

A 25 page teaser excerpt from:

**The Coming Out of Beatrice Wicks**  
**A Case History of an Unlicensed Sex Therapist**  
**By Erik Johnson**

There I was, thirty-five, worked all my life, still had no car. That had to change. And somehow I felt it would. How, I had no idea, I just felt it was going to. It was an optimism I now had. It was my psychiatric dollar at work. I got a new self-image and it was making a difference.

On the other hand I'd just spent an insane night with a masochistic foreigner packing a sequoia, who wouldn't fuck me, but was apparently intent on hounding me into the ground. Funny, I avoided the word stalker.

What actually were those feelings I seemed to have for Abu? Had to be something- I thought about him a lot, and undeniably finagled my way into his pants. Was it all pity? Can pity also be erotic? You wouldn't feel lust for someone you pitied, would you. And I didn't. I felt sorry for him. Wanted to bring him some joy. That sounded right, the exception always being when the object of your pity sports a foot long schlong.

That brought a smile and I turned around to see again that childlike face- and it wasn't there. I quickly scanned the landscape and couldn't see him. He was gone.

They say watch out you might get what you wish for. I felt a definite loss.

Odd. Why would he suddenly disappear ten minutes after pledging himself my guardian? I broke into a laugh. Was I nuts? Was I trying to make sense of Abu? He had obviously taken off in response to whatever bizarre personal logic his warped mind ran on. Well, god speed. Whatever his real story, and I had no idea what it was, he was clearly a twisted soul. I thought I would always wonder about him.

Maybe he had gotten into one of the cars following me.

I turned back around and continued my walk.

Alone again, naturally.

I had about another three blocks to go.

I had to laugh. Here I was trudging along to the bus stop when all I had to do was snap my fingers and twenty cabs would jump to take me anywhere for free.

Irony. Good for me to recognize. I felt my life was going to experience a lot of it.

Suddenly, I felt my elbows grabbed. I heard a voice in my ear say urgently, "Would you come with us, miss," and I felt myself being strong-armed towards the road. When I realized what was happening, I dug my heels into the pavement, only to feel my whole body being lifted above the

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pavement. My feet churned the air like Wiley Coyote on the way down while I was quickly carried to an awaiting car.

I looked back to my friends the cab drivers and screamed, “HELP!” I heard the same voice, sounding like an usher at the ballpark, saying, “Right this way, Miss.” I was dumped into the back seat.

One middle-eastern looking thug shoved me toward the center and dropped in next to me, while another ran around to the opposite door. He slid in on my other side as the car pulled off. They were both behemoths. I felt like a lovely little unicorn stuck between two rhinos.

I looked over my shoulder to see how my rescue was coming, and sure enough the line of cabs had started up after us. Then another car came speeding alongside the cabs and made a sliding turn in front of them. Brakes screeched and I was disheartened to see the whole column had to stop or hit the sliding car. We pulled away as I bid a fond farewell to all those love-sick studs who a few moments ago had to have me, but were becoming mere dots on the horizon.

I turned back around and screamed the highest, most piercing, scream I could. (Which I had developed when I was twelve and my mother told me I was to be restricted to one milk shake a week. I let out that scream which scared the shit out of both of us. We eventually compromised on three shakes.) I guess I was hoping to rattle the driver, but I just going with what worked for me as a brat.

And it did here too in that the driver had to take his hands off the steering wheel and clasp them over his ears. A rather pleasant looking young Arab man riding shot gun turned around and said in a surprisingly quiet voice, with no discernible foreign accent, “Miss, would you mind not screaming. It isn’t at all necessary.”

That was so stupid. I freaked.

“WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I’M BEING KIDNAPPED!”

The nice looking one shook his head with disappointment, like I was a show dog that had peed on a judge.

“You’re not being kidnapped. You’re being abducted. There’s a difference.”

I was about to really lose it. I was sandwiched between two tons of beef, hightailing it down the road, doing definitions.

“WHAT DIFFERENCE? I’M HERE AGAINST MY WILL! WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?”

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“We don’t want ransom. That’s a big difference.”

“What?”

“And most kidnappers kill their victims. We’re not going to kill you. That’s a significant difference.”

“Oh, that’s a relief,” I said very sincerely.

A smile broke out over his face as if he had a funny secret to tell.

“In fact, we intend you no harm. We just wanted to talk with you in private. You’ll be back home in a few minutes.”

“You already harmed me. You scared the shit out of me. And you’re keeping me from my job.”

“We’re sorry. We had to do it. We’re F.B.I. agents.

“Oh, come on! Give me a break! You’re a bunch of Arabs.”

“Right. We’re Arab-American F.B.I. agents. Admittedly new ones, but it’s a new game out there, Beatrice.”

He looked in my eyes so directly, so earnestly, it unnerved me. I had never felt a rock like presence like that before. Through looks alone he was telling me this was serious business, probably deadly serious business. My eyes started to flit because I needed to pin down immediately what it was about this man that riveted me, and was it real or was it an effect? The answer would tell me how to play this. The issue was trust.....

O.K. I thought I had it. It was maturity. This kid was the most mature man I had ever seen, and he was probably all of twenty-five. He dripped responsibility. I saw that he understood how he acted could determine life or death, and I sensed he worked mightily for it to be life. What made my hair bristle was the realization that it wasn’t this man’s confidence that was striking. Confidence I’d seen in many men and I always found it thin. It came across as a conscious attitude to achieve a purpose. Confident men, though, were invariably striking but not necessarily attractive, at least not to me. But this guy in the front seat was soulful, which to me was appealing. It wasn’t his confidence. It was his maturity. There’s a difference.

“O.K. What’s this all about?”

“You have any idea who you spent the night with last night?”

“Some crazy guy who thinks I’m Mother Theresa.”

“His name is Bharat Atta. Does that name mean anything to you?”

Suddenly my temples started pounding like base drums, and the words flashed before my eyes like they were on a giant pulsating billboard, “YOU

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MUST CRUSH MY BALLS SO THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER ATTA!”

I tried to speak but nothing would come out. I wanted to throw up my hands to ward off the blow I knew was coming.

“He’s Mohammed Atta’s brother. The guy who planned the whole 9/11 thing.”

I had heard words before that felt like a load of bricks falling on me. When I was told my mother had fallen through the ice and froze to death, I thought something had crushed my lungs. When I heard my best friend Kathy Hicks bought it in a car crash, the same thing. Ditto, for a half dozen other people. And here it was again, only this time almost three thousand people had been killed, and not two hours before I sucked off the brother of the monster who did it.

I started to gag.

“I.....I.....”

I covered my face in my hands. I tried to cry but couldn’t. I started making loud grunting noises as if straining on the john.

The mature striking but soulful Arab F.B.I. agent in the front seat put his hand on my shoulder.

“Beatrice, you didn’t know.....”

A soothing wave washed over me. I rode it as long as I could, and took my hands down. He was looking right at me. He was calm, as if he’d been meditating. His eyes told me to get over it, there were more important things. I cleared my throat and found my voice.

“.....I.....I thought his name was Abu.”

“It’s a nickname.”

“He told me he was in Venice, Florida with his brother.”

“He was.”

“He told me he was an orphan-a test tube baby.”

“We know. We think he’s had some kind of psychotic episode and really believes that.”

I stared at him in disbelief as another load of bricks slammed me. He must have seen the blood drain from my face.

“What?” he said.

“You know? How.....how do you know?” I could barely get the words out.

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At least he had the decency to look sheepish. “.....We bugged your house, Beatrice. We had to.”

Wham, I was hanging by my toes and every ounce of blood was rushing to my head. It was the mother of all blushes. I instantly went into rewind and hit play- the moment Abu showed up at my door.

O.K, opening scenes not too bad. Can't hold me responsible for a guy begging to be whipped and taking his short down. I was clearly dealing with a sicko.

Oh, fuck!..... No wait, they couldn't possibly hear me through the shower.....Whew for that.

Oh, my god! “Good job, Abu.”..... In front of the whole F.B.I! And no telling about this morning.

I covered my face with my hands again.

All I could hear was the sound of my pulse in my ears. For thirty seconds or so no one said a word. I somehow took solace in that. It was, I felt, oddly, a respectful silence.

Then I felt strong hands pulling my hands down. When I found the courage to open my eyes, I saw his face leaning into mine. I searched his expression for evidence of disgust, but he looked all business. I was again taken by how he knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that a milligram of condescension would have destroyed me.

My eyes defensively flitted over the other three who stared straight ahead. They had maintained stony silence the whole trip- clearly well trained.

“Beatrice, we need your help.”

I felt so drained I had to wet my lips to get out a sound.

“What.....what can I possibly do?”

“Don't chase Bharat away. We want you to keep him around.”

“I don't know where he is. He vamoosed.”

“We took him. We didn't want him going berserk when we took you.”

“Oh.....Jesus..... But what do you want me to do with him? You can see he's out of it.”

“Maybe. Probably. But we're not absolutely sure.”

“Hey, you'd be talking about the greatest acting job in the world. Believe me, you just don't know. And why would he go through all this?”

He glanced over at the driver, which was the first I'd seen him acknowledging his cohorts. The look was a nervous counting off, as if saying, ‘Wish me luck, guys, here goes.’

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“Beatrice, we’re not a hundred per cent sure Mohammed Atta was on that plane. All the circumstantial evidence indicates that he was, but we’ve never identified the actual body. And if he wasn’t, we need to know where he is, and what he’s doing, because he could be planning something even worse.”

I gulped my spit.

“You see how serious this is.”

Mohammed Atta on the loose. What a nightmare, a threat to every man woman and child in America, and who knew where else. He could strike anywhere and call it victory.

But I read the papers- occasionally. How come I never heard a word?

“I thought all the attackers were accounted for. There were twenty-two, weren’t there? I never heard of anyone missing.”

“We think it’s possible that it wasn’t Atta on that plane, but Atta’s lover.”

“His lover? But surely you’d have noticed a female attacker.”

“His male lover, Beatrice.”

My mouth dropped.

“Atta was gay?”

“We’re not sure, but there are sources that say he had a lover when he was a student in Germany. Plus we know he absolutely hated women. He didn’t want them around him even when he was dead. The family has that in his will.”

“So you think Mohammed Atta may contact Abu?”

“Could be-or the other way around. Who knows? But we have to be ready for everything.”

This was happening so fast and it was so shocking. Abu by himself had been a shock to say the least. (I wondered if they knew he could toss his privates over his shoulder.) And now this escalated things a thousandfold.

Could I do it? I didn’t have any of this kind of training. What if I blew the whole deal? What if I let Mohammed Atta slip through my fingers and he blew up Yankee stadium on opening day?..... What a selfish thought that was. What if I could catch Atta but choose not to? How would that be? No, of course, I had to do what I could. But it still didn’t add up.

“What do you need me for? You’ve got the technology to follow Abu anywhere he’d go, and he’d never know.”

“That’s true, but we need to get inside his head, and we can’t do that without getting rough and that wouldn’t be ultimately productive, especially

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with a psycho. You can get to him, Beatrice. You already have. For some reason, he thinks you hung the moon.”

He would have got that from.....

“Oh my God..... Rudolpho!” I blurted out, and then I started babbling. “If Rudolpho is a part of all this, then.....then..... Britney!.....What would he possibly be wanting from Britney Spears?”

“Rudolpho is?”

“The person who sent me Abu. He just married Britney Spears!”

This got immediate attention, everybody looking at everybody else.

My guy turned to the driver. “Get immediate coverage on Britney Spears’s new husband.”

The driver took out his cell and started mumbling officialese into it.

“O.K. I’m going to drop these guys off, and then I’m going to take you home. We’ll have turned Bharat loose and I expect he will be waiting for you. We want you to find out whatever you can about his brother or any of his brother’s friends. Use whatever means you can to find out any information you can. Will you do that for us, Beatrice?”

Of course. We were at war. American soldiers were dying. American workers were facing attacks from suicide bombers. Thousands were volunteering their services to ensure the public’s safety. I should be happy for the opportunity to do something.

I nodded. Naively, I suppose. How could I have known what I was getting into, but even if I had known, how could I have said no?

We drove in silence for a while, time for the ramifications to hit.

“Look...hey, are you ever going to tell me your name?”

He answered as if he were waiting for the question.

“You can call me Al.”

“Al? Al? You don’t look like an Al, Al.”

“It stands for Al-Hadaq.”

I didn’t think so, an agent giving his real name, but what the hell.

“Look, Al-Hadaq, I was on my way to try to get work. I don’t have a cent, and from what I see, neither does Abu.

Al reached in his pocket and pulled out a credit card.

“Here. Use this as you need.”

I looked down at the card. It was an American Express card. It had my name on it. Damn.

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The driver pulled the car over. He got out along with the other guy and they both walked straight away as if some attached to some track. Al got behind the wheel.

I was relieved to see we really were heading back to my place.

After an awkward pause, Al, stuck his head out the window, took a deep breath and started talking about how good the air smelled for a change. I joked about my expensive hair spray. We both laughed, relieved I think to have latched onto a subject other than terrorism. At the next light he turned to me.

“Listen, Beatrice, I’m hungry. I can take you home if you like, but if you’re hungry too, I know a very nice Italian restaurant near here. My guess is that when you get home you’ll have your hands full with Abu. This might be the only time you get to take a break”

I looked at him and wished I had more experience in this sort of thing. Was he sincere or had this bastion of maturity gotten his jollies from eavesdropping on my bedroom and decided to get himself some. I looked over at him, like a poker player studying another to see if he’s bluffing. He looked harmless. I guessed if this guy was going to be shitty, I’d better find out about it sooner than later.

“Come on,” he said casually, “we’ll have some wine and relax a little.”

I could eat, and the prospect of rushing back to Abu was definitely not as inviting.

He took us to a table cloth restaurant with a small crowd. Probably too expensive for most. He ordered a bottle of Tuscan wine, some antipasto, and a dish of chicken marsala.. Though it was hardly noon the waiter lit a candle at our table. Did we look like lovers?

He wanted to hear all about me. I stumbled so badly trying to hide that there was nothing to tell, I decided to tell the truth. I told him I was this frustrated saleslady that went to see a therapist and left feeling wonderful and ready to fully enjoy the rest of her life. He smiled at me. I wasn’t sure if it was in sympathy or I’d said something funny. He told me he too had done nothing with himself. He was too lazy to go to college, and was working in his Dad’s office supply business when 9/11 hit. All of a sudden the business stopped, he was getting insulted in the streets, and he felt betrayed by his own heritage. He called the F.B.I. and told them he spoke Arabic and wanted to help. A whole year went by and he hadn’t heard anything. When the administration started getting flack for bad intelligence he had a feeling

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something would pop and it did. They called and he found out that there were only thirty people in the federal government's combined intelligence agencies that spoke Arabic. They went on a recruiting binge and hired him. He said the responsibility had made him a new person. He was dedicated body and soul to preventing another catastrophe.

I reached out and grabbed his hands. He squeezed back tightly. I told him that I admired his commitment and the fierce determination I saw in his eyes. He told me he hoped I wouldn't be offended, but he found me exciting. I had a look of compassion about me, and showed true grit. He thought I was going to prove myself a warrior and really take to this assignment. I felt he was not bull shitting me and we were both being honest- that we both sensed we didn't have time to play a lot of games.

In the car I sat close to him and he drove with his arm around me. Maybe it was the wine, but I felt wonderfully easy with him as if we'd known each other for a long time. I took hold of his hand that was around me. We didn't say anything and were enjoying not needing to.

At a traffic light he leaned over and kissed me on my temple. I leaned into his lips.

At the next one we looked at each other.....longingly would be the only word. I felt he was my ally, a man who was seriously in the world and who took me seriously, who already knew my secrets but saw me as his partner, and even found me attractive. If this was all very fast, again, then that was the way it was now.

He leaned over and kissed me on the lips and I put both my hands on his face- a thrilling moment as first contact always was. So much is instantly revealed. Are our breaths compatible? Do our lips mesh? Does his nose get in the way? Is he rough or tender? Does he taste bitter or sweet? Is this overall pleasant or unpleasant. All this feedback processed in a millisecond instantly provides the answer to the pressing question: is this man worth it?

He drove on and I knew we were no longer heading toward my house.

"Where are you taking me, Al?"

"To my apartment..... O.K.?"

As much as I felt for this man, I wasn't sure it was. I'd already had relations with two men in as many days- three in four days, counting you, Doc. In every instance I trusted my heart, but was my heart turning me into a slut? My mother certainly would have thought so.

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Then I thought about the many years I sat at home watching love stories on television, pretending it was me. I thought about all the years I'd wasted being too afraid to get involved, worrying about being rejected, hiding from all feeling out of fear of feeling bad

Hey, three men in four days. O.K., make that four in five. I deserved it. I could make it twenty and I'd still be way behind the curve.

"Yes, Al, it's O.K."

He squeezed my hand, gave a comic rebel yell, and gunned the accelerator. It was nice to see he wasn't all seriousness.

He drove to a condo in Arlington, a location chosen, I guessed, close to his office.

For a guy so intense, he was a surprisingly fun lover, starting with the nippy playful kisses the moment we got in the door. We made a bee-line for the living room couch and just sat there and necked for the longest time.

He was a wonderful tease which in a way is the whole ball game, isn't it, Doc. He ran his tongue around my teeth for minutes and had me giggling. Just playing around my lips and teeth got me hot as he knew it would. It showed he knew how important timing was, and he intended to play me like a harp. And when his tongue unexpectedly snuck down my throat my heart started beating so fast I thought he'd hear it. He put a finger from each hand in my mouth even while his tongue was in there as if he couldn't get enough of that orifice. Then he ran those wet fingers all over my face and followed that with kisses on chosen spots-the side of my nose, my eye-lids, under my chin. He licked the inside of my ears, which I loved, and when he put his tongue in my mouth again I sucked it so hard I could feel him wince. Instead of pulling back he crammed his face into my mouth and extended his tongue as far as it would go as if he were trying to reach the back of a cave.

When going deeper proved futile he pulled out and in a frenzy undid my blouse, freed my breasts from my bra, held them with both hands, and licked the end of my nipples as if they were cherries. He had become wonderfully unglued, and I thought how could this be the same cool, collected, guy, I knew earlier? Isn't that what's so sexy about collected men-the fantasy of seeing them undone?

And Al was definitely letting go. He was licking, kissing, kneading every inch of my chest, and then suddenly he'd leave and slip his tongue back into my mouth as if that was the source of hot new energy.

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When I felt his thumbnail running along the center of my panties I groaned. He whispered in my ear, “let’s move to the bedroom?” He stood up leaving my head even with his waist. I put my hand over the bulge in his pants. I rubbed it gently, as if to say, patience big guy, your time is on the way.

Al bent over and kissed the top of my head. I could feel him twitching under my palm. I was pleased that he didn’t grab my head in his hands as many men do.

Hey, fuck timing. I unzipped his pants, reached in his fly, and pulled out his cock.

It was a most handsome cock, symmetrical, lean, long. It was pointing straight up, so straight the tip was actually arching back towards his stomach. I placed it between my hands like it was a bird, and petted it. And then, as if welcoming my new friend into his new home, I took it in my mouth. Al bowed his legs, leaned back, and, god damn it, gripped my head in his hands. He redeemed himself by leaning over and whispering, “come with me, Beatrice” enticing words if I ever heard them. He pulled me up, (I blushed when his penis made a popping noise like a champagne bottle opening as it left my mouth), and led me by the hand into the bedroom.

I stood inside the door as he very quietly took off my clothes kissing every new bare spot. When I was completely naked he seemed to want to just stand there and stare at me. I got self-conscious, Doc, because I know I can’t be much to see, but he seemed to want to. I guess partially to cover up I moved to him, unbuttoned his shirt and kissed his nipples. I felt them shrivel up and get hard, just like mine. While he was slipping his shirt off I kneeled down and planted soft kisses all across the downy hair that covered his stomach. I could feel his cock stiffening again. Soon it was jabbing my chin. I quickly gave it a playful lick, pulled down his pants, and helped him step out of them.

I grabbed his cock with my fist and led him to bed. like in “Body Heat”.

From there he totally and most wonderfully took over. He jumped into bed and invited me to join him by patting the mattress next to him. I mimicked his rebel yell in the car and leaped on him and giggled at the sight of him bouncing around and losing his cool.

In mock anger he got up on all fours and glared down at me. He made guttural sounds like a horny dog about to fuck a hot bitch- a pretty apt description of us if I say so myself.

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As an appetizer, he put his mouth on my pubes and licked me from there up over my belly, between my breasts, along my sternum, up my neck over my chin and into my mouth. It was an athletic move that set us both into a kissing, licking, sucking frenzy. He repeated it in reverse and when he reached the end of me his fingers attacked my pussy like they'd been out in the cold and needed to be shoved in an oven. I held his balls gently in my hand as he probed me so deep he had me actually backing away. It was like he had lost himself in an abyss and had to reach beyond it before he could return. When he did he blanketed my body with his, stretched my arms above my head, pinned me, and kissed me. I let the juices flow, and gather wherever.

We were both slimy messes. I was so sopping and so open and so ready that when he slid into me it felt as natural as a seal slipping into the sea.

We immediately went into a beautiful synchronized see saw thing where we rode each other in perfect counter rhythm. I slid myself along the full length of his cock at the completion of his every stroke. I could bear down and grind the base or the tip as I choose, that's how much control I felt. We were like a well-oiled Olympic rowing team, gliding effortlessly through the water propelled by even, fluid, powerful, strokes. As we sped to the finish we were careful even then to stay in rhythm.

When we came even our spasms seemed in phase.

It took awhile for the twitching to completely stop.

Exhausted, he lay with his full weight on top of me.

I didn't mind. In fact I tried to keep him in.

When he slid out, he rolled off me.

He lay on his side staring proudly at me.

What a magnificent animal he was. A lion- he should have had a long auburn mane that extended down his shoulders as he lied there watching over me proud and content. I giggled as I thought, he's proud I'm in his pride. He chuckled with me as if he knew what I was thinking.

Where did this young guy, whose face was still thin as a teenager's, whose hair was solid black without even a hint of gray, who was without an ounce of body fat, who looked so fresh and wholesome, where did this kid learn so much about women? Did they give how to fuck courses in the F.B.I? Had he had an explosive affair with a matronly lady that gave him wisdom beyond his years like in Summer of 42? Or was he just a gifted lover, a

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genius at romance, who instinctively knows what a woman wants and how to give it to her. Or did he really have strong feelings for me.

My eyes started to well up as I thought how rare such moments had been in my life-how I had allowed the Bobby Hazlehursts of the world to run me to ground. Bobby Hazlehurst, the twerp I let kiss me, let take my bra off and feel my breasts, let put his hand in my crotch, but when I wouldn't let him pull my pants down called me a fat bitch, told all his friends I blew him, told his mother who told my mother who beat the shit out of me and never looked at me the same again.

No, the concept 'gentleman' was pretty alien to me.

Until, I met you, Doc.

And voila here was one lying beside me.

"Bea," he whispered.

"Yes...." I almost called him darling. No, no, no.

"Bea, I don't have time to find out all I want to know about you. So I want you to pick out one thing, some secret thing about yourself, or that happened to you, something that you've never told anybody else, and tell me. O.K?"

Jesus, when does he have time to think this stuff up? I could feel myself heating up again. Hey, Doc, tell your men, you want to get your women hot, bag the dirty talk. Come up with shit like this!

O.K sweetheart, let me think.....

I told a lot of people about Bobby Hazzlehurst when I was making my defense. It's a bad story anyhow. I needed something as romantic as the question, but not silly. I needed to reveal something that in its revealing would provide the bond which I hoped Al's request sought.

I searched way down deep inside, down where things hurt, where I knew truth lay, where I knew the convincing stuff would be.

I was going to tell him about my third date with Tommy Shannahan when I was a junior in high school and he was a sophomore in college. How I knew I could stall no longer and this would be the date for me to lose my cherry, but Tommy thought I had already lost it, and I knew he could not handle deflowering a virgin, either the commitment it implied or the actual act. So I deflowered myself with a coke bottle. It worked, actually. I was not particularly ashamed of it, and from what other girls told me, it was about as much fun as the real thing.

But, I didn't think that'd be a good one for Al. It was intimate as hell, but not very romantic. It was deromantic if anything.

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I could tell him what I never mentioned to anyone, not even you, Doc- that my father was in jail. It was certainly a big secret in my life, something I was just learning to deal with. I just didn't feel like talking about it right then. Looking back on it, I wish I had. It might have saved me a lot of problems.

I decided to tell him about the strangest thing that ever happened to me, a mystery even to this day, to myself and everyone who went through it with me. There was no sense in telling you, Doc, because it wasn't intimate or even personal. It was just plain bizarre. But for some reason I wanted to tell Al. It would be like a confession, like I needed him to know I had this weirdness in my life. And though there was nothing emotional to it, the telling would be a kind of intimacy. "When I was nine, I was found wondering alone in downtown Zurich, Switzerland two thousand six hundred miles from home. I had no idea how I got there, and I couldn't remember anything I did there except wait in the police station. The authorities picked me up, questioned me, and sent for my parents who came and took me home."

Then, Doc, instead of the onslaught of questions I was expecting, he said something that absolutely picked me up, slammed me to the ground, and crushed me.

"You see how powerful sex is, Bea?"

I felt like I'd been dropped from a hundred-story building. I knew my silly conjecture had been right and my heart horribly wrong. The afternoon had indeed been taught by the F.B.I. Though I knew what was coming I heard myself whispering in a croaky voice dry from lack of spit.

"What.....what.... do you mean, Al?"

"Well, Bea, think about it. You tell your deepest dark secret to a man you've known for two hours."

I felt the blood which had a second ago been totally drained from my head rushing back. It kept pouring in until I knew I had turned a beet red. I felt totally engorged and thought I was going to explode.

And I did.

I jumped on Al and starting clawing at him with my fingernails, on his face, his chest, his arms, anywhere I could reach.

He grabbed both my wrists and held them away. I was straining so hard to get at him I didn't realize he was shouting at me. Finally I heard, "BEA, LISTEN TO ME! LISTEN TO ME! LISTEN TO ME!"

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For a second I stopped my attack, I didn't know why. Something in me had always automatically given way to authority. When he saw he momentarily had my attention he tried talking in a normal voice.

"I didn't think you appreciated in the car what we were talking about."

"And what was that, Al? That I might have to fuck Mohammed Atta?"

That seemed to throw him. His mouth closed a moment and he looked confused.

"Well, yes. Not necessarily Atta. Atta himself hates women. But somebody close to him. In fact, there's a particular person we know of who was a very close friend of his-Akram Samir."

I lost it again. I broke out of his grip and slapped his face as hard as I could.

"AND YOU THOUGHT THE ONLY WAY TO GET ME TO WHORE FOR YOU WAS TO FIND ME, FEEL ME, FUCK ME, FLIP ME? WHAT KIND OF ASS HOLE ARE YOU, AL?"

"Stop, Bea. That could never be how I think of you. You are a wonderful, wonderful lady who it's an honor to know."

"Yeah, right. I'm your wonderful fucking assignment who you got to suck your dick and screw."

"Listen, Bea, I needed you to fully appreciate the real power you have. It wasn't enough to just tell you. I needed to show you exactly how vulnerable a spent lover lying by your side could be, because I needed to know you knew. Not just in your head, but in your being. It can mean everything."

This was so humiliating. I got up and started putting on my clothes.

"Well, fuck you, Al. Use somebody else. Only with them, try being a little less the slime ball. Try being out front, O.K? Try saying, 'Hey, we want you to fuck for the F.B.I.' I think you might do a little better that way."

By that time I had my shoes on my toes and I was shuffling for the door.

"Bea, you can't go. Three thousand people died in the World Trade Towers. They could be planning the death of three million people next. Ten million people. A hundred million."

It stopped me in my crooked tracks.

"We have to know how to do anything we can do to stop them."

I tried to think it out, but I was hurting too bad. I thought of fireman running up the stairs of a collapsing tower.

There was nothing else to think about.

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I turned around. He was standing alongside the bed, still naked. He looked ridiculous. I almost laughed. I didn't because even angry as I was I could see that his ridiculous nakedness was a testament to his commitment.

I walked back to him, and stopped two feet away. I slapped his dick as hard as I could. He groaned and fell on the bed.

I said, "What do you want me to do, asshole?"

He had both hands over his groin and was writhing around. He kept saying, "God damn, God damn."

I stood over him impassively. I knew I hadn't really hurt him. I hit all dick.

Finally he managed to sit up and drop his hands. He looked like he had a beet between his legs.

"We.....damn.....we want you to stay with Abu. Find out everything you can from him. Maybe he's the whacko you say he is, but we can't presume anything. At some point somebody may contact him. Find out what's going on. Find out whatever he knows. Be alert for any valuable information. Do whatever you have to get it."

"How do I contact you if I find out anything?" This set him to scratching his head, which I thought weird. Wasn't that an obvious question? Shouldn't the answer be at his fingertip?

"Well, let's see....."

What the fuck?

"I tell you what. When you need to see me, walk counterclockwise three times around a circle of about twelve feet radius, and I'll be there as soon as I can. Certainly within a few hours."

I laughed. I had missed this dry side of Al's humor. Come to think of it, I had missed any side of Al's humor. He stared at me in dead seriousness. He was good- a perfect straight man to himself.

"That was a joke, right Al?"

"No, no, you do that and I'll be there."

Upon further study, no crinkle around the eyes, no twitching upper lip, he didn't seem to be joking.

"What do you mean you'll be there? How the hell will you know where I am?"

"I'll know. Don't think about it, Bea. Just trust me. We're not going to let anything happen to you."

He started looking for his clothes.

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What was happening? How could this be an F.B.I. plan? I felt I had suddenly stepped through the looking glass.

And on the other side was Al-Hadaq putting on his pants- one leg at a time as if he were normal.

How could my walking in a circle tell him where I was?

“Geonavigation, Al?”

He was buttoning his shirt and pretending he didn’t hear me.

“But.....don’t you need a transmitter for that? I’m not carrying a transmitter.....am I Al?”

Now he was sitting on the bed putting on his shoes as if he were alone in the room.

I began frantically rifling my clothes, but I only felt fiber. Could they make a transmitter out of fiber? It wouldn’t be on my clothes anyhow. Would be gone that night. I started to get the jitters.

“WHERE’S THE TRANSMITTER, AL?”

He looked up at me. “Ready to go?”

I stuck my hand down my dress comically searching my own body. Next thing I knew I’d be doing my own cavity.....

I went pale as I remembered the deep probe that had me gasping.

“WHAT WAS IT, AL? WHAT DID YOU PUT UP ME?”

“Look, Bea. It....”

“WHAT WAS IT!!! I HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW!! DON’T I HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW?” I was fighting hysteria.

“.....a microdot.”

“I want you to take it out.”

“Bea....”

“I want you to take it out right now!”

I went to the bed, lied down and spread my legs as far as they would go.

“TAKE IT OUT!!!”

“Bea, look..... , put your legs down. This is for your protection. No matter what happens, and we’re dealing with totally ruthless people here, no matter what happens we will always know where you are. You will never be out of our sight. You can’t suddenly disappear never to be heard from again. This is the only way we can do that!”

“BUT I’VE GOT A TRANSMITTER IN ME TWO INCHES FROM MY OVARIES!”

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“There’s no radiation coming from that transmitter, Bea. There is absolutely no risk to you.”

I closed my legs and propped myself up on my elbows.

“AND I’M SUPPOSED TO JUST TRUST YOU ON THAT? A MAN WHO EXTRACTED MY DEEPEST SECRET AND THREW IT IN MY FACE! A.....A.....A MAN WHO MADE LOVE TO ME SO HE COULD PUT A MICRODOT IN MY TUBES!”

Al came over to me and went down on one knee as if he were going to propose.

“Bea, dear Bea. Nothing is easy anymore. These are extremely, extremely, complicated times we’re living in.”

Great, just what I wanted to hear- the fucking preamble to the fucking Constitution.

I sat up and started to push myself to my feet. Al grabbed me and held me down.

“Bea, look, look at me! Look!

He held up his hands up like he was surrendering and stayed that way as if posing for a snapshot.

“What it all comes down to is you have to look at me and decide whether I’m a good guy or a bad guy. It’s as simple as that.”

And it was. All the horrible things that Al had done to me that day could be justified and even seen as noble. Or they could be the work of the most evil of men, a consummate con artist who had manipulated me in the most blatant way for evil ends. I had no real way of knowing which was the case. I just had to make a judgment. A judgment based on.....what? My heart? We’d already seen what that had got me. My intelligence? What did I know? I was practically an illiterate blouse saleslady for Macy’s. My intuition? That was a hell of a thing to risk your life on. And yet there was no other way. I had to choose something. Either I was to see Al as a fraud and get up and walk away, or I was going to trust him and become an undercover agent, which I had no illusions, hadn’t he actually said so, meant being an underthecover agent. So which was it going to be, door number one or door number two?

Actually, I realized, there was a door number three. I could sort of trust him, see where it goes, determine later if it’s for better or for worse, then play it from there. That seemed reasonable.

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But first, especially if I was going to be walking around with a fucking FM station up my honey pot, first I'd better make damn certain of door number one.

I tried looking at Al like I was seeing him for the first time. There must be something about his looks that would tell me what he was really about.

I looked into his face. He looked back at me absolutely expressionless. He knew I was taking his measure.

And that was a plus. No look of seduction. No charm. No encouraging smile. No soulful expression.

Well, I had to take that one back. It was one of the things that got me about him. His eyes were so soulful, so damn moving, as if he was always in mourning for somebody dear to him. Was that right? This was my life I was betting on. Could that look be feigned? And even if not, did it really mean anything? Maybe that look came from just the way the skin hung on his face. Maybe it was the size of the bags under his eyes. Maybe dark eyes were inherently soulful. Maybe Mohammed Atta had deeply, deeply soulful eyes. Maybe Hitler did.

I tried to look for something else. The mouth. That was going to be really hard. How could I objectively study a part of his body that I had completely surrendered to, bit tenderly, slobbered over, invited into my throat. But that was ancient history. What did his mouth now say to objective students of the human face about the man within? Were his lips slovenly fat? Nastily thin? Were there signs of sadism in the corners? I meant to seriously examine these things. I knew any revelation could mean everything.

I couldn't see anything decisive, and when I saw that little cleft that divided his upper lip, the little curl I first noticed in the car, I ridiculously started to heat up again. I forced myself to look elsewhere.

It would be a waste of time studying his chin. It was a wonderful one, full but not thuggish. There was certainly nothing measly about it. No recession that would cause insecurity and violent overcompensation. It was warm and friendly, which was why he probably kept it shaved. If he had evil in him, he obviously wasn't carrying it there. It was a lovely chin. I doubt if Hitler or Mohammed Atta had a lovely chin. I looked for something else. What was I missing? Probably his most prominent feature.

His nose, of course. I would have considered it first if I hadn't had a weakness for lips. His nose was strong with a broad bone running down the center. Such a nose could mean anything. It could be proud, and heroic, or

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arrogant and defiant, spiteful. The identical nose could go either way. One thing for sure, it wasn't pert, turned up, fine. It was powerful, but was it powerful good or powerful bad? There was no way to tell. It wasn't like squinty eyes, rotted teeth, lop sided ears, things that gave you a gut-felt taste. Al had a powerful nose and that was neither here nor there.

I was back where I started.

I had to make a choice. Now.

I tried to back off and see the entire body. What was the overall impression? Come on, Bea, was this really a good guy or was he faking it?

Through this entire time I saw that Al and his whole expression had remained still as a painter's model, as if saying, "no hurry, I'm here as long as it takes." I thought there's no way this guy's a jerk.

I had made my decision and what a relief. Had it gone against him I would be fleeing an enemy while impregnated with a device that made it impossible to hide. And, Doc, at that time I really didn't know the half of it.

"How can this work? The whole world saw you take me. Aren't they going to be suspicious when I suddenly reappear?"

As if released from a box Al jumped to his feet. He chuckled.

"Most of those guys were our people anyway. The rest.....well we don't know the rest. But we will soon enough if they involve themselves with you. See? That's all we want you to do. Be yourself. Just notice what happens."

"What about, Abu. He's probably into something completely different now. Probably doesn't remember who I am. And who does he think nabbed him?"

"Two black heroin addicts looking for a wallet."

"I'm telling you. When you turn him loose he'll go right off on some totally new quest."

"Could be. We'll just have to see. I think he'll be on your door step."

We stood there for a second looking at each other. There was clearly nothing else to say. I had chosen to accept the mission- what dream was I in- and it was time to stop talking about it. Time to do it. Time to leave.

Except, I had plenty more to say. Could this person who had just melded his body into mine after showering me with the most tender, caring, intimate caresses, could this guy really just turn me off like I was tap water? Was I now nothing to him? I was trying to be a big girl, but I couldn't help looking to him for some acknowledgement of what we had just been through, some

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little wink that said, “Hey, babe, we were pretty damn good together. Let’s do lunch.”

I didn’t get it. He broke for the door.

“One thing, Al.”

He slouched to a stop, the first time I’d seen frustration in him. He turned to me as if to say “now what?”

“Yes?”

“Who exactly did you want me to fuck?”

“Bea, don’t .....

“What do you mean don’t? I thought this is exactly what you wanted from me. Wasn’t that the point of my training? Didn’t you teach me the value of a spent lover? I thought you had somebody in mind. Who is it? Atta’s friend?”

“I’ll tell you in the car. We need to get going.”

“No time like the present, Al. You might get run over in the street.”

I wasn’t proud of it, but I knew exactly what game I was playing. If I couldn’t have a lover’s love, then I would go for a lover’s quarrel.

He reached over, grabbed my arm, and pulled me out the door.

He apparently knew that game, too.

We rode back awkwardly listening to each other’s silence. Then, as we waited for a light, he started talking quietly but quickly, as if he was one of those heady type basketball coaches and I was about to be sent into the game.

“Remember, Bea, you’re dealing with a culture that teaches its sons that woman are unclean, an evil temptation, and should be kept out of sight and never heard from. These kind of men will only feel rage when they see you. You’ve got to learn to watch out for them. Stay out of their way when you can. On the other hand many of them have come to America, or lived in the west, had their eyes opened a bit and are starting to break out of the sexual straight jacket. They may seem like the first group, pay lip service to the same things, but these guys underneath are dying to try an “American” sexual experience, which they have no idea how to initiate. These types will flock to you if they hear you’re at all receptive to them, which would explain the crowd outside your door. You have to learn to differentiate these types, Bea. When in doubt, stay away. But we’re particularly interested in Atta’s immediate circle, or spin offs from that circle. Take a look at these pictures. These are people we know he associated with when he was in Venice going to flight school.”

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He pushed a box over to me that had been all the while lying on the seat. I picked it up and took out a small stack of 8x10 head-shots. I started to look through them. Was I supposed to remember these faces, or the names written across the top? No way. I'm one of those who could never remember a name *or* a face. This really was looking like a mission impossible. All it needed was a burning fuse, and I had the feeling that had already been lit.

I zipped through the pictures, which were a bunch of Arabs, and was about to put them back in the box when I stopped myself. Time to talk this out. This was serious business. I really had to get that to sink in. It was not school. It was not all right to make C's. Any one of these men in the photographs could be carrying an anthrax vial, or a nuclear device, or a car bomb, or be planning a huge disaster. What if one of them got in my face and I let him slip by? That'd be a great thing to have on my resume- she could have stopped the world from blowing up but forgot the face. Too bad she was such an airhead.

I picked the photographs up again. I started from the top and tried to memorize them. 1. Stanley Peera- a dark fat face with eyebrows running across the broad nose. He was wearing a half-smile as if he'd just eaten a MacDonald's double cheeseburger and was thinking about getting another. 2. Ibrahim Tariq- a dark skinny face, real skinny, with noticeably big ears and a beak like nose. He looked like an ugly egret. I wouldn't forget that mug. 3. Yusef Mosarin- a dark broad face with a huge beard. How could I remember this guy since so much of his face was hidden? His beard went to the very top of his cheekbones. And his hair was slicked to the side like a sixteen year old dressed for the prom. I'd focus on the prom look. 4. Ziad Alghamdi- a dark face, small goatee with the area above the chin shaved. Unusual look. Nice looking. Seductive. Dangerous. Looks Jewish. 5. Nawaf Jarrah- dark, no facial hair at all, only one so far in full smile, glasses, tortoise shell. Looks smart and totally non-threatening. Could be excited about going to Fort Lauderdale on spring break. 6. Shinaz Arquat- the one female, pretty eyes, covered with a shawl, reputed the ex-girl friend of Kareem Al-Hazmi, Muhammad Atta's assistant. 7. Majed Moqued- wore a headdress, flatulent lips, whole face sagged. Looked like a basset hound. 8. Salem Banihammad- the youngest looking, like still in high school, not smiling, too serious, deeply troubled. 9. Saeed Hanjour- dark, three musketeers pointed goatee, Beezlebubian- the villain from central casting. In fact, the whole bunch looked like they were auditioning for a movie about

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terrorists. I know that's stereotyping, but what the hell, they all looked Arabic. Not to sound heavy, Doc, but nature is not averse to profiling. When's the last time anybody saw a blond Arab?

I put the pictures back in the box, which I kept on my lap. Maybe I'd get another chance to go over them. I looked over at Al who suddenly turned deep blue. He looked like he'd jumped out of an upset stomach commercial. Then we heard the siren.

We both jerked around and saw the cop car on our heels.

"God damn it!" Al slammed the steering wheel with his hands. His face was all twisted as he looked again, as if he didn't believe it the first time. He yanked the car over to the curb.

He turned to me and started to talk fast and desperate. I flashed that scene in "The Day The Earth Stood Still" where Michael Rennie is shot and knows he's about to die, and urgently instructs Patricia Neal exactly how to go and activate the robot Gort who'll bring him back to life.

"Listen, Bea, I want you to know, I was not blowing you off back there. We know all about what happened to you in Switzerland."

".....What?"

"Yes, and we know about your father?"

"WHAT?"

"When someone spends the night with the brother of Muhammad Atta, we're going to find out about them."

Al looked almost panicked.

"Relax, Al. You'll show them you're F.B.I. and that'll be it."

A cop got out the driver's side, and Abu popped out the passenger side.

I yelled "Oh my god!"

Al hit his forehead with his fist and snapped, "For Christ sake!"

Abu was dancing around and pointing at our car. The cop went over to him and made him get back in the car. He then walked over to us with his hand on his gun.

Suddenly two more cop cars pulled up from the opposite direction and fishtailed in front of us. Four cops jumped out with drawn guns and aimed them at Al. All four seemed to say in unison, as if they'd been rehearsing it, the line I'd heard a million times on T.V.- "Put your hands over your head and get out of the car!" I thought, "Wow, what bad acting." It seemed like it was more convincing on T.V.

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Al opened the door, raised his hands, and said to me, “When you get Abu alone tell him ‘Haj zafata elabar bayeem, Haj zafata elabar bayeem’ Bea. It could be important.”

He got out of the car with his arms raised, ducked his head back inside and said, “Find out about your father. Find out about Zurich.”

I got chills.

Two of the cops rushed to my door and opened it and shouted, “Are you all right, ma’am?”- also weirdly in unison. Very bizarre. It was like I wasn’t in the real world any more, but in some bad HDTV facsimile.

I jumped out and shouted at the cops who were pointing their guns at Al, “IT’S ALL RIGHT. HE’S F.B.I!”

From the corner of my eye I saw Abu running to me carrying his little black case. He had a knot on his forehead the size of a grapefruit. He looked like the elephant man. I feel so ashamed of myself sometimes, Doc. There I was, really in the middle of a life and death type thing, scared they were going to shoot Al, and I couldn’t help checking out the huge bulge running down practically the whole side of Abu’s leg. With a million critical things going on, I’m thinking “Am I worse than a man? Do I think about sex every second of the day?”

The cops were shouting at Al to get down on the ground.

I shouted, “GO AHEAD, AL. SHOW THEM YOUR CARD!”

Abu reached me and said breathlessly “Oh, good lady. I am so happy we found you! Did he hurt you? Are you O.K?”

“Just a sec, Abu.....AL, GO AHEAD. SHOW THEM!”

Al looked over and shot me a sheepish look.

For about the fourth time that day I lost the blood in my brain.