

A close-up photograph of a woman's midsection and legs. She is wearing white lace underwear. Her right hand is resting on her hip, and her left hand is resting on her thigh. The background is plain white.

*Dapper Carter's*  
*8 Rules of Dating*  
A NOVEL

**ALAN MITCHELL**

**DAPPER  
CARTER'S  
8  
RULES  
OF  
DATING**

Alan Mitchell Books are published by

O'dell Publishing

5010 Grove West Boulevard

Suite 502

Stafford, TX 77477

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ISBN 978-0-9856977-2-3

[www.alanmitchellbooks.com](http://www.alanmitchellbooks.com)

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## *The White-Winged Albatross*

“So, how’s married life treating you?”

I could no longer tell if that was my best friend Caesar asking me that question or if it was the tiny voice deep down inside of me inquiring. Caesar always had a way of asking the tough question, but he always had a way of making sense too. The truth is that Caesar *was* the little voice deep down inside of me at times. He represented my desire to be honest with myself, which was something I was incapable of achieving right now.

“How do you think married life is treating me? It’s after midnight and I’m sitting here in a strip club with you.”

I had what everyone thought was going to be the perfect marriage. Kennedy Craig (KC) was my high school sweetheart. We were from the same hometown, our families got along well, and her girlfriends even liked me...at first. Then, the real Dapper Carter showed up to the party. He’s moody, hates to be alone and hates to be with someone at the same time. And he doesn’t really like to come home every night. Not the best recipe for a marriage.

*Chicag-hoes* was my home away from home and the grimmest of all the strip clubs near Newark Airport. I was just as comfortable in Beverly Hills as I was in Port Newark. I had all the best opportunities afforded to me but still I like to live on the edge and maintained a strong affinity for the hood, not to mention its hood rats.

It was a slow Tuesday night by strip club standards so there were only about *fifty* horny motherfuckers in there, including Caesar and I.

The hue of the blue and red lights bouncing off the well-toned strippers’ bodies was more intoxicating to me than the Grey Goose and Red Bull I sipped. I could never quite understand how combining a depressant with a stimulant could cause a euphoric effect. But it did and that was my drink of choice to get me revved up for the fun I was going to have that night.

I fixed my eyes on the ultra fit Lollipop as she acrobatically performed walkovers and rabidly pirouetted around the brass pole hinting of her classic dance background. I committed all seven of the deadly sins simultaneously in my already oversexed mind

whenever I saw Slippery When Wet gyrated in front of me finger-popping her pussy. Of all the deadly sins my favorite was lust, though I was pretty good at all of them to say the least. The mouthwatering Miss Peanut Butta, creamy caramel skin and an ass like a horse was climbing hand over hand up the forty-foot stripper's pole then nose-dived to the bottom, stopping on a dime one inch from the floor and rearranging her picturesque face...butt ass naked.

"I don't know how you do what you do," Caesar said as he maniacally "made it rain" dollar bills all over Puss in Boots, the thicker-than-grits Latina whom we learned danced at night to pay her way through NYU Medical School. It was cliché but education was expensive. So I guess half of the female doctors in the United States are probably former strippers. That should help my next prostate exam go down a little easier.

"Don't know how I do what? Be married or fuck around on her?"

"Be married, of course. I don't really care what a nigga does on the side. I'm talking about looking at the same chick for forever. Do you know the definition of forever? Check this shit out. No other animal, except one, mates for life. You don't see two buffaloes chillin' next to each other for life. By being with one woman, we are fighting against nature and evolution."

Caesar always had a unique way of looking at things. He was my number one dawg and had been since the day we met in fifth grade.

"Damn man, why do you have to be so brutally honest?"

"Real honesty is brutal, unfortunately, and there is no way around it." The red light and siren wailed signaling that it was "money time". All the ponies, colts, and stallions came from the dressing room behind the stage. One by one Trinity, Popsicle, Me Love You Long Time, Hot Chocolate, Sexual Chocolate, Chocolate Thunder, Thunderpussy, Lickity Splits, Holly Hood, Lorraina Bob It, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Sexy Lexi and Strange` hit the stage and started working the crowd for lap dances. The stallions were old pros and knew to hit the stroll first before the newbies got out there. I usually would get two or three but not tonight I was saving my dough for something special.

Next the ponies came out who had been dancing for about a year. They usually thought this was going to be temporary but weeks turned into month, and months eventually will turn into years.

Last to come out were the fillies. They were young, usually around nineteen, shy, and new to dancing. They hadn't stepped their lap dance game up to the level of the

stallions and ponies but they would learn quick.

“So which animal mates for life?”

“The White-winged Albatross.”

“Get the fuck outta here! How do you know?”

“C’mon, son. You know I went to Princeton!”

That didn’t have shit to do with it. He just watched a lot of Discovery Channel on those nights when he was home alone because no one wanted to deal with his brutal honesty. Caesar shoved a twenty dollar bill into The Clapper’s dental floss thong, making sure to cop a feel before slapping her on her juicy booty.

“I’ve got so many bitches checking for me right now that don’t know what to do with myself,” he boasted.

I don’t claim to have the greatest respect for women, but I had more than he. Every once in a while he would aggravate me with his Neanderthal references of the opposite sex. I used the word bitch a lot myself. Too much, actually, but it was nowhere as much as Caesar did. He actually had a method to his madness. For him, it was all about word placement. If he started the sentence out with the word “bitch,” he used it like a pronoun and to be dismissive. *Bitch, fuck you!* Now, if he used it at the end of a sentence like an exclamation point, you have pissed him off and now he’s trying to be hurtful. *Fuck you, bitch!*

“How come every woman got to be a bitch?”

“Because that’s what they are to me, either a bitch or a ho.” Caesar’s venom spit from his disparaging lips. He was hardcore like that and it was self inflicted. “They all want some of Caesar,” he boasted.

Caesar is not the best looking guy by any stretch of the imagination and he knows it. He’s tall, about six-foot-four, gangly, and kind of looks like the Warner Brothers’ frog. But nonetheless, he’s pretentious, articulate, undeniably confident and impeccably groomed, taking extra special care of his hands and feet. Women *do* like him and confidence will take you places you never thought you could go. And he actually is a fucking genius, being tested with an IQ over 150.

“They all want some of Caesar’s money,” I countered as we continued to covet the heavenly bodies in front of us while not so secretly thirsting for Baton Rouge, the stallion of the stable. She was a redbone and proud of her Creole look. Hair black as coal waved down to the sexy Christmas tree at the small of her magnificent back. She had mammoth implants going up three cup sizes from a D to a full double D, massive speed skater thighs, and a tail like a New England lobster. She was as close to perfect

as I had ever seen.

I had enough money on me so I could actually afford to holla at her, but the queen bee didn't come cheap. I had no problem paying for pussy, because one way or another I was probably going to drop over \$150 on dinner, a movie, and drinks anyway, so I might as well just pay up front and know how the evening is going to end, without a shadow of a doubt. Actually, what I was doing was paying you to leave!

“Whatever it is, so be it. Just keep giving Caesar the ass. You know, I listen to these young bucks talking all this shit about how they ain't spending no money on these hos. You ain't spending no money on these hos? Then you don't want no pussy!”

“You're right.”

“I know I'm right. Niggas who don't have money complain about spending money on a bitch. Niggas with money take that shit in stride and know it's a part of the game. That's the difference between a player and a baller.”

What Caesar philosophized was true, if you have the money. He's a big-time trader on the New York Stock Exchange, pulling in about a million dollars a year with the top brokerage firm on this side of the Atlantic. It's what he always wanted to be. While the rest of us had our heads in the clouds with false hopes of the NBA, Caesar fantasized about being president of the Bank of New York. He's not there yet, but there is no doubt in my mind that he will get there someday.

Caesar dubbed his approach the "West Coast Offense," short, quick strikes. He was all about the skins and he would do whatever it took, or cost, to get 'em. Conversely, I played more of a defensive game tailored to stopping the run, as in stopping a chick from running all over me. Offense is pretty, scores a lot of points, and is exciting to watch. But defense wins championships.

Caesar agreed while throwing back his fifth Hennessy on the rocks. “So, you never answered my question. How is married life treating you?”

“I'm cool. As long as I keep hitting Kennedy off right, she ain't going anywhere.”

The truth of the matter was that we hadn't had sex in so long I was starting to wonder if maybe she was doing her thing on the side too. I mean, everybody needs sex. Even if the two of you aren't speaking, sooner or later you're going to roll over onto that ass lying right next to you every night, right?

I watched Baton Rouge work her way around the bar until she finally reached me. But not before some idiot decided he was going to pilfer an extra feel and stick his fingers in her chocha. She cussed him out royally and the bouncers kicked his ass royally. The devious smile on her unblemished face excited me. It made me want her

more, if that was even possible. She lap danced for me, unmercifully grinding her fat ass against my stiffening manhood. Then she whirled around and sadistically taunted me by slapping my inebriated face with her impressive watermelons. While I contemplated my next move, she rammed her tongue into my mouth and began to devour mine like a greedy lion cub.

“You like that, Daddy?”

It was impossible to respond with her huge tits now pressed up against my face suffocating me.

“Tell me what you want me to do, Daddy?” she begged as she straddled me grinding her pussy against my awakened bulge. My dick was harder than Chinese arithmetic.

“Do it all and I’ll tell you when to stop.” I couldn’t help but to caress the softness of her pistachio-colored skin. Her butt felt delicate like tissue paper underneath my sweaty fingers. For once I had enough money to afford her and Cheetah, the snow bunny with tiger paw prints tattooed up and down her milky white thighs. Baby girl was doing deep throat tricks with a longneck Corona bottle that was very impressive. *That girl got talent.*

I glanced over at Caesar to let him know that it was time to jet, but the only thing I could see was the back of his head buried between Miss Peanut Butta’s tig ol’ bitties. I tapped him on the shoulder and gave him the same look we’ve been giving each other for over twenty years when it was time for the jump-off. He was with it, of course. That’s my nigga and he was the best wingman a guy could ask for. No fuss, no muss as long as he was getting hit off too.

## ***Why Not?***

We took the party back to her apartment in the Towers across from Penn Station. A lot of the strippers lived there so they could easily get in and out of the city, depending on where they were dancing that evening. Not to mention Newark had some of the best stripper fashion to choose from right there on Broad Street.

But first we had to make a stop at Kennedy Fried Chicken to pick up a fifty piece of Buffalo wings. Nothing soaks up alcohol better than wings and greasy fries. We knew food would be an afterthought once we got to the crib, so we devoured them right there in Cez's diamond white S65 AMG Benz (\$211,000) with customized black leather Coach seats. He usually drove the Benz when he wanted to floss. The Escalade was reserved for hanging out with the fellas and the red Ducati 848 Evo was just because. He called it justification for higher education.

Nonetheless, he wasn't very happy about us eating in his baby, but fuck him because he's the same guy that would let a chick smoke crack in his car if he thought he was gonna get a blowjob.

Cez brought along another dancer from the club that I called Heroin *because she was killing niggas*. We also needed to pick up a bottle of Patron, a liter of Hennessey, and a twelve-pack of Coronas. Heroin had her own "party favors" and my concubine had weed at the crib as the Coup de grâce.

When we got there it wasn't what I expected. It *wasn't* the love den of iniquity. It *wasn't* a lair of S&M. It *wasn't* a fortress of bondage. It was quaint and neat, not like the wreck I was accustomed to whenever flight attendants shared an apartment. They would have six girls sharing a place, splitting the rent, and no more than two would usually be there at once. But the unit was always a wreck because they turned around and were headed back to the airport so quickly not leaving time for anyone to do the cleaning. Dirty chicks are such a turn-off.

Baton Rouge's place was antiseptic and spotless like a hotel room. Everything was in its place and it had a light, airy feel being set off by shades of yellow, orange, and tan. But that changed quickly.

“Who’s ready for some drinks?”

Caesar announced trying to get the party started.

“You know what I want, Daddy,” Heroin anxiously replied.

She and Caesar had hooked up plenty of times which gave him no reason to fuck around wasting time with Cheetah or Miss Peanut Butta as far as he was concerned. Caesar lined up four shots of Patron, four Coronas to chase it, and four Hennessey’s to chase all that.

We raised our glasses in a bullshit toast. “Let’s pour a little out for the hos who ain’t here.” Caesar declared. “I’m just joking. If you pour that ‘gnac out I will kill all of you.”

We didn’t go through that lick your hand then suck a lemon shit with the Patron shots. We each took the five ounces of agave straight to the head then followed up by chugging as much of a Corona as we could. Last we each took a healthy swig of Hennessey right out of the bottle.

Feeling good and ready for more we each grabbed our glass and took it into the living room to listen to some music and whatever else that would come along with it.

The multi-faceted Heroin had a talent for rolling a blunt with one hand while she slowly but firmly gripped Caesar’s manhood through his pants with the other hand.

While we smoked, drank, and rode the white horse, the girls put on some music to show off some of their salacious new moves. They got off to some crazy hip-hop tracks that I hadn’t even heard yet. Strippers were my barometer of what was going to be hot in the streets. If strippers liked it, it was going to be a hit.

After a few songs of “dropping it,” and “booty clapping” the girls became bored and things quickly turned pornographic. Baton Rouge and Heroin started kissing heavily before taking turns eating one another out on the chaise longue for our entertainment. Cez and I smiled at one another, trying to recount how many times we had been in this exact same position...during that year alone! Caesar still had about \$500 in \$20 bills, so he continued to shower the girls with dead presidents just for kicks.

After fifteen minutes or so of preliminaries we robotically peeled off our clothes and made our way to separate ends of the couch.

Heroin dropped to her knees in front of Caesar, unzipped his pants, and then instinctively plunged his pink and brown pole inside her mouth. She looked like she was trying to commit suicide by stabbing herself repeatedly with a blunt instrument in the back of her throat. Heroin was what we liked to call a brain surgeon and she

enjoyed sucking dick more than any girl I had ever met. I knew this to be true because she broke me off the week before.

Baton Rouge decided she had enough and sprawled herself over the arm of the couch, presenting her perfect brownish-pink love canal which was pleading for the unyielding eight and a half inches I had for her.

I tenaciously grabbed a handful of her wavy locks, wrangled them, and then pulled, triggering her to arch her muscular back.

“You like that don’t you?!”

“You know I do, Daddy.”

“Say you’re a dirty fucking whore.”

“I’m a dirty fucking whore,” she whimpered.

She liked it rough and so did I. But I liked it even rougher than that.

With the one hand entangled in her locks, I took the other hand, ripped open the condom package with my teeth, and stretched the prophylactic on my impressive erection.

Without hesitation or warning, I thrust my rocket deep into her vast Milky Way. She yelped with delight. With each thrust I could feel myself going deeper inch by exciting inch into her never ending tunnel. She expanded and contracted her sugar walls with each stroke extracting the nut from my overworked muscle. I fucked her hard, amused to hear the sound of my balls relentlessly slapping against her well-developed backside. I tried with every enthusiastic plunge to drill my dick through her writhing body and out her panting mouth. She howled in rapture.

I chased her into the corner of the sofa, still on all fours, with my greedy cock so she couldn’t run anywhere as I mercilessly pummeled her juicy punaani into submission like a piece of raw meat.

Caesar had long stopped Heroin from her sixty-eight and I owe you one.

“Hey dawg, ain’t it time for that switch?”

“Naw son, I’m good.”

We usually do switch up but not this time. I was in a groove and didn’t want to interrupt my flow. I sadistically slid my hands around her delicate throat and began to squeeze, constricting her airflow. I fucked her like she stole something while she gasped, gagged, and flopped around like a big mouth bass. Until she went limp. At first I thought she was fooling around, but after several seconds fear crept up my spine. *Oh shit, did I kill her?*

Finally, she gasped, recruiting as much oxygen as possible to fill her almost

lifeless body and scaring the shit out of me as well. Then she broke out into a hearty laugh. That was her thing and she loved that shit so I had no trouble obliging.

Cez and Heroin had stopped what they were doing to watch us. I was more of a voyeur than an exhibitionist, but I didn't mind the two of them spying on Baton Rouge and me.

“Can I go next?” Heroin pleaded. *Why not?*

### *I Wonder If I Take You Home*

I got home just as the sun started to rise on my modest, Colonial style house in Edison Township. The house that was actually in my wife's name.

Stillness blanketed the Oak lined cul de sacs and manicured lawns of central New Jersey. Each Colonial in the neighborhood was a clone of the next. The gas guzzling SUVs and carpool-friendly minivans of upper middle class life peppered the New York City suburb. The toughest decision here was whether to buy the Dodge Caravan or the Kia Sedona and who would be hosting the next neighborhood watch meeting.

I was still fucked up and my clothes were crumpled, looking like I was in bar fight rather than the pussy-cat fight I had actually participated in. I had fresh, deep, tiger-like scratches on my back that I had no idea how I was going to explain. I usually went to bed shirtless, so wearing a sweatshirt to bed would surely send up a red flag to my already distrusting wife.

I struggled to choreograph the simple task of placing one foot in front of the next, causing me to stumble up the six steps leading to the front door. I stopped, momentarily recalling how I never liked the flower pot of Azaleas by the front door, so I decided that I would give them a little energy drink and pissed out the Grey Goose and Red Bull I had been consuming hours earlier onto them.

After I finished showering Kennedy's plants I finally tried to enter the house, but as I turned the door knob, it unexpectedly and violently swung open. As a matter of fact, it swung open so violently that my shoulder was almost ripped from the socket. It was obvious that she had waited up all night for my return.

KC had the sweetest, most angelic face you've ever seen...if it weren't so pissed off. Her eyes were beet red and her lip quivered uncontrollably. They were puffy and swollen, indicating that she had been crying for hours. I noticed how she had her tiny little fist clenched next to her side like she may actually swing on me.

I remembered the first time I laid eyes on her. We had a dance at my high school, Saint Vincent, and the surrounding area private schools were also allowed to be there. That's why we had girls from the three neighboring all-female high schools in

attendance, which contributed to our teenage hormones raging at these dances. It was my junior year and I was pretty introverted, even though I was becoming a budding basketball star averaging just under twenty points per game. In spite of this, my bashfulness kept me from getting the attention and notoriety other athletes had.

Lisa Lisa's "I Wonder If I Take You Home" started to play and I caught a glimpse of my angel stand up and start to sway to the melody.

She was tiny, standing only five foot and three inches, but solid. She was also a gymnast and a cheerleader, so she had powerfully built legs for her tumbling and somersaults she had to perform. Her auburn hair was curly and her chestnut eyes were inviting. She had a broad, cheeky smile that was contagious.

Kennedy was an angel in every sense of the word. She sang in the glee club, read to the elderly, and fed the homeless in her spare time. She was the type of wife that if you mentioned you wanted something, the next day she would have it for you.

I tapped my boy Trace, the star of the team, and asked him to let Kennedy know that I wanted to dance with her. I was taking a chance by sending the future Arizona All-American over to speak to her. Most girls gushed over him and he always got what he wanted.

Despite that, she was unimpressed with him as well as my lack of courage, stating that if I want to dance with her I would have to ask her myself. Reluctantly, I began that *loooong* walk, dreading the possibility of her turning me down and having to take that *loooong* walk back across the dance floor to stand against the wall.

Halfway into my hike across the gymnasium floor my legs grew heavy like I was dragging two tree trunks. My palms were sweaty and my mouth was dry. My fight or flight response was in full effect and it took everything for me not to act upon the latter. I desperately needed a sip of water so my tongue could cooperate with the roof of my mouth. I stopped off at the water fountain and lapped up as much of the thirst-quencher as I could handle.

I was running out of time as the second verse to my favorite song had just started. I navigated frantically through the other desperate sixteen year olds that had already latched on to one another. I finally reached Kennedy just as Full Force kicked in with the "take me, take me, take me home" part of the song.

Confidently, I asked her to dance. *Confidence will take you places you never thought you could go*. She smiled and said yes. We awkwardly danced for the last thirty seconds of the song, eight inches apart, careful not to draw the attention of the chaperoning nuns. Even so, it was magical and evidently it was enough.

The next day in school my life went to bizarro world as everything went from Betty Boop black and white to full blown Toto-we're-not-in-Kansas-anymore color. There were notes being slipped into my locker and upperclassmen eyes being batted at me for the first time. Unexpectedly, every girl at my school started to check for me and I owed it all to Kennedy. She was one of the most popular girls in our town and every guy wanted her. Here was the first lesson I was to learn regarding women only wanting guys that other women wanted, and I was the showcase winner.

We dated through senior year of high school, all of college, broke up during my short stint in LA, and then got married shortly thereafter. We've been married for eight years. None of that mattered right now because her brow was deeply furrowed into the crease between her disapproving eyes.

I had screwed up before, but this felt different. She was seething. Usually I could sway her with an easy smile and turn her frown upside down, but not this time. Nor would I even try. I was pretentious, arrogant, and pompous—all synonyms meaning the same thing. I was an ASSHOLE!

I thought the last straw was a year ago when she clicked on the ten o'clock news and there was my face being praised as a local hero.

I was out on one of my "lunch dates" when this dumbass at the table next to mine began choking on a tiny jumbo shrimp (double oxymoron). As my luck would have it, I was the only person within earshot who knew the Heimlich maneuver and promptly administered it to him, saving his life. I was a fuckin' hero.

Unbeknownst to me, a local news crew was doing a special down in Red Bank on Healthy Lunch choices for under \$10 and they happened to be in this particular restaurant of all places.

Red Bank was fifty miles away from my home in Edison. I made it a point never to shit where I ate, so I would take my little indiscretions out of the immediate area. I slipped the busboy \$20 to take credit for saving the man's life when the news crew decided to interview the Good Samaritan.

Of course, the Mexican immigrant barely knew English let alone the Heimlich and the jig was up pretty quickly. He folded like a bad hand in poker and confessed that I was the real hero. Even when I tried to do the right thing, it somehow ended up being the wrong thing to do. And to add insult to injury, Kennedy and I were in bed making love when the story came on the ten o'clock news. *Fuck!*

So there I was, plastered all over the news, and being praised as a fucking hero over one hundred miles away from where I had told her I would be. Naturally she was

pissed and “preferred” to go up to Martha’s Vineyard to “clear her head” since she was sooo distraught over what I did, allegedly. *Who you gonna trust, me or your lying eyes?* She came home a week later and we never spoke of it again.

“Do you know what time it is?”

“*Nope.*” And I didn’t care. She already knew where I was and what I had been doing. “The credit card company called and said you took out fifteen hundred dollars in cash advances in Chicag-hoes?” Her bottom lip trembled as it took her every ounce of composure not to slap the shit out of me.

“So?”

“So that’s *my* money, motherfucker!”

“Whatever.”

I chuckled as I pushed past her toward our bedroom then pivoted on my heel and spun back around. My head was throbbing and I knew I needed a shower to wash the sweet stink of coitus with Baton Rouge off of my worn out body. She had drained me of most of my bodily fluids, replacing it with her own mixture of saliva, sweat, and love juice. Since my wife was part bloodhound, it was just a matter of time before she caught wind. But just for good measure I decided to take my level of arrogance to another level.

“If you’re so unhappy then why don’t you just divorce me?” No reply. So I poked my chest out a little further, deciding to be an even bigger prick. “I thought so.” I was confident that would never happen. *Too confident.*

## ***You've Been Served***

Kennedy was up and at 'em early as she had done on every Saturday since I had been married to her. She started her morning with an 8:00 yoga class, and then she went to the cleaners and post office before going grocery shopping and returning home by 2:00 like clockwork.

It was typical in that most women can't stay in the house on Saturday, making lists, running errands, and doing all the stuff they couldn't get to during the week. However, men usually won't leave the house on Saturday, concentrating on lawn work and home improvement. I was on my brown, tattered sofa from college, passed out and cradling a half empty bottle of Johnny Walker Black. Kennedy gave me a big, juicy kiss on my lips to awaken me.

"Happy anniversary, baby."

I didn't realize that our anniversary had snuck up on me once again. It was hard to keep up with anniversary dates as many times as Kennedy and I had broken up and gotten back together. I didn't even bother to wake up and wish her the same. I remember opening my eyes just long enough to see her grab her keys, Versace sunglasses, and gym bag as she scurried off in her dressed-in-spandex-from-head-to-toe ass.

My cell phone hummed for what seemed like an infinite amount of times before it finally jarred me. After I could no longer ignore it I unconsciously searched for the Talk button, careful not to move too quickly as to exacerbate the tidal wave of a hangover headache I felt coming on. I felt like I had been drugged. I probably was.

"Hello?"

"Baby?"

"Who's this?"

"It's your wife. Baby, wake up. This is really important and you need to hear every word clearly and I need to make sure you understand."

"Huh?"

"Wake up!" she screamed.

The urgency in her voice finally got my attention. Very rarely did Kennedy raise her voice. Usually she spoke softly, making me crane my six-foot-three-inch frame down nearly a foot to hear her. But not this time. She spoke with conviction, bluntness, and decisiveness. Finally sensing the seriousness of the situation, I sat up to talk to my wife. “Baby, what's wrong?”

“Everything. And it has been for a long time. The drinking, the partying, the not coming home, not being here even when you are home. I need a man who will listen to me, respect me, and grow with me, not to mention go to work once in a while. I can't do this anymore. I'm getting a divorce.”

Those words have echoed in my mind many times. *I'm getting a divorce*. Not “I want a divorce” or “I'm thinking about getting a divorce.” It was “I'm getting a divorce.” The finality of it all was agonizing. I must admit that this woman had the patience of Job.

A few years earlier during one of my drunken stupors, I passed out with one of my various email aliases still visible on the computer. My dumb ass, being technologically challenged, didn't know that if you threw something in the recycle bin, you still had to delete its contents.

She dug out and read every email that I had sent my mistress. Several of them detailed the many vile and disgusting things I had planned the next time I saw her at our regular rendezvous spot. Don't you know she held onto that information for six months before finally revealing that she knew about Anastasia and me all along? What kind of sick person could hold onto that kind of info and climb into bed with me every night and not say a word? That's scary. If the same thing happened to a man, he would blast his wife literally and figuratively the second she stepped in the door.

It was so quiet that I could hear my carotid artery throb until I thought it would explode. I tried to understand it, but I just couldn't seem to wrap my mind around what she was saying. Or maybe I just didn't want to.

“Dapper?”

Unconcerned, I drifted back asleep with the phone cradled to my ear.

“Dapper Carter! You're such an asshole,” she screamed as she hung up.

I really didn't give a shit. I had heard her threats so many times before that I didn't pay her any mind. That was my last mistake.

Eventually the phone fell to the floor with a loud *thud*, awakening me. Stunned, I rambled to the refrigerator. I had a dreamlike moment, stopping in my tracks to take notice of the barren living room. The fifty-inch plasma TV was gone. The \$1,000

Italian marble coffee table was gone. Every picture from the wall, including the Matisse, the Picasso print, and even the *dogs playing poker* hanging in the den was gone, too. *The shit was there yesterday.* The seriousness began to tighten like a noose as I struggled to get my heart and lungs to cooperate with one another.

Opening the refrigerator door, I saw nothing but the rear of the empty refrigerator staring back at me. There was one thing: a *Post-it* hanging from one of the empty shelves. It simply read "*DAPPER, IT'S OVER!*"

*What?* Being taken aback isn't the usual for me but this time I was blown away. I walked through the whole house barely able to comprehend what was taking place. Everything of value was gone along with the China from our wedding, the sterling silver, the Xbox 360. Not one damn thing was left. I stumbled into the bathroom as my legs started to weaken from having realized the gravity of the situation. Another *Post-it* on the mirror reminded me: "*I MEAN IT! IT'S OVER!*"

I thought to myself that this had to be some kind of terrible joke, but we were just getting started. The water in my nightmare was just starting to rise. The doorbell rang. I frantically rushed to the door like a chicken with my head cut off, praying that it was Kennedy, but it wasn't.

Things were getting worse because it wasn't Ed McMahon coming to give me my million-dollar check from Publishers Clearing House either. It was an official-looking dude in a cheap, black suit with scuffed up wingtips and a five o'clock shadow. He looked down at the envelope he was carrying to make sure he had the right person.

"Dapper Carter?"

"Yeah."

"Great name."

"Yeah I know. What can I do for you?" He smugly handed me an envelope.

"You've been served. Have a good life Dapper Carter."

*What an asshole.* The asshole pivoted on his cheap wingtips, leaving me standing dumbfounded in my soon to be former doorway. I quickly opened the letter. It was an official notice of suit for divorce. *I'll be damned. She actually did it.* Time slowed down to an excruciating crawl as the magnitude of the situation began to set in. I didn't even mean what I said to her about getting a divorce, but once again me and my big mouth wrote a check that my ass was not going to be able to cash. I brokenheartedly sat on my ex-steps and began to sob.

### ***Find a New Best Friend?***

Caesar's grandfather left him an enormous brownstone on 145<sup>th</sup> St. and Amsterdam Ave. in the historic Sugar Hill section of Harlem. Once upon a time it was a popular area for wealthy African Americans. Who would have thought that the day would come when Black people would be a minority in Harlem? Gone were the pimps and drug dealers, replaced by Europeans pushing blonde-haired, blue-eyed children in strollers down 8<sup>th</sup> Ave.

But also gone were great Harlemites like Thurgood Marshall, Adam Clayton Powell, Joe Louis, Billie Holliday and Puffy. I knew things were different when I witnessed a young white couple arguing on 125<sup>th</sup> St. and MLK at four o'clock in the morning without a concern in the world. But why would you be concerned if you had the advantage of a constant police presence 'round the clock to protect your assets?

I was going to be staying with Caesar for a couple of weeks since Kennedy had sold the house months before unbeknownst to me, so I had to get out.

Women have a funny way of knowing the relationship is over way before you and have mentally and financially prepared for the breakup. Then they drop the bomb on the guy, and most of us never see it coming because we're too wrapped up in our own shit to realize our wife is unhappy.

We're caught so off guard that there becomes a mad scramble to try and save the relationship, but it's too late. The desperate suggestion for couples counseling eventually falls upon deaf ears.

Disappointed, disenchanted, and disheveled, I laid curled up in the fetal position on Caesar's chocolate sectional. It was a habit I had developed at a very early age whenever I was really bummed out. He offered me a drink from the well-stocked bar he kept, but that was the last thing I needed.

The replay of the day's events ruminated in my fragile mind. I was having a hard time processing it, and an even harder time letting it go.

I tried to call Kennedy, but she had already changed all of her phone numbers, not wanting to speak to me ever again. From that point forward any contact we had would