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Chapter One – Tequila Sunrise

I will never drink tequila again. I know I have said it before, but this time I mean it.

I used to know this girl who would say her head was in pieces after a heavy night out. It was nights like the one I have just had that the term was invented for.

My mate Nick came over last night with a bottle of Jose Cuervo, a salt cellar and a lemon. It was Saturday night after all and there was drinking to be done and clubs to be hit afterwards.

He parked his black sapphire BMW 325 Ci Auto Sport Convertible behind my Le Mans green MG TF on the drive outside my place.

Most of the tequila was gone by the time we went out at 10pm. My head was giddy and my stomach only loosely associated with the rest of my body. My body only loosely associated with the rest of the world.

We started in a bar for a quick pint before the club opened. I ordered two lagers, Stella Artois of course, from the barmaid, she was pretty, but looked young, probably just 18. I was not in the mood for teaching. I wanted experience, so we would both come away satisfied.

Nick and I drank the pints and scanned the bar for girls. It was a trendy kind of a bar, all leather sofas and sturdy wooden tables. The place attracted aspirational types. Up and coming smart business types who wanted to be seen drinking in the right places. For them this was the right place. Half the conversations were work related despite it being the weekend. People talking about their firms new product they were developing, others discussing strategy for their blue chip company.

The bar occupied by 20 and 30-somethings all of whom were out to network and generally give off the impression they were hardcore business types.

Nick and I both work in marketing. We live with this kind of bull on a daily basis, I would like to stay away from it at the weekend, but it is kind of hard without going drinking in a hovel full of student types, or worse water holes where people who are not young professionals go. We would look out of place, which could get us into trouble with the locals. So this kind of bar was safe as we fitted in.

The fact that we are in marketing and used to wading through bullshit just kind of helps in this environment.

Also if we did manage to pull, it is always best to be in this kind of setting so at least we might have something in common to talk about to whichever lucky ladies we lure to our beds.

There were a few nice looking women about the place, most were with partners. We saw one of my least favourite sights in polite society.

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The reasonably attractive 20-something girl with a 50 plus guy, clearly someone high up in the finance firm she works in. He is obviously besotted and she is with him for a number of reasons – all of which involve furthering her career.

I pity the guy, as once she is established in the firm, somewhere in lower middle management, or when he takes early retirement in a year or two, the relationship is history.

He gets a few years riding a young girl and is then left with nothing. She gets 30 plus years of valuable insight into company politics and is left entrenched in the firms way of life.

There are one or two groups of girls about the place, but they all seem kind of average. Secretaries maybe, here looking for career guys to get in with, with a view to the three 'M's. Mortgage, marriage, maternity. Not necessarily in that order.

Dangerous beasts. Once they have their hooks into you, they are hard to get rid of. Within three months they are talking about the rest of your lives together, planning holidays with you and their parents and coming up with names for your future offspring.

Usually echoing national trends. After Courtney Love got famous there was an explosion of little girls named after her. Basketball star Jordan also became a popular boys name in the early 1990s and then girls started getting it as a name after the tacky British glamour model.

Nick and I headed for the club when we had established there was nothing in the bar we liked.

The club, Jabba's is also quite upmarket. A few years back it was an Indie club with a student population, but it got sold on and after some investment became the trendiest place in town. We pay £10 each to get in. The drinks start at £3.50 for a bottle of piss weak lager.

The club looks good, dark, with mirrors and the décor that says young professional meeting place. The bar staff are dressed in trousers with shirt and black tie. None of that polo shirt look in here. The clientele are straight out of the last pub we were in as well as the half dozen others like it across the city centre.

We come here a lot. The tequila theme continues in Jabba's. Nick and I have Tequila Sunrises. I chat to some bird I know from somewhere. I think she either works in my building or in one of the shops or cafes nearby. I am not that into her. She is not bad looking, but she bores me senseless. I have a rule that I only let stunningly attractive women bore my pants off as a route to the bedroom. I wonder off and talk to some other people I vaguely know.

Nick is pretty drunk and he says to me: "Blake, I am bored out of my brain. There is no one worth talking to out tonight. Let's go play some cards and do some proper drinking."

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Now Nick is a cracking card player. I try never to play him for money or when I am drunk. But the tequila was clouding my judgement and the club was full of unattractive women and drunken men trying to pull them.

We headed off to the taxi rank and as we go to jump in the only car, this pair of fit looking girls do the same.

"Hey," says the blonde, "this is our cab."

Nick, drunk but cool as ever, says: "Where are you going."

The blonde tells him.

"Fine we are going the same way, we can share," he says.

"Sure thing," she says.

The four of us jumped in the back of the black cab. I was drunk, but knew where this was all likely to end up.

The blondes name was Katy Potter. She had green eyes and a tan. Her friend with shoulder length wine coloured hair, brown eyes and pale skin was Sara Vasey.

They had been out drinking in the city centre and had a boring night out too.

Nick was giving them the chat and explained we were going to drink tequila and play cards and they were more than welcome to join us if they liked.

So there we were playing cards on my kitchen table at 1am with these two girls we had just met. The tequila was already finished so we drank White Russian cocktails made from vodka and kualloua I had around my flat.

Strip poker is the name of the game with Nick playing a blinder and the girls already down to their G strings. They seem quiet happy sat in their underwear at my kitchen table. It suits me fine too. We talk and play poker.

It turns out they are local to this dump of a town. Nick and I came here around four years ago as part of the relocation package with the graduate programme at our marketing firm.

"I couldn't have gone back to my home town after I finished university," I tell the pair of them.

"Too many girls I slept with while I was at sixth form either stayed there or moved back after they finished university. I go home every now and then and cannot go out in the evening for bumping into some girl I slept with back then. Meeting up again was always so embarrassing for both of us. I would find out they have been working in the same shop or bar for the last eight years and hate the job. They would ask what I was up to and I'd get to tell them about my kick ass career in marketing and the look on their faces

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would make me feel bad – like I was wrong to have left the town where I grew up and move on and upwards."

"Most of the people I slept with when I was doing my A levels have moved away," Sara says. Her hand under the table on my leg. "I got a good job with the local authority, I don't make mega bucks, but I am not poor and I get to live near my folks and I was never madly motivated to move away."

"Too many exes back home," I say.

"The problem with exes, "Nick says, "is that there is always something there afterwards."

"No," I say.

"Liar," he says, "anyone who you have ever slept with would sleep with you again if you tried hard enough."

"They wouldn't and I wouldn't try," I say.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of. I can think of a dozen girls I've gone out with or shagged, who deep down if they came over tomorrow I wouldn't hesitate in getting right back into bed with them. Whether I dumped them or they dumped me, it doesn't matter. The spark never goes away."

"I agree," Sara says. "Last year I slept with this guy I had briefly seen when I was doing my A Levels. He is still with the girl he dumped me for. I never really had the strongest feelings for him, but when I bumped into him, his name is Will, and got chatting it seemed the most natural thing in the world for the two of us to go back to his hotel room and sleep together. I hadn't seen him for years. I hadn't thought of him for just as long. He lives in London with Harriet Cleft, this girl who Katy and I both went to school with. It was a moment outside of both our real lives. He went back to Harriet and I carried on and what we did was irrelevant outside that room."

"Would you do it again?" Nick asked.

"Sure I would. It was wonderful, but at the same time I'm not going to chase after him telling him I love him and make him choose between her and me. Mostly I won't do this because I don't love him and it is just sex anyway. I don't want him 24/7. The odd shag would be fine, but I don't kid myself it is ever going to happen as we have slept together twice in a decade."

"You see, I would sleep with just about any girl I have been to bed with in my life. No question. I don't hold huge candles for them, but to have liked them enough to have sex once, the magic can still be there again." Nick says.

"Well I can think of a couple of ex girlfriends I would like to sleep with again, but not all of them." I say.

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"What you mean is, you think they would let you get away with it as you think they still hold torches for you." Sara says.

I was extremely attracted to her. Intellect, insight and a great body. She and Katy were now naked thanks to the poker game.

I gave up on the conversation for now and kiss Sara. She pulls my boxer shorts down and we start having sex on the kitchen table. I was vaguely aware of Nick and Katy moving into the lounge for the same thing.

After we were done Sara and I talked about exes. She told me she is a firm believer in the concept that the attraction to a former lover never fades away. She told me she had slept with more than 50 guys and would shag almost any of them again if the truth be told.

"Even the ones who two timed me if I tell the honest truth. Why would I be so mad with them for screwing someone else if I didn't still want to fuck their brains out?"

She had a good point.

"Men are consumer goods. There are lots of them about and I chose which I want. I can have as many as I like or as few as I like. I take the pill, I use condoms. No big deal. Men have seen women as objects for eternity, so the logical extension of feminism is that women see men as objects. I'm happy to be seen as an object by potential sexual partners cause I see them the exact same way. If I want to re-use one of them then fine. Having been there before means you don't have to worry about the whole do they fancy me or not stuff. They have been to bed with me before so they will probably do it again."

I drink some water from a pint glass and Sara has some too.

"I'm probably going to sleep with your friend later. I know Katy wanted to sleep with you, so she will probably still be up for that."

"Whatever," I say. Katy is kind of pretty too, so I'm not much bothered. I was half planning to try it on with her anyway, so it seems better if we are all up front about it our intentions.

Nick comes back into the kitchen and pours more White Russians for everyone. Sara and I join him and Katy in front of the television. He has put some old film on the DVD.

"I bet you couldn't sleep with more than three of your exes if you tried." Nick says to me.

"I am sure if I wanted I could sleep with all of the girls I have ever slept with," I reply, the alcohol making me cocky.

"How many is that?" Katy asks.

"Tonight makes 36."

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"Don't you ever wonder what if things had been slightly different with one person," Katy says, "that you and she could still be together, happily somewhere. Isn't it possible there is someone out there who you would jump at a second chance with? Could there be a girl out there you wish hadn't dumped you, who is maybe wishing the same thing too? Or a girl you finished with you now wish you hadn't. Or even some girl you only slept with once who you quite liked, but circumstances stopped anything else happening. What if she is the one for you and you didn't realise."

"I bet you couldn't worm your way back into the knickers of any girl you have been with," Nick says.

"You can have me anytime," Sara says, stroking my leg.

"For £20 quid a girl, I bet you can't sleep with six of your exes in say, nine weeks from today – present company excluded as they know about the bet. That would have to be a rule of course, you couldn't tell them it was a bet."

"If we are going to have a bet lets make it interesting. £50 a girl at least."

"Fine £50 a girl for the first five, but I only pay you when you hit five and then we get to play a bonus round for the last girl. For £100."

"The final one shouldn't be for money. It should be something more important than that," I say.

"How about my BMW against your MG?"

"Fine," I say.

"But there have to be a few more rules. One of them has to be from university or back home, tell you what, let's make it someone you slept with before you turned 20. And as I've known you a long time, another rule has to be the girl in the bonus round has to be my choice from the pantheon of your exes."

Without really thinking who Nick would chose or how tricky it might be to find someone I slept with at university or how nauseating someone from home would be, I say "yes."

"Also," Nick says, "you have to give me a list of girls you have slept with so I can verify whoever you pull are not fresh."

"I'll write it down for you," I say

"I will also need some sort of evidence, say picture. Taken with your digital camera and e mailed to me.

"Great, evidence is not a problem."

"Fantastic," he says. He whips out his diary and proudly tells me the date when the bet comes to an end. We shake hands on the bet, making it unbreakable. He circles it in his diary before downing his cocktail.

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He starts kissing Katy, but she pushes him away. He looks puzzled for a moment, but Sara is on top of him almost instantly. I get the feeling this is not the first time these girls have done this, but I don't have a lot of thinking time before Katy reaches me.

The morning light eases its way between the gaps in the curtain. The sunrise pleasing me less than the tequila numbness in my body. It takes a Herculean to get off the floor and pull the curtains properly together.

Sunday lunchtime rolls around and my head is still all over the place. My brain aches, deep and hard. I know I am dehydrated, I know I need water, salt and glucose to make me feel better, but the thought of attempting to ingest anything that would provide these things simply makes me feel sick.

Nick got up and drove home an hour or so ago. He had to go to lunch with someone. I forget who he said. He never ever gets hangovers and merely got up and went. Katy is asleep on the sofa and I am thinking about getting up and putting the television on. Sara is on the floor nearby, she looks awake, but I cannot think of anything to say to her.

She smiles and moves towards me. "Morning," I say. She ignores my words and wraps her lips around my penis, blood rushes down from my brain into it and I am quickly ready for sex.

Afterwards she chuckles to herself, post orgasm she beams at me: "It is a shame you cannot count me and Katy for your bet. We could have counted for a third of it."

"The bet," I say. "A stupid idea, how am I ever going to get six ex girlfriends into bed?"

"You say it like trying to get six women into bed is a bad thing to do. Or even a tough thing to do these days. You have bedded two in 12 hours and here you are thinking six in nine weeks is going to be hard."

"But they are exes. People who I have been with before and one or other or both of us has chosen to move on. I always believed you should never go backwards. Never."

"Why not?"

"Back is bad, life is about moving on and moving forward. Been there, done that, moved on has always been my attitude to life. Once you decide that is the end of a relationship, you begin letting the wounds close and going back reopens the scars."

"Have all the women in your life given you scars?"

"Not all of them," I say.

"And have you given them all scars?"

"No."

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"Then what is the problem. Like I said yesterday sexual partners are commodities. I see men like that and men see me the same way. You do, don't you."

"No," I say.

She reaches her hand towards my genitals and grips them. Her touch is gentle for now. "Tell me the truth Blake."

"Truthfully, yes women are just divided up into three categories. Those I want to sleep with, those I don't want to sleep with and those I have already slept with."

"Good enough." She release her grip.

I turn the television on. Some banal Sunday programme is on. No intellectual challenge, which is exactly what I want while my head is in pieces.

"Have you got any strategy for getting into bed with any of your exes?" Sara asks.

"I hadn't really thought about it. How about I just ring one up and see what she is doing one night."

"Good plan," she says, "Simple is the best way. I had this horrible feeling you would try some stupidly elaborate bumping into them set-up, when a phone call would do the job."

Later in the day Sara and Katy get their stuff together and say goodbye. I don't ask for their phone numbers and they do not volunteer them.

Katy kisses me tentatively on the cheek. Sara puts her lips on mine and I say "See you around."

"Maybe," she whispers before following her friend out of the door.

I eat some plain bread, my stomach coming back towards the real world. Tomorrow will bring me back to the marketing bull of the office. I decide when I feel better in the morning is when I should start my quest for reclaiming past conquests.

My mobile receives a text message. It is from Nick. It reads: "6 brds 9 weks + countin".

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