'll bet you anything you like that to this day she goes around complaining to all of her friends about what a bunch of cheating assholes men are.

The Big Point

Here's my point: my cousin sucks, which reflects poorly on him- but Kara kept going out with him, and that reflects poorly on *her*. Kara sucks by extension. She's guilty by association. She encourages and rewards his behavior by staying with him. A guy might want to be the best boyfriend in the world, but that's just not exciting enough for a lot of young women.

Ladies, if you screw guys like my cousin, you're encouraging more of the same. You're implicitly telling them, "Feel free to treat me like garbage; I'll absorb whatever crappy behavior you dish out." Kara was undoubtedly hurt by my cousin's actions, but it wouldn't have happened if she'd stepped back and taken the time to realize she was pairing herself with a self-destructive schmuck.

Exhibit C: The Girls at my High School

High school is important when you're an adolescent. You're starting to learn how to be an adult, and you're preparing yourself for immersion in college or the job market. It lays the foundations of socialization, and helps you learn how to act in the real world. At least, that's what I've been told. If the girls at *my* high school learned anything, it was how to be catty, shallow and materialistic.

My high school was a rich, lily-white, preppy paradise, and it showed. The girls I went to school with were little princesses in training, and almost every last one of them disgusted me. Most were so ugly on the inside that it burned through whatever makeup and clothes they were wearing to the point that you could sense their unpleasantness approaching down the corridor.

Garbage In, Garbage Out

As part of my senior year, we all had to attend a special one-day seminar about adjusting to life in college (it was assumed that we were all going to college; over 98 percent of my high school does). Some outside facilitators were brought in to lead a few discussion groups, and at one point the guys and the girls were split up to tackle the issue of sex.

The discussion facilitators for the male group talked mainly about responsibility, safety and respect – things I happen to think are important when it comes to sex. I did my best to take the discussion seriously, but there was a fair bit of juvenile sniggering going on in the background. About thirty minutes later, both groups were finished and the girls dutifully filed back into our classroom. Intense murmuring immediately broke out as the class started to discuss what we'd talked about during our brief segregation. Apparently, one of the topics the girls had covered in their room was why they'd want to have sex with someone. Their answers were not encouraging.

“I think he’s cool,” and “he’s hot,” and “because I want him to like me” all featured prominently as reasons the girls in my class would have sex with someone. Not a single one of

them had said anything about love. In fact, the facilitator in the girls' room had never even brought it up! I was appalled. A room full of girls being asked why they'd have sex with someone and not one of them says "love?" That's quite a notable omission in my book.

The air in that school smelled a little more toxic from that day forward. I was surrounded by empty, vacuous young women, who by consensus had decided that sex and love were entirely separate things.

The Social Hierarchy

The thing is, virtually all the girls at that high school either rejected me or didn't even notice I was alive. You might say that this shouldn't have mattered (since by my own accounting they were all awful), and you'd be right... but it still would have been nice to have a girlfriend. I was lonely, and having somebody to share affection with might have made life a little easier. At times, I even felt like my female classmates were coordinating their efforts to ensure that any source of possible romantic attention was kept out of my reach.

What I didn't understand then, but do now, is that I just wasn't popular enough to justify talking to. Being a bit of a geek, I just didn't fit in, and the whole social order was a faction-ridden popularity contest that I didn't give a damn about. My failure to conform to clique politics made me something of an outcast. I could almost hear the subtext in the voices of some of the girls I tried to talk to at school: "Gee, Niceguy, you're a good person, but the social power hierarchy is pressuring me not to give you the time of day."

It's when you're on the outside looking in at everyone else having a good time that life starts to hurt. I can see that pain when I look at my old photographs from high school. Not one of them shows me smiling, and in some ways I still carry that pain with me. If just *one* of the girls at my high school had found a way to buck the social hierarchy and merely show me some kindness, I might have been a far happier teen.

Exhibit D: My Ex-Fiancée

Ahh, my ex-fiancée... I could write a book about just her. At the beginning of our relationship, I was madly in love. On the surface, she had a lot of positive attributes, and in her, I saw an opportunity to open my heart and be desired for who I truly was. It felt wonderful.

My story with her isn't just *Exhibit D* in the opening chapter of this book, but the first leg of a personal journey to the depths of hell and back. Along the way, I learned a valuable lesson: *never choose a traveling partner named "Lying Whorebag."*

The Façade

Physically, my ex was extremely good looking – I'd give her at least an 8 out of 10 in that department. Her skin was perfect, and her lips were full and pouty. Personality-wise, she was tough and very strong-minded. She also seemed hard-working and down-to-earth. I found all of these traits extremely attractive. More than that, she could be *so* seductive. She knew how to be sexy, and she knew just what turned me on. She was a regular temptress who could turn my knees to jelly with a single touch, and the two of us had a lot of fun together.

When we first started seeing each other, I was really excited to be with a beautiful woman possessing the kind of strength and understanding that I'd yearned for. It felt wonderful to be with her, and I started to develop some very strong feelings. If I'd paid more attention to her previous dating choices, however, I might have clued in to the fact that she was not all that she seemed.

Before meeting me, my ex-fiancée had dated a lot of guys who had never treated her well. She'd dated a rather scummy, green-haired musician who had cheated on her regularly and treated her like she barely existed, she'd dated a smart-ass who spoke to her like she was a moron, and she'd even dated a drug dealer whod tried to run her over with his car. I, by contrast, was her first Nice Guy, and her friends and family really seemed to love me for it.

Unfortunately, the person I loved turned out to be an elaborate façade. As time passed, her image flaked away like so many old paint chips, and even when I started to see the truth, I

willfully turned away because I didn't want to acknowledge it. For the longest time I lived in denial, but eventually had to face the fact that my fiancée was a Lying Whorebag.

A Rocky Start

Our first six months together were both wonderful and terrible. During that time, Whorebag broke up with me repeatedly only to make amends a few days later. It was an emotional roller coaster and it really started to take its toll on me. I wanted to have a more stable relationship with her, but couldn't seem to find solid ground.

I never initiated any of these breakups; it was always her. On one occasion, she said she was "confused." On another, she said she might still have feelings for her ex-boyfriend. A third time it was because she "might fall in love."

I'm a sensitive person, and I couldn't cope with the constant turmoil Whorebag was putting me through. Here was this very pretty girl who was fun and exciting to be with. She was outgoing and sociable. She was *awesome* in bed. Yet, she made me a nervous wreck because I never knew if she was going to call me and break up for some trivial reason.

One day I finally confronted her. "Honey, I want this to stop. It's too hard on me emotionally. I want you to know that I care about you deeply, but I can't keep going through these constant breakups. It hurts too much."

Her response moved me deeply.

"Niceguy, I've never had someone be so good to me before, and it *scares* me. I mean, my last boyfriend treated me like *crap*, and when he broke up with me, I went into a deep emotional tailspin. I've had self-esteem problems in the past, and stayed with guys no matter how badly they treated me. Now that I've met someone who's *good* to me, I'm afraid you'll suddenly change and it'll hurt me *so much more*."

The poor dear! She was just afraid of getting too close to someone! She didn't want to be hurt again!

I smiled. "Sweetie, I'm not going to turn bad on you. I *want* to be good to you! I *want* to make you happy!" I held her close. "I really do care about you and how you feel."

My words really seemed to assuage her fears, and our relationship started to settle. I made sure to openly display my affection for Whorebag so that she'd know I had been truthful with her. I brought her presents and flowers. I held doors open for her. I complimented her on her looks, often.

Whorebag's parents and friends were really happy to see someone taking such good care of her. According to them, compared to the yahoos and jerks she'd been with before, I was a real Prince Charming. One time, I walked out of her parents' living room, and overheard her mom express relief and gratitude towards me to everyone present. "Thank God she's with Niceguy. He is *so* good to her." That comment made me feel wonderful inside.

Sweet Little Lies

One night, Whorebag and I were lying together in bed. She peered at me with glistening eyes. I could see she was extremely nervous.

"Niceguy, I've been meaning to tell you something..."

"Go ahead hon, I'm listening," I smiled.

She looked away skittishly, but I was patient. I held her and let her know it was safe to tell me what she was feeling. Whorebag always needed a little coaxing when she had a confession.

"Niceguy, I think about you all the time." She paused. "I think... I *love* you."

Holy shit. A waterfall of emotions swept over me. I looked into her eyes. She *meant* it. She really *did* love me! I looked right back at her and my voice became really strained.

"I love you, too."

Fool's Paradise

From that point forward, Whorebag realized she had a green light to misbehave with impunity. Yes, I was living in a fool's paradise where she could do no wrong. If something was awry with our relationship, it was only because I had not been sensitive enough to her needs. It was my job to know what she wanted even before she did.

The beautiful field of hidden cluster bombs was spread out before me, begging me to traipse across it, and our engagement would prime the trigger: Whorebag got me to pop the question the old-fashioned way – by threatening to commit suicide if I didn't propose.

Chapter 2

Why Can't I Meet a Nice Guy Like You?



Meeting My First Feminist

The first time I recall running across a feminist was when I was at summer camp during a three-month period between fourth and fifth grade. The year was 1984 and I was ten.

I remember the summer camp somewhat well. There was a really big raspberry bush behind my cabin. I would occasionally go pick a bunch of berries and gorge myself. And, as is typical of raspberries, the seeds would get lodged between my teeth.

What was I thinking about on this particular day before I met my first feminist? Probably Transformers. Yes, that was undoubtedly one of the best toy series of the 1980s. I was really into the Transformers in those days, as were most kids my age. They were more than meets the eye, after all! The Transformers were cars and planes that changed into fighting robots. Hence the name “Transformers.” Because they *transformed*, you see. Oh yes. Autobots waged their battle to destroy the evil forces of the Decepticons. And the Decepticons – they were evil. I owned Starscream. In fact, my favorite was Starscream. He was an airplane that turned into a robot. Starscream, the betrayer. The turncoat. The total bastard without redeeming features. Boy, was he evil! Even among the Decepticons, he was evil. Of that you can be certain!

And the actor who did the voice of Starscream (Chris Latta) was rumored to have died of a drug overdose in 1994. Sad, that was. He had the best voice for evil cartoon characters. By sheer coincidence he had been the voice of Cobra Commander, too – an evil character in a totally different cartoon series! That’s how evil he was! All shrill and hissy and scoundrel-like.

Anyway, I digress. It was amazingly hot that day. The sun was beating down upon us, burning off the mist. I remember walking up to a standpipe where I knew a water fountain was attached. I’d been playing dodgeball that day and I needed a drink.

I approached and noticed that there were two girls standing there, talking. One of them was named Loralei. I remember Loralei well. Her last name was one of those scary-looking Austro-Hungarian appellations with lots of Zs in it. Loralei Zumzeigetwastizewicz, or something like that. God only knows!

Loralei and her companion were busily twittering away. My mouth was parched, and she was leaning in such a way that she was obstructing the drinking fountain.

“Um, can I use the fountain?” I asked. She looked at me and sneered.

“Oh, look. It’s one of *them!*” she snarled. Her voice dripped with a distinct form of non-niceness.

“What?” I asked.

“I heard you on the soccer field! You were talking all kinds of sexist shit with those other guys, weren’t you?”

I genuinely had no clue what she was talking about. “Those other guys?” I’d just come from playing dodgeball by the lake. I hadn’t been on the soccer field all day. I scratched my head. “I wasn’t on the soccer field,” I said. I then vainly tried to change the subject. “I hope we have s’mores tonight, don’t you?”

“Yeah, right.” she harrumphed, not distracted from her nascent bout of anti-male ranting. “You were with the group of guys who were saying that girls were dumb!” she glowered.

Okay, it was obviously a case of mistaken identity. I shook my head.

“What? Dumb? No, it wasn’t me!”

“Oh, come *on!*” she persisted. “Why the hell are you guys so sexist?!?” she demanded.

I was flabbergasted. Why was she accusing me of saying things I’d never said?

“No, I don’t think it was me!” I folded my arms. “I think men and women are equal.” I proclaimed proudly. That’s what my parents had always taught me, after all.

Her lip curled up, as if I were a foul odor.

“Uh-huh. *Riiight.*”

She turned around and placed her thumb on the drinking fountain’s nozzle. She twisted the handle, and a thin stream of water shot out. It sprayed me square in the face.

I jerked back, stunned.

What the hell?

She and her friend both ran off towards the cabins, giggling. I stood there dripping wet. In the distance I thought I heard one of them laugh, “Girls rule!”

What. The. Hell?

I stood there, wiping the water from my face. I stepped up and started to drink. One thought echoed through my mind over and over as I drank: What the hell is wrong with them? Indeed! That question hasn't changed since, either. Almost word for word.

What the hell *is* wrong with them?

Joining a Gym

I'm a skinny guy. No, I don't look like Gandhi after a fast. No, bullies don't kick sand in my face at the beach. There is no denying, however, that I'm fairly slender.

More than a few women have noticed, and they sometimes take it upon themselves to provide me with "helpful" advice. This usually takes the form of a suggestion that I need more muscles and should therefore work out. My would-be advisers rarely seem to realize how shallow their advice sounds, however.

One time during high school, I was playing tennis with a female student. After the game was over, she looked me up and down.

"You know, you should work out."

"Really? Why?" I replied.

"Oh, it's nothing. Never mind." She waved her hand in the air to dismiss the topic.

Then there was Gabrielle, a girlfriend of mine in grad school. I once asked her if she thought I was attractive. Her reply was very telling.

"Well... you have the *potential* to be attractive."

Gee, thanks. I have the "potential" to be attractive. That's really nice to know. How would she have liked it if she'd asked me about her personality and I'd responded, "Well, you have the *potential* to not be a bitch." At least she was being honest, I suppose. Shallow, but honest.

Me vs. Earl

I'd always felt that most men and most women could be attractive in their own ways. Every person has their own unique combination of positive traits, and I'd been brought up to believe that everybody's inner beauty would somehow shine through like a beacon to the right partner. I was casually disabused of this notion when I started hanging out with a guy from my dorm at college, named Earl.

Earl was kind of a big guy – an ox, actually. He was about a foot and a half taller than me and weighed about 200 pounds more than me. It wasn't flab, either. The two of us were on

good terms, but he had a tendency to act like a dickwad when he was drunk. He also didn't seem to have much respect for women. I wasn't always comfortable hanging out with him, but he did have a car, so he was periodically useful if I ever had to leave campus.

One day we drove to a local supermarket to buy some food. We got out of his car (which I had nicknamed the "extension-of-Earl's-manhood car") and walked into the store, talking as we went. A good-looking woman in her early twenties exited just as we were about to walk in. She saw us, stopped, and then walked up to Earl. She asked him what he was doing the following evening.

"My sorority is throwing a party. It would be *so* cool if you could come," she trilled.

"Well, I'm kind of busy, so I can't make it. Sorry," Earl replied.

I'd noticed that she'd said "you" singular and not "you" plural. She'd acted as if I didn't even exist, actually.

After being politely turned down, Miss Sorority Party walked away. It would certainly be nice if women walked up to me and invited me to parties, but it would be even nicer if they could be bothered to acknowledge my existence when I was standing right next to them!

I Don't Like Pain

At one point in time, I *did* start going to the gym regularly. This was at the request of my first-ever girlfriend, Tricia. It was my freshman year at college, and she had hinted to me that she might get more turned on when we were together if I was more muscular. So because I really loved her, I decided that I'd work out. Almost every night, I lifted weights and exercised. In truth, I had no clue what I was doing, which I'm sure hindered my results. Regardless, I hated every second of it.

After a few months, Tricia decided to break up with me because I was out of town all the time. Feeling the fool for having put myself through hell only to be dumped over my choice to go to college, I quit working out and the minuscule gains I'd made disappeared overnight because I have the metabolism of a racehorse. I was certainly glad not to be constantly sore however, and it baffled me as to why anyone would subject themselves to such torture if they weren't a masochist.

Going to a Local Health Spa

The last time I thought about signing up at a gym was once again at the request of a girlfriend. This time, I went to a health spa near where I lived and asked about signing up for a membership. The place looked clean, well appointed, and generally well maintained. It didn't smell like a gym and I was somewhat impressed. I walked in and waited for a manager to show me around.

After a brief tour, we sat down to discuss the costs. They were absurd. I told the manager I'd "think about it," and walked out. I had no intention of shelling out the kind of money that was better suited to a life insurance policy than a gym contract. I shook my head, thinking of what I'd gone through with Tricia and the superficiality of it all. Instead, I immediately went to McDonald's and purchased a bag full of McRib sandwiches; so much better.

Take Our Daughters To Work Day

As is true for everyone, certain events over the years have taught me important life lessons. Sometimes, particular experiences even taught more than one lesson at the same time. Way back in the spring of '93, my high school took part in the very first Take Our Daughters To Work Day. This event qualifies as one such instructive occasion.

Take Our Daughters To Work Day was a program organized by the Ms Foundation for Women. That organization was founded by Gloria Steinem and a few other like-minded feminists back in the early '70s. Its intent was to provide funding to advance causes deemed necessary to the progress of women in society. On the surface, I suppose this seems like an unobjectionable goal.

The idea behind Take Our Daughters To Work Day was that young women needed to have role models out in the workforce to inspire them. They needed to see adults, preferably their own parents or guardians, working at their jobs. This would hopefully start these girls on the process of envisioning their own future careers, instead of hopelessly falling into domestic drudgery under the thumb of some man. This seemed particularly urgent at the time, since, back in the early '90s, there were a flurry of studies coming out which purported to show that girls suffered a calamitous drop in self-esteem in their teenage years.

I remember reading about those studies in the mainstream press, and I found the narrative to be rather odd. If this claim about young women's self-esteem was correct, the girls around me should have been acting rather differently. Surely they'd have been mopping around aimlessly or generally acting quite glum. Yet, the vast majority of my female classmates didn't seem to be acting that way at all. A lot of them appeared to be utterly infatuated with themselves. I had no idea where researchers were getting this "low self-esteem" stuff from.

Still, what did I know? If the do-gooder academics said that it was true, then it *must* have been true. Who was I to question the vaunted social scientists? Who was I to question the received wisdom whose truthfulness was self-evident? If the research showed that girls'

precious, ever-so-frail self-esteem was always deflating like a punctured tire, I had no business standing out from the crowd to dispute such a claim.

At any rate, it was arranged that on that first Take Our Daughters To Work Day, the girls would get a day off from school to see their role models in action in the workplace. The boys however, apparently did not need role models as our self-esteem was deemed to be just fine. No one ever actually approached us to inquire about that, of course.

The day arrived and I went to school as normal, but something about the place didn't feel right. Half of the students were gone, and things were visibly different. I hadn't chosen to go to an all-boys school and now the campus looked like one.

In first period I sat at my desk in the half-empty classroom and looked around, seeing numerous empty spaces as the other boys filed in. Nothing about the situation seemed quite right.

Isn't This Sexist?

There was an important concept that I had learned during my early years of schooling: "Sexism." To me, that word meant unfair, discriminatory treatment based upon one's sex, and I had been told it was normally inflicted upon women.

I turned the current situation over in my mind. The girls were off having a great time. The boys were stuck in class. This was *favoritism*, I concluded – some kind of sex-based favoritism. Could this be... sexism? If that was so, why had nobody said anything? The splinter in my mind was starting to cause me serious discomfort.

I raised my hand.

"Yes?" my teacher asked.

"Isn't this sexist?" I suggested a bit forcefully, gesturing around the room with my hand.

As I asked the question, every other boy in the room suddenly looked up. It was as if I'd fired a pistol into the air.

"Yeah!" about four or five voices exclaimed. "That's right!" someone else said. Another boy's fist pounded his desk.

My teacher looked at me and then at the rest of his now all-male class. His reply was something I'll never forget.

"Yes it is. Shut up."

A murmur spread through the room, and the atmosphere became a little uncomfortable. I felt as if we'd learned the awful truth but weren't supposed to say anything about it. If we'd been allowed to continue talking, who knows what else we might have concluded?

The Fairer Sex

My classmates and I might seem a bit slow to you, but I think part of the problem is that boys are not typically taught to use the word "sexism" to describe the bad things that happen to them; it's taught as something that happens exclusively to women. Boys are instead encouraged to think about overcoming the obstacles they encounter, no matter how unfair the situation may be. On the other hand, they are heavily encouraged to act upon anything which impacts women negatively.

A few months after that day at school, I received a document in the mail: I had to sign up for Selective Service. If I did not register for a potential military draft, I would be penalized. I would be ineligible to receive federal student loans, ineligible for federally-funded job training, and for work in the federal government.

My sister, who was an able-bodied woman, was not required to sign up for Selective Service at all. An 18-year-old male in a wheelchair, however, *would* be required to sign up. That made zero sense to me. When I got that letter, my sister pointed and laughed at me, jeering that I'd be packed off to Bosnia or the Middle East or some other shithole to get my ass shot off. She was a very warm and caring sibling.

The Selective Service requirement is another obnoxious example of naked sexism against men, sanctioned by the government and by society. It's a clear example of "institutionalized sexism" that feminists claim to care so much about, but at that time, no one even called it "sexism." It was just something that guys needed to do, or else. Funnily enough, the feminists' legendary brand of righteous, fiery, fist-pounding indignation is rather scarce when it comes to Selective Service. I wonder why?

As an aside, some people like to bend over backwards to conjure up goofy definitions of "sexism" such that it cannot be used to describe gender-based discrimination directed against men. This tactic is so transparently phony that it's clear the people in question simply want all the attention for themselves, and acknowledging that others have problems worth addressing might cause them a narcissistic injury.

The Empress Has No Clothes

Perhaps you know Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 story *The Emperor's New Clothes*. It tells the tale of a vain Emperor who gets swindled by a pair of fast-talking scam artists who sell him a fabulously expensive outfit made of thin air. They claim that the clothes are invisible to people who are stupid, so naturally, wishing to avoid social ridicule, everybody keeps up the pretense that the Emperor is wearing a fabulous new outfit.

At the end of the story, the Emperor goes out among his subjects totally naked, and everyone acts as if they are impressed, but one small child, too young to know to follow the crowd, blurts out: "The Emperor has no clothes!" Once the charade is exploded, everyone realizes how idiotic they've been the whole time, and a lesson is learned by all.

I never liked that story because the ending was too optimistic. In a real-life version of that tale, the Emperor's goons would have stomped that little boy's head down into the pavement, and then the more subservient subjects in the crowd would have joined in the curb-stomping to demonstrate their loyalty. That's a more down-to-earth ending, isn't it?

I would say that I was raised according to fairly feminist values. My mom went to college in the late '60s and I wouldn't exactly call her a traditionalist. I have always believed that men and women should be equal before the law, and that they deserve equal opportunities, equal pay, and equal responsibilities. My experience with blatant sex-based favoritism on that first "Take Our Daughters To Work Day" however, showed me the essence of feminism as it is practiced in reality: girls get a special junket while the boys continue soldiering on as normal. Girls get a day off and boys get toilet duty. And if you notice that the Empress is naked you need to shut your goddamned face.

At the Bookstore

I love bookstores. Well, I love books. I live very close to three used-book sellers and one new-book store. There's nothing I like better than to go buy a big, ol' fat vanilla latté and walk into a bookstore. Then I'll pick titles off of the shelves, and once I bundle up a nice little pile, I'll flop down in "my" spot and just read read read *sip* read read *sip*. Life just doesn't get any better.

Sometimes, there will be women in the bookstores. I often like to think that women you meet in bookstores are my kind of women. If they read, if they think, if they have an education... well that's sexy.

So one time around April 2001 I was in a Barnes & Noble. I had my latté, I had my pile of books, and I saw this young woman sitting alone. I walked by and saw her nose buried in a Java programming book! Oh ho, this could be interesting.

I asked her if I could sit down across from her (the other tables were taken), and she let me do so.

"Are you a computer science major?" I asked, to strike up a conversation. Oddly enough, she responded to me and she seemed friendly! Her name was Lillian.

"I'm a programmer." Oh! A geek like me! I felt my spirit brighten. And she was trying to get certified in Java! I know Java!

I smartly replied, "Well, I'm a software developer. I work for Initech."

"Oh, well my boyfriend says that's a good company..." Oh no.

Ugh, I know this trick. The casual use of "my boyfriend" might just be to tell me not to get too close. Or is her boyfriend actually real? I hate those little games that women play.

That reminds me of another story. Some years ago, my friend Roger and I were sitting in a Perkin's late one night. We were talking about little mind games. Specifically, casual usage of "my boyfriend" (our waitress that night was hot, by the way).

"Roger, do you ever notice that sometimes women will say "my boyfriend blah blah blah," even when you strongly suspect they don't really have a boyfriend?"

He nodded then sipped his coffee. “It’s a self-defense mechanism. Essentially, they’re saying ‘don’t even try. As far as you’re concerned, I’m taken.’ Sometimes they fire it right away, sometimes they don’t deploy it until, like three or four hours into the conversation. Mighty tricky if you ask me. By the way, our waitress is *hot*.”

A minute later, the waitress came by with our plates. Roger struck up a conversation.

“So, Miss, do you always work so late?”

She put down our plates and shook her head. “No, my boyfriend doesn’t like it when I work the late shift...” Immediately, Roger and I burst out laughing.

Back to the Bookstore

Lillian and I talked for a bit. She had a good sense of humor. She was also bright. I really wanted to get to know her better and maybe she was lying about her boyfriend. I asked her for her email address, and we exchanged our addresses.

A week later, I sent her an email, asking her if she wanted to go out to lunch on Thursday. She accepted. When Thursday rolled around I hoped it would be my opportunity to know if she *actually* had a boyfriend or not.

I waited in the restaurant. She walked in a few minutes late. “Sorry I’m late. And I can’t stay long, I have to leave in about an hour...” So we rushed through lunch... rushing through lunch always stinks. Near the end of the hour, I asked her what she was doing that weekend.

“Got plans. Something with my roommate.”

“I see. Well, just let me know when you’re free to do something, okay?”

“Sure.”

She ran off. Presumably, back to work. Okay, now what? Do I wait? Boy, I should have planned this better. Why is it that going to *lunch* with a woman has to be as hard as preparing for a job interview or something?

A week passed and there was nothing. I sent her an email:

Hey Lillian, just wanted to see if you’d like to see a movie this weekend or something. Hope to hear back from you, Niceguy.

I got a response later that day.

Dear Niceguy, I think I gave you the wrong impression. My boyfriend doesn't like it when I get emails from other guys, and I don't think he'd appreciate me going to a movie with you.

Ooookay. *Why* then, did she give me her email address in the *first place* if her boyfriend doesn't like it when guys email her? Oh well, I didn't want to get her in trouble with her boyfriend... or wait a minute... is she making this "boyfriend" up? It's so hard to tell. Why can't more women be more honest so that I don't have to second-guess them?

It was obvious that she was not interested in me, regardless. It was time to cut my losses. I sighed then I wrote back:

I'm sorry Lillian. But, you have to explain to your boyfriend that I have no romantic intentions towards you. I'm sorry for any misunderstanding I may have caused, and I hope I'm not making the problem worse by writing back.

Then, I didn't hear back from her. Bah, what a waste of both of our time.

Why I Will Never Loan Money to Another Woman

This is the story of why I've developed a "never loan women money" policy; it's also evolved into a "never loan money outside the family" policy as well.

I once loaned a previous girlfriend (Mi-Jun) money and it took her more than six months to pay it back. I was a student at the time and so was she. I had to pay for rent and tuition, so I couldn't afford to throw that money out the window. It took a fair amount of pressure to get repayment, but thankfully I eventually recovered it.

I guess I don't like to have people tell me that they'll pay me back and then not pay me back. It makes me feel betrayed. I'd much rather a person was up front with me. If they said, "Niceguy, I'm desperately short of money, and there's absolutely no guarantee that I can ever pay you back," I'd probably take pity on the person and try to help them out in some way. If they say, "oh sure, I'll get the money back to you," and then skip town to avoid paying me, of course it would make me a lot more angry than if they were truthful right from the beginning. I don't think I'm very different from most people in this regard.

So, as I've said before, I've been called a really Nice Guy. I had a stable high-paying job at the time. Nice + stable job could have been considered my biggest weakness because weaseling female freeloaders would sometimes start to think that they could take advantage of me.

Shirley Moocher

My friend Miriam has a friend I like to call Shirley Moocher. I met her through Miriam and I've come to know her because she and I have hung out a bit. Shirley... geesh... you know, I try to be charitable in my judgments of people... but I'll be honest; she acts like a total simpleton. She's one woman who I can say is honestly *not* oppressed by society, but consistently acts so dumb that she fucks herself over time and time again. I'll use a word I hate using: "bimbo."

When I first met Shirley, I was attracted to her on a purely physical level. But then something happened... I actually got to know her and understand what she was like. That sure cured my attraction in a hurry. Now I only talk to her to be polite and prefer to keep her at arms' length. She does have a killer body though, and I *love* the way she dresses. What can I say? I love a glimpse of nice cleavage. Sadly though, a pair of boobs is pretty much all that she is.

She used to be somewhat chubby, but then she lost a lot of weight (I think it mostly went straight to her breasts), so now she simply loves to show off. Either she's oblivious to men's reactions to her body, or she pretends to be oblivious. Or perhaps she doesn't mind it when men look at her body, or she just doesn't notice it. I'm not saying that women with large breasts are necessarily dumb, I'm just saying that this *particular* woman with big breasts *acts* dumb. In fact, I think acting dumb helps her out in a perverse way. It allows her to be passive-aggressive without arousing suspicion. But her body can't compensate for the wreck that she really is and the garbage fire that she turned her life into.

Why is She a Wreck?

First of all, Shirley does not know how to manage her own life. She's a total flake. For example, she does not know how to, say, concentrate on schoolwork. She's been in community college off and on for the last ten years and still isn't any closer to a degree. Additionally, she has no clue how to make a budget or keep her checkbook straight. Sometimes, I feel like saying, "*Knock. Knock. Knock. McFly?? Hello, McFly?! Anyone home in there?!*"

Secondly, she strictly dates guys who are bad news. And she doesn't like me in "that way" (thank God). When I was first getting to know her, I asked her once why she wouldn't consider dating me. She said that it was because I'm too "sweet and feminine" and she thinks of me as a brother. Gee, *thanks*. I've asked her several times to set me up with one of her female friends, but she says all her female friends are married or already have boyfriends, so she's been zero help on that front. In fact, when she had a bit too much to drink one night, she even said that if I really want to attract women, I should move to a country where they'll appreciate guys like me. Ouch. At least she was being honest, which is more than I can say for her when she's sober.

She really prefers men who are the opposite of me. In fact, some of her friends ended up being so disgusted by her dating habits that they threatened to *not talk to her again* if she continued to date guys who were bad news. But every now and then, she'll tell me how she wants to go out with some boneheaded guy or another, but if her friends find out, they won't talk to her again. She trusts telling *me*, though – again, because I'm "sweet."

Sometimes you just want to whack her 'round the head a couple of times with a pillowcase full of tangerines in order to pound a little sense into her... not that I condone violence.

Thirdly, Shirley knows I'm somewhat altruistic and that I'm fairly reliable. That's something that she can take advantage of. In insurance, they have this concept called a "moral hazard." A moral hazard is the idea that insured people might start to behave more recklessly; if someone else is going to clean up after your mistakes, then why should you be careful? I always seemed to come through for her when she was in a jam, so why should she try to avoid getting into jams in the first place? She'd gotten into the habit of depending on me because she knew I was dependable.

The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions

One time, when I was first starting to get to know her, she and I went out clubbing with Miriam and Dan, and I was hoping that she might want to date a Nice Guy for a change. We went to this club downtown and I really wanted to get her to like me. She and I went up to the bar together, and I handed the bartender my credit card to start a tab.

I pointed to Shirley then said to the bartender, "Give this lady anything she wants tonight, on me." Her face made a happy-surprised expression.

"Thanks! You're so *sweet!*" She gave me a quick hug and put her head on my shoulder for a second or two.

I wanted to make a good impression. In hindsight, perhaps I shouldn't have done that.

Niceguy is a Jackass. Why Not Ask Him for Money?

This conversation took place on the phone a mere three months after I first met Shirley Moocher. It was about 7:00 PM. I was relaxing at home.

"Hi... Niceguy?"

"Allo. What-up?" Can you imagine me in my red smoking jacket, wearing a monocle and holding a brandy snifter in my palm? That must be how Shirley imagines me – overstuffed with filthy money, just dying to lavish it on some needy damsel like her.

"Oh... just wanted to call and say hi... um... and I wanted to ask you a favor?"

"It depends, what is it?" I lit up a Cuban cigar with a flaming \$100 bill, and blew a ring of bluish smoke out into my billiard room as I spoke.

"Well, my mom has this big credit card bill coming up, and she's a little short on paying it – and I wanted to loan her some money, but I don't have any to spare. I really want to help her, so I was wondering..."

I could tell exactly where this was going. Call me "Daddy Warbucks" while you're at it, sweetheart. I opened a tin of black Ossetra caviar and began to smear it on toast points with a gold spoon.

"Well, Shirley, I'm afraid I don't know your mom." With my free hand I swirled the brandy around the snifter.

"Oh, you'd be making the loan to me. I'll pay you back," she said.

"I don't know..." I was not convinced. Standish, my butler, quietly asked me if he should start polishing the silver in the ballroom for the annual Rotary Club Cotillion which was to be held on Friday. I nodded to Standish and he bowed before exiting the room. I looked out the window and noticed the caterers had started setting up the large tent in the center of the hedge maze for the guest reception.

"Pleeeeeeeease! I really want to help my mom," she pleaded.

"I'm afraid that I wouldn't be comfortable doing that. You see, I have this auto insurance premium that I've paid and if I make a withdrawal over the next week, the check will bounce. Anyway, I apologize." I hung up and breathed a sigh of relief.

I'd extricated myself by telling a white lie. I'd only known her for three months and she was already asking me for a loan? Jesus. I mean, she wanted to help her mom, so she shifted the burden of helping her onto *me*? In hindsight, I'm glad I didn't give her any money on that occasion. If I'd done that I'd still be waiting for repayment up until today.

Paul Encourages Her

About three weeks after this, Dan, Miriam, Shirley and I went out to the local mall to catch a movie and do some shopping. We met up with some of Dan's friends; three guys whom I'd never met before. Miriam and Shirley went off to try on clothes in *The Limited*. We five guys were milling around outside. We waited and waited. I looked at my watch.

"Hey, I thought we were planning to go the theaters soon?" I said to Dan.

"Yeah. Let's go in and ask them how much longer they'll take."

Dan, Paul (one of the three guys I'd never met before that point), and I walked into the store. Miriam was browsing through a rack of dresses, while Shirley was trying on

something new and checking herself out in the mirror. She was wearing a ribbed, blue cotton turtleneck shirt that was so tight, it looked painted on. Her pair of perky attention-getters were proudly standing out in front.

“Holy fucking shit,” whispered Paul. He took the words right out of my mouth. He walked up to Shirley.

“Hi, are you thinking of getting that?”

She nodded. “I think it’s a little tight. Makes me look fat. And I don’t have much money besides.”

“No way, you look great. I heard it’ll be your birthday soon. Let me get that for you as a present!”

I sighed. Yup, I’m not the only one.

Hi, Would You Like to Make a Donation?

Shirley called me about six months later, and guess what? It was a plea for more money.

“Hi, Niceguy?”

“Allo, what-up?”

“Well, I just wanted to know if you could do me a really big favor?”

“Depends...” It’s not related to how your personal finances have been destroyed by the fact that you spend money like an idiot, is it?

“Well, I’ve just arranged to move into my apartment, and I’ve used all the money in my checking account for my security deposit.”

This sounded like a money-related inquiry. Would I like to make a generous donation to the Shirley Moocher Foundation?

“And...?” Spit it out, woman. How much?

“Well, can you loan me \$500 so I can cover my expenses in the meantime? I’ll pay you back next month.”

“I don’t know... I mean, I...”

“Please! It’ll help me a lot, and... I’ll tell you what? I’ll write a check for you and you can deposit it next month. Okay?”

Well, Shirley was usually kind to me and her mooching had not yet become incessant at that time. And, plus, I'm hoping she might even consider dumping her asshole boyfriend for me (I know, I know). Okay, \$500? I could afford it. Why not?

I wrote the check, and she picked it up the next day. She trilled with gratitude and hugged me.

"Oh *thank you!* You're so *nice!*" Yeah, yeah. Just pay me back. She wrote me a check with next month's date on it. "Now, you can deposit this next month. So, you can relax. I'll be paying you back all right." Well, I went out on a limb and trusted her. Why not? I'm a Nice Guy. And women with huge knockers *never* lie.

Silly Silly Me

Exactly one month later I walked up to an ATM, punched in my secret pass code, and slipped the check into the slot. The next week I got a letter – I'd been charged three dollars because the check bounced. Ugh, why am I not surprised by this?

I called Shirley.

"Hey, your check bounced." I grumbled.

"Really? I didn't know... uh... I've had a lot of bills this month... more than I thought, I guess. I had to get some furniture."

I rolled my eyes.

"I don't care what the problem is on your end. I was really hoping to be paid back by now." I started to sound really irritated. It was not the money I was irritated at. It was the fact that she was not honoring her end of the agreement.

"Look, I'll pay you back when I get some cash freed up. Okay? I promise."

"You promised me last month that I'd get paid back this month. You've already broken your promise. Why should I believe your new promise?"

"Please believe me! It's not like I'm not going to pay you back!" She was adamant.

"Oh, but that's what happened, you didn't pay me back. That's why your check was worthless."

"But I *tried!*"

“No. Do or do not. There is no ‘try’ got it? You didn’t pay me back.” Do you *understand* the noises that are coming out of the flapping hole on the front of my head? But she swore up and down that she’d pay me back when she got some spare cash.

Three Months Later

I wasn’t paid back. In fact, I had even helped her do her taxes, hoping that might somehow encourage her to pay me back. Nope, wrong again. Whenever I brought up the subject, Shirley acted a little offended that I’d dare to do such a thing.

“You know, Niceguy, I thought you were my friend! Friends don’t distrust one another the way you distrust me. I’m very disappointed in you.” She would retort rather piously. How convenient.

“Well, what about your tax refund?” I asked. “It’s June, and it should have come in by now.”

“It hasn’t come in yet.”

“I don’t believe you. Everyone in the country has gotten their refund by now. Why haven’t you?”

“I’m telling you the truth! I’ve called the IRS and asked them about it. I can’t get any information out of them.”

I didn’t believe her because the IRS knows that taxpayers get very, very angry when they don’t get their refunds. She might have been telling the truth, but I just didn’t believe her. Still, I felt bad for being accused of being a bad friend, so I didn’t bring the topic up very often. Ugh.

Another Three Months Later

One night, Miriam and Dan invited me out to go clubbing. Shirley tagged along. I was irritated with her, but I didn’t mention her debt to me because I didn’t want to be a jerk and ruin the evening. Besides, she was wearing this red dress that made her body look truly *ex-traw-din-ree!*

I was at the bar trying to get a drink. The bartender had a big crowd of people waiting, and I’d been standing there for at least five or ten minutes. I was waving a ten-dollar bill to get his attention. Shirley walked up to the bar and got to order a margarita while I was still waiting for service. Hell, why wouldn’t the bartender serve me? I’d been standing there longer than Shirley. She just walked right up with her boobs falling out the top of her

dress, and the bartender immediately served her. Do I need to fire off a starting pistol or grow a pair of tits to get some attention?

Shirley checked her purse. "Oops, I think I left my wallet at home... Niceguy? Sorry. I hate it when I do this to you..."

For God's sake! I was furious as I put a \$10 bill into her hand, but I didn't show it. Seriously, I needed to do something about this. Me asking politely to be paid back hadn't worked. It was then that I decided to start playing hardball.

Time for the Heavy Artillery

Two days later, I went jogging in the park with Miriam and Dan. I almost never jog, so this was an unusual thing for me to do. I normally don't jog because I'm too lazy. I admit it.

Lazy.

Dan doesn't like Shirley very much, because... well... Dan thinks Shirley's a simpleton who doesn't know how to handle money. Funny that he reached that conclusion independent of me. I knew I could play to his biases.

I started talking to Dan as we jogged. Miriam was rollerblading about ten feet ahead, so she could hear me too.

"So, I'm thinking of taking Shirley to small claims court," I said, a little louder than normal.

"How does that work?" Dan asked.

"Well, I have all the documents that show I've transferred a total of \$500 to Shirley. And Miriam can be my witness if I need one. Basically, I go to the court, lodge a complaint, and they send Shirley an order to appear in court. I'm going to sue her for the amount I gave her. No more, no less."

"You've got to do what you've got to do." Dan said. "I mean, you've given her plenty of time to pay you back, and she hasn't."

Miriam slowed down a bit for us to catch up.

"I think Shirley has been lying to you about how she can't pay you back. She went shopping the other day. But if you take her to court, she'll get really mad at you. I don't think she'll talk to you again."

"I can live with that. It's nothing personal, just business. I can't wait any longer because my company is about to lay me off and the job market is flooded with unemployed people. I need the money back soon – that's one month's worth of rent that I've given her."

That was, of course, a bluff. I really hated the idea of litigating. I just wanted the message to get back to Shirley that I could unleash some legal hurt on her. I was positive Miriam would say something about it the next time she saw Shirley.

That night, I got a phone call from Miriam.

"Hi, I just wanted to call you to say that I think you're right to be upset at Shirley. I think you should get tough with her."

"Well, I intend to. I'm going to file a claim in court tomorrow. I know she owes you money, too. Perhaps you'd like to file a joint lawsuit?" She didn't go for that idea, but she really believed that I was going to do it.

The Next Day

I got a phone call. It was Shirley. She sounded sheepish.

"Hi... um... Niceguy?"

"Yeeeessssss?" I said it like Frank Nelson on *The Jack Benny Show*.

"I'd like to start paying you back the money I owe you... I mean, I don't have very much, so I was thinking that I could give you \$50 out of my paycheck every two weeks. Is that okay?"

"You get your paycheck every two weeks... so that'll be twenty weeks before you pay me the full \$500. I'm afraid that's a little slow for my liking..."

"Well, I wish I could pay you back, but as I said, I don't really have a lot of money to give you. If I could, I would."

"Oh, indeed, I *know* you would if you could. What with all the loans and the tax advising and the other stuff that I've given you..." I sighed. Well, her offer was better than nothing.

"Fine. If you could give me fifty dollars every two weeks, that would be okay. I understand that you have bills to pay."

"I can't say how sorry I am, and I wanted to thank you for being so patient. You know, if you were to take me to court or something, I'd be really, really pissed at you."

I chuckled. "Oh Shirley, I would *never* do anything so vindictive as take you to court." I grinned evilly.

Over a six-week period, I got \$150 back. Then there was a two-month period during which she stopped making payments. She had unexpected expenses to take care of, of course. Car repairs, medical bills. She couldn't afford to give me anything. And her tax refund *still* hadn't come in, supposedly. I don't think I'll be doing her taxes again.

What did she give me? Apologies. Lots of them. She was sorry that she couldn't pay me back. She said that I'd always been so good to her, and I'd always helped her out, and that she was feeling bad that she couldn't do anything to help me. Bleah. Maybe I should have grabbed her by her ankles, held her upside down, and shaken the change out of her pockets?

No, Really. Never Loan Money.

Anyway, this experience taught me a valuable lesson: never loan money outside the family, especially not to a woman and *definitely* not to a bimbo. Hell, in fact, never even start off being *generous* to a bimbo, because as time goes on, she might try to weasel every freebie she can from you, and it just ain't worth it. No matter *how* great she looks in a sweater.

Strip Clubs

I was 26 before I ever went to a strip club. Why? I guess I didn't like the principle. At the time I considered it to be kind of degrading to women.

I once went to a job interview, and the building downtown was within spitting distance of two strip clubs. If I got the job there (which I didn't), I wondered if could I stop off at the Jiggly Room after work? Or during lunch? I didn't think I ever wanted to go to a strip club. It just didn't feel right having to pay a woman to take her clothes off for me. I thought the décor would be kind of gaudy, too. Maybe that's a weird thing to say, but I like tasteful décor. Now, a burlesque show would be interesting perhaps, but you can't find very many of those anymore.

So, what would it be like at a strip club? I didn't know. I saw them portrayed in movies (*Showgirls*, for example) and in the occasional TV program, so everything I knew about strip clubs was from hearsay, pop culture and second-hand stories. I imagined that there would be burly toughs at the door who kept order. There would be a catwalk runway with one or more chrome poles. There would be a bar with overpriced and watered-down liquor. The colors and noises would be intended to inflame the senses. Already, that kind of place sounded like it would make me feel uncomfortable.

What would I do there? I didn't know how to *act* in a strip club. I didn't know how I was supposed to talk to a stripper. I imagined that I'd hold out a handful of \$20 bills (I didn't know what the optimum denomination should be... \$10? \$20? \$1?). The woman would start to peel off her clothes for me and maybe she'd rub up against me. Even if I got goosebumps thinking about it, I thought it just wouldn't feel right somehow. I wanted to respect women. I didn't want to be the contemptible, leering, male pig that women claim to despise so much.

When I was in college, some guys tried to force me to go to a strip club. I was 18 and idealistic enough to really think that if I refused to go, then perhaps that would mean that I wasn't a pig. So I refused. What did that accomplish? Well, it alienated me from those guys. They thought that there was something seriously wrong with me that I didn't want to go (well, I also had a class the next morning, and I didn't want to be out too late. I'm such a geek).

So, here's my question: since I hadn't been to a strip club until age 26, would women put a "plus" next to my name or a "minus?"

It might be a plus, because it would show that I thought it was a degrading gesture to women. On the other hand, it might be a minus for some women, because they would think that I was weird for not going until so late in life. Besides, no one ever put a gun to an exotic dancer's head to force her to dance – she had made her own choice to use her body to make money. If anything, I was doing *her* a favor by shoveling my money into her panties.

For the longest time, I did *not* know whether it was okay to go to a strip club. My ex-fiancée however, upheld a very obvious double standard about it. She was actually pretty sexist, but she'd never admit to it because she, like many American women, had a twisted, dishonest and opportunistic definition of what the word "sexism" means. That term can *not* be allowed to cut both ways because it would implicate too many hypocritical women.

One time, my ex was invited to go out to a strip club with her girlfriends to see some male dancers. She was all excited about going and she invited my (gay) brother to go with her.

"Sure," he said. "I'll go... provided that you give Niceguy the same liberty." My brother, by the way, is a really cool guy. He's one of my best friends.

"What do you mean?" Whorebag asked.

"He means," I chimed in (grinning because my brother would soon have her over a barrel. She would *never* allow me go to a strip club), "that he'll go to the show with you, if you'll let me go look at female dancers." I didn't actually *want* to go, I just wanted to hear Whorebag *admit* that she was a sexist hypocrite. That, and I would rather not have some steroid-popping stud gyrating in her lap if I could prevent it.

"No!" she snarled. "It's not the same."

"Why?" I asked. "Because I'm a man?"

"Yes! Guys get turned on by it more. Women don't get turned on as much. Therefore, I won't get as much out of it as you."

Oh lah-dee-freaking-dah! Nice little way to wheedle out of a trap; claim that your biology gives you a disadvantage, so you can tilt the playing field in your favor. She *never* fought fair. In her little universe, men and women were equal, but they had to follow different rules. The ladies' rules, of course, allowed her more perks.

“Let me get this straight.” I shook my head, unable to believe that she didn’t grasp the double standard. Her authoritarian hypocrisy was oozing out of every pore. I wondered if she’d realize it if I rubbed her face in it? “*You* can go watch male dancers, but I *can’t* watch female dancers?”

“Yes. It’s different for women.” She didn’t even blink. She really believed what she was saying. She did *not* see any kind of contradiction, but that kind of brainless idiocy was par for the course with her.

My brother laughed. “Come *on!*”

“It’s true!” she said. “Women don’t get turned on by it, so it doesn’t mean anything. Guys really get horny from it, and I don’t want Niceguy getting off on other women.”

“Bullshit!” my brother laughed. “Women get turned on by it too! Why else would you go?!?”

“No we don’t! We’re not as visually stimulated as guys!”

“Whorebag...” My brother looked her dead in the eye, and clucked his tongue. “You can’t pull that bullshit on me! *Look* who you’re talking to! I just *think* about a male stripper, and I get a stiffie.” I winced at the mental image, but it got his point across.

“Well, you’re a guy too,” was Whorebag’s only comeback. Her argument was out of steam. She ended up not going to the show. And you know what? If my brother hadn’t been around to hammer her argument into the ground, she’d have gone *regardless* of what I thought. Niceguy was never allowed to win arguments with her. Furthermore, if she’d gone, she wouldn’t have had any money because she didn’t work. I would have been giving her the money so that she could stuff it down some other guy’s G-string. That would have sucked.

What a sexist sow.

So, this brings me back to the original question: *can* I go watch strippers without being a pig? I just don’t know. How would I behave in a strip joint? I’ll come back to this one later, so you’ll just have to keep reading to find out!

Turned Down Again

I was sitting in my favorite bookstore, in “my” spot, drinking a latté and reading a small pile of books. Then I got distracted. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed something that didn’t belong there. When I looked over, I saw what had to be *the* most outwardly *erotic* woman I’d seen in months! I was stunned. She dressed like that in public? I *liked* it!

She looked as if she was in her early 20s, and straight out of a wet dream. Perhaps she was a Latina? A mix of something? I couldn’t tell and I never got a chance to ask. She had gorgeous coffee-cream skin and black hair in pigtails. She wore a tight-fitting white T-shirt and a short plaid dress with white knee socks. She also had one of those teeny knapsack purses that gets suspended in the small of a woman’s back. She looked like a combination of a Catholic schoolgirl and one of the women you’d see painted on the side of a B-29 bomber. All she needed was a lollipop and the whole Lolita look would’ve been complete. Now I know what Nabokov was thinking, the dirty bastard.

Okay, I’m a coward in the face of such a gorgeous creature, but I could *not* just sit there without at least trying to say hello. I sat there for a moment and wondered how I was going to pull this off. I was not going to use a cheesy pick up line. Women hate those. Hey, maybe I’d just try to go up and talk to her? Yeah, that’s what I’ll do. Women always tell me “if you see her, just go up and talk to her!”

I gathered all of my courage, swallowed hard, and walked over to her. She was scanning a bookshelf.

“Hi,” I said.

Now, I know I didn’t look my best. I had a new shirt, but I hadn’t shaved that day. In one hand, I was holding a biography of Nelson Mandela, the other held my coffee. She turned around and studied me with an amused smirk. Her eyes were *huge*, like the eyes in Japanese cartoons. I swear a big bead of anime-style sweat must have slid down my forehead.

“I don’t mean to bug you, but I just had to come over and say hello. I’m Niceguy.” I held out my hand and she shook it.

“Hi.” She smiled and it was like being given a million bucks. Her eyes were bright... *glistening* in fact. “I’m Esther.” Just looking at her face made me want to smile. I maintained eye contact with her. It was a little trick I learned: if you’re not comfortable looking someone in the eye (and I’m not) look at the bridge of their nose; It gives the exact same effect.

I stared at the bridge of her nose. I wanted to keep the tempo of the conversation going before I turned chicken and ran away. “I didn’t mean to bother you. I’ve never seen you in this store and I’m here, like, all the time. Is this your first time?”

She nodded. “Yes, I’m not from around here.”

Oh, that’s a good conversation-starting topic! “Where are you from?”

“Northern California.”

“Eureka?”

“No, closer to San Francisco.”

“Oh, I’ve been to the Sierra Nevada mountains recently, it’s nice scenery up there...”

I paused and she just looked at me as if I was supposed to keep the conversation going.

“So, why are you in town?”

“Well, I’m here for an academic event. A conference on liturgical studies.” My, she sounded bright. I didn’t even know what that was, and I know a lot.

“Oh, I don’t know what to say. What’s that?”

She gave me a brief overview of liturgical studies. I was impressed. This woman was obviously very intelligent. But I noticed that she hadn’t asked *me* any questions so far. I wasn’t sure what to say. By now, my conversation had run out of steam because she wasn’t engaging me. I was about to offer to show her around town, but she interrupted me just before I opened my mouth.

“Well, nice meeting you,” she said pointedly. I got the hint. Very well, I won’t force you to talk to me.

“Um... you, too. I’ll let you go back to browsing.” I was inwardly disappointed. Not merely disappointed, but *very* disappointed. I’d expected as much, though. Pessimists can’t be disappointed as easily. Just going up to her was an act of random optimism (hey if lightning can hit my apartment building, as it had the week before, then maybe she’d like to talk to me?) But realistically, I couldn’t expect her to show interest in me, a mere *mortal*. Some mere *person*. I walked away and bit my fist. Maybe I gave up too quickly?

Ugh. Still, while I was not going to force her to talk to me, I will tell you one thing: at least she acted as if she didn't have contempt for a bug like me. From my point of view, that was an accomplishment.

I'm sure she must get hit on a lot. Well, dressing like that, you're definitely going to get hit on. I'll be honest, her mind wasn't the first thing I looked at. I am, however, the kind of guy who'd appreciate her mind. If she'd been a bimbo, I'd probably have had zero interest. I want to get to know a woman before I'll sleep with her. What did I learn that day, however? She's not interested in you, Niceguy. Don't bother talking. Don't even *think it*.

Captain FreeTherapist: A Hero for Our Times

Yes, when women call me late at night crying their eyes out, I turn into (dun-da-da-DUN!) Captain FreeTherapist! *HUZZAH!* The shoulder to cry on, the provider of tissues, the soother of feelings. I offer emotional support and try to help women pull themselves together after they've just had a tough fight with their asshole boyfriend. That's what I do. Hal Jordan never *asked* to be the Green Lantern. Peter Parker never *asked* to be Spider-Man. And Niceguy never *asked* to be Captain FreeTherapist. It just sort of happened.

I was 18 the first time that I was really drafted into this role. I was a freshman in college, and there was this half-Mexican student who I thought was just wonderful: Juanita. She wasn't drop-dead gorgeous, but I considered her to be about a solid 7.5 in my book. She got hit on by quite a few of the rugby players. (She found rugby players to be kind of sexy, she admitted to me. They're so "big and strong... They make me feel small. I like that.")

Juanita was smart. Her dad was a surgeon, and she wanted to go to medical school too. In fact, her boyfriend was already enrolled at a distant medical school. Oh, that's right – she had a boyfriend. I could tell she wasn't too happy with the relationship. They'd been separated for months and she felt that his friends were a bad influence on him (encouraging him to go drinking and such).

Like a moron, I thought that maybe if I became friends with her, I could be introduced to one of her girlfriends? Or better yet, perhaps if she decided to break up with her boyfriend, maybe she'd consider... me? I wasn't going to aggressively *push* myself onto her, but we had dinner in the college cafeteria together quite often. Juanita was a very cool young woman, and I was perfectly content with being friends, but I would have gladly dated her if she'd given me the chance.

One night, she gave me a call. "Um... Niceguy?" Her voice sounded very strained. "Can you bring some soda over to my dorm? I...*sigh* need to talk to someone."

So, I dutifully came over with some Coke. I walked into her room and she was all red-eyed. She'd been crying.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

She sat down and looked just awful. That much was obvious. Her heart seemed to be in the throes of a full-scale Chernobyl meltdown.

“My boyfriend. I just found out from one of his friends that he’s been cheating on me. He’s been sleeping with some *slut* at his med school.” She shook her head, unable to speak. The words were just too painful for her to say. She looked at me, and her eyes misted up. Her lips trembled.

She collapsed right into my arms and started sobbing really loudly.

“Oh, NICEGUY! I loved him SO MUCH! Why did he do this to me?!” She hollered into my chest.

I put on my mask and cape... (dun-da-da-DUN!) Captain FreeTherapist wrapped his arms around her and held her as she cried and cried.

“Hon, let it all out. Cry as hard as you want.”

“I gave him my virginity! I wanted to be his one and only! How could he?! How COULD HE?!” She weakly pounded her fists on my chest. Captain FreeTherapist spent a few hours with her, consoling her.

I held her tight and let her cry all she wanted. She cried until she didn’t have any tears left in her. I rocked her until she was too tired to say anything more. I explained that, yes, he was a jerk and she didn’t deserve this treatment. It wasn’t her fault. I felt her heart beating up against mine.

Her heart was destroyed. I don’t like it when my friends get hurt so badly. For the next few days, she’d talk about how sad she was. About how hurt and confused she was. Every now and then, she’d get really angry and poke her finger into my chest as she ranted about this slut and how her boyfriend had to have been influenced by evil people to cheat on her. I really felt sorry for her, because she was a wonderful girl. I told her that she was wonderful, and she deserved better treatment.

She told me about her first sexual experience with her boyfriend; about how they made love. About how the morning after, fresh snow had fallen and covered the landscape. She said it looked like everything was covered in powdered sugar, like in a fairy tale. She felt like the most special woman in the world. Her first lovemaking experience was so wonderful that the memory of it made her weep.

I really wished that I could give a woman a wonderful experience like that.

A Few Days Later

A few days later, I received another phone call. It was Juanita.

“Hi, how do you feel?”

“Well...” She sounded a bit nervous. “I was at a party last night...”

“Oh, that’s good. Did you have fun?”

“Um... afterwards, I kind of... spent the night with Mike.”

“Wha– Mike?!?” I knew of him. He was a guy who’d flirted with Juanita repeatedly in the past. He was a huge rugby-playing ox. A ham-fisted, brawling goon. A total slob with no manners. Devoid of brains. Vacant of class. I was a little stunned. “Why did you do that?”

“I don’t know! I... guess I wanted to get back at my boyfriend! I was so mad at him, it was the only thing I could do!”

Okay... sooo... she was going to get revenge on her jerk ex-boyfriend by sleeping with some other jerk? That made no sense. It must have been really fun for the other jerk, though.

Captain FreeTherapist calmly said, “Juanita, honey, you’re feeling very confused and hurt right now. Maybe this isn’t a good idea.”

“I don’t know... I... I think I kind of like Mike, and I think he’s really interested in me...”

I slapped my hand against my forehead.

So with that, Juanita started dating Mike. I advised her not to, simply because I knew he wouldn’t treat her right. From that day forward, I saw her less and less because she was wrapped up with Mike for a few months. Then, after Mike, she started seeing some other rugby guy. Captain FreeTherapist can give the best advice in the world, but it don’t make a *lick* of difference if Juanita decides to do her own thing. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make her drink. How about this advice: “Get thee to a nunnery!”

Every now and then, I’d bump into her between classes and we’d have short verbal exchanges. One time, she asked me: “So, are you dating anyone?”

“Me?” I got a little nervous. “No. It’s... not easy for me to meet women.” I stammered.

“I don’t see why. You’re so *nice!*” Well, there’s your answer babe. Unthinkingly, she continued. “What kind of woman wouldn’t want to go out with you?” she trilled.

Oh, I don’t know... Maybe *you*, perhaps?! GAWD!

On Strike

I can only take the same scenario playing out over and over again a certain number of times. Some people refuse to learn from experience, so Captain FreeTherapist is now on strike. No more will I allow a woman to cry on my shoulder, sobbing, “Oh, why can’t Mister Asshole treat me just like you do? I want someone who will treat me like you will, only he’ll be someone I can have sex with in the shower, against the cupboards and on the kitchen table. Let me tell you in detail all about the sex you’ll never have with me because you’re not Mister Asshole.” In response, Captain FreeTherapist will shove her away and say, “Go to hell and burn with the rapists, idol-worshippers and simoniacal[†] Popes!” And then, he might poke her in the eye with a pointed stick or something.

[†] Simony – the sin of giving ecclesiastical promotions or pardons in exchange for bribes.

We hope you enjoyed this preview.

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