
The Venus Fly Trap

Cut Scenes, Dirty Secrets & Shady Confessions

By

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Prologue

The following chapters will provide insight into some of the life experiences that shaped me into who I am — the triumphs, the traumas, the dangerous obsessions I mistook for love, and the recklessness I confused with freedom. These moments didn't just shape my story; they *etched* character flaws into my psyche with the precision of a master sculptor and the emotional recklessness of a drunk with a chisel.

Somehow, amidst the madness, I manifested an extraordinary life — one filled with wealth, eccentricity, and just enough self-awareness to know I was hurtling toward disaster with a smile on my face, accompanied by delusional confidence and certainty that I had finally got my shit together. I built the fantasy — the mansion, the indulgence, the ornate sex room adorned with secrets and velvet — before I even knew who I was building it for.

And then *she* arrived.

Meeting the Venus Fly Trap was inevitable. Everything — and I do mean *everything* — in my life was orchestrated to prepare for her entrance. The chaos. The craving. The conflict. All of it aligned in perfect dysfunction. She didn't just walk in — she *descended* like a firestorm wrapped in silk, latex, leather and contradiction.

The Sex, Lies, and Repercussions were more than dramatic titles. They were tangible manifestations of the fantasies, fears, and unresolved shadows I had harbored for years. I saw them first in dreams, then in moods, and finally, in the flesh.

What I hadn't seen — what I *couldn't* have seen — was how those repercussions were going to unravel me. Strip me bare. Challenge every delusion I had about love, control, and who I thought I was.

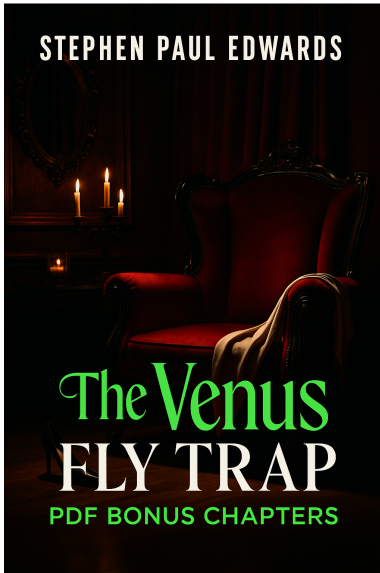
This isn't just a memoir. It's a warning and a confession — a glimpse into what happens when two beautiful disasters collide inside a gilded cage built for pleasure and pain. But before all that there is a story before the story, before The Venus Fly Trap exploded into my life.

So consider this PDF book your backstage pass to some of the moments and incredible crazy adventures that led up to her arrival, that in some cases were *too wild* — *too raw* — *too real* for the main book. These are the untamed chapters, the out takes soaked in lust, lunacy, and late-night revelations. Welcome to the shadows behind the chandeliers.

You're not just about to read about madness and mayhem.

You're about to *feel* it.

Brace yourself. The trap is open.



Chapter One

I Am The Anti-Christ.

The past year has been brutal. In June 2013, Jules and I bought our dream home after six months of negotiations, convinced we would build a future there together. I had imagined we would spend the rest of our lives there. Happily ever after. But within months, we were separated and on the path to divorce. It was a whirlwind of emotions and decisions. Sitting here, my thoughts drift back to the beginning—when everything felt perfect, and I never could have imagined we'd end up here.

It all started two months before our first meeting. It was New Year's Eve, 2007. I had just endured yet another date from hell.

I said to myself, *"Never again! I need to get clear about what I'm looking for in a woman."* It was New Year's Day, so I made a resolution—I wouldn't date for two months. Two Months? Okay, I know that is not long enough to pull myself together and be ready to get into a healthy relationship. But for me, being without a girlfriend, or a wife for that matter, for two months was a long time.

About a week later, I was staring out my condo window, watching the street below. That's when I noticed a young woman walking into the courtyard of the La Ballasara Condo building next door. She wore a black pinstriped business suit with a tight pencil skirt. She had beautifully styled brown, shoulder-length hair. She looked perfect. Not just because of her obvious physical beauty but her clothes, the way she walked, the way she carried herself—told me a lot about her. *That's precisely what I'm looking for*, I thought.

Then, on February 29, 2008, I met Jules (Her real name is Julie but I always called her Jules) for the first time—exactly two months later. This was another sign that my words, thoughts, and actions were aligning.

I had imagined Jules, and to this day, I can still see that image, what I had imagined her to be like and of what turned out to be her, in that black pinstripe suit outside my condo window. Jules was literally a manifestation of my imagination.

At the time, I was speaking for three days at an event in Anaheim, California. Then, I had a day off before doing a second three-day event at the same location.

As the speaker, I had to be careful about approaching a member of the audience, which I had never done. Well, okay... *rarely*.

The funny thing is, I hadn't really noticed Jules during weekend. She dressed professionally and carried herself with confidence. She was undeniably beautiful, and it was clear she had an incredible body.

So, like I said, I hadn't really noticed her.

On the last day of the event, the students sat down with a consultant to discuss their options for further education. When Jules walked into the ballroom that day, she had really stepped up her game. Damn! She was wearing a tight little black jacket, a cute blouse, sexy leather ankle boots, and just the right amount of light but sultry makeup.

By now, I had seen enough of Jules to know she was all the things I had noticed before—and more.

At this point, I was still behaving myself. But then one of my salesgirls, Judy, approached me and said, "*Julie was asking if you wouldn't mind sitting down with her and giving her your perspective on the best way for her to move forward with more education.*"

In my head, I thought, *Are you kidding? Of course!*

Then reality kicked in. *Wait. This could be a landmine. Don't do it.*

So, listening to my own sound advice, I pulled myself together and said, "*Sure. Tell her I'll get things started here and let her know when I can sit down with her.*"

I know. Hopeless.

Anyway, I got the event going, and about an hour later, I let Judy know I was ready to sit down with Julie. I gave the class an assignment and went to sit down with her.

When we went to find a table, they were all taken. So, we ended up standing just outside the ballroom door, talking. Then, out of nowhere, Jules said, "*There's something you should know about me—I'm a Republican and a Christian.*"

There it was—that ominous feeling again. Not that there was anything wrong with being a Republican or a Christian, but it just struck me as an odd thing to mention so early in our conversation.

I thought to myself, '*This will never work.*'

Later, after Jules and I decided to separate, I remember one morning lying in bed, feeling sorry for myself. I leaned over to grab something from the bottom drawer of my bedside table when I noticed a stack of my journals.

I wrote in my journal on my flights each week, but this was a drawer I rarely opened. I had forgotten they were even there.

Curious, I pulled one out and flipped to a random page.

And there, at the bottom of the page, was that exact conversation. Jules' words: "*There is something you should know about me—I'm a Republican and a Christian.*"

And right beneath it, the thought that had gone through my head at that moment: '*This will never work.*'

We always know.

Reading my journal, I understood. The universe was letting me know that the relationship with Jules was not meant to last a lifetime. Relationships are meant for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. My relationship with Jules was for a reason, a season, but not a lifetime.

Anyway, back to my event.

As our conversation continued, Jules casually mentioned, "*I'm taking tomorrow off. I need a break after these three days.*"

An invitation?

Like I said earlier, I was staying in LA because I had back-to-back events with one day off in between—which, of course, you guessed it, was the next day.

Ignoring my intuition (again), I thought, *Well, I have the day off. Why not?*

Two of my friends were coming into town—Anaheim, where I was hosting the event—and we had plans to visit California Adventure, one of the Disney theme parks. Fitting, right?

So I told Jules, "*I have the day off tomorrow, and I'm going to California Adventure with some friends. Would you like to come?*"

"Yes," she said. Just like that—yes.

So we made plans. The four of us—Jaia, Dale, Jules, and I—met up and went to The Cheesecake Factory for lunch. We spent about two hours talking, laughing, and getting to know each other.

When we arrived at the park, I walked in with Jules. As we entered, side by side, I held out my hand. Jules put her hand into mine, and that was it. We barely left each other's side after that.

Jules later confessed that before even seeing me at my event, she'd heard my voice and thought, *"I'm going to marry that man."*

Jules had all the qualities I had listed. We had both manifested our dreams.

Meant to be? Well, it happened.

Every evening that week, Jules drove from LA to Anaheim to spend time with me after my event wrapped up. I was scheduled to fly home on Friday.

That never happened.

Instead, I invited Jules to spend the weekend with me.

"Hey, let's go somewhere together this weekend. Let's go have some fun. We could stay at the St. Regis and then explore SoCal together—go to Laguna Beach, La Jolla, and Newport Beach. Would you like to do that?"

"Yes."

A woman of few words.

She was very shy, or, as I like to call it, demure. Jules was a very strong woman but also had a quiet, gentle spirit. That's how her family described her, and it was a very accurate description.

That weekend turned into months of what felt like perfect harmony.

In those early days, everything about us seemed to align effortlessly. We shared a passion for fitness—Jules had an incredible figure that turned heads everywhere we went. Our dietary habits matched; we believed in clean eating and healthy living without drugs or alcohol.

But what really connected us was her growing interest in spirituality—beyond traditional Religion.

I have a PhD in spiritual counseling. That's a long story for another time. Still, spirituality—understanding our spiritual nature and speaking about it—is my true **mission, vision, and purpose**—or, as I like to call it, my **MVP** for my life.

Jules was questioning her Christian upbringing, especially after witnessing the behavior of a prominent leader in her church—someone who seemed more interested in control than compassion.

She was fascinated by the spiritual principles we discussed, often staying up late into the night, asking questions, and sharing her doubts about her traditional faith.

Eventually, Jules decided to break away from the Christian church.

Meanwhile, we were having an incredible time in *La-La Land*.

The transition happened quickly. Within months, Jules left her position at Warner Brothers Studios and moved from California to Sarasota to be with me.

But her background as a Southern Baptist from Murphysboro, Illinois, would prove to be more challenging than either of us anticipated.

Her family lived in a tight-knit, closed circle, socializing almost exclusively with other Southern Baptists. Their belief system was rigid—everyone outside of their faith was, in their eyes, destined for eternal damnation.

I remember asking her father for Jules' hand in marriage. The moment felt strange—he wasn't much older than me.

He said he was concerned about our age difference and thought I was *too old* for Jules. She was 32, and I was 48 at the time.

He said that if *this was what Jules* wanted, he would grant me *permission*. I have to admit, I was shocked by his reticence. I could understand it, to a point—but deep down, I couldn't help shake the feeling that it was born out of the fact that I wasn't a Christian, not because of my age.

By the fall, we were engaged.

Of course, my spiritually non-denominational website—with provocative quotes like, “*Religion is for people trying to avoid going to hell. Spirituality is for people who have already been there.*” Didn't exactly win me any points with her family.

To them, I wasn't just a bad influence. I was the *Anti-Christ*.

The engagement celebration at her parents' home perfectly illustrated what we were up against.

Her entire family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends—had gathered to welcome Jules home.

They embraced Jules warmly and treated me as if I were invisible—a ghost at my own engagement party.

Welcome to my first *cult* experience.

I tried everything to integrate into the family, but it quickly became clear that nothing short of a full conversion to Christianity would satisfy them.

They were convinced I was leading Jules astray, though ironically, she had decided to leave the church long before meeting me. Fear kept her from telling them the truth, making *me* the convenient scapegoat.

It was unsettling. I was being judged—not for my character or how I treated Jules, but for my religious beliefs. I felt like an outcast as if somehow I was not *good enough*. And yet,

the solution was simple—if I had just claimed to believe as they did, I would have been accepted instantly.

Jules had two brothers and a sister. Andy and Vicky were great—we laughed, joked, and got along effortlessly.

But the family dynamics ran far deeper.

Her other brother, Jim—once a notorious school bully—had found the perfect outlet for his aggressive tendencies as a U.S. Marshal.

He had followed in their father's footsteps. A man who had traumatized Jules throughout her childhood, screaming at her until she withdrew—emotionally fragile, frozen, and frigid.

We spent countless hours working through these wounds in our relationship. I encouraged her to confront her past, suggesting she write a letter to her father—a technique that had transformed my relationship with my parents.

I remember Jules's voice tightening when she talked to her father on the phone. She'd smile and nod, responding in the way she knew was expected.

Then, after she hung up, she'd sit in silence, staring at the wall.

The first time I asked what was wrong, she just shook her head.

The last time, she said, "*I don't know who I am anymore.*"

After five years—despite her fear—Jules finally found the courage to write that letter, pouring out years of childhood trauma and suppressed emotions.

Two weeks of tense silence followed.

Then, something remarkable happened. Her father not only apologized to Jules but also extended his apologies to his other children and his wife. The impact rippled through the family, creating unexpected healing and openness.

Everyone seemed moved by this breakthrough.

Everyone except Jim.

Furious, he accused me of orchestrating the *destruction* of their family.

To my shock—and heartbreak—Jules eventually sided with him.

That moment is burned into my memory.

I was in the movie theater fixing the projector when Jules reached the top of the stairs, her expression tight. Something was clearly wrong. When I asked if she was okay, she walked into the theater and blurted out, "*Jim thinks you're trying to break up our family, and I agree with him.*"

The floor seemed to vanish beneath me. My world imploded.

How could she *think* that?

I had done everything possible to bring the family together—flying them all to our home for Thanksgiving every year, treating them like royalty despite their frequent coldness.

My father and I had even taken her father and brother golfing, hoping to create a bridge between our families. But they refused to let their walls down and let us in.

I remember one Thanksgiving when I was saying a prayer before dinner. Jim took his entire family *outside* rather than listen to a "non-Christian" prayer.

It was just one of his many acts of disrespect.

But Jules agrees with him? That cut deeper than any previous slight.

I felt like an outsider in my own family. I didn't say anything, but it hurt. Deeply.

I had given Jules *everything*. Not just material things—emotionally, I gave her my all.

Every morning, I woke up, kissed her, and told her I loved her.

I constantly found little ways to show her how much she meant to me.

I never could have imagined my life without Jules.

I truly believed she was my *forever* girl.

And I would have been *so* happy to spend the rest of my life with her.

I was devastated.

It felt like someone had slammed a sledgehammer into my stomach.

The pain—though emotional—was worse than any physical pain I had ever experienced. It left me gasping for air, unable to fully grasp the reality of our divorce. My mind refused to accept it.

The betrayal felt both familiar and uniquely agonizing.

I felt like I had been sleeping with the enemy and never even knew it. The realization was crushing.

And so, almost exactly five years after our engagement party in the fall of 2008, we separated in the fall of 2013.

We both recognized we needed help untangling the wreckage of our marriage.

Chapter Two

What Are You Really Fighting For?

We eventually attended a 'Spiritual Uncoupling' retreat in Sedona, just for the two of us, which helped us begin to process the ending. The retreat was held in a quiet lodge tucked away in the mountains. The air was crisp and thick with the scent of pine carried by the wind.

The warmth was immediate inside the lodge—soft lighting, flickering candles, and an open fire made it feel cozy. Before each session began, we meditated on the outcome we wanted to experience.

Then, the therapist guided us through another meditation designed to help us open our hearts and minds to each other and accept each other's perspectives with love and compassion. By the time we finished, we were both in a centered, calm, and peaceful place, ready for the transformation.

When the therapist asked us to describe the end of our marriage in one word, I struggled.

"Sudden," I finally said.

Jules hesitated longer.

"Inevitable."

The retreat forced me to confront my role in our unraveling. My temper, though never intended to hurt, had often triggered painful memories of Jules's traumatic past, igniting arguments that eroded the foundation we had once believed unshakable.

Through countless uncoupling sessions, we circled the same question—how had our marriage fallen apart so fast?

Just months earlier, we had moved into our dream home—an airy, sunlit space with floor-to-ceiling windows—the kind of home any couple would dream of in June. By October, we were living separately.

But the truth was, it hadn't happened overnight. The cracks had been there all along—silent, unnoticed—until, one day, they shattered us.

We both carried unspoken frustrations. Our arguments, though seemingly ordinary, had deeper roots. We just hadn't seen them—not until it was too late.

We both came from very controlling environments, so we developed strategies to ensure we would never be controlled again. The irony? Fighting not to be controlled often means becoming controlling yourself.

This is another example of how we are destined to become what we judge.

Our mindsets were mirrors of each other. "*You are not going to tell me what to do,*" was our unspoken, constant driver.

I was direct and aggressive. Jules was passive-aggressive.

Let me give you an example.

I liked keeping the lights on. Jules always turned them off.

I left the AC running upstairs; she shut it down.

"It's a waste of money," she would say.

"I work hard enough to afford it," I would retort.

At first, I thought we were arguing about lights and AC. But as I sat in that retreat, listening to the therapist explain the dynamics of what we were fighting for, I realized—I wasn't fighting for lights.

I was fighting to feel cared for. Every time Jules flipped that switch, it felt like she was flipping off my needs.

I was fighting for respect. I wanted my choices to matter.

And I was fighting for Control. Deep down, I feared I would have nothing left if I wasn't in Control.

I wanted Jules to see me, to understand what I needed.

I'm sure Jules felt the same way.

We had spent a large part of our marriage fighting—not each other, but for something neither of us had the words to express.

So, what were we really fighting for?

Apparently, there are really only three things we fight for:

1. **Care/Closeness:** It made me feel like Jules didn't care about me, so I didn't feel

close to her.

2. **Respect/Recognition:** I didn't feel that Jules was respecting my wishes or recognizing my needs.
3. **Power & Control:** I thought, "You are trying to control me and making me feel powerless in our home."

That realization changed everything.

Later, Jules and I sat alone together on the floor, watching the fire flicker.

"I never knew why we were really arguing," I admitted.

"I know," she said. *"Neither did I."*

"I'm sorry for hurting you," I said.

"Me too. I never wanted to hurt you either."

We turned toward each other and embraced. We held on for a long time.

It was the last time we ever did.

Even as I sat there, writing my thoughts down, I couldn't help but wonder: *If I had realized this sooner, would it have changed anything?*

Jules was also struggling with her identity. She felt disconnected from her family because she was no longer part of their religion. She was constantly torn. Her family wore her down, and over time, she began to see me as trying to pull her away from them.

It was tough for me to accept that our time together had come to an end. I wanted to believe the retreat had fixed something: that walking away from Sedona meant walking away from the pain.

But grief doesn't work like that.

I still caught myself reaching for my phone to text Jules. I still woke up some mornings expecting her to be beside me.

The retreat had given me a place to start.

But I still had a long way to go.

Chapter Three

“Shoot for the moon;
even if you miss, you
will land amongst the
stars”

After our spiritual uncoupling in Sedona, I felt lost and empty. Most nights, I couldn't sleep.

My friend Jerry would often come over at midnight or later, and we'd walk the community golf course in darkness or drive around Sarasota in my Bentley with the roof down.

As we drove around, he often huddled in the well in front of the passenger seat, shielding himself from the cold wind.

“Hey, I found a book of poetry on your desk. I brought it with me. Thought I'd read some since you like this shit.” Jerry was always finding ways to cheer me up.

He had a hard time sleeping. When we were on the road, we sometimes shared a room, but he often chose to sleep on the floor—for some reason, it made resting a little easier for him. I guess he had insomnia, though he never used that word or even talked about it. I always suspected it had something to do with his childhood trauma. He was terrified of his father, who was an abusive alcoholic. So, he understood loneliness and pain in a way most people didn't.

He was awake at all hours of the night, lying there, staring at the ceiling. So, spending time with me at 3 a.m. was a great way to pass the night for him.

Over the years, Jerry has been through some rough breakups, and I'd sit with him for hours, talking things through. It didn't necessarily fix anything, but it deepened our friendship.

He'd read poetry aloud as we cruised the empty streets at 3 a.m. Yes, I know that sounds very gay (Not that there is anything wrong with being gay...oh whatever!) and probably looked ridiculous—two grown men in a Bentley, reading poetry in the December cold. Well, cold for Sarasota. I could barely hear the words over the wind, but his presence made me laugh, and that's what mattered.

There's something magical about being awake while the world sleeps—a sense of freedom from life's pressures, like time and responsibility don't exist.

When he'd entertained me enough with reading poetry, he would devise something else for us to do while driving to nowhere. "Okay, enough of that shit. Let's call some people," he'd say.

We often called friends in different time zones, like my friend Malia in Hawaii. I'd met her before I met Jules at one of my events. Despite my rule about not dating attendees, I was instantly smitten. The event was in Seattle, where her aunt lived. Both Malia and her aunt were originally from Hawaii. Malia was living in Vegas at the time. She was stunning, attending with her aunt, who looked surprisingly close to her age—because she was. It was one of those family anomalies.

That "*rules are made to be broken*" moment led to dinner with them and one of my sales guys. Malia and I connected immediately. Later, I flew to Vegas to see her, and she visited Sarasota to explore a potential real estate business partnership with me.

But my insecurity and determination not to come on too strong too quickly landed us squarely in the friend zone. A month later, Malia started dating a prominent Vegas attorney. Around the same time, I met Jules.

Yet Malia has remained a constant friend, offering comfort and inspiration through the years. She even helped at my events, always bringing her sharp mind and calming presence. We made a vow of lifelong friendship. Despite our history, she never let things get awkward—maybe because she understood me better than I realized.

I have to admit, I often wondered what might have happened if I'd had the courage to make a move. There was definitely a connection. I remember Malia once saying, *Some guy*

is interested in me, but he won't make a move. When a guy likes a girl, he needs to have the courage to ask her out. What will he be like in a relationship if he can't even do that?

I guess that just went right over my head—or maybe I was too afraid to hear it then.

Malia is strong, confident, and incredibly intelligent. For as long as I've known her, she's been a successful entrepreneur.

During those late-night Bentley drives, calling Malia became a ritual. She'd listen to Jerry and me bantering, always warning us to *stay out of trouble*—though in Sarasota, where they called 9 p.m. *Sarasota midnight*, finding trouble wasn't exactly easy. Although I was soon going to find it in droves.

I also processed my feelings through daily journaling and writing what I call *Soul-try*—poetry from the soul, with its own rhythm and rhyme. It's deeply spiritual, flowing straight from your stream of consciousness. I'll share some later.

That was a tough time for me. Having friends to talk to, support me, and be there made it a little easier. Slowly, the pain became more bearable, and I even started sleeping a little.

These experiences helped me work through my emotions to the point where I was finally ready to step out and have some fun. Dating might be a good distraction. So, I was excited about my first date in a long time.

As I walked into my garage, preparing for my date with *Tomoz*, my eyes landed on my white Rolls-Royce Ghost, parked beside my brand-new sapphire blue Bentley GTC Convertible. How does someone end up with both?

Part of the answer lies in my childhood, growing up in 1960s England. Like every young boy back then, I was obsessed with James Bond. I was Stephen Edwards 003.5, racing my toy Aston Martin across the floor, complete with an ejector seat and front-bumper machine guns.

Occasionally, my mother would peek into my room, reminding me to tidy up my toy cars. Sometimes, she'd pause at the door, smiling as she said, "*Stephen, one day, you're going to pick me up on a Sunday afternoon and take me to lunch in your Aston Martin.*"

That dream had been burned into my mind, lying dormant until I finally reached a point where I thought I could afford a luxury car.

My dream car then was the new Mercedes SL500 with its sleek, fully convertible hardtop. The journey from that dream car to my current collection reflects the financial changes in my life and the fulfillment of a little boy's dream—though with different marques than young Stephen Edwards 003.5 had imagined.

A few years earlier, I was driving past the Sarasota Mercedes dealership with my friend Jimmy, when we spotted a lineup of brand-new 500SLs surrounding the dealership. We spent half an hour admiring the different colors, and that's when I noticed a business card tucked under one windshield wiper. It belonged to a salesman named Steve Edwards. A coincidence or an omen? At the time, I was barely making rent, so owning a Mercedes—of any kind—wasn't even a consideration.

Fast forward a few years, and my financial situation has improved dramatically. It was time to pursue my dream car. Walking into the showroom, I was utterly unprepared for the price tag.

I stepped outside to catch my breath. *Holy shit! How do you even justify spending that kind of money on a car?* I thought to myself. After a moment of reflection, I realized—there's no way to rationalize spending that much on a car—you just have to suck it up!

So, I went back inside the showroom and bought a brilliant silver Mercedes 500SL. Maybe it really *was* an omen—or the manifestation of a long-dormant dream. One of many, as you'll soon see.

The first thing I did was take my mum to lunch at the Ritz-Carlton. As always, we had a wonderful time together. She has an incredible sense of humor, which I've inherited—at least partially. When we're together, laughter takes over. We often find ourselves in uncontrollable fits of laughter, sometimes forgetting what even triggered it in the first place. Everything just gets funnier and funnier; we usually end up crying with laughter.

My mother was always the most beautiful woman in the room. She could have easily been a movie star.

Her personality was magnetic—funny, sophisticated, elegant, yet completely down-to-earth. She was especially magical with children. No matter where she went, she would effortlessly strike up conversations with people. She was always herself—humble, kind, and absolutely hilarious.

My father was always away on business and had no time for his family when he was home, so my mother raised me.

I could talk to her about anything. She never judged me. Whenever I complained about something—or someone—she would help me see another side to the situation, always encouraging me to consider the other person's perspective.

She would remind me that everything happened for a reason and that there was always a silver lining if you looked for it. My mother was always there for me, offering the guidance I needed and instilling strong values in my heart and mind. She was my hero.

After lunch, as I dropped her off and opened the front door for her, I stood on the doorstep. I said, “Hey, Mum, remember when I was a kid, you used to say, ‘Stephen, one day you’re going to pick me up on a Sunday afternoon and take me for lunch in your sports car?’”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Well, look.” I pointed proudly at the Mercedes in the driveway. “Dream come true!”

My mum glanced at the car, then turned back to me and said, “Yes, but that’s not an Aston Martin.”

I couldn’t believe it. My jaw dropped.

Typical of my mother—always pushing me to the next level. She often said, “*Stephen, shoot for the moon; even if you miss, you will land amongst the stars.*” I thought I’d reached the moon, but in her eyes, I was barely ready for takeoff.

I drove away that day, determined to return one day in an Aston Martin.

A year later, while vacationing in La Jolla, California, I saw an ad for luxury car rentals featuring an Aston Martin Vantage. We rented it for a few days and fell in love with it.

After returning home, a friend introduced me to someone seeking help raising money for a real estate project. By then, I had gained a reputation for fundraising after successfully closing a multi-million-dollar condo deal. These events are, as it turned out, inextricably intertwined.

One afternoon, I was having lunch at Marina Jack’s, a fabulous waterfront restaurant overlooking the marina in downtown Sarasota, with my 89-year-old Jewish friend, Helen. She wasn’t just a dear friend—she was also like a mentor to me.

We met under very unusual circumstances. It all started with the Buddhist monks.

Yeah. Like I said—unusual circumstances.

They were performing at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota. I had purchased tickets for some friends and my sister.

My friends went into the theatre while I stood in the lobby, waited for my sister to arrive. And Waited. The show had started at 7:30 p.m., but it was now 8:05 p.m.

This was nothing unusual for my sister. In fact, it was completely normal. Honestly, this was my fault—I should have left her ticket at *will call*.

Frustrated, I stepped outside and stood in front of the theater. Nearby, a well-dressed Hispanic guy was also waiting. I figured he must be in the same boat, waiting for someone running late.

He turned to me and asked, “Who are you waiting for?”

“My sister,” I said, shaking my head in despair.

He glanced at his watch. “She’s not coming. Give me her ticket, and let’s go and watch the show.”

I thought he was joking. But when I looked at him, I could tell he wasn’t.

“No,” I said firmly. “She’s late, but she’s coming.”

Then, out of nowhere, he asked, “Would you like a free massage?”

WTF.

Here I was, outside the Van Wezel Theatre, waiting for my sister—who was already 45 minutes late—about to see the Buddhist monks, and now being propositioned by a random Hispanic guy offering me a *massage*?

This could only happen to me.

“What?” I asked, confused and more than a little suspicious.

He must have noticed my hesitation because he quickly shook his head.

“No, no, it’s not like that,” he said. “I’m in massage school, and I need to complete a certain number of free massages before I can graduate.”

Oh. Okay. That was a relief. Or so I thought—perhaps a bit naively.

“Well, thank you,” I said, trying to brush him off. “But I’m only here for a few days, then I’ll be traveling for a few weeks.”

He wouldn’t take no for an answer. He pulled out his phone.

“Okay, give me your number, and I’ll call you in a few weeks. What’s your name?”

“Stephen,” I told him—because, well, let’s face it, that *is* my name.

He completely took over the conversation, which, oddly enough, I admired.

“My name is Carlos. Nice to meet you, Stephen.”

“Nice to meet you too, Carlos,” I said, feeling... well, I wasn’t sure *what* I was feeling, but it was strange.

I gave him my number just as my sister finally arrived—already mid-rant about how her lateness wasn’t her fault.

Sometimes, I find it amazing that it never is—even though you can pretty much *guarantee* she’ll be late every single time.

Although she flies every week and has never missed a flight.

Anyway, it's my own fault. I always expect her to be on time.

"What are you waiting for? Let's get inside," she said impatiently as if *I* were holding *her* up.

So, we went into the theater and enjoyed the last 10 minutes of the show.

After the Buddhist monks finished their performance, I understood something deeper. At the beginning of this book, I talk about how everything is vibrational. But sitting there, immersed in the sound of their instruments and voices, I *understood* the power of vibration at a much deeper level.

I could feel the power of the vibration resonating throughout my entire body.

People often ask, "*How do these monks think they're going to change the world just by sitting in the Himalayas chanting? Do they really believe that will shift humanity's consciousness and create peace on earth?*"

Yes. That is *precisely* how.

Stay tuned. Literally.

Can you feel the energy shift?

There are two prophecies I would like to mention here.

The first is:

"When those who wear the red robes roam the earth, this will signify the birthing of peace on earth."

Have you noticed how Buddhist monks—those who wear red robes—have been traveling the world and become an increasingly prominent presence in the West over the past decade?

The second is a 2,000-year-old prophecy:

"When the Condor meets the Eagle, it will signify the reuniting of humanity."

Both of these magnificent birds are powerful symbols in Native American mythology.

The Eagle represents the North, embodying masculine energy and the focus of the mind.

The Condor represents the South, deeply connected to feminine energy and the softness of the heart.

This prophecy isn't just a message about the future and the inevitable changes ahead—it also speaks to the past, to how human societies split into two distinct paths. It tells a story of conflict but also of peace and reunion.

As the East and West intertwine in the global economy, the Eagle and the Condor are inextricably linked. Men and women are awakening to and embracing their masculine and feminine aspects.

Eventually, we will integrate, find balance, and make peace, and that gives me hope.

These two prophecies came back to me that evening, triggered by my powerful experience with the Buddhist monks.

It raised my vibration.

And guess what?

Yeah—Carlos called me.

I agreed to the free massage.

I mean, how could I say no? The guy needed to complete his training hours, so *why not help him out?*

We set a time during the day. I'm not sure why, but I just felt more comfortable doing this during the day. Ok, I was sure why.

I arrived at the address he gave me—a luxury condo building on Golden Gate Point, just a few yards from where I would soon be living: *The Grand Riviera*.

Of course, I didn't know that at the time.

Carlos was waiting for me outside the condo building. We took the elevator up to the condo. When the doors opened, we stepped into a beautifully designed home overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

The place was immaculate. Everything was perfectly in place. Thoughtfully decorated.

The owner was obviously gay.

What?

How can I say that?

Keep reading.

I didn't realize it at the time, but looking back later, yeah... it was apparent.

Carlos led me to one of the guest bedrooms. The room was dimly lit, with scented candles flickering softly.

Again, everything was pristine. Neat. *Perfect*.

Carlos set up his massage table.

"Go ahead and get undressed," he said.

Fuck.

I don't feel comfortable, I thought.

But it's probably just all in my head, I thought. I mean, I'm *here* now.

It's too late to bolt for the fucking door!

I didn't want to offend Carlos—he seemed genuinely nice.

(Not like *that*. Stop. You're not helping.)

So, I got undressed.

Yes, I kept my underwear on.

I had to try and keep *some* dignity.

Carlos started the massage.

To break the tension, I tried making conversation.

At one point, I asked, "Is this your condo?"

"Oh my God, no!" he said. "It belongs to a friend of mine. He's visiting his mother today, so he let me use it."

And in case you're wondering—no, he did *not* give me a happy ending.

I was relieved.

No, not *sexually* relieved—you know what I mean!

The massage was... fine. It was not particularly memorable, except for the *circumstances*.

I mean, I met this guy outside a theater. I knew *nothing* about him. For all I knew, he could have broken into the condo!

Sometimes, I'm just too trusting. Too impulsive.

Then, just as I was starting to relax, he pulled the sheet up and made a quick karate chop motion up and down my spine—a universal signal that the massage was over.

"Put your clothes on. I'll meet you in the living room," he said.

So, guess what? I did.

I walked into the living room—fully dressed, massaged, and, most importantly, *safe*.

"How was it?" he asked.

"Very good," I said.

Okay... not exactly a lie, but not the *whole* truth.

I didn't want to burst his bubble—I tried to encourage him.

"Oh, thank you! Would you please fill out this form so I can show the school I gave you a massage?"

"Sure," I said as he handed me the form and a pen.

As I filled it out, he asked, "Would you like to see *The Nutcracker* with me? I have tickets."

I looked up from the form and saw him smiling at me—*hopeful*.

Ughh.

What had I gotten myself into?

I've been through this before. Many times.

I'm friendly to everyone. I don't care if someone is gay, straight, or anything in between.

Friendship is one of the highest values Aquarians have. However, my friendliness can be mistaken for *interest in more*.

If you're not clear from the beginning, people can feel like you led them on.

It's happened to me with both men and women.

And it always ends badly—with me feeling guilty, like *I'm* the bad guy.

I didn't want to offend Carlos, but I had to be honest with him.

“Carlos, I'd be happy to go to *The Nutcracker* with you. I've never seen it. But there's something you should know—I'm not gay.

So if you still want to go, that's great, but it would be *as friends*. Nothing more.”

He smiled at me and said, “Of course, we will just be friends.”

I think I just made things worse.

The way he said that implied he was thinking *He's shy. He's not ready to come out yet. Or he's in denial. I'll work on him.*

Or something to that effect.

This is what happens.

People hear what they *want* to hear.

I have to admit, though—a lot of people assume I'm gay. More of that later. Maybe there's something in my energy? Who knows.

Anyway, I had told Carlos the truth.

And I decided—I *was* going to the ballet with him.

On the evening of the performance, Carlos and I arrived at the Sarasota Opera House—a breathtaking, historic pink building that had recently undergone a \$20 million renovation.

The place was packed. A sold-out crowd was making its way inside.

We walked around, taking in the elegance—the ornate gold banisters contrasting against the deep red carpets and the dazzling crystal chandeliers.

As we stood near the top of the grand staircase, a very refined gentleman in a *flawless* tuxedo came gliding up the stairs.

When he reached the top, he smiled immediately and walked straight toward us.

“Carlos! How good to see you, my friend. How are you?”

“Mr. De Warren! It’s great to see you too. I’m doing very well, thank you—and thank you for the tickets this evening. I want to introduce you to my friend, Stephen.

Stephen, this is Mr. Robert De Warren, the director of the Sarasota Ballet.”

I held out my hand. “Very nice to meet you, Mr. De Warren.”

“Very nice to meet you too, Stephen. Have you seen *The Nutcracker* before?” he asked politely.

“No, I haven’t. This will be my first time,” I admitted, suddenly feeling like I *should* have seen it before.

“Well, you couldn’t see it with anyone better than Carlos. He played the Nutcracker Prince for us many times during his career.”

What?

Carlos was a former ballet dancer?! And, from the sound of it, a very good one.

Mr. De Warren smiled. “It’s great to see you, Carlos. We’ll talk more at the afterglow.”

Apparently, the *afterglow* was what they called the after-party.

We thanked Mr. De Warren, and he went on his way. We took our seats and thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

When the show was over, Carlos invited me to the afterglow.

As we walked into the ballroom, I noticed heads turning. People were looking at Carlos, waving hello. Some had expressions that seemed to say, *Hmm, he has a lovely new boyfriend*—and that was probably one of the more polite thoughts.

Before long, we were surrounded by young male ballet dancers, all vying for Carlos’s attention.

Carlos introduced me to his friends. They greeted me with a quick hello, then immediately turned their attention back to him.

I felt awkward—entirely out of place.

As I turned to get a drink, I accidentally bumped into a little old lady behind me.

“Oh! I’m very sorry. I didn’t see you there. Are you okay?” I asked, genuinely hoping she was okay—which, of course, was why I asked.

She was elderly, maybe in her 70s, and very short—4’11” at most.

Her dress was pretty but hung straight down her frame like there was no body beneath it.

Not a curve in sight.

She had sharp, pointed features, and her skin was deeply wrinkled.

She looked strange—but also fascinating. I was immediately captivated by her.

“Oh, I’m fine, don’t worry,” she said. “I haven’t seen you at the ballet before. I’m Helen. Everyone knows me here. What’s your name?”

She was a little jittery but otherwise seemed in good health. More than that, she absolutely oozed confidence and energy.

“Hello, Helen. My name is Stephen, and you’re right—I haven’t been to the ballet before.”

“Oh, well, *welcome!*” she said, then gave me a knowing look. “I see you’re here with Carlos—is that right?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Hmm... And how did you meet Carlos?” she asked.

“He gave me a massage,” I said. Well, it *was* true.

“Oh, I see,” Helen replied, although she really didn’t

“Actually, we met outside the Van Wezel. We were there to see the Buddhist monks. That’s when he asked me if I wanted a massage,” I added, realizing how much stranger the story was beginning to sound.

“Yes, well, it all makes perfect sense now,” she smirked.

We both laughed, and just like that, we became instant friends.

When the afterglow was over, Helen walked over to me and said, “I really enjoyed meeting you, Stephen. You’re an interesting chap.” She teased me about being English.

“I feel the same way, Helen. You are certainly an interesting and swell gal,” I teased back.

We laughed again before she reached into her bag and handed me a card.

“Here’s my card. I’d like you to call me and take me to lunch. We’ll go Dutch.”

I couldn’t help but smile. A seventy-something-year-old woman with a business card—Helen was a force of nature.

“I will do that. I look forward to it.” I said. And I did.

Helen lived in a condo at the Sarabay Club overlooking Sarasota Bay. It was a luxury assisted living facility with a private hospital on the grounds. I picked her up in my little black BMW convertible and took her to the very restaurant where we were now sitting—Marina Jack’s.

Conversation with Helen always flowed effortlessly. She was brilliant and wise, keeping up with current events. She was worldly, sharp, and full of life. I valued our time together immensely.

She loved going out for lunch and dinner with me and insisted I always kept the roof down. She enjoyed the wind in her hair and the sun on her face. She looked adorable in her 1940s-style outfits, giant sunglasses, and her big handbag perched on her lap.

Helen was very Jewish and originally from Manhattan, New York. She had never left the island until she was fifty years old.

She was heavily involved in the gay community. Her son, Bruce, was gay and had died of AIDS. Her husband had also died from AIDS—not because he was gay, but because he was a hemophiliac who had contracted the disease through a blood transfusion.

Helen introduced me to advocacy programs supporting AIDS treatment and research. She got me involved in CAN Community Health – Sarasota, an organization specializing in treating and curing AIDS. Eventually, I was voted onto the board.

Helen was also very wealthy, but wherever we went, she insisted we split the bill or, as she would say, “We are going Dutch.”

“It’s just better,” she’d say.

She didn’t want or need a *toy boy* to take care of her, nor did she want to be taken care of anyone else. Paying her own way reassured her that the people in her life were there because they *wanted* to be—not because they wanted something from her. She wanted me to feel the same way.

A few months after we met, I was on the phone with Helen, as always, engrossed in a deep conversation.

At one point, I said, “Hey, guess what? I have a date tonight! I met her at The Granary while trying to find the Stevia.”

Helen listened in silence.

“She was standing on the bottom shelf of one of the fixtures, trying to reach the top shelf. She obviously works there, so I said, ‘Excuse me, I’m looking for the Stevia.’”

“She climbed down and turned toward me. Oh my God, Helen—I think I fell in love right then and there. She has beautiful Hispanic features, gorgeous skin, and long, light brown hair that falls all the way down her back to her waist. Her name is Gina Marie, and I’m taking her out tonight.”

Helen was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “So... you have a date tonight?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“And... it’s a *woman*?” she asked incredulously.

“Yes, of course. Why?” I asked, confused.

Silence.

Then it hit me.

“Helen... do you think I’m gay?”

“I don’t *think* you’re gay,” she said with certainty. “I *know* you’re gay!”

I was shocked. “Helen, I am *not* gay. Why would you even think that?”

“Well, when I met you, you were with Carlos—and I *know* he’s gay. I’ve never seen you with a woman. You’ve never even had a girlfriend since I’ve known you, and you seem very comfortable around gay men. So, you *are* gay.”

Well, she had a lot of circumstantial evidence. I had questioned myself about this many times—it was definitely a recurring theme. *Maybe* I was in denial, but I have no desire to have a gay relationship. Quite the opposite. Honestly, dating would be a lot easier if I *was* gay, that’s for sure.

Anyway, I went on my date with Gina Marie, and six months later, we were married. Of course, I introduced her to Helen—they fell in love instantly, and just like that, we had our own little family.

Gina Marie and Helen spent a lot of time together, usually conspiring against me. Our wedding ceremony was even held at Helen’s condo building.

Eventually, Helen agreed—I was *not* gay. Or so she said.

Helen helped and guided me through many trials and tribulations. She was incredibly wise, worldly, and full of energy, with an insatiable zest for life. I trusted her opinion implicitly. She often said, “Steve, if you were twenty years older and I were twenty years younger, we would have *got it on*.” She was probably right.

And so here we were, sitting at Marina Jack’s restaurant, overlooking the marina.

Through the large windows, we could see Bird Key—home to the wealthy—and Golden Gate Point, a 22-acre peninsula extending into Sarasota Bay. With its stunning views of downtown, the Gulf of Mexico, and the new Ritz-Carlton nearby, this peninsula had become Sarasota County’s most valuable real estate.

As we dined, I was drawn to a striking new condo building at the tip of Golden Gate Point, crowned with a magnificent gold dome. The architecture captivated me completely.

Helen noticed my distraction and asked, “What are you looking at?”

From where I was sitting, it looked like there were around 100 condos in the building.

“Helen, I’m going to live in that condo building,” I declared spontaneously, knowing nothing about the property except its striking appearance. Helen immediately began

questioning my decision-making process, but, as usual, I had no logical explanation for my intuition.

But as usual, it was spot on.

Chapter Four

Hello, I'm Stephen, The Burglar

After dropping Helen home, I went to investigate the fabulous condo building I had declared I was going to live in. Despite the six-foot mesh fence surrounding the unfinished structure, I found a gap and slipped through. As I admired the spectacular views of the boat docks, marina, Bird Key, and the Gulf of Mexico, it was apparent there were not 100 units in this building. It was a luxury condominium building.

I could already tell this was way out of my league.

Suddenly, a door opened behind me. A man emerged, his voice carrying a hint of suspicion as he asked, "Can I help you?"

Caught off guard but keeping my composure, I said, "Yes, I am interested in this building. Do you have any condos for sale?" Well, I lied. I mean, while I *was* interested, there was no way I could afford to live here.

To my surprise, he said, "Well, we're almost sold out, but there is one unit left. Would you like me to show you around?"

"Sure, that would be great," I replied, thinking, *Well, why not? Can't hurt. At least I'll get to see some nice condos.*

He introduced himself. He held out his hand and said, "Angus Rogers, the developer."

I shook his hand and said, "Stephen Edwards, the burglar. Nice to meet you, Angus."

Despite our unusual first exchange, Angus went ahead with the tour. While the exterior had already impressed me, nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to see. As we rode the gold elevator to the penthouse, Angus shared the building's fascinating history.

As we walked through the 13 units of *The Grand Riviera*, he told me how he came to buy the land.

“The property had previously been home to a Buddhist monastery,” he told me. I know the Buddhist monks again!

The monks had decided to sell the property and received numerous offers for their land but were more concerned about the buyer’s intentions for the property than the money. They wanted someone who would personally discuss their plans for the property’s redevelopment—unlike the other land developers, who had submitted their offers by mail.

“So, I called the monastery and requested a meeting with the monks to share my proposal with them,” he continued. “They liked me and my proposal. They appreciated that I respected them, their beliefs, and the sacred nature of the land. They said they could see my passion for creating something extraordinary—which, as you’ll see, we have done.”

I liked Angus, too. Although it was clear he came from wealth, he had depth and humility. I could feel that energy radiating from him.

We took the golden elevator up to the units. As we stepped inside, Angus said, “So, here we are.”

At the time of my visit, the building was nearly complete, with only Angus and his wife living there. *The Grand Riviera* had been financed by Bob Roskamp, a prominent local businessman and developer, who had secured the top penthouse as part of the deal.

The building’s design was remarkable—just 13 units in total, with the ground floor dedicated to the concierge reception area and garages. The elevators were programmed to stop only at your designated floor, ensuring complete privacy for residents.

The layout consisted of two units per floor for the first five levels. In contrast, the top three floors were reserved exclusively for penthouses.

When the elevator doors opened onto the top floor—Bob and Diane Roskamp’s penthouse—I was stunned by the sheer scale of the 10,000-square-foot space. Panoramic views stretched across the Gulf Coast, marina, downtown Sarasota, Bird Key, Lido and Longboat Keys.

The interior design was breathtaking. A dark green mural surrounded a hallway adorned with wooden branches, forming an archway and creating an enchanted forest effect.

“The wall unit you see over there,” Angus said, pointing at a massive mahogany cabinet, “they purchased that from Harrods in London, had it shipped here, then had

to take out that wall of windows just to get it inside. They even had to hire a special crane to lift it in.”

In the master bedroom, a fresco was being painted on the domed ceiling in a style similar to the one Leonardo da Vinci used on the ceiling and walls of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City.

Finally, we arrived at the last available unit on the fourth floor. It was *designer-ready*—essentially a blank canvas with white primer on the walls, allowing future owners to work with their interior designers.

As I pretended to examine a wall, Angus said, “I’m sure you’d like to know the price?”—more of a statement than a question. I hadn’t even bothered to ask; I mean, what was the point?

But I played along. “Oh yes, what is the price?”

“\$2,295,000.” He delivered the figure as casually as if discussing the cost of groceries. It was even more daunting than I’d anticipated. I barely managed to breathe out, “That sounds reasonable.”

Finally, Angus handed me his card. “Here’s my card. If you have any questions, feel free to call me.”

I took it and made my escape, breathing easier once I was back in my car.

But here’s something you should know about me: when I truly want something, there’s a very good chance it will happen.

Despite living in a 3,000-square-foot home and being nowhere near financially ready for a \$2.3 million condominium, I began to think differently. Instead of telling myself, *You can’t afford this*, I started asking, *How can I make this happen?*—a mindset shift I had learned from reading *Awaken the Giant Within* by Tony Robbins and *Rich Dad Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki, among others.

I’ve also learned that miracles can happen when we act on faith—not religious faith but trust in all possibilities. I had consistently manifested my dreams throughout my life, but this was taking them to another level.

This was the last available unit in the building, situated on prime waterfront property where no future construction could block the views. Next door, a new development called *La Bellasara* was breaking ground, with more projects planned. *The Grand Riviera* would soon be recognized as the gateway to Sarasota.

I considered my options. At a minimum, I could find a buyer and earn an assignment fee or convince an investor to purchase the unit and let me live there while it appreciated in

value. I contacted Angus to ask about the contract terms. The requirement was a \$50,000 deposit, which was refundable for two weeks but then non-refundable.

Despite not having the cash readily available—most of my assets were tied up in real estate equity—I managed to raise the money within a week. My track record of successful real estate deals had earned me enough trust that several people together were willing to lend me the funds for a short period.

So, I put the last unit under contract without a clear plan—only faith and conviction in the property’s potential.

The downtown revitalization, the new neighboring development, and the incredible views all suggested significant appreciation potential. While I didn’t have a buyer lined up, these factors gave me enough confidence—along with my strong faith in miracles—to take this calculated risk.

That said, a calculated risk is still a risk. It was a scary thing to do. Even if you can rationalize the risk, it remains a risk. If I didn’t pull it off, my reputation would take a hit, and if, for whatever reason, I couldn’t get the money back, I would be \$50,000 in debt—a hell of a lot of money.

So, was I afraid? Very. It took courage. But courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is when you are afraid, but you do it anyway.

As I’ve said before, I believe strongly in our ability to manifest miracles through the power of thought, words, and action. We can manifest extraordinary opportunities by maintaining a clear vision and taking bold steps—despite our doubts and fears. I had done it many times before, and I was about do it again.

Chapter Five

Funeral for a Friend

A few weeks prior to this venture, I had been teaching a seminar in Dallas, Texas. A young woman, probably about twenty-three years old, sat in the front row with her friend. Her name badge said *Laudes*, so I assumed that was her name.

Laudes seemed particularly appreciative of my humor and personality. I mean, she was laughing her ass off at my jokes and sarcasm most of the time. She even started bantering with me, which was —not exactly professional in front of an audience, but, for the most part, they seemed to enjoy our playful flirting and having fun with each other. Some even joined in, usually taking her side, which Laudes loved.

At the end of the first day, Laudes and her friend approached me at the front of the ballroom, where we picked up our conversation and playful back-and-forth. Before long, the three of us were standing there alone—the ballroom now completely empty.

“What are you doing tonight?” Laudes asked. Before I could answer, she added, “Why don’t you come to dinner with us? I have some questions about what you talked about today.”

“Well, I had big plans to stay in my room, get bored, and sleep. I know that’s a lot to give up,” I teased, “but since you have questions about today, then as a good teacher, I feel obligated to honor your request.”

“Oh, so you’re an honorable man?” Laudes teased back.

Oh, there were so many sexual innuendos that ran through my mind when she said that.

I was already breaking one of the sacred speaking rules—never get involved with a student, which as you already know I fully agree with and follow diligently.. This was

already pushing it. So I bit my tongue and said, “Of course, dear. I’m an Englishman, and all Englishmen are honorable.”

It sounded ridiculous, probably because I was biting my tongue.

“Hmmm.” She smiled wryly. “Anyway, we’re having dinner here in the restaurant at 7:30 p.m. Shall we meet you there?” she all but commanded.

“It will be my honor, young lady. Your honorable host will be there at 7:30 p.m. on the dot,” I said in my finest upper class English accent.

Reflecting on the situation, I realized that attending this dinner could lead to complications. But I had already committed to being there and didn’t want to renege on my promise. I decided to proceed with caution, being mindful of the potential consequences. I hate breaking promises—probably because I hate when people let me down. My intentions were simple: enjoy their company and the evening.

So, I showered, changed, and headed to the restaurant—unaware that this evening would change my life.

When I arrived, Laudes was already seated at our table. Somehow, she had forgotten to bring her friend.

Apparently, her friend wasn’t feeling well. We were both *terribly* disappointed but decided to push through and make the most of it.

The conversation flowed effortlessly, and after dinner, we had so much more to discuss that we continued talking in my hotel room until sunrise. I know how it sounds, but it was genuinely just conversation—an all-night exchange of ideas and stories that created an unexpected connection.

Laudes came from extraordinary wealth—her father was one of the wealthiest men in America. Despite attending an elite college and growing up surrounded by opulence, she remained remarkably grounded.

She was beautiful and intelligent and had a sharp wit that made our conversations sparkle with humor and playful banter. Yet beneath the privileged exterior was someone who had learned early on that money couldn’t guarantee happiness.

Her wit and intelligence were just a few facets of her complex personality. Growing up in immense wealth, she struggled to carve out her own identity and purpose. Our conversations weren’t just filled with humor and teasing—they carried a deeper emotional connection.

That night, we formed a genuine friendship. Yes, spending an entire night in a hotel room with a beautiful young woman—without any romantic advances—apparently earns you an official spot in the *friend zone*.

While Laudes was undeniably attractive, I was more drawn to her personality than her physical beauty. It was the right choice—she was much younger, wanted children, and came from a completely different world than mine. Despite any mutual attraction, I knew a romantic relationship had no future. As an Aquarian, I value friendship above all else.

We became fast friends, often talking multiple times a day. Laudes was easy to talk to, and we laughed a lot.

“Where are you now?” she would ask, never quite sure which city I was in.

“I’m in Chi-town, heading to LA right after. I need to breathe in those fumes,” I said.

“You really are a jet setter—with a different girl in every city, I bet,” she teased.

“Well, not every city... just most,” I teased back.

“Hmmm, I hope you’re using protection. You know how these young girls are—before you know it, they’re in your room, and you know what happens then...” she continued bantering.

“I certainly do. We spend the whole night talking, and she thinks I’m gay!”

We both laughed.

“Oh, I know you’re not gay. I saw the idea cross your mind that night more than once. But you were, as you said, a gentleman,” she said, flattering me.

“It is one of my greatest regrets,” I replied, trying to flatter her too.

“So, when are you going to come see me? I just got a new place here in Dallas. When are you coming back?” she asked.

“Well, I’ve just been waiting for the invite. I thought you’d never ask.”

“Hmmm... as a gentleman, you should know it’s not proper for the lady to ask. I just got tired of waiting. You’re a little slow on the uptake, I’ve noticed.”

She was relentless with her banter. She also knew what she wanted and how to get it. Few people said no to Laudes—I wasn’t about to be one of them.

“Okay, tell you what—after I return from LA and spend a few days at home to regroup, I’ll book a trip to Dallas. Send me your new address so I can find a hotel nearby,” I said, still trying to keep up my ruse of being a gentleman.

“We’ve already spent the night together, so let’s get over that. You’re staying with me, and that’s all there is to it. If you get out of hand, I have some mace spray. I hope I can find it in time,” she teased, laughing. Then she added, **“I have to go. I**

have a living to make, you know. You go back to being a playboy. Let me know when you're coming so I can prepare the couch. Ciao."

And just like that, she was gone. She always had to end the call first. Though, to be honest, I could have talked to her for hours.

Her father was the CEO of a major oil and gas company in Houston, Texas. When I mentioned the Grand Riviera deal to Laudes, she suggested it might interest her father as an investment opportunity. She told him a little about it, and he was intrigued—anything for his beautiful, darling daughter.

Not long after, tragedy struck. Her younger brother was killed in a devastating car accident. Driving late at night, drunk, and at high speed, he lost control of his truck, hit a center barrier, and flipped multiple times before the vehicle burst into flames. He was killed on impact, tragically ending his young life in an instant.

Laudes was, of course, devastated; she had been extremely close to her brother. Like many sons of successful, wealthy fathers, he had struggled to carve out his identity and find where he truly belonged in the world. I went through the same thing with my father, though not to the same degree. As the old saying goes, *A tree cannot grow in its parent's shadow.*

She invited me to the funeral in Spring, Texas, about two hours from Houston. I was honored that she wanted me there.

My friend José discovered I was heading to Houston and mentioned that one of his old girlfriends lived there. He told me they had once been deeply in love, but of course, José would never marry her. He suggested that while I was in town, I should meet her. He showed me a picture and told me her name was Sandy.

Sandy was incredibly sexy—not exactly the kind of girl you take home to meet Mom. Knowing José, this wasn't surprising. I was immediately drawn to her—like a moth to a flame.

José warned me, "Sandy is very high-maintenance and very sexy. She's just your type," he said, laughing. Then, with a more serious tone, he added, "Steve, take good care of her."

(Side note: José called me Steve. Long story.)

That was a big statement coming from him. I had known José for at least ten years, and in all that time, he had never stayed with one girl for long. Women came and went, usually within a few weeks. He never dated just one at a time.

José gave me Sandy's number, but I didn't want anything to interfere with why I was in Houston. Still, I called her, and we arranged to meet at my hotel after the funeral—the night before I flew back to Sarasota.

The funeral was a grand affair, held in a cathedral filled with hundreds of family members, friends, and prominent figures from the oil & gas industry.

Laudes's friends were all there—young, beautiful women from wealthy families who had attended prestigious colleges and finishing schools, accompanied by their equally beautiful and elegant mothers.

It felt like a service for royalty. Everyone was dressed to the nines. De Beers would have been proud of the sheer number of diamonds on display. The sight of the choir walking down the central aisle of the massive cathedral, led by the Cardinal, was breathtaking. And when they sang, it was like the sound of angels. The music resonated deep within your soul, making it impossible not to be moved. It was a wonderful service.

Laudes was overcome with grief. With so many family members and friends surrounding her, I barely spoke with her.

"I'm so glad you came. Thank you for being here. I'm sorry I couldn't spend more time with you. I know how busy you are, and it means the world to me that you took the time to be here," she told me.

"Please don't be sorry. Of course, you needed to be with your family. It meant the world to me that you asked me to come. We can talk later. I still need to come see you in Dallas, remember?"

"Yes, I would like that very much. We can stay up all night talking... or whatever it is you like to do," she said, attempting a smile through her grief.

It was a brief but poignant moment. I hated seeing her like that. But at least I'd get to see her soon and, hopefully, lift her spirits. I knew it was going to be a long and painful journey for her and her family.

I returned to mingling, doing my best not to look like a funeral crasher.

Among Laudes's friends, one, in particular, caught my attention—Carly. Tall, blonde, and absolutely stunning.

I wasn't there to find a date, so I tried not to pay her too much attention. But it wasn't easy. She seemed to be everywhere, and our eyes met more times than I could ignore.

When it was time to leave, I walked over to Laudes, kissed her on the cheek, and said, "I have to go now, but I'll call you so we can make arrangements for me to come to Dallas.

Soon. I can't wait to see your new place and stay up all night. Make sure you have your mace handy."

I was trying to lighten the emotional intensity—for myself as much as for her.

"Yes. Don't you forget," she said, forcing a smile.

Carly, who was sitting next to Laudes, spoke up. "I have to get back into town too. I'll give you a ride."

"Thank you, that would be great," I said.

Turning back to Laudes, I added, "Okay, looks like I have a ride. I'll talk to you soon." I kissed her on the cheek one more time. As I reached the door, I glanced back. She waved, holding back her tears.

The weight of the funeral stayed with me. I could feel Laudes's pain, her profound loss. While I was honored that she had invited me and wanted to support her, I couldn't shake the feeling that I didn't belong. Other family members and guests seemed confused by my presence—it was obvious I wasn't a relative or a close friend.

So, when Carly offered me a ride back to my hotel, I was grateful. At least I had company—something to take my mind off the day's heaviness.

The drive to my hotel was about two hours, so we eased into light conversation.

"So, I hear you and Laudes have become close," Carly said—more of a question than a statement.

"Yes, we've developed a great friendship," I replied, careful not to give her the wrong impression.

"Laudes tells me you live in Florida." I noticed that she had a way of making statements sound like questions.

"Yes, I do. I live in Sarasota, on Florida's west coast," I said.

"I know where it is. I *am* an American," she replied. I couldn't tell if that was a snipe or if she was trying to be funny.

She continued, "I've been to Florida many times, although I usually stay in Miami."

"What were you doing in Miami?" I asked, though I had a feeling I already knew.

"Mostly modeling. I do some work for Wilhelmina Models," she said nonchalantly.

Just as I thought.

"Well, that's a great agency," I said. "What kind of modeling do you do?"

"Runway and some print," she replied. "I hate it, though. It's so boring. Most of the time, you're just standing around doing nothing. And the other girls are mostly bitches."

I can't imagine how awful that must be, I thought.

Carly continued, “I haven’t decided what I want to do yet. I really want to get into a business like Laudes. I hope she’ll take me under her wing—maybe even help me get a job. My father absolutely hates me modeling. He pays me to do nothing so I don’t have to model. It’s pretty messed up.”

“It sounds like you’re searching for your passion—or a deeper meaning in your life,” I said, though I wasn’t entirely sure if that was true.

“That’s exactly right,” she agreed. “Laudes always says we all have a reason for being here. I need to find mine.”

We spent the rest of the drive trying to discover Carly’s reason for living—without much success.

I was staying at the boutique hotel ZaZa in Houston. Upon arrival, Carly surprised me by asking, “What are you doing later?”

I was caught off guard. Shocked and very taken aback. When I say Carly was stunning, that’s an understatement.

There hadn’t been much flirtation between us. But she didn’t need to flirt. Carly carried herself with confidence from knowing she was extraordinarily beautiful. In her mind, if you were a man, you wanted her. Simple as that.

Carly’s stunning appearance was only a small part of who she was. Beneath the surface, she had a complex personality—driven by a deep desire to prove herself and gain validation. Her confident exterior hid a more profound vulnerability she probably didn’t show to many people.

Of course, I knew I had arranged to meet Sandy, but there was no way I could pass up the chance to spend the evening with Carly. I’d figure it out somehow, even though I had absolutely no idea how.

“Nothing,” I lied.

This was a *basisis*. I’ll explain that word later.

“I’ll come by later then. Give me your number so I can text you when I arrive,” she said casually, as if this were the most natural thing in the world.

Now I have two dates for the evening. I actually pinched myself—to make sure I wasn’t dreaming.

Obviously, this created a complicated situation. But let’s be honest—who wouldn’t want a complication like this?

If push came to shove, I figured I'd make my excuses to Sandy and spend the rest of the evening with Carly. Of course, there was always the possibility that Carly wouldn't even show up.

In the meantime, I decided to go with the flow and figure things out as the evening unfolded. Nothing is more dangerous than a horny man with two dates, both beautiful women, on the same night—and no plan.

I had arranged to meet Sandy at the hotel's outdoor bar. As I stepped onto the veranda, I spotted her immediately. There was no doubt it was her. She looked noticeably older than her photograph but still very beautiful.

"Hello, Sandy," I said, taking a seat at her table and kissing her on the cheek. "Very nice to meet you. José has told me a lot about you."

"Oh, I bet he has," she said, her deep, sultry voice carrying a knowing smile. Sex just dripped off her.

It was apparent she led with her sexuality, but beneath that façade, I sensed a kind, vulnerable woman.

"Hello, Stephen, is it?" she asked, fixing me with an intense, smoldering gaze.

"Yes," I answered, suddenly feeling slightly uncomfortable and nervous. She looked like she might eat me alive.

"Hmmm. José has told me a lot about you too," she said, locking eyes with me, her sexy, deep blue eyes. "You are a successful real estate mogul, is that right?"

I let out a small laugh. "I don't know about *mogul*, but I do okay."

Mogul?

I mean, *calm down, José. You laid it on a bit thick, didn't you?* I told him later.

"Well, you *did* want to get laid, didn't you?" he shot back.

Can't argue with that.

Turning back to Sandy, I decided to shift the conversation, dialing down the sexual intensity by at least 50 degrees.

"So, tell me about you, Sandy. What's your passion? What gets you up and out of bed in the morning?"

She tilted her head and studied me. "Hmmm, you're deep, aren't you? José said you were a very spiritual guy."

I just smiled.

"Well, since you asked... Since my divorce last year, I've been struggling to find myself again. My husband took very good care of me, so I never had to work." She paused, her

expression darkening. “I let him control my life, which was a mistake. Then it was the age-old story—he met a much younger woman, and that was the end of that,” she said. Her eyes welled up slightly. I could tell she hadn’t meant to show that much vulnerability.

Sandy’s beauty went far beyond her looks. Beneath her sexy, confident exterior was a woman searching for meaning, grappling with her past, and trying to reclaim her sense of self.

She pulled herself together and continued, “So, to answer your question, to be honest, getting out of bed in the morning is pretty damn difficult right now. I’m still looking for my new passion in life. How about you, Stephen? What is your passion?”

I told her about my passions, but it was clear she wasn’t really listening. Sandy was here for one reason and one reason only. She wanted to escape from her current reality, sex, drugs, and alcohol were her medication.

As I shared more about myself and my life, Sandy reached across the table, placed her hands on top of mine, and said, “*Let’s go to my room.*”

She didn’t want to hear more, had no interest in making a connection, and did not want to risk being hurt again.

Not “*Let’s go to my room and have a drink*” or “*Look at my etchings.*” Just, “*Let’s go to my room.*” a direct invitation.

She might as well have added, “*And fuck each other’s brains out.*” But at least she was being honest.

Sandy was already pretty drunk when I sat down. After two more cocktails with me (on top of the four she’d had before I arrived—confirmed by the \$320 tab the waiter slid onto the table), and I strongly suspected she’d also popped some Paxil or Zoloft.

So, we went up to Sandy’s room, where she took complete advantage of me in various positions all over the room before finally collapsing on the bed and falling asleep, drunk and exhausted. And that was... Exactly. I felt very used—but happy.

Seriously, though, I felt like I had given her what she needed: relief—an escape from the pain of her current reality, even if only for a very short time. There was no way I could reject her, even though the experience was far from fulfilling.

Still, I was glad I could bring her some pleasure and make her feel sexy and wanted. I suppose that’s what a hooker might say after leaving a client. But as difficult as things were for her, I knew she would get through it and find happiness within herself again. Sandy is a survivor—of that, I am sure.

I took a quick shower, and my phone pinged as I quietly dressed. When I stepped out of Sandy's room, I checked the screen. It was a text from Carly.

"I'm here in the bar. Come get me, hurry—these horrible men are all over me like flies."

"I'll be right there," I texted back.

I followed the orders of the little princess (though she wasn't so little—she had to be at least 5'11" in heels) and hurried down to the bar to meet her.

The moment I walked in, I spotted her. And she wasn't exaggerating—guys surrounded her, circling like lions stalking their prey. I wasn't surprised, though. She was dressed to be devoured.

She wore a short, tight, black fitted jacket, a black fishnet top with a half-cut black leather bra underneath, tight black jeans, and black high heels. Her makeup and outfit screamed, *FUCK ME*.

"Hi," I said, stepping up beside her and kissing her cheek.

"What took you so long?" she teased.

Well, I had to tuck my other date—who I just fucked—into bed before I could get down here, I thought. But instead, I just asked, "What are you drinking?"

"Oh, I'm okay," she said. "Let's just get out of here."

The hotel had a nightclub, so I suggested, "Would you like to check out the club? I've heard it's excellent."

"No, let's just go to your room," she said, just like that.

What the fuck. What is wrong with these women? They're worse than men!

I was starting to feel used again. But do you think I was going to say, "No, my hotel room is boring? Let's go to the nightclub so I can spend a small fortune getting you drunk and then take you to my room?"

Yeah, no. I was all for the shortcut approach. I pinched myself again to make sure this was still really happening.

When we got to the room, Carly walked to the foot of the bed, turned around, and, with her finger, beckoned me to come to her.

The room was spacious, with sleek mahogany furniture—modern and streamlined. A double dresser, a loveseat, and a wide, deep armchair with white leather upholstery gave the space an elegant contrast. A sweet fragrance lingered in the air, probably from an air freshener.

I walked over to Carly, took her in my arms, and we started kissing. Then, she pulled away and pushed me onto the bed.

She started to strip for me. She deftly pulled out her phone, put on some sexy techno music, and began to slowly take off her clothes as she gyrated and danced for me.

I just sat there, wide-eyed, with my jaw dropped. I might have been drooling.

I was worried if I would be able to have sex again so soon. Carly made sure that would not be a problem.

She used every piece of clothing seductively and explicitly. She was in no rush. By the time she was down to her fishnet top, an all-in-one, with her half-cut black leather bra underneath, I was out of my mind. My cock was dripping with pre-come.

Then she pointed her finger to the front of the bed and commanded me to pull myself up and sit there. She kneeled down in front of me, pulled my pants down, took off my underwear, and then took me in her mouth. She looked me in the eyes as she sucked and licked all the pre-come off my cock. She pushed her mouth onto me so my cock was deep in her throat. Then she took her mouth and tongue along the side of my cock, all the while looking at me and making sure I knew she loved every second.

She held of my cock firmly in her right hand and began jerking me off. Slowly, at first. Then faster. She would go from jerking me off, almost making me come, then put me in her mouth again.

Then she stood up, pet her legs over my legs, and sat on my lap, grinding her pussy on my cock. She was already soaking wet. I held her body so she could get a better balance. Her head was thrown back. Her beautiful, long blond hair fell down her back like a waterfall. She did a head swish, and then her hair was all over her face. She was incredibly sexy.

Then she stood up, walked to the side of the bed, and rolled on. She came to rest in front of the headboard, opened her legs wide, and said, "Now fuck me."

I began crawling up towards her from the front of the bed. I was about to go down on her, but she put her hand on my head and said, "No, I want your cock inside me."

So, I kneeled in front of her. I started to rub my cock down her thighs and teased her pussy with the tip.

She was moaning and breathless. "Just fuck me." She commanded. So, I did.

"Harder." She commanded as she pulled her knees up so I could get deeper inside of her.

I thrust harder, feeling her pelvic bone on mine. I was still kneeling in front of her.

She held up her arms and said, “Hold my throat and choke me.”

I fell forward and took her neck in one hand, squeezing her throat.

She began gasping and writhing. As I was coming inside her, she orgasmed, screaming, “Fuck, fuck, oh yeah, fuck!”

Then, without missing a beat, she sat up, let my cock slip out of her pussy, took me in her hand, and started sucking the remaining cum and her juices off my cock. That was an experience like I had never had. I was used to being the driver in the bedroom. This girl was totally in control; she knew exactly what she wanted, how she wanted it, and how to get me to give it to her. Now, don’t get me wrong—it was incredible. To have the opportunity to enjoy sex with Carly was truly like a gift from God.

It was not my favorite kind of sex, though. There was no emotion or connection, and I prefer my partner to be submissive. That is a much bigger turn-on for me. We talked a little, and then Carly said, “So, how long have you been dating Laudes?”

I couldn’t help but think: *If you believed I was dating Laudes, and she’s your friend, then how come we just fucked?* Then the penny dropped.

“We’re not dating, Carly. Laudes and I are just friends,” I said, thinking, *You are a terrible friend.*

Carly scoffed. “Oh, come on. She told me you stayed up all night in your hotel room, and nothing happened. Do you really expect me to believe that?”

“I don’t expect anything, Carly. I’m just telling you the truth,” I said.

“I don’t know why you two are playing this stupid game. It’s obvious you’re into each other. Anyway, I have to get up in the morning—I’m meeting my mother for breakfast, so I need to get some sleep,” she said like I was the one being annoying. She slid under the covers, pulled them over her shoulder, and shut her eyes.

“Okay. Good night,” I said, doing the same.

Carly’s intentions were crystal clear—this wasn’t about romance or connection. She wanted to prove she could attract the man who had caught Laudes’s attention and fuck him.

Laudes was the alpha in their social circle, and the others were constantly competing for her attention and position.

When we woke up, we talked briefly and exchanged a few kisses; then Carly got up, dressed, and left.

After our encounter, she made it clear she wasn’t interested in anything more.

In a way, her incredible external beauty was a detriment to her. She had never needed to develop a personality—her looks alone had always been enough. She could have any man she wanted, but she hadn't yet realized that while physical beauty might attract men, inner beauty keeps them.

Looking back, I could see Carly searching for herself, living vicariously through Laudes. She wanted to *be* Laudes because she wasn't happy with who she was. She competed with everyone, desperately seeking validation. It's a journey most of us take at some point. And, like the rest of us eventually do, she would find her way.

Well, that was a whole new experience. I shook my head and smiled.

I had done the same thing to women many times when I was younger, and now I understand how they felt.

Based on that experience, it seemed women had taken back their sexual power. I thought to myself, *This is a whole new world.*

I checked out late in the morning. The receptionist handed me my bill to review. I glanced at the balance and thought they must have made a mistake. But when I looked at the itemized charges, I realized *they* hadn't made a mistake—I had.

Sandy had been to the hotel spa. She'd indulged in just about every service they offered—and charged it all to my room.

After I got over my initial shock and flash of anger, I smiled and shook my head as I walked away. *These girls sure know how to play the game,* I thought to myself. It was a small price to pay for an evening and experience I would never forget.

Later, when I told José all about what happened, he laughed and said, "Yeah, that's Sandy."

The evening was fun and exciting. The sex? Not so great. But what can you really expect from one-night stands? Still, what an amazing, thrilling adventure.

Everyone had fun, no one got hurt, and someone even scored a spa day.

Sometimes, you just have to go with the flow. Life is short, so —grab it by the horns now. Take advantage of the opportunities it throws your way.

Make the most of them, and you'll have a lifetime of incredible memories to look back on.

Carpe Diem. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it. That's my philosophy, and I live by it. It's not for everyone—certainly not for the faint of heart. It makes for a life filled with ups and downs—super highs and super lows. *As you'll see.*

“The big question is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure.”—Joseph Campbell.

I was never really into one-night stands. I had my fair share, but deep down, I always craved a deeper connection—something beyond surface-level attraction. I wanted to be with someone with *substance* and real depth.

I was hoping she would show up soon. What is that old saying? Oh yea, be careful what you wish for.... you just might get her.

Chapter Six

The Call of Destiny

I never did go to see Laudes in Dallas. She met a guy, John, who swept her off her feet. They spent a whole night together, though not talking. It didn't seem appropriate for me to go to Dallas and sleep with her. You know what I mean.

We talked on the phone almost every night, and I found myself looking forward to it more than I wanted to admit. Her laughter felt like home—familiar and warm—but I couldn't tell if I was filling a void or if I genuinely wanted something real with her. Did she feel the same way?

Sometimes, she would call me to vent about John. “He is such an idiot,” she'd say, her voice laced with frustration—somewhere between fuming but two steps from a full-blown rage.

“It's funny you say that because he called me earlier and said the same thing about you,” I teased, hoping to get her to see that there might be another side to the story. “What did he do this time?”

“I can't believe it. I told him I don't like it when he looks at other girls, but he just keeps doing it. It drives me crazy. What is *wrong* with him? He has a gorgeous blonde on his arm—who is intelligent, sexy, and charming. *Why am I not enough?*”

“How tall are you?” I asked her.

“I'm 5'8” in flats. Why?” she asked, confused.

“There you have it then,” I replied.

“What do you mean?” she asked, even more confused.

“You see, if you were 5'9”, all your problems would be over,” I said, smiling through the phone. It was just enough to break her pattern.

She chuckled. “Oh, you're very funny. So, are you saying I'm short?” she challenged.

“I wouldn’t say *short*—maybe on the shorter side, but not *categorically* short,” I teased.

“What is wrong with men? Why are they so mean?” she said, pretending to pout.

“I have an idea—ditch John. I’ll come see you, we’ll stay up all night talking, I’ll bore you to death, and you can just use John for sex. What do you think?” I continued to tease her, trying to keep her laughing.

She let out a laugh—or maybe a snicker.

“Well, you succeeded in making me feel a little better. I’ll make up the couch for you and let John know about the new arrangement. I’ll have him call you for the details,” she said playfully. “In the meantime, I have to go—things to do, darling. Ciao.”

Laudes was always full of energy, fun, and drama. Young yet wise beyond her years. She had a zest for life, a sense of adventure, a quick wit, and undeniable intelligence. Not to mention, she was gorgeous—and from one of the wealthiest families in America. Quite a catch for John... if he could stop looking at other girls—at least when he was with *her*!

While Laudes was navigating her personal struggles, her father was facing an entirely different challenge—one that would soon intersect with my life.

The energy sector was experiencing a major upheaval at the time. In 2005, four powerful hurricanes struck Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, where countless oil and gas rigs operated. The storms caused widespread damage, disrupting production and sending oil prices soaring. Energy companies scrambled to secure equipment for repairs, racing to restore operations and take advantage of the higher prices before the market stabilized.

This crisis in the Gulf of Mexico kept Laudes’s father busier than ever. Normally, he handled his own investments, but with his packed schedule, he no longer had the time.

With oil and gas prices surging, his income had increased significantly. But leaving that money sitting in the bank was costing him—he needed to put it to work *fast*.

All these factors combined to make him eager to find a trustworthy investment partner with a proven track record—someone who could deliver strong returns.

As mentioned earlier, Laudes had already told him about the condominium deal. It was a perfect example of how doing the right thing can lead to unexpected and extraordinary opportunities.

When Laudes’s father called me, I could hardly believe it—one of the wealthiest men in America wanted to discuss investing in *my* condo deal.

“Hello, Stephen, this is Dan, Laudes’s father,” he said, his voice calm and polite.

“Hello, Dan, nice to meet you,” I replied, trying to steady my nerves.

“Laudes mentioned you have a condominium under contract with exclusive rights,” he continued. “She said it has strong appreciation potential. Is that correct?”

He was clear, concise, and straight to the point.

“Yes, that’s correct,” I said, doing my best to mirror his tone.

“Tell me more about this deal and why it should interest me.”

It was obvious who was in the driver’s seat and where Laudes got her confidence and business acumen.

After several phone conversations and sharing all the requested information, Dan finally agreed to purchase the unit.

It all sounds easy now, but it *wasn’t*. More than once, it looked like the deal would fall through.

Dan was no pushover. He didn’t get where he was by making quick decisions. He challenged me at every turn, scrutinizing every detail—including the realtor commission. I was supposed to get half, but Dan said *no*—he wanted half. He didn’t miss a thing. I had to jump through endless hoops—not to mention raising \$50,000.

But somehow, I found a way to convince Dan, my investors, and *myself* that this was a great deal.

Then came the wait. What felt like an eternity.

Finally, Dan called.

“Okay, Stephen, here’s the deal,” he said. “I’m going to buy the unit. You’ll live in it and take care of it. We’ll hold it for three years. Then, depending on the market, we’ll either sell or keep it for another year. When we sell, we’ll split the equity—less my costs. Do you agree to that?”

“Yes, Dan. That’s fair, and I agree,” I said, trying to sound composed.

But inside? *Are you kidding me?*

It was a very *pinch*-worthy moment.

“Okay then, I’ll have my attorney draw up the paperwork,” Dan said. “I spoke with my wife, Kathy—she’ll be coming out to handle the closing, designing, and decorating the condo. She’s very good at that.”

And just like that, the deal was set. I would assign him the contract within the two-week window. We’d hold the property for three years to capitalize on appreciation, then sell and split the equity—less his costs.

Dan had no interest in living there, nor did he want to rent or lease it out to a stranger. Someone needed to occupy the condo, so naturally, I volunteered.

Sometimes the universe works in wonderful and mysterious ways. And sometimes, we manifest our dreams.

A few days later, Laudes's mother, Kathy, flew to Sarasota to handle the contract assignment and closing. She was stunning—graceful, confident, and full of personality. It was easy to see where Laudes got it from.

I met Kathy at the airport. As she walked out of the terminal, dressed in a crisp navy blazer and white flowing trousers, her confident stride made her impossible to miss.

“Hello, Kathy, I'm Stephen. Very nice to meet you,” I said, extending my hand.

She barely glanced at my outstretched hand and said, “Alright, let's get to work. Have you picked out any materials yet?” she asked, her Southern accent adding to her charm.

And just like that, we were off and running. I showed her the flooring, fabrics, and paint colors I had found, and the whirlwind of design decisions began.

“How much is this travertine tile?” Kathy asked.

I told her the price.

“Oh my God, there's no way. What are you trying to do, bankrupt us? We are not paying that! I can get travertine flooring for half that price!”

I sighed. “Well, I've looked around, and that's the best price I could find,” I said, feeling slightly defensive.

She waved a hand dismissively. “Stick with me, honey. You're about to get a lesson in designing and decorating,” she said with absolute confidence—like she knew exactly what she was doing. And she did.

To her, design wasn't just about aesthetics; it was about knowing where to look and how to negotiate.

That evening, after checking into the Ritz-Carlton—right by the condo—Kathy spent the evening researching local suppliers for the needed materials.

The next morning, I picked her up early. She directed me to a discount warehouse in the middle of nowhere. We drove past Myakka State Park, where towering trees arched over the road, creating a breathtaking canopy. The way the sunlight filtered through the leaves made it feel like a scene straight out of a painting.

As we drove, Kathy turned to me. “So, tell me about yourself. What exactly do you do?”

Her curiosity was genuine, and for the first time, I felt like this wasn't just a business deal—it was the beginning of something more.

We finally arrived at the warehouse, a massive space filled with every kind of gorgeous floor tile and stone countertop imaginable—sourced from all over the world.

Kathy moved through the aisles like a pro, running her hands over the materials and examining the tiles under different lighting to ensure they had the perfect blend of colors for the condo. She asked all the right questions, negotiated effortlessly, and, in the end, purchased the travertine tile for less than half the price of the one I had found. Within minutes, she arranged for delivery and installation—set to be completed within 48 hours.

On the drive back to Sarasota, our conversation shifted. I asked Kathy about her life, and she shared how she and Dan had come from nothing. Despite their wealth, they remained humble, down-to-earth, and meticulous with their finances.

We clicked immediately, and the more we talked, the more I enjoyed her company.

One afternoon, after picking up some more items for the condo, we stopped at Starbucks for coffee. The rich scent of roasted beans filled the air as we settled into a cozy corner booth. Kathy stirred her cappuccino absentmindedly, her gaze distant as she reminisced about her life with Dan.

She shared funny stories about Laudes as a child, how headstrong she had always been, and how much she took after her father.

“She’s my princess, but she’s Daddy’s girl,” Kathy said with a soft smile. Then her expression darkened. “We’ve always been very protective of her, and now, with Jason gone... she’s all we have.” Her voice wavered, and her eyes glistened with unshed tears.

“My condolences, Kathy,” I said gently. “I can’t imagine what you’re going through.”

It was true—I couldn’t begin to understand the pain of losing a child. But looking into her grief-stricken eyes, I recognized something familiar. Loss has a way of hollowing people out, reshaping them into someone they never expected to become. I wondered if, in her place, I could keep going at all.

“Thank you.” Kathy traced the edge of the design catalog absentmindedly. “Jason has left a hole in all our lives—one that can never be filled. He was a wild child. He needed a father that Dan could never be. Like most young men, he was desperate for his father’s approval. He wanted Dan to be proud of him.”

“I tried to explain to Jason that he already had that. But he truly needed Dan to spend time with him—time that Dan couldn’t give him. Dan spent his life climbing, clawing his way up the corporate ladder in the oil and gas business.”

“He worked his butt off every day. He was gone, sometimes 12 to 14 hours a day, often seven days a week. Let me tell you, there’s a lot of money in the oil and gas business, but it’s a tough industry. We all sacrificed a great deal.”

“Sometimes, he would sleep on the floor of his office. I raised Laudes and Jason.” Kathy sighed. “Don’t get me wrong now, Dan loves his children and would do anything for them, but he just couldn’t be there for them. I was an oil and gas widow for most of our married life.”

She paused, sipping her cappuccino, lost in deep thought.

Setting her cup down, she continued, “Being as successful as Dan has been comes at a price—perhaps the highest price anyone could ever pay.” Tears welled in her eyes, but she quickly composed herself.

Then, fixing her gaze on me, she asked, “So, what are you doing with my princess? What are your intentions? You look old enough to be her father.” She picked up her cappuccino, taking a slow sip as she studied me over the rim. She didn’t take any prisoners.

“I’m glad you asked so we can clear the air,” I said, meeting her eyes. “Laudes and I are just good friends. We have a great connection, simple as that.”

“Well, that’s what she says too, and I trust her. You—not so much,” she replied, taking another sip, still sizing me up.

“Dan is gone so much; she needs a good man in her life right now to give her some guidance. Especially now, with Jason gone. Maybe that’s you. We’ll see. You don’t have my approval yet.” She looked at me like a lioness protecting her cubs.

“I respect that. I’ll do nothing but be a friend and a support to Laudes—I promise,” I said, and I meant it.

Together, we selected materials—flooring, paint, and carpet—to decorate the unit. Once everything was in place and combined with my furniture, the space looked spectacular.

The white and gray travertine-tiled floors were magnificent. We kept the walls white, which contrasted beautifully with my furniture. With all the rich mahogany wood, the space exuded luxury.

The bedrooms had thick beige carpeting that felt like walking on cushions. The kitchen was already fitted with stunning walnut cabinets, an island with a marble countertop, and every conceivable Viking appliance.

The family room overlooked the balcony view through massive sliding doors, with Bird Key visible from the windows. Every room had a water view.

In my bedroom, I had a four-poster bed. Why? Because I'd always wanted one—that's why. Ever the romantic.

There was also a game room with a pool table and card tables. The elevator led directly to the garage, allowing easy access without stepping outside.

Overall, it was quite nice, really.

Kathy and I went to the closing together. She was all business—asking all the right questions and ensuring everything was in order.

When the paperwork was signed and the deal was done, Kathy handed me a check for \$50,000. I had managed to get my deposit back within the two-week window. That was an incredible feeling. For once, I was actually proud of myself. I did it. For me, it was the deal of a lifetime. Yes, another pinchable moment.

Her three-day trip had been a whirlwind—we didn't waste a minute. When it was time for her to leave, I drove her to the airport. As she walked toward the terminal, she suddenly stopped, turned around, and walked back toward me, her hand outstretched.

"It was nice to meet you, Stephen," she said, shaking my hand. Now, she was ready to shake my hand.

"It was very nice to meet you too, Kathy," I replied, shaking hers. And it was.

Then she turned and walked away to catch her flight.

Preparing the condo for my move took six weeks. Much work had to be done, and getting all my furniture into the elevators and the unit was no small feat.

I remember it was New Year's Eve. The condo was almost—but not quite—finished. I invited some friends and family over to enjoy the downtown fireworks display from the balcony.

I took it all in as I stood in the darkness, looking at the view.

The lights of the mansions on Bird Key, the glow of downtown Sarasota, the fireworks, the moonlight shimmering on the water below—it was all overwhelming. From the balcony, we had a perfect, unobstructed view of the fireworks as they shot into the sky from City Park, just to the condo's left.

When the fireworks ended and everyone left, only my niece Gilly (pronounced *Jilly*) and I remained. As we stood together on the balcony, she rested her head on my shoulder and said, "*You did it, Uncle Stephen. I am so proud of you.*"

Hearing that from my niece meant more to me than anything. It was a moment I would treasure for the rest of my life.

Not long after, the condo was finally ready for me to move in. The morning after my first night there, I woke up and wandered through the condo, admiring the décor, the furniture, and the breathtaking views of the water and city. Everything looked incredible—a dream come true.

I opened the massive hurricane-proof doors and stepped onto the balcony. The view was incredible.

Boats were moored at the docks below. To my right, the grand mansions of Bird Key stood proudly. To my left, Marina Jack's restaurant overlooked the marina. I had come full circle.

Not long ago, I sat in Marina Jack's with my friend Helen, pointing at this building and saying, "*I am going to live in that building.*" At the time, I had no idea how it would happen. And yet, here I was.

I had simply followed my heart and my dream. And now, it was real.

Now, *that* was a miracle.

Definitely a pinchable moment.

From January 2006 to January 2009, I lived in this stunning \$2.3 million condo overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and downtown Sarasota.

Laudes occasionally visited with her boyfriend, John—who looked like Adonis. He came from a similar background to hers, and they were a great match. I was genuinely happy for her. We shared some wonderful times together.

Still, I have to admit there were pangs of jealousy. As her relationship with John flourished, our calls became less frequent. I missed her. I missed her relying on me, needing me. But, of course, it was inevitable.

Despite those feelings, I felt incredibly blessed to have her in my life.

This experience reinforced my belief that anything is possible—that we can manifest our dreams and that miracles do happen.

But the story doesn't end here—just this chapter.

Chapter Seven

Life Is About Moments

Enter Ali, the young entrepreneur my friend Andre wanted me to help raise money for an international real estate deal. See? I told you all these vignettes were inextricably connected. Hang in there—we're almost there.

Andre, who introduced us, told me that Ali was a young entrepreneur from Turkey.

Ali and his partner, an even younger entrepreneur named Callum, had teamed up to leverage their resources and contacts to create international investment opportunities. They had already closed land deals in Las Vegas and Arizona. Now, their focus was on a project in Bodrum, Turkey—Ali's hometown.

Once a quiet fishing village, Bodrum has transformed into a vibrant destination, drawing investors and travelers.

Ali picked me up at the condo to take me to lunch at the Ritz-Carlton, where we would meet Callum and discuss their real estate venture in Turkey.

He arrived in his brand-new Bentley Continental GT—an impressive sight, especially considering he couldn't have been older than his late twenties. As I settled into the plush leather seats and admired the handcrafted wood trim, I couldn't help but murmur, *"Very nice."*

"Thank you," Ali replied.

He was polite, conservative, and perhaps just a little uptight.

He wore a three-piece suit and tie despite the sweltering 80-degree Florida sun. He took pride in looking professional and presenting himself as a successful businessman. I had no doubt his father was proud of him.

Perhaps driven more by insecurity than practicality, I casually mentioned, “I’m thinking of getting a new car myself.”

“Oh, really? What are you thinking of getting?” Ali inquired.

“An Aston Martin,” I said, the words slipping out almost instinctively as if they had bypassed my conscious thought.

“Which model?” Ali asked.

“Well, I drove the Vantage in California a few weeks ago, but it felt a little small. The Vanquish seemed too large, so I was considering the DB9,” I explained, trying to sound knowledgeable.

What happened next left me stunned.

“Really?” Ali said. “We’ve got a DB9. If you’d like, we could lend it to you.”

He was polite and genuinely seemed like a friendly neighbor who cared.

My mind screamed, *What?!* But I somehow managed to maintain my composure as Ali continued, “I mean, you wouldn’t want to buy one without driving it around for at least a few weeks, would you?”

“Yeah, no, of course not,” I stammered.

“There’s only one problem,” Ali added. My heart sank, expecting the inevitable catch.

“It’s a convertible. Is that okay?”

I laughed. A convertible *Aston Martin*? Are you kidding me? What were the chances? Talk about manifesting your dreams!

Without hesitation, Ali said, “Take it for as long as you want,” like we’d been lifelong friends. Although I of course knew he was using this to entice me into his deal.

The next day, Ali and his partner had a brand-new Aston Martin Volante—the convertible version of the DB9—delivered to my condo. For me. To use. For free. It seemed too good to be true, but there it was—another moment that called for some self-pinching.

Naturally, my first move was to take my mother out—this time in a *genuine* ASTON MARTIN. We upgraded from lunch to dinner, cruising along the tree-canopied, winding road that divides the beautiful mansions of Casey Key, one side facing the ocean and the other the intercoastal. It was a beautiful evening. The sun was about to set, and we had the top down. As my mother basked in the warm glow of the setting sun, I couldn’t resist.

“So, Mum, what do you think?” I asked, grinning. *Now, this time, it’s an honest Aston Martin!*

“Oh, Stephen, it’s beautiful,” she said warmly. “But if you’re going to spend that kind of money on a car, I think you should get a Bentley.”

“Mum!” I exclaimed, astonished. “It’s a good thing I didn’t buy this car!”

She never ceases to take my breath away.

“Well, you asked,” she said with a broad smile, hands raised in mock surrender.

Like I said before, my mum is my hero. I just had to win her approval. So, I didn’t buy an Aston Martin. Instead, my sights were set on an even bigger goal.

Her comment planted a seed. Not long after that emotionally charged revelation, I found myself flying to Hawaii for a speaking engagement. While browsing for in-flight reading material, I picked up a copy of *The Robb Report*. Flipping through its glossy pages, I came across a full-page advertisement for the new Bentley GTC—the convertible version of the Continental GT.

It was stunning—a mesmerizing light blue with a cream leather interior.

I knew instantly: *This was the car for me.*

The moment I landed, I called my assistant and asked her to look into it. She contacted O’Gara Coach Company, the Beverly Hills Bentley dealer featured in the ad.

She told me the color wasn’t light blue but *Silver Lake*—a name that made it sound even more spectacular. There was a six-month waiting list nationwide for the new GTC, but the dealership had one in its showroom. The only catch? It was already sold.

Still, the salesman mentioned that I could come to view it since the buyer was away. And if I was interested, I could order my own.

My assistant had arranged everything perfectly, even giving the salesman my contact information for when I returned from Hawaii to LA.

I had planned a short vacation in La Jolla. Still, landing in LA at 9:30 p.m. was late. I spent the night at *The Beverly Hilton*—my first time staying there—before driving south the following morning.

Upon landing, I noticed a voicemail on my phone from the salesman.

“Mr. Edwards, this is Manfred from O’Gara Coach Company; we are the Bentley dealer in Beverly Hills. The people who purchased the Bentley GTC you’re interested in have backed out. If you’re still interested, it’s here. However, I’m calling everyone who’s expressed interest—it’s first come, first served.”

The dealership was already closed, guaranteeing a *sleepless* night in Beverly Hills.

At exactly 10:00 a.m., I called Manfred Von Imbior—a name that sounded crafted specifically for selling Bentleys.

“Is it still available?” I blurted out.

“What?” Manfred sounded genuinely confused.

“The GTC!” I said, incredulous.

“Oh, yes,” he replied, collecting himself.

“I’m at *The Beverly Hilton*. Can you bring it by for a test drive?”

Minutes later, Manfred pulled up in the magnificent Bentley Convertible GTC in *Silver Lake*. Its luxurious cream leather seats complemented that mesmerizing light blue, just like in the magazine advertisement.

He was the perfect character to sell high-end vehicles. As he guided me around the car, he said, “Ah, the Bentley GTC.” His Scandinavian lilt gave each word an elegant weight. “Handcrafted by artisans in Crewe. It’s not just a car—it’s a legacy.” He adjusted his cufflinks, flashing a platinum watch that gleamed in the California sun. “You wouldn’t wear an off-the-rack suit to a gala, would you? This,” he tapped the car’s hood, “is *tailored luxury*.”

He looked like a grown-up version of Little Lord Fauntleroy. He wore an immaculate royal blue designer suit with a silk pocket handkerchief, a crisp white shirt, and a Hermès silk cravat.

Back at the Bentley showroom, he had another surprise in store.

“Now, let me show you something,” he said, leading me outside to a lineup of Bentleys on steroids—wider bodies, massive tires and rims, and striking custom modifications.

As he strode through the showroom, salespeople straightened their ties, fixed their makeup, and hurried to adjust displays. He didn’t glance at them—he didn’t *have to*. With a clipped nod, he gestured toward a gleaming Rolls-Royce. Within seconds, an assistant rushed over to polish an invisible smudge from the hood.

“These cars have been upgraded with *Mansory* bodywork,” Manfred explained.

“Now, most of my clients—CEOs, celebrities, even a prince—don’t settle for the standard package,” he said smoothly, his fingers gliding over the car’s leather interior. “A GTC deserves custom touches. Carbon fiber accents? Bespoke stitching?” He paused deliberately, his smile knowing.

“Would you like any of these upgrades on your GTC?”

The timing was masterful.

“Yes,” I responded, practically drooling.

We returned to his office, a luxuriously appointed space that could have housed an Arabian prince. Manfred began crunching numbers, and while I can’t recall the exact breakdown, I’ll *never* forget the bottom line.

I was stunned. The figure was astronomical. My ego fought to maintain composure.

I swallowed. "Give me a minute."

"Of course," Manfred said, knowing the sale was done.

In a daze, I drifted into the showroom, phone in hand, calling the one person who had steered me toward this moment—my mother.

She answered as she always did.

"Hello, Stephen, it's so nice to hear from you," she said in her elegant British accent.

I recounted the whole story, right down to the grand total, and pleaded for guidance.

"Stephen," she said in that unmistakable way only my mum could pronounce my name, "life is about moments. And no matter what happens, nothing can ever take away the moments that car will give you."

I will never forget that moment.

"Okay, Mum, I will buy the Bentley and take you to the Ritz-Carlton. Then it's a dream come true, okay?" I said, making sure this was it.

My mum replied, "Well, we will talk about that when you get back. In the meantime, enjoy California, and I can't wait to see you. I look forward to going to the Ritz-Carlton with you in your new Bentley. Take care, darling. I love you very much."

And that was that.

Now, what does she have in mind for me? I should have known it wouldn't end here. But at that moment, I was just so happy to have her approval.

Those words were all I needed. As always, my mum was there for me—just when I needed her most.

I returned to the office and emerged as a brand-new Bentley GTC owner. Since the bodywork would take time, I arranged to keep the car during my vacation and return it to the dealership the following week before flying back to Florida. Once the Mansory modifications were finished, they would ship it to Florida.

Less than an hour later, I was cruising down Rodeo Drive in my brand-new *Silver Lake* Bentley GTC. Roof down, wind in my hair, and my beautiful blonde girlfriend at the time, Linda, beside me—tears of joy welled in my eyes.

The kid from Thornton Cleveleys, England, the one teachers doubted, the one they said would never amount to anything, had *made it*.

If only they could see me now.

That first Bentley led to an even more spectacular second one—a *Sapphire Blue* GTC. Once the Mansory modifications were complete, it would be one of only two in the country.

Though the Mansory kit was still in progress, this automotive masterpiece shared garage space with a brand-new Rolls-Royce Ghost—one I'd bought for Jules.

The Rolls-Royce purchase had its own story. A couple of years earlier, we'd spent ten days every month in Las Vegas, staying in the Wynn Suites while contemplating a move there. One day, while waiting for Jules to get ready, I absentmindedly flipped through a hotel magazine. I spotted an ad for luxury car rentals featuring a Rolls-Royce.

Having never driven one, I suggested renting it for our house-hunting expedition. We immediately fell in love with the *Ghost*, laughing as we imagined a future where we'd own a Rolls-Royce Ghost and a Bentley GTC Convertible.

The power of intention is remarkable—that dream became reality two years later.

However, manifestation works both ways. When we create situations that feel negative or that others might judge, our instinct is often to deflect, blame, or deny our role. We justify our behavior instead of taking responsibility for our choices and their outcomes.

While these material achievements were impressive, they were never the most crucial thing in my life—not by a long shot. I am really not attached to material things.

I enjoy them while I have them, knowing nothing is permanent. I knew they would come and go, but what truly matters is staying true to my beliefs, values, and who I am—whether I have these material things or not. They're just one part of my story.

Now, I'm about to share experiences that were not only embarrassing but truly humiliating. Some were painful, traumatic, and devastating. Others? Equally mortifying and hilarious. And just like everything else, I manifested all of it.

Yet these experiences—triumphant or tragic—have shaped who I am. Someone I am learning to love and accept, flaws and all. And you'll discover those soon enough.

That was a lot of backstory, I know.

But as this story unfolds, you'll see why it matters. You'll understand—at least a little better—how the *fuck* all of this happened in my life.

Through these experiences, I've grown tremendously, though I'm still a work in progress. More than ever, I believe that everything happens for a reason—not *to* us but *for* us. We manifest our own world through our thoughts, words, and actions. I get what I ask for. We all do. You have to be *really* careful what you ask for.

And if you stop doing the things that got you where you are—or worse, start taking it all for granted—the whole damn thing can come crashing down before your eyes.

How do I know? Well, I read it somewhere, probably in one of the many books in my library.

But while I might have read about it, here's the thing: you don't *truly* know something until you actually *live* it.

You can gain knowledge from reading, but *wisdom*? That only comes from experience.

And I was about to gain a whole lot of wisdom—because my world was about to come tumbling down.

Epilogue

'The Trap Was Set Long Before She Arrived.'

By now, you've seen more than I ever intended to reveal. The secrets. The seduction. The spirals. The unfiltered truth behind velvet curtains and polished floors.

Looking back, it all makes a kind of deranged sense.

Every twist in my life — every indulgence, mistake, and half-buried trauma — was part of a larger blueprint I didn't realize I was drawing. My character flaws weren't accidents; they were invitations. Invitations for chaos. For beauty. For her.

I manifested a life most people would envy: the mansion, the money, the madness — dressed up in luxury, decadence, and denial. And then *she* appeared. The Venus Fly Trap. As if summoned by the very energy I'd been broadcasting to the universe.

She didn't just walk into my life. She *hijacked* it.

The sex, the lies, the repercussions — none of it was coincidence. They were the physical expressions of everything I'd fantasized about, feared, and refused to face. She was the mirror I didn't know I was staring into until it cracked wide open.

And what spilled out changed me forever.

Because while she was the storm, I was the fool who built the house of glass. Our love was never soft. Never safe. It was a beautiful catastrophe, destined to leave scars and unforgettable memories alike.

But would I do it all again?

In a heartbeat.

Because some lives aren't meant to be lived quietly.

Some people aren't meant to love gently.

And some traps... are meant to be sprung.

Thank you for reading.

May you survive your own Venus Fly Trap — or at least enjoy the fall.