

**YOU  
comma  
Idiot**

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## ONE

You're the kind of guy who falls in love after one date.

You're the kind of guy who rehearses a conversation fifty times in your head then blows it when it's for real. You're the kind of guy who washes your hair three times in a single day because you're meeting a chick at a restaurant that night. And then gets caught walking in the rain to get there. You're the kind of guy who's kind of stupid that way.

You're the kind of guy who's always feeling sorry for yourself. You're the kind of guy who takes it personally every time a girl walks by with barely a glance over. The kind of guy who likes to think of yourself as sensitive. The kind of guy who confuses sensitive with pathetic.

You're the kind of guy who still thinks about the pretty girls you were afraid of in high school, girls who never even knew your name. The kind of guy who can't stop wondering what it would be like to meet one now. Maybe she's not doing so well. Maybe things are tough. You're the kind of guy who's attracted to women having a hard time.

You're the kind of guy who thinks he can save them.

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You are not, it's fair to say, a good-looking guy. You were given a look too dreary and drawn, skull too thin, face too long. Forehead too high. Cheeks hollow, chin weak. A nose that points oddly, breaking down and away like a difficult putt.

In the mirror in the morning, you often stare at yourself for long periods of time. Sad, extended moments. You wonder what you did wrong and whom you angered. You wonder what you're being *punished* for.

You find yourself contemplating a face that is angular and gaunt, yet with skin curiously loose and fleshy. Jowly. If you ever traced your family tree it wouldn't surprise you to come across the name Flintstone. Unlike Fred, though, you are skinny and tall. Very tall. Which makes you look, well, very skinny. Jeans fit you like a twelve year-old girl. You haven't worn a pair of shorts in a decade. Jackets hang off you like they're sopping wet and sweatshirts engulf your laughable shoulders. The average tie covers half your chest. Clothes hate your guts.

As soon as you set foot outside your apartment you feel as though you're on display for all to cringe at. You're forever glancing at your reflection in every store window you pass, checking your face, your hair, your shirt, your legs, obsessing with a vanity only the truly dimly endowed can appreciate.

Strangely, you don't do well with women.

You are, more accurately, the kind of guy who gives other men the confidence to approach them. You're the kind of guy plain girls practice their dismissive looks on. You're the guy at the bar who's always going off to sit and mope in a corner by himself, whose friends always have to come and get him, cajole him back to the table. You are what the periphery of the group was made for. When a pretty girl tells a funny story and everyone laughs, that's you in the everyone part. A voice that matters only in that it rounds out the chorus.

You are, of course, an entirely necessary element of your species. You are what balance must have. A low end.

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Or maybe it's not as bad as all that. Maybe you have a tendency to exaggerate. Maybe it just *feels* that way some days. Mornings are hardest. The waking up alone thing. In the evening it's not so bad. You go to bed maybe having done something, hung around with your friends, gotten high. Watched a movie, or some TV. The night is over and now you can go to sleep.

But in the morning, the whole rest of the day is waiting. You get to be ugly, and with a whole mess of hours ahead of you. It's why the first thing you usually do once you're up is go back to sleep. Also because you have no job.

You're lying in bed now. You can hear the TV talking from across the apartment. You keep it on almost all the time. There's a commercial playing. It's the one with the two detectives on a stakeout late at night. You can picture it from memory. They're slouched in a car, both handsome guys with chiseled jaws and cool expressions, exchanging clever, clipped dialogue. One guy is black and the other is white and they make it clear that even though the white guy has been driving his partner crazy lately because he's always sneezing and his nose is running and he should just take the cold medicine, they're the kind of partners that deep down really like and respect each other.

It's a good spot. They sure know how to make them, you have to admit. It seems like a wonderful product and it's fun to sort of bond with these rugged dudes, even if just for thirty seconds. And the whole black-white thing is good too, them being good friends, reminding us how far the world has come, that we now live in a perfectly harmonious, racially integrated land only TV seems to truly endorse.

Finally, the white guy takes a pill and the black guy is happy because he won't have to listen to his sniffing all the time. It looks like maybe they can even get some sleep. But then at the end, the black guy sneezes and now it looks like *he's* getting a cold. Uh, oh. His buddy gives him a knowing look and reaches for the box of medicine.

Fantastic!

Actually it's amazing that you can recall all this. You, with the short-term memory of a week-old puppy. You, who half the time can't remember what you came in to the room to get. You, who this very moment are wondering what was that thing you were supposed to do today? Something important, you think. Although with you that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Not a lot happens. A guy like you, it could just mean you're out of milk.

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Honey came over this morning. To kill a few hours. She does that after work sometimes when she's not ready for bed yet. Wakes you up at eight thirty in the morning buzzing from downstairs. It's alright, you've gotten kind of used to it. She brings breakfast that she buys on her way over. Those greasy egg-

cheese-bacon on a croissant heart attacks they sell at doughnut places. Honey's a nurse but she's got the worst health habits you could pick. Smokes, drinks, eats garbage. She's a coffee freak too. And she never exercises. It doesn't matter. She'll be gorgeous until she's ninety. She's just one of those chicks.

Honey's been with Johnny a long time. Johnny Karakis is your best friend. Everyone's always known you're crazy for Honey too. Johnny knows, Honey knows. Your friends know. People make jokes. Fuck them anyways, they all lust after her too. You have nothing to hide.

Your life's regret has surely been rooted in the way you look. It bothers you to have been so short-changed in this department. It angers you. What a *gas* it would have been to walk through life as attractive as Johnny. And other lucky pricks you can think of. And so, a certain cynicism has set in. You believe that everyone but you is dumb. Or some degree of dumb. You believe that you're accountable to no one. You believe that people waste their lives doing whatever they think will sound good when they tell it to their friends. You believe that all friendships are fleeting. That if it means enough, anyone will betray anyone. You believe that people will pay to be entertained by just about anything. You're convinced that video ruined music. And then music ruined movies. You've downloaded the soundtracks to some of the stupidest movies ever made. You believe that all handsome men are simpletons. And that the problem with attractive women is that they're too shallow to look beyond the obvious in order to see the real you. Myopic bitches. You believe that only you know what's really funny. You believe that no one else brings any real perspective to the table. You believe that computers are just a fad. Relatively speaking, that is. A hundred years from now everyone will be busy being revolutionized by something else. You believe that knowing all this, that being burdened with this much vision, is paralyzing, that it would paralyze anyone, and so it's not your fault if you've never really done anything in your life.

You believe that you have the right to say whatever you feel. As well as the right to say nothing. And on the whole, lying is easier than both. You've slept with friends' baby sisters. You've been with desperate women. You've had relations *with a cousin*. It's been rough. You've had to watch year after year while lesser men than yourself escorted perfectly good chicks through shopping malls while you had to shop for some shitty gift for somebody's shitty birthday all by yourself. You believe the world's against you. You believe that you're entitled to whatever you can get.

You made it with your best friend's girlfriend this morning.

You're an idiot.

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"You're not sleeping," Honey says.

It's not quite a question, but the way she says it makes you feel obliged to respond. It's maybe nine o'clock.

"I think I'm going to get up," you say.

You've been lying here, the two of you, post-coital, for the past twenty minutes. Longer than it took you to screw her.

Her head is tucked into the crook of your armpit, a strange posture. You wonder if she does this with

Johnny too, or is it just for you, today, her snuggling like this? You're dying for a cigarette.

"I'm dying for a smoke," you say. Low, almost a whisper.

"Get one then."

But you don't. You just lie there some more. She just lies there some more. There's nothing to say. You think to yourself, how weird is this?

You've thought about sex with her almost *daily*. For years. About seeing her naked. About touching her body. About just basking in the glow that is her relentless beauty. About slowly sliding her panties down off her hips, over those perfect thighs, tiny blonde hairs on her leg glistening, standing up straight as you go. About your hand worming its way up into that tight t-shirt, softly cupping one of what you've always considered to be two of the finest breasts ever grown. About grabbing a fistful of that ass, rolling it around, feeling it between your fingers.

And you did that today.

So how do you feel?

She throws an arm over what little chest you have, pulls herself in closer to you.

"You're gorgeous," she says, kisses your neck. "You're a beautiful guy. You're too much man for me."

"Really?"

"No."

"No?"

She smiles. "Well, you're alright. You're *okay*."

"I don't care," you say, pretending to pout.

"Don't. It doesn't matter."

A beat goes by.

"It was weird," you say.

"It *was* weird," she allows.

You slide the comforter off her. Expose some of that beautiful flesh, look at it again.

"You know something?" you say. "You're really how I thought you'd be. Naked, I mean. Really something."

"Just how you thought I'd be? Not better?"

"Yes. Better. Even better than I thought."

"Really?"

"No."

Actually, yes.

Better than you'd ever dared to imagine. Better than you've ever seen. That's the truth. The kind of body that belongs in the movies, belongs up on a screen. Belongs with somebody else. Like Johnny.

She came on to you.

She made the first move, got into the bed. Climbed on you.

That's also the truth. It couldn't be anything but true, you'd never have had the courage to do anything on your own.

She enjoyed it, you think. Joking aside. Reasonably so. As in, it wasn't like a complete failure or

anything.

You enjoyed it. It was amazing, an amazing thing.

It wasn't great.

It's impossible for it to have been great. It could never be as great as you'd built it up to be. And you'd have had to go at it with her a lot heavier than that to compete with the jillions of scenarios that used to flutter through your head during those relentless off-the-wrist sessions she's starred in for you over the years. You'd pretty well have to be shooting a porn flick too, given that you used to picture other babes in there with her. And a lot of it in slow motion.

This is not the beginning of an affair.

This is not something that will ever happen again.

You have no illusions about *that*.

It went by too fast.

You were too nervous.

She never kissed you.

These are all facts.

You kissed *her* a few times. More or less pinned her mouth down. Like when you read that hookers don't kiss their clients. It felt like that sort of thing.

You don't even have a clear idea as to why it happened in the first place.

Another fact.

"I'm so tired," she says. "Let's sleep a bit. Let's crash for a couple of hours."

"I don't think I can sleep, Hon."

"But I worked all night, Lee."

"I know. I'll go read the paper or something. Tell me when you want me to wake you."

She ignores this, snuggles in tighter.

"Close your eyes, my little watermelon seed."

Her little watermelon seed. Her little potato chip. Her little cucumber salad. Her little guacamole dip, her little eggplant. These are pet names she always called you by. Names that made you smile. Made Johnny smile. It's always seemed so cute to everyone how she did this, how this stunning creature took it upon herself to bestow these affectionate little monikers upon you, you who everyone knew couldn't end up in a million years with a girl like her. And how she knew how much you liked it, though you pretended you didn't. How she'd always pick the right moment to do it, make you feel a little better about yourself even if you were determined not to. Say it when she knew other girls could hear it. In a bar, at a party, a barbecue. Bring you in just a little closer from the periphery of the circle. Her little kumquat. Her little pie crust.

"Honey?"

"Sleep, Lee."

"No, I want to ask you something..."

"I don't want to talk about *this*. If that's where you're going."

"No, no. That's not it."

But it was.

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Later. At the door. She's looking for her keys. She's always looking for her keys. Keys to the ancient Firebird she loves so much. Like her other nurse friends, she's always dug on old muscle cars.

She finds them. They were in her pocket. It always ends up they were in her pocket. "Lee, don't say anything to Johnny, alright? Okay?"

You don't answer. Try to think of a good lie.

She picks up her jacket, purse, slings them both over her shoulder.

She says, "I'll see you on the weekend. You're still coming over."

This is a question.

"I don't know," you say. "I guess so."

She reaches up, strokes your cheek.

"I'll see you on the weekend."

She kisses you on the chin, releases you with a stern look. Opens the door, turns back to you.

"Don't get weird, Lee."

"I won't get weird."

"You're already weird."

"I'm a bit weird."

"Just take it easy."

"I'll take it easy."

"Okay."

"Alright."

Pause.

And then you say, "But I don't understand."

Audible sigh. Hers.

"What?" she says finally.

What? Why she got into bed with you this morning, that's what. Why she didn't just wait for you with the food in front of the TV like she did all the other times. You were just trying to get a few more minutes sleep. Honest, Ma. Why you woke up to her tongue on your stomach. Why she *wanted* to. After all these years why she picked *today* to cheat on Johnny? After all these years, *you* suddenly got sexy to her? A thousand different guys could've been you. And now she's splitting like it's no big deal. Telling you to take it easy.

It is a big deal. It means it's over. You've thought about this since forever, and now it's over. The two of you went at it like alley cats this morning—okay, not really—and now it's over.

When something like this is over, it's time for the *consequences*.

You turn to her.

"Well, what do you mean, don't tell Johnny?" You don't exactly stammer, but it doesn't come out smooth either. "Ever?"

She walks to the elevator, pushes the button. She could be there a while. This is one slow elevator.

“No, I just meant don’t tell him,” Honey says again. The door opens. For once in its lifetime, the stupid thing is there. She steps in, turns back to look at you. “It’ll be better if I do it.”

Oh.

And with a smile, she goes.

Man, is she beautiful.