



THE GAME

PENETRATING THE SECRET
SOCIETY OF PICKUP ARTISTS

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Those who have read early drafts of this book
have all asked the same questions:

**IS THIS TRUE?
DID IT REALLY HAPPEN ?
ARE THESE GUYS
FOR REAL?**

Thus, I find it necessary to employ
an old literary device . . .

**THE
FOLLOWING
IS A TRUE
STORY.
IT REALLY HAPPENED.**

Men will deny it,
Women will doubt it.
But I present it to you here,
Naked, vulnerable, and

disturbingly real.

I beg you for your forgiveness in advance.

DON'T HATE THE PLAYER . . .

HATE THE GAME.

STEP 1: SELECT A TARGET



MEN WEREN'T REALLY THE ENEMY—
THEY WERE FELLOW VICTIMS
SUFFERING FROM AN OUTMODED
MASCULINE MYSTIQUE THAT MADE
THEM FEEL UNNECESSARILY
INADEQUATE WHEN THERE WERE
NO BEARS TO KILL.

— BETTY FRIEDAN

The Feminine Mystique

MEET MYSTERY

The house was a disaster.

Doors were split and smashed off their hinges; walls were dented in the shape of fists, phones, and flowerpots; Herbal was hiding in a hotel room scared for his life; and Mystery was collapsed on the living room carpet crying. He'd been crying for two days straight.

This wasn't a normal kind of crying. Ordinary tears are understandable. But Mystery was beyond understanding. He was out of control. For a week, he'd been vacillating between periods of extreme anger and violence, and jags of fitful, cathartic sobbing. And now he was threatening to kill himself.

There were five of us living in the house: Herbal, Mystery, Papa, Playboy, and me. Boys and men came from every corner of the globe to shake our hands, take photos with us, learn from us, be us. They called me Style. It was a name I had earned.

We never used our real names-only our aliases. Even our mansion, like the others we had spawned everywhere from San Francisco to Sydney, had a nickname. It was Project Hollywood. And Project Hollywood was in shambles.

The sofas and dozens of throw pillows lining the floor of the sunken living room were fetid and discolored with the sweat of men and the juices of women. The white carpet had gone gray from the constant traffic of young, perfumed humanity herded in off Sunset Boulevard every night.

Cigarette butts and used condoms floated grimly in the Jacuzzi. And Mystery's rampage during the last few days had left the rest of the place totaled and the residents petrified. He was six foot five and hysterical.

“I can’t tell you what this feels like,” he choked out between sobs. His whole body spasmed. “I don’t know what I’m going to do, but it will not be rational.”

He reached up from the floor and punched the stained red upholstery of the sofa as the siren-wail of his despondency grew louder, filling the room with the sound of a grown male who has lost every characteristic that separates man from infant from animal.

He wore a gold silk robe that was several sizes too small, exposing his scabbed knees. The ends of the sash just barely met to form a knot and the curtains of the robe hung half a foot apart, revealing a pale, hairless chest and, below it, saggy gray Calvin Klein boxer shorts. The only other item of clothing on his trembling body was a winter cap pulled tight over his skull.

It was June in Los Angeles.

“This living thing.” He was speaking again. “It’s so pointless.”

He turned and looked at me through wet, red eyes. “It’s Tic Tac Toe.

There’s no way you can win. So the best thing to do is not to play it.”

There was no one else in the house. I would have to deal with this. He needed to be sedated before he snapped out of tears and back into anger.

Each cycle of emotions grew worse, and this time I was afraid he’d do something that couldn’t be undone.

I couldn’t let Mystery die on my watch. He was more than just a friend; he was a mentor. He’d changed my life, as he had the lives of thousands of others just like me. I needed to get him Valium, Xanax, Vicodin, anything. I grabbed my phone book and scanned the pages for people most likely to

have pills-people like guys in rock bands, women who'd just had plastic surgery, former child actors. But everyone I called wasn't home, didn't have any drugs, or claimed not to have any drugs because they didn't want to share.

There was only one person left to call: the woman who had triggered Mystery's downward spiral. She was a party girl; she must have something.

Katya, a petite Russian blonde with a Smurfette voice and the energy of a Pomeranian puppy, was at the front door in ten minutes with a Xanax and a worried look on her face.

"Do not come in," I warned her. "He'll probably kill you." Not that she didn't entirely deserve it, of course. Or so I thought at the time.

I gave Mystery the pill and a glass of water, and waited until the sobs slowed to a sniffle. Then I helped him into a pair of black boots, jeans, and a gray T-shirt. He was docile now, like a big baby.

"I'm taking you to get some help," I told him.

I walked him outside to my old rusty Corvette and stuffed him into the tiny front seat. Every now and then, I'd see a tremor of anger flash across his face or tears roll out of his eyes. I hoped he'd remain calm long enough for me to help him.

"I want to learn martial arts," he said docilely, "so when I want to kill someone, I can do something about it."

I stepped on the accelerator.

Our destination was the Hollywood Mental Health Center on Vine Street. It was an ugly slab of concrete surrounded day and night by homeless men who screamed at lampposts, transvestites who lived out of shopping carts,

and other remaindered human beings who set up camp where free social services could be found.

Mystery, I realized, was one of them. He just happened to have charisma and talent, which drew others to him and prevented him from ever being left alone in the world. He possessed two traits I'd noticed in nearly every rock star I'd ever interviewed: a crazy, driven gleam in his eyes and an absolute inability to do anything for himself.

I brought him into the lobby, signed him in, and together we waited for a turn with one of the counselors. He sat in a cheap black plastic chair, staring catatonically at the institutional blue walls.

An hour passed. He began to fidget.

Two hours passed. His brow furrowed; his face clouded.

Three hours passed. The tears started.

Four hours passed. He bolted out of his chair and ran out of the waiting room and through the front door of the building.

He walked briskly, like a man who knew where he was going, although Project Hollywood was three miles away. I chased him across the street and caught up to him outside a mini-mall. I took his arm and turned him around, baby talking him back into the waiting room.

Five minutes. Ten minutes. Twenty minutes. Thirty. He was up and out again.

I ran after him. Two social workers stood uselessly in the lobby.

"Stop him!" I yelled.

"We can't," one of them said. "He's left the premises."

"So you're just going to let a suicidal man walk out of here?" I couldn't waste time arguing. "Just have a therapist

ready to see him if I get him back here.”

I ran out the door and looked to my right. He wasn't there. I looked left. Nothing. I ran north to Fountain Avenue, spotted him around the corner, and dragged him back again.

When we arrived, the social workers led him down a long, dark hallway and into a claustrophobic cubicle with a sheet-vinyl floor. The therapist sat behind a desk, running a finger through a black tangle in her hair. She was a slim Asian woman in her late twenties, with high cheekbones, dark red lipstick, and a pinstriped pantsuit.

Mystery slumped in a chair across from her.

“So how are you feeling today?” she asked, forcing a smile.

“I'm feeling,” Mystery said, “like there's no point to anything.” He burst into tears.

“I'm listening,” she said, scrawling a note on her pad. The case was probably already closed for her.

“So I'm removing myself from the gene pool,” he sobbed.

She looked at him with feigned sympathy as he continued. To her, he was just one of a dozen nutjobs she saw a day. All she needed to figure out was whether he required medication or institutionalization.

“I can't go on,” Mystery went on. “It's futile.”

With a rote gesture, she reached into a drawer, pulled out a small package of tissues, and handed it to him. As Mystery reached for the package, he looked up and met her eyes for the first time. He froze and stared at her silently. She was surprisingly cute for a clinic like this.

A flicker of animation flashed across Mystery's face, then died. “If I had met you in another time and another place,”

he said, crumpling a tissue in his hands, “things would have been different.”

His body, normally proud and erect, curved like soggy macaroni in his chair. He stared glumly at the floor as he spoke. “I know exactly what to say and what to do to make you attracted to me,” he continued. “It’s all in my head. Every rule. Every step. Every word. I just can’t... do it right now.”

She nodded mechanically.

“You should see me when I’m not like this,” he continued slowly, sniffing. “I’ve dated some of the most beautiful women in the world. Another place, another time, and I would have made you mine.”

“Yes,” she said, patronizing him. “I’m sure you would have.”

She didn’t know. How could she? But this sobbing giant with the crumpled tissue in his hands was the greatest pickup artist in the world.

That was not a matter of opinion, but fact. I’d met scores of the self-proclaimed best in the previous two years, and Mystery could out-game them all. It was his hobby, his passion, his calling.

There was only one person alive who could possibly compete with him.

And that man was sitting in front of her also. From a formless lump of nerd, Mystery had molded me into a superstar. Together, we had ruled the world of seduction. We had pulled off spectacular pickups before the disbelieving eyes of our students and disciples in Los Angeles, New York, Montreal, London, Melbourne, Belgrade, Odessa, and beyond.

And now we were in a madhouse.