



'I'm not a thief or a liar and right now you're calling me both,' asserts Pete, who wears a plain blue baseball cap that matches his blue eyes. His thick lips twist into a frown on his clean-shaven face connected to his medium-sized neck that sprouts out of his eighties retro blue-and-yellow striped polo shirt.

Robin, the pale young waif across from him, bats her thin eyelashes with a shocked look of sober discernment across her thin face that some would perhaps call mousey but Pete would call perfect. Her golden hair as though from a Murnau film—as perfect silk—pulled back tight and taut behind her head. A subtle hint of lavender across her eyelids.

The batting of eyelashes somehow alleviates the tension. Pete: 'You make me confuse the relationship between love and sex.'

'I don't know if you're just feeding me lines,' answers Robin.

'I don't know, either.'

'Okay. I think we should play Twenty Questions,' Robin suggests.

'Look, I think that if we're going to keep talking like this, we should go somewhere more private,' says Pete, whose frantic eyes quickly scan the active phantasmagoria all around him in the coffee shop. Through tightened teeth, a forced grin: 'I don't feel very comfortable talking about these things here.'

'I don't want to go somewhere private with you, Peter. I don't trust you.'

'Well, I don't trust you either, Robin.'

'Fine, so let's stay here. And let's play Twenty Questions. So, other than all that, how are you doing?'

'Still cheating till I get caught.' A moment to let the epigram seep in, then: 'The one thing I learned in high school and college was how to put in the least amount of work to warrant the most production.'

'Are you going to go back for your PhD?'

'No. I could *do the work* if I *had* to, but I don't think about computer science all day like most of the people who go for their doctorates. Like, all I think about all day is *movies*. It's what I'm doing now and it's what I *want* to do. It's odd: it wasn't until the last few months that I realized that I've made a life out of doing things incorrectly.'

'You seem to be doing okay. You're surviving.'

'That's the odd thing about it. It's like I've been waiting for somebody to come up and grab me by the shoulders and shake me violently and say 'Don't do that! *Stop* it!' But, nobody ever does and so somehow I just keep going.'

'They tried to do that to you back in high school,' smirks Robin with humble delight.

Pete looks down and away. 'Better to beg forgiveness than to ask for permission, I've always found.' He picks up his coffee, sips it, puts it back down on the table. 'My turn,' he looks back up to her eyes. 'So, how are *you* doing, then? Aside from everything else.'

'Aside from everything else? Not much. I've been going to this therapist. She brings dogs in. You ever hear about that?'

'Sort of. Like *The Dog Whisperer*? They talk to dogs or something to help them?'

'No,' snorts Robin who quickly rocks back and forth in jubilation. 'She doesn't bring in dogs to, like, *treat* the dumb dogs. She brings in dogs to be with the patients like me. The dogs feel our vibrations and empathize with us and then we feel that and it helps us to feel better. It's pretty amazing.'

'Sounds ridiculous. I'd go so far as to say it's re-*dir*kulous.'

'It makes me feel better. You didn't go through everything I went through in the last year and a half.' Robin holds back her tears, looks away from Pete.

'That's true,' Pete leans back in his chair with a cavalier expression across his face.

Without looking back up, Robin asks timidly 'How was Israel, anyway?'

'It was hot and I lost my hat.'

A moment of silence goes by without a word. Robin lifts her head to see Pete there with that same damn cavalier smile across his face. He won't say more.

'What is it now? Question number four? Have you figured out yet what you want?'

'Security and love,' Pete answers with a sly sense of sardonism.

'So, Money and Girls. How *dull*.'

Pete stops the charade, smiles for real, nods as though he gets it and concedes at last. 'You know, it's funny: did I ever tell you that whenever I dream about sexy celebrities—or, at least, celebrities who *I* find sexy—we never have sex? Like, if I dream of Jennifer Jason Leigh or Inara George or Fiona Apple, we always just end up talking, or going to the bookstore, or taking pictures or stuff like that. Literally, we've *never* had sex in my dreams.'

'I thought you never really found famous girls hot.'

'Not really hot. But you know that I've certainly always had a thing for Fiona Apple and Jennifer Jason Leigh. Probably the reason why I always go after fucked-up girls like you is because of my crazy obsession with Jennifer Jason Leigh as a kid until now.'

Robin peers down at her tea, picks it up and sips it gently.

'Did I tell you about my friend Katherine?' asks Pete suddenly. 'It went into my whole jag about misogyny and feminism and everything. She told me this whole story about how she had gotten all drunk when we were still in school and this guy named Andy was on a couch with her and started feeling her up and everything and she was too wasted to do anything about it.'

'Oh my god.'

'And at first I was all upset and was getting riled-up and wanted to take a fuckin' bat to the guy, right? But, then I started thinking about it. And as she told the story it was suddenly like 'Well, wait a second: what were you doing getting all drunk and wandering around the Row at like two in the morning and going into a crazy frat house where everyone—including Andy—is all drunk and already practically in their rooms or having an orgy or whatever anyway?' It's like, *don't fucking do that!* And I suddenly realized that I wasn't mad at this guy *Andy* but at *Katherine* for being so stupid. I mean, the way she told it, the Andy guy sounded just as drunk as she. You know? It's like all these billboards and things that like say 'Just Because She Looks Eighteen Is No Excuse' when in reality, the billboards should read 'Hey Sixteen-Year-Old Girls, Please Don't Sneak Into A Bar With A Fake ID And Shove Your Tits Up Against Some Drunk Guy—He'll Probably Try To Fuck You!' You know?'

'I just hate feminism because it makes it so they we're supposedly able to do anything *except* allow ourselves to be subjugated. Like there's something wrong with a woman *wanting* to be dominated or protected. I *want* to stay home with the kids and take care of the house and my family and my husband. Most feminists seem to think there's something wrong with that, or that I've been brainwashed since being a child or something. But in reality, *they're* the ones trying to force their ways on *me*. I think that's one of the reasons everything is so messed-up these days.'

'Yeah.'

'Because the mom's don't stay home as much anymore, when I *like* the fact that women really are better suited to stay home. They're more maternal and that's really amazing. I don't *want* to be equal to men. I want women to be their own thing. Women are better mothers, black people are better at sports, Asians and Jews are better at math—no offense—and Italians are better at making Italian food!' She smirks.

Pete giggles quietly. 'Yeah.'

'Totally. I think it's great that everyone has their something and it's a shame that feminists and those who are so hypocritical like them try to make like we should all be the same. Some people are better than others at different things. How else do clichés become clichés if they're not true?'

'Mmm hm. And you don't need to say 'No offense,' right? Just say it. No worries.'

'Sorry.'

'It's cool.' Then Pete: 'The thing that's so weird for me is that I've never understood why girls seem to have such an issue with the whole sex thing in the first place. I mean, if I'm your friend and we're in bed and we're cuddling and I wanna rub up against you and it feels nice to me and feels nice to you and we're both friends, what's the problem? I don't get it.'

'It's not about that.'

'It's just so unfair because it seems like the only guys who ever get anything are these total assholes and then the normal guys like me never get anything.'

'You sound like that cartoonist guy who you showed me a documentary of.'

'Crumb.'

'Who?'

'Robert Crumb. No, he's right. Regular guys like me always have trouble with women. Whenever there's a choice between me and another guy, I *always* lose, no matter how much of an obnoxious jerk the other guy is.'

'Really? That must be awful,' says Robin with a certain cynicism Pete chooses to ignore.

'Not really, actually. Serious. Frees me, allows me to have fun and be myself without worrying about anything. I get to be much more playful. I touch her a bunch more and make it a kind of game.'

'And that never works?'

'Nope. No matter how good of a time we're having, no matter how much we're connecting, she always ends up going home with the other guy. It's cool. It's how it goes. Girls is girls. It's the same way with break-ups. Girls. They always go much crazier at first and get all kooked-out and everything, but then they almost always immediately get with some other guy, then they completely forget about the last boyfriend. With dudes, it's the complete opposite.'

'I don't agree with that at all.'

'Look around! You *never* see a cool, hot girl by herself out and about reading a book or just chilling. She's always either with a few girlfriends or she has a boyfriend. She's *never* by herself. Even when I meet some girl who seems kinda cool, she always has to fit it in almost right away: 'Hey, my *boyfriend* has a sweater just like that.' So annoying.'

'I don't see what one thing has to do with the other.'

'I just like going off on girls whenever you're around. Like, how difficult it is to live with girls: they use *so much* toilet paper!'

'Well, it's a good thing then that we so rarely see each other.' Robin sips on her tea.

Pete picks up his coffee, takes down a few gulps, glances around the coffee shop. 'It's so funny to look at a couple and see them acting all normal and being there and just doing their thing and then you think about what they're like at home and the fact that they're gonna be fighting and screaming at each other and fucking and sucking and exchanging fluids, with everything all sticky and creamy and disgusting and sour and bitter and everything else. Just looking at some couple sitting there and being friends and smiling and talking and then they're at home and totally just bleeding and ripping at each other and squeezing breasts and cocks and everything else. It's so weird.'

'Why do you have to be so vulgar all of the time?'

'How would *you* know? Maybe I'm only like this when *you're* around.'

'Look, do you love me?'

'No, Peter. I don't love you. I really do...not...love...you. Okay?'

'See that? We *do* have something in common. I don't love me either.'