



A delightful laugh-out-loud
romantic comedy

Drica Pinotti

International Bestselling Author

**My Crazy
(Sick)
Love**

**Girls
CAN**

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(Sick)
Love

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To Sammy B,
For believing in my talent and my ability to
accomplish my dreams.
Thanks for being my biggest supporter and
for smothering me with all that love.



1

When the alarm went off at six-thirty I thought my head was going to explode. Not that I had never expected that to happen someday. That the veins in my brain would just erupt, like some sort of sleeping, devious volcano, waiting for the right moment to leap into action and whisk me away, from my bed to a coma, and from the coma to another astral plane, once and for all. But in reality, it was just a pounding headache. What scared me was that this was no simple and pure case of cephalalgia. If it had been a migraine, two aspirins and I would be good as new. But, this was different. My stomach was thrashing about from side to side, like a washing machine with only soap and water, no clothes, going back and forth, up and down, leaving me with a feeling that needed no medical genius or specialist to diagnose as nausea.

I stayed in bed no more than five minutes, carefully analyzing all the symptoms, a total of four, to be absolutely certain my liver was a rotten mess. That's because the night before I had spent just three short hours having a few drinks with friends at a new bar that opened on the corner of 83rd and 3rd. Cool place, with good

music and beautiful people. But, a little dark for my eyes, which we all know could destroy my sight. Well, you might as well know right from the get-go that although I panic every morning after thinking I have cirrhosis or cancer of the liver and pancreas - just so you have an idea of how vivid my imagination can get - I go right on drinking. I must confess that I also enjoy a cigarette after a good cup of coffee or a meal fit for a king. It is this combination that gives me a month full of reasons to believe that one day I am bound to have serious throat problems or lung cancer.

Back to my liver. I woke up and decided to make a checklist of the symptoms before my thoughts short-circuited and I fell into despair. The indisposition alone was enough for me to not want to get out of bed. I had every sign of a liver problem. I also felt a pain in my stomach, right there on the right side, under my ribs, lots of nausea, and I even threw up (three times I had counted so far) I could feel my liver pounding in my chest, alongside my heart, and they both gleefully skipped about and danced in perfect harmony in my rib cage. And that made me very, very nauseous. Although I knew precisely what the doctors were going to tell me, since this was not the first nor will it be the last time I thought I have cirrhosis, I went and called one. Actually, I called many of them.

I opened my phone book, which my friends call DD (dial a disease). I have an updated A to Z list in there with the best doctors in town and their specialties. There are also other possible health care professionals and

entities to which I may need to resort to. Such as hospitals and customer service centers of more than 50 reliable laboratories I was able to catalog. Drugstores, all of which are open 24 hours a day and within a 20-mile radius of my apartment. Under the letter H, I had all my hepatologists.

I tried talking to Dr. Richard Ember – with whom I have the most contact with and one of the few who still answers my desperate phone calls – over the phone. But he wasn't in, so I left a message on his answering machine.

“Dr. Ember, this is Amanda Loeb. I need to talk to you urgently. I have cirrhosis. I'm sure of it, but I need you to confirm the diagnosis. Please, get back to me as soon as you can. It's really urgent. Thank you.”

With those I didn't know as well, I tried to set an appointment for that same day, early, before they even began working at their office. After all, it was Friday, and it doesn't look good at all to miss work, especially on a Friday. I confess I find this sort of “veiled” protocol pretty stupid. After all, it isn't as if we can choose the most appropriate day to get sick. I was only able to get squeezed in at one of them. I had to practically beg the secretary to find me a little opening in the doctor's extremely tight schedule, according to her.

“Brenda, your name is Brenda, right?” I asked trying to win her over.

“That's right. Amanda, unfortunately Dr. White's schedule is booked for the day. I'm certain he would love to see you, but it just won't be possible.”

“Brenda, please! Take another look. Check if someone hasn’t confirmed an appointment? I’m having a liver crisis. If my diagnosis is correct, I only have a few months to live. In that case, waiting one week for an appointment is out of the question. Please understand, I don’t have much time,” I begged.

“Look Amanda, what I can do is schedule you as his first patient since I can’t squeeze you in anywhere. I’ll tell Dr. White to arrive 15 minutes earlier than usual, but if he can’t, you may have to wait to be seen if the other scheduled patients arrive on time. Is that all right for you? That’s the best I can do.”

“That’s great for me. I’ll get there before Dr. White starts seeing his patients. Thanks a lot, Brenda. You’re an angel.” I said, clearly trying to flatter her. Many people in Manhattan hate that type of buttering up, but I could tell she liked it.

That’s when I paused to reflect. I had never stopped to think about so many people, who like myself, suffer from silent cirrhosis and have their symptoms masked by a Thursday night of drinking with their friends.

After insisting I truly had all the symptoms of cirrhosis in its critical stages, and that perhaps I would be dead by next week, Brenda reluctantly agreed to give me the first appointment of that morning. And so, I went.

First, of course, I needed to study my case so I would be ready with technical terms and arguments when it came time to give my report to the doctor. I have to feel confident about my own diagnosis. So, I went to

my personal library, my collection of health care books that range from: *YOU: The Smart Patient* to *Merck Manual of Medical Information* (the updated version!) and including *The Complete Manual of Things that Might Kill You: A Guide to Self-Diagnosis for Hypochondriacs*, where I saw my disease as crystal clear as mineral water. I had now completed my diagnosis and knew precisely what I had. It was a lesion in my liver cells, the hepatocytes, which results in the formation of fibrosis. There was no cure and it could EVEN lead to cancer. There you go. CANCER. That was just the word to drive me completely insane! I have cancer!

I called my mom. Actually, I do that every time I go into a crisis. After all, being a mother goes beyond giving birth. It is necessary to participate.

“Help, help... You’re not going to believe it (*I think she thought: I bet I won’t!*), but I’m going to die.

“Good morning to you too, Amanda.” She answered calmly, before hearing me out.

And after one of my nosophobic speeches, I made the poor thing go to the doctor with me. I swore this time it was true. She would hear right from the mouth of a specialist that I have the worst of all diseases found in humankind (a malignant tumor had taken over my liver!) and I only have a few months to live.

How it all began...

I really can't pinpoint when this all began. Can anyone tell me when depression sets in? Precisely when someone becomes an alcoholic or drug addict? When anorexia takes over a healthy creature's body and soul, transforming it into something pale and corpse-like and full of vanity? Which was the first drink or first drunken stupor that led to an alcoholic existence until the person realized he had to go to AA meetings? Can anyone do that? I can't either.

When it hit me, I was already refusing to greet people with kisses on their cheeks, claiming I had a horrible cold. I would place my hand over my mouth and simulate a cough and hoarseness. And that was just to avoid contact with anyone's dirty skin. Who knows what sort of virus people are carrying! Who knows what their habits are in terms of hygiene, if they have any at all? Carrying around my own viruses is more than enough, and Interferon is an extremely expensive medication! Besides, in my research I have already read that a person's mouth is a source of countless forms of contamination. That a bite from a human being (how ironic) can even kill. I am an intelligent person and as such I have decided to not run any unnecessary risks. When I understood I needed help, it was already too late and I was walking around with my antibacterial hand sanitizing gel in my handbag, disinfecting my hands after opening each and every one of the thousand doorknobs between the ground floor of the building and the room where I work in a nonprofit company.

My mother tells me that when I was about five years old, I would watch her carefully take care of my grandfather who was suffering from a serious case of pneumonia. It was so strong he didn't make it. She often diminished her functions as a housewife and mother to a maid. She dedicated herself exclusively to grandpa. I remember how that bothered me. I loved him too, but I didn't understand his pain. I was just a child, and as such, I couldn't understand why she, of three children, had to abandon her husband and daughters to dedicate herself full-time to this task. Obviously, today I understand.

Months later, she says, I had already demonstrated my first signs of insanity. I would feel feverish and get the chills just to get her and my father's attention. While my youngest sister, beautiful and so talented, only had to smile, I had to succumb to pharyngitis or, in extreme cases, tuberculosis. And all I had to do was cough twice and the world would begin spinning all around me. Now you can begin to fathom why my little sister "hates" me to this day.

However, as only natural, I disagree with this version of my sickness saga. I can't accept the fact that the truth could be so simplistic: A girl develops a very serious mental disorder just to call her parents' attention. Just to get ice cream and toys or to miss a few days of school.

What I do remember is that at the age of 14 I was already walking about with a clinical medicine book under my arm. I loved reading works like *The Pill Book* or *The Johns Hopkins Complete Home Guide to Symptoms and Remedies*, while my friends read those sugar sweet novels

by Nancy Drew or books that were *in* like *Christiane F.* I watched every episode of *Mysteries of Medicine*, and I'm still obsessed with every medical-based TV series. I would discuss the most whimsical syndromes with my doctors to the point of driving them and my mother insane. My friends thought I was going to study medicine. But, people could never understand that reading about medicine was not my hobby nor something that gave me pleasure. It was downright despair. By the way, that is how, ready to begin a brilliant medical career, I went to study Law at Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut. And during the time I wasn't going nuts because of every pore in my body that was functioning improperly, I was studying to be the best in my graduating class.

In other words, I have no idea how my paranoia began. What I do know is that I am far from well and my panic attacks are getting more and more frequent. I've been able to make totally insane associations. I can transform a simple toothache into maxillary cancer. An itchy elbow becomes an urticarial eruption, and a simple sneeze, pneumonia. That's why I have already thought about joining a help group, like HA - Hypochondriacs Anonymous - to give vent to my "many probable diseases," neuroses and eccentricities. And who knows, maybe I can find a boyfriend who can put up with me for another three crises. The other probable hypothesis, speaking rationally, is to surrender to my mother's constant pleading and finally seek help from a psychiatrist. Which I absolutely refuse to do!

Just as I was walking out the door, the phone rang. It was Dr. Ember. He had heard the brief report about the case, gave me a short list of exams, which I carefully took note of, and promised to take on my case. Now a little calmer, I went for my appointment with Dr. White.

I met my mother in the lobby of the building. As soon as we got to the right floor, we could see Brenda. She was sitting behind a counter organizing medical charts in a file. As soon as she saw me, she blurted, "You must be Amanda?" *She most certainly detected the despair in my eyes.* "Yes, I am." *I answered a little uneasily.* "Dr. White hasn't arrived yet, but he shouldn't be long. Please sit and wait," she said.

Of course, I'll sit and wait. Where does she think I can go with my liver in this state? Does she think I have somewhere better to be? Perhaps a party? Or that I have the physical disposition to run a marathon?

When Dr. White arrived, my mother and I were still the only ones in the spacious waiting room. So, as soon as he settled in, he came right out to call us in.

Both of the doctors I consulted asked me for the same things (I think there is some sort of medical conspiracy against my person and I need to reorganize my phone book, perhaps including doctors from New Jersey to break up this cartel).

Blood tests, an assessment of hepatic enzymes, an ultrasound, and a few others. "And the biopsy?" I shouted before the visit finished as he had yet to ask for that exam, crucial in my opinion.

"Isn't anyone going to examine a piece of my liver?" I would not calm down until someone came in with at least minimal knowledge of our language – as we all know, that is not a strong point for doctors – to explain my problem, or lack thereof, in details.

"Amanda, calm down and let Dr. White do his job." *My mother was visibly embarrassed.*

"Amanda, what you have cannot be cirrhosis, don't worry," said Dr. White.

Don't worry? I thought. How could I not worry if the only thing I do is worry. Day and night studying and thinking about the next perfidious illness that was going to attack me and leave me in a bed for the rest of my days. While I was fighting my thoughts, he continued explaining my case to my mother, who listened attentively.

I ran all the required tests and waited for the results. Two hours later, without further delay, the visit continued more or less from the same point it had stopped earlier.

"The exams we've already analyzed are sufficient to ensure us that what Amanda has is no more than a heavy hangover." *He said that almost smiling.* I could feel my mother's eyes burning into me, wanting to exterminate me. Meanwhile, he went on.

“A patient with real cirrhosis (and he looked at me) will have redness in the hands, red blotches on their stomach, enlarged liver, edema (swelling) in some parts of the body and a series of altered results in lab exams.” *He spoke slowly.* Besides my dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and pain, which by that time were already affecting my soul, I had nothing that could be considered a symptom of cirrhosis.

I paid for the appointment up front because Dr. White is one of the best in his area, and as such, he does not accept health insurance plans. I paid in cash, while my mother watched, bewildered by yet another blow to my finances. This time nearly six hundred dollars between the visit and exams. I will uselessly try to get my health care plan to reimburse me, and, as always, I can already see the rejection letter.

“We are sorry to inform you, but these expenses are not reimbursable, blah blah blah blah...” And I’ll just have to deal with the health costs on my own.

I walked back to the office, just fifteen blocks from Dr. White’s. My mother angrily abandoned me at the subway station on 77th and Lexington. On the way, I stopped at Crumbs Bake Shop to get a large decaf coffee with “plenty of sweetener” and a large slice of cake with “plenty of fat and sugar.” I know how absurd that seems, but what can you expect from someone who swears a hangover is actually cirrhosis? To be sensible? After all, I had to take advantage of the fact that my liver was in such good shape. I continued towards the office on 72nd and 3rd. In my hands, I held my snack and a prescription for

two medications: an analgesic and an antacid, and the recommendation to drink plenty of water.

I was still unconvinced my illness was not something to be taken seriously. I arrived at the office and went directly to the chapter on liver diseases in my clinical medicine bible (I keep a compendium at home and one of those pocket books in the drawer at my office). If I don't have cirrhosis yet I am at least going to begin preventing it! I need to give my liver a vacation! Tomorrow (if there is one), I will become a teetotaler. I will not drink anything with an alcohol content greater than 1%. I will begin a diet (tomorrow!), with little protein, little salt and little sugar, so my liver can rest. Since there is no shortage of medications for the liver, thank God, I will leave conventional treatment for when the disease stops being so stubborn and shows the doctors, especially Dr. White, that it *is* there, hiding, silently, waiting for the right moment to leap out and attack. And I truly hope that day comes quickly, otherwise, it may be just too late for me.



2

Horrible start to the week. It went against all my expectations, because I had promised myself I would start my week in a healthier fashion. No doctor's appointments, which would have been my first Monday free of doctors' offices in five months. I spent all day Saturday without taking the slightest peek at any article about diseases. I did not read the obituaries in the *New York Times*, and as a result, I finished the weekend taking only three capsules of a powerful antibiotic (because no one can convince me I do not have a urinary tract infection, and I have already heard that I could lose my two kidneys with a crisis like this one). I also took one of those whatchamacallits because my gastritis (I think I'm on the verge of an ulcer) just won't let up. And Saturday night, I only spent two hours on the Internet, a record for me, looking up details on a new super powerful flu virus since I heard on the news that next winter it is going to be stronger than ever. It's probably going to infect the entire city with its new mutating version, transforming my body into a walking incubator.

It all seemed perfect, a dream-like weekend. I was even beginning to think how lucky I was, can you imagine? Forty-eight hours without a single medical incident. That's a dream come true! But perfection doesn't exist, so you don't have to pinch me. All hopes were destroyed on Sunday! And now it's eight twenty-five on Monday morning, and guess where I am? You're right if you said it: sitting on a comfortable white sofa next to a pile of magazines on health, yoga, and getting in shape. Besides, of course, those frightful gossip tabloids about the lives of celebrities! (*Madonna switched boyfriends again! How could I ever go on without that information?*). There is a chubby, smiling receptionist in front of me in the sizable lobby. She can't stop eating her cereal bars packed with chemicals. But, they are DIET bars, so she thinks she's going to lose weight healthfully. In other words, I am at the office of Dr. Linda, my new gynecologist. And for those who have yet to notice, I must say: I am on the verge of a nervous breakdown!

I don't like to blame anyone for my anxiety crises. Far be it from me to say the one to blame for my being here now is Julia, my best friend of more than 5 years. But I cannot deny it. She *is* the one to blame. All because on Saturday, she had to go and invent a party to celebrate her 30th birthday. She claims it is as special as anyone's 15th birthday, and she had to be debuted to society for the second time. How ridiculous! When I hit 30, which will happen in three months (if I'm still alive by then, because the way things are going, I can't guarantee anything), please, forget about me! I've already told all my friends

and enemies alike: don't send me flowers, unless I'm dead. And don't look at this as some sort of lack of gratitude (although it may look that way), but how can I thank anyone who sends a biological weapon into my house? That's not a present. It's an attempt on my life! Flowers are like bombs to my immunological system, triggering a very serious allergic reaction in me. No one can imagine how I feel. It's more or less like this: flowers give off pollen, a cloud of almost invisible dust that floats about the air. Well, that pollen gets stuck in my throat, attacks my bronchial tract, causing an inflammation in my airways, and I begin to suffocate. A few minutes later, if I don't get immediate medical attention, I could become just another cadaver among the statistics. Now tell me. Is that a present to send someone? I don't want anyone calling either. I'm too busy and don't have time to waste. Send no emails! Do nothing! Please understand. I will be extremely ashamed and depressed for having crossed the finish line for old age. Being just a few years away from menopause and including geriatricians to my list of doctors are not pleasant thoughts. So, I will have no motive at all to celebrate, but rather one to lament. And the only present I'll love getting, if someone wants to give me it, is a week at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. That way, I can get a complete check-up, from the tip of my toes to the last cell in my brain. And I will know precisely about all the evil that has been afflicted on my organism by advanced age.

But, back to the facts. Julia included Diego among her guests. A really super cute guy I dated for a long time,

like about two weeks, three days and 4 hours. And after taking me to the hospital for the third time in that enormous stretch of time, he decided to break up with me. He decided, all on his own mind you, that the relationship was no longer viable and disappeared without leaving a trace. That's right. I also think people nowadays show no sympathy towards the health of others. I remember my last crisis in front of Diego as if it were yesterday (and from the looks of how he stared at me when he entered the party, I think he did too). I was suffocating. My lungs didn't have 1 ml of air, and I was thrashing about against the wall, in total despair. At the same time, I was forcing my index finger down my throat towards my trachea, trying to perform a tracheotomy, with no success at all, in search of air. He went white as a sheet and almost fainted. Dreadful, I admit, but rather than help me, he went and dialed 911. Can you believe that? I was dying, my lips purple and my face pale as a ghost and the guy didn't have the guts to shove a pen tube into my throat! Talk about insensitive!

I never heard from him again after that. He didn't accompany me in the ambulance and never even gave me a call to see if I was okay. He didn't even have the nerve to do that. And now, there was Diego, standing in front of me, gorgeous, with the whitest smile I had ever seen, which is why I had imagined he'd be the right guy for me. He has a beautiful smile, healthy mouth, and consequently fewer bacteria than all other men on Earth. *I remember thinking, which is, by the way, the biggest mistake made by humankind, the second good reason I had stayed with*

him for so long: the sex. The sex was just incredible! He made a point of wearing EXTRA thick condoms. Which was a glad surprise! And he was so clean (so was that!), beautiful, well-groomed feet, good smell of deodorant... yummy... And then that... Those memories would have sufficed, but once I added the three shots of some distilled alcohol that blended right in with my anti-inflammatory medication and went straight to my head like fireworks, there I was groping Diego again.

You know all that you kiss me and I'll kiss you, you rub me here and I'll rub you there, I took a couple of breaks to powder my nose and gargle efficiently with Listerine. After all, I had to reduce any risk of contracting herpes or something like that, so gargling with mouthwash was absolutely necessary. After an hour of shaking about to the sound of that loud and unbearable music which pierced my extremely delicate ears, Diego finally invited me to go somewhere a little quieter. We went from there to Mr. West, a new lounge in Chelsea, where Julia decided to gather her friends and share the onset of her decadence, straight to my place, or better, to my bed. From there to my discovery was just a hop, skip, and a jump! Or a fright! I had dried up! I was frigid!

"Amanda, are you okay?" He asked, frightened. "Of course, I'm fine." I answered, but I was unable to be very convincing.

"You're not going to have another one of those attacks, are you?" He was even more frightened.

"Attacks? What attacks?" I said trying to change the subject.

As he tried to get back to the initial maneuvers of what promised to be an exceptional night of sex, I was thinking of ways to first get him off of me and then out of my apartment. A thousand thoughts rushed through my mind. Why don't I feel anything? Why do I have that horrible feeling that I'm doing something against my will? I want to be here. I invited Diego to my apartment. So why? Why don't I feel anything? *Questions, questions, thousands of questions and no answers. I had to act. I had to understand what was going on with me.*

The first thing to do was to get Diego out of my apartment as he was getting ready to take a shower. I tried not to do anything scary, because this time he would never forgive me and would go about telling everyone I was some sort of half-dead version of Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*. I am a respectable attorney. I have to keep my reputation intact, regardless of how many Prozac's it takes. I quickly began to fake a few sneezes and invent some highly contagious virus. *Didn't you hear the news? Everyone in NY is coming down with it.* I mentioned it, without trying to sound weird, but I don't think it worked.

As soon as he went through the door, grabbing his Urban Outfitters jacket, and visibly upset, I was certain I would never see him again. Nevertheless, I then took my second precaution and called my kid sister. I know that because I'm the oldest I should be the most experienced in these situations, but my sister has always been the more mature between us, you see? Lauren has already been married for almost five years, an eternity

according to the words of her own husband, Eric. They have a beautiful and normal daughter, although she does already simulate her first cramps, but nothing too serious yet!

I called Lauren and asked her a question of utmost urgency and importance, ranking an 8, and only exceeded by degrees 9 and 10, Cancer and Death.

“Can you tell me how many women suffer from frigidity? I’ve already searched the Internet and the results of all my research are inconclusive. *I said with some indignation.*

“I have no idea how many women suffer from frigidity, but I imagine it’s a small number. And if it’s big, I think many women don’t admit the problem, out of shame, I don’t know. *She answered as calmly as possible, as if we were talking about a hair loss problem.*

I cannot understand and I find it very worrisome how a person can live like Lauren. She never thinks she can get sick. She never tires of bragging about her perfect health and she says she only accepts dying of old age. She almost never goes to the doctor. Besides routine visits and exams, she refuses any sort of preventive treatment or new natural experiments. I confess that at times I envy her normality and apparent calm in the face of issues like death. Just mentioning the word sends a chill up my spine.

I spent almost two and a half hours arguing with Lauren, who irritatingly tried to convince me that the fact I had not had an orgasm with someone who was practically a stranger was absolutely normal. She kept

saying I had no need to worry. But at that point I was already convinced that all of the arguments she was using were just part of her role as a sister to calm me down, or a way for me to stop pestering her anymore with my sexual crisis.

I hung up and went straight to the source that has always satisfied my thirst for knowledge, or as my mother says, the source of all my problems, the Internet.

Since research on the subject was not unreliable, I decided to read reports from women who openly admitted to suffering from the lack of sexual pleasure, like me. Then, I tried a chatroom to discuss the matter, but whenever I brought up the topic, the women began to sign off, one after the other. I still haven't been able to understand this taboo. But for me, someone who has just been diagnosed as frigid a mere few hours ago and who has no intention of "embodying" roles (because no one can convince me that most of these "multiple orgasm" cases are actually true. I think it's a bunch of lies or just pure delirium.), there's only the right to remain silent so my words cannot be used against me.

Among reports and co-reports, I found the explanation I needed there: "Frigidity is a sexual disorder in women, characterized by a lack of desire and any sexual response even when stimulation is adequate" (and here I must be fair with Diego, the stimulation was far beyond adequate). Well then, if it's a disorder, in the language I know quite well, it's a disease. And if it's a disease, I have it!

Researching a little more, I realized there is also a line of reasoning by some doctors who do not think this way, and they do not consider it a disease, which in my opinion is a purely chauvinistic attitude! You can bet that study was conducted by some man with nothing to do. You mean to tell me only *their* thingee deserves treatment??!! Pathology, prosthesis, tons of medication, surgeries, then Viagra, Cialis... And what to do when we are unable to receive pleasure? With what dries up? With what doesn't thrive? Tell me. Show me a little light at the end of the tunnel.

Whatever it is: disease, disorder, emotional problem, "inability" or "inexperience" (the last two refer to the partner, of course), doesn't interest me. I am frigid, and if it is temporary or definitive, I still have no means to know. For now, it is only a verified fact, and that's enough for me to enter into a state of consummation.

What matters in all this nomenclature is my total lack of desire to have sex and my own private desert, my semi-arid being, which is on fire, but not out of pleasure. I want treatment! I need urgent treatment! But who should I look up? A sexologist? A psychologist? Or gynecologist? A priest?

Well, based on my literary findings, this condition may have a physical, psychological, emotional or religious (the reason for the priest) cause, and it is common to have a combination of two or more sources. Among the psychological causes, depression (I have), stress (I have a lot), and relationship conflicts (I don't have, but would sure love to) are the most frequent. The

physical causes may be thyroid disorders (I think I have), an increase in the prolactin hormone, which is directly related to the hypothesis (it is involved in the production of milk - I am a woman, so I must have that), lack of feeling related to diabetes (I eat chocolate all day - could it be diabetes? Just to be sure, I need to check that, too), alcoholism (yes, my occult cirrhosis will not allow me to lie) or the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants (I use them all!). I don't think the emotional causes need to be checked right now, after all, I feel completely fulfilled, emotionally speaking. And religious ones? I am honestly much too concerned about my own health problems to think that having sex could be some sin and that my frigidity could be some sort of punishment. I decided to be practical and removed the priest and confession from my list!

Going back to my symptoms, I must point out that anxiolytics are an absurdity to me: if the lack of sex transforms me into a pool of anxiety, and the use of anxiolytics can cause frigidity, anxiolytics - medication that should control anxiety - are the actually root of my anxiety! That's pure logic!!

I also learned that frigidity may also be caused by discomfort produced by a bladder or vaginal infection (just as I suspected, I have a urinary tract infection!), or by an endometriosis (when cells from one of the layers of the uterus are deposited outside it), "surgical removal of the ovaries or estrogen deficiencies in menopause" *I read out loud*. Menopause. I knew turning 30 would not bring me wonderful things like everyone had insisted would

happen. Maturity, bull, it's called old age. Who do these people think they're fooling? *I thought.*

With my head full of theories, I decided to visit a gynecologist first. If in general the changes are to occur from the inside out, so be it. Besides, my health plan doesn't cover

psychologists. Medicare probably thinks it's a luxury, and a mind as good and well resolved as mine doesn't need "superfluous treatment."

Once in the room, I explained my case to Dr. Linda Kayes, in detail (I don't think I'm ever going back there). My anguish led to me choosing a doctor's office that was not part of my daily routine and I thought my fame as a hypochondriac had yet to reach those neighborhoods. But I guess I was wrong. Those receptionists who answer at most ten calls per day must sit around gossiping with each other all day long because they have nothing else to do. That's it. They must be spreading the news about me. Now, besides being sick, no one believes me.

"Amanda, the fact that you had unsatisfactory sexual relations once does not mean you are frigid", she said, obviously minimizing my state.

"So, what's going on? This is something I've never had. I know I have many health problems. But when it came to sex, everything always went well. And now this..." I was saying, when she interrupted me.

"I don't think it's anything serious. But Amanda, if it *is* an infection, we can treat it with antibiotics. Let's

run a few tests and depending on the results, we'll know what to do", she said patiently.

"How many tests?" I asked anxiously.

She laughed and continued her explanation in a condescending tone, like a first-grade teacher. And I felt like that stupid little student who needed the slow explanation in order to understand any subject.

"If any hormonal alteration shows up, we're going to correct the problem calmly," she added.

Calmly? I thought. She must be nuts! Like I said, I don't think I'm coming back here.

One week of waiting for the results, no infection (I think my warrior bacteria are in such a state of inanition that they are feeding off of any other bacteria that dare to get close), and hormones at ridiculously normal levels. *This is impossible. Either this laboratory doesn't do a good job, or they went and changed my exams with those of some perfectly healthy girl. Do I have to change labs again? I changed labs five times just last month and I'm running out of alternatives.* I promised myself I would start believing in the lab results. BUT, I CAN'T! My symptoms are so obvious that I can't understand how, with all the technology involved in lab work nowadays, they still can't detect my diseases.

I only know I arrived at the doctor's office wanting some sort of miracle pill (some sort of sexual stimulant) and I left with the following instructions: "do pelvic muscle exercises, which can help you feel more pleasure during sex." Yeah, exercises with my pelvic muscles... in other words... "Amanda, you need to start

masturbating.” That’s a good one! The lady charges \$200 per visit and dishes out that kind of advice.

I need something a little stronger than that. Doesn’t she get it? Something like a shot of Oxytocin, for example. I know it doesn’t exist. But, it sure would be great if people with problems creating ties or having good sexual relations could use a medication that would increase their levels of Oxytocin, the hormone related to love. Imagine! An injection of hormones that shoots straight to your brain and charges your emotions, and five minutes later you have become the most loving creature in the universe. It could be used as a violence inhibitor. *Amanda Loeb, you are a genius. I must patent the idea.* I could call it the Cupid Drug, or the Love Pill, who knows? *Yes, I am a genius!*

I was upset the entire week, but tried to follow Dr. Kayes’ instructions. I only stopped all movement down below when it was time to eat, so I wouldn’t choke. Twenty-four hours of daily contractions!! I actually think I felt cramps!! And every once in a while, a little sign of pleasure, I must confess.

Now, I can only think about one thing, since I’ve already gone through so many self-tests. I urgently need to try it out for real, with a real partner. I thought of calling Diego and asking him to help me out with this – but I quickly decided against that. I think it highly unlikely he’d agree to help me give my reputation a new start, but I must try. The worst that could happen would be for me to get a big fat NO.

I decided to put that matter aside for a while and occupy my mind with other thoughts. Temporarily forgetting about the matter seemed to be the most intelligent and healthiest thing to do for now. After all, I need the other part literally involved to solve my case. And as you can see, I have no one to help me out right now. When you really think about it, who needs a man when you have a stock of Godiva chocolate in the closet?



3

I wake up almost every morning at the same time, 7:15. Normally *indisposed*. I get up with just enough energy to slowly crawl from the bed to the bathroom. After I expel the first morning toxins from inside of me, I truly wake up.

I have to pay more attention to my morning chores. And, with my eyes still half asleep, I analyze my entire body in search of any signs of abnormality or symptoms of illness. Whenever I wake up feeling *good* (which rarely happens!), I immediately think I may have one of those taciturn, silent diseases, the worst kind, you know? If I wake up with a headache, I quickly take an Extra Strength Tylenol. And, if it's almost miraculous effectiveness does not quell the pain, I begin to despair. I no longer see the symptom as a simple little headache. I start from the principle that a resistant headache may be a migraine or even an aneurism. And if I must choose, I go for the second option, of course! I begin a countdown, expecting the worst to happen. In this case, the worst is a CVA (cerebral vascular accident, or stroke). And if I wake up feeling *really bad*, call the medical team, a priest, and

my family members, because there is no doubt this will be my last day.

Then, I recover my mental sanity and what's left of my dignity (I need to rescue both each and every day). This is generally after I talk to my mother on the phone, which is already part of the routine, since I talk to her every day. I decide I don't have an aneurism and I don't need a doctor, and brush my teeth instead. I try to find some way to move on to the practical part of my life. I hang up and drag myself into the shower, in search of a hot bath. But nothing in my life is that simple. I spend a long time examining every square inch of my body and only after the third check do I finally feel ready to turn off the water.

Every day of my life begins this way. It's the first sign of my disorder. It's what I remind myself of every day: "Yes, you have a problem. You have a serious problem. You need professional help. The kind you refuse to get."

I take another ten minutes trying to decide what to wear. I must admit that unlike most women, this is a rather banal task for me. I'm a practical person. And, as such, I have all my clothes previously arranged in my closet. Just like my medicine cabinet, my wardrobe functions with a color code and by order of priority. Clothes fit for work are organized in outfits on the right. Clothes fit for weekends and leisure on the left. And clubbing clothes and eveningwear are in the middle. The pieces are put together on hangers, forming matching outfits, by color and style. Shoes are positioned right

under each hanger, which also makes my life much easier each morning. Some people would say this is a symptom of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), but I prefer to believe I am only pragmatic, and I refuse to waste my time in front of a mirror every morning.

I make my own coffee in an Italian coffee maker that Eric, my brother-in-law, got me for Christmas. It is incredibly versatile. It grinds Colombian beans I buy at Dean & DeLuca and boils the water and prepares my coffee the way I like it, strong and full-bodied. I love that good coffee smell that permeates the apartment every morning. At times like this, I even feel like a normal person. Seated at my tiny kitchen table for two, with my "I Love NY" mug in one hand, I calmly skim through *The New Yorker* with the other.

I follow my routine, taking my pills. A pack with 8 capsules of a vitamin complex I've been taking for two months. Ever since I visited a GNC store and was convinced (rather easily) by a clerk that I should take them because they are the *in* thing. "*All the celebrities are taking them, didn't you know? I swear. You know that actress from the film... what's it called? Can't remember now. But she's 60 and has the face and body of a 35-year-old. These vitamins are really amazing. And they combat free radicals and the effects of aging.*" She said as she analyzed my skin. And as always, she didn't have to give me a very elaborate line for me to buy two extra-strength kits, enough for two months. I paid \$49 plus tax for each. That could be added to other expenses made in such a manner (irresponsible!) and blow my credit card limit again. But who cares about

money when we are talking about health? Eight gigantic pills I shove down my throat, every morning, right after enjoying my cup of coffee and bagel with olive cream cheese.

I'm not someone obsessed with slimness. But everyone knows obesity is also a disease. And as such, it also enters my life, unfortunately transforming food into an enemy of pleasure. So, I try to control my weight with some strict rules. I do it with actual pain in my heart, because I love to eat! During the week, I eat little and only healthy foods. I always have those vitamin compounds at home, the kinds that say they replace a meal. Shakes and soups that alternately enter my menu during my weeknights. They help me maintain my BMI (body mass index) at an acceptable limit for my bone structure. And then on weekends, I let it all go. Everything goes, from brunch with Eggs Benedict and bacon, to a fat, juicy hamburger for lunch and potato soup with cheddar cheese for dinner. And then, if I begin to feel guilty, I jog for two hours in Central Park and feel forgiven. Three kilos lighter, in my head, and I feel ready for another week.

Physical exercise is a challenge for me. At this point, I am able to infringe upon three of the eight capital sins. First, because whenever I think about it, I immediately get lazy, something that happens a lot. Just talking about it makes me tired. The association with vanity is obvious. Don't believe anyone who says they spend 4 hours (minimum) per day at a fitness center just for health reasons. I can't understand those people! How

can they spend their days and nights off in a crowded room, full of strange equipment and sweaty people, thinking it's awesome? Some even think it's a cool place to pick someone up. Do you believe that? Here's where I violate the third sin. I die of envy of people who have the disposition to care for their body with that much dedication. But, what can I do? I'm lazy, and my health doesn't help. I know that physical exercise is fundamental for aging with dignity, without arthritis, diabetes and circulation problems. Not to mention flaccidity, cellulite and other things that drive women nuts. But seriously, having stretch marks is not a sin, and cellulite is not a violation. So, I see no need to move my body from the soft sofa I have sitting in the corner of my living room. On a rainy weekend or in the winter, absolutely no way. I'm an assumed sedentary woman. Jogging increases my blood pressure. Swimming? I hate it. Soul-cycle? OMG! My legs hurt. Muscle-building? Boring. The only parts of my body I exercise every day are my fingers, on my computer keyboard. An average of fifty words per minute, which I'm proud of.

First, I check my iPhone to see if I've received any messages during my reinvigorating nap. Then, another look at my agenda. Professional commitments and doctors' appointments are always the first part of my day. My day, which begins on some waiting room sofa, or at a work meeting outside of the office and ends up in my living room, surrounded by thousands of papers at around 8 at night. Every day.

I leave home and walk the streets of Manhattan. I live just eight blocks from the office. That really facilitates my life since I also suffer from claustrophobia and many other imaginable phobias. This makes it impossible to use the subway or public transportation in general. I've already tried. Unfortunately walking the station's corridors wearing my anti-virus mask just doesn't work. The kind the Japanese also wear to avoid contamination. Here, I need to make a small observation: I love Tokyo. It's the cleanest city on the planet. The day I decide to leave Manhattan, I will certainly move there. But, back to the facts. Unfortunately, they - the masks - are not considered stylish in New York, and the sound of contained laughter as I pass by wearing mine is extremely intimidating. I admit it may be slight exaggeration, but don't forget: I'm sick!

So, I prefer walking, something I enjoy a lot. Sometimes, I allow myself to pause in the middle of the rat race just to observe people, cars, in short, the life of the city in movement. My brief respite is suddenly interrupted by a sharp horn blaring, almost puncturing my eardrums. Typical New Yorker, waking me up and making me get out of the way of the taxis to avoid an exposed fracture.

When I moved to the city five years ago, I began a true crusade in search of the perfect apartment. Everyone knows the Manhattan real estate market is insane. Absurd prices for studio apartments the size of a pantry. And the brokers actually say that renting "that" is a great opportunity. What's worse, depending on

location, state of conservation and competition to live in the “food closet,” it ends up being true.

I immediately contacted several brokers and told them about myself (not a lot), my work, and my demands (if we can call them that) for the right apartment for me.

“Yes, that’s right. I need an apartment very near a hospital, a big hospital with all the specialties and a good Emergency Room. *I kept repeating over the phone until convincing them my request was no joke.* No, no. I don’t have any contagious disease, nor am I going to live with some elderly person. *I repeated several times until tiring.*

But only one very nice broker, called Tim, actually took me seriously. He was efficient and discrete right from the beginning.

I know it may sound strange. After all, the normal thing is to ask for parks for the children to play in and good schools. Or even a party neighborhood for the younger crowd. Tranquility for the elderly. But, I only need a good hospital close by to feel comfortable. Maybe, next time, I’ll ask for a building that expressly prohibits pets. Not that I don’t like animals, but one episode in particular made me look at them in a different light, that of the enemy. But, I’ll tell that story later. Some brokers I spoke with insisted on questions like: Are you going to live with your sick parents? Or, do you have some horrible disease? (In the latter case, we will not rent an apartment to you! Let that be understood). Or even, could you give me details about the reason for your demand? *Others would ask, with even greater curiosity.* Tim was the only one who simply said: “I know exactly where to start

looking and I'll call when I find something just right for you." Two weeks of back and forth, and nothing. I visited about fifteen apartments. Some even had some potential to become a decent home. Others that had noisy neighborhoods, dogs, cats, or children (all probable hosts of creature hostile to my health) were immediately rejected. Very old buildings may actually have some charm, but living among rats and neighbors with dubious hygiene, let's be honest, I could only do if my good sense abandoned me like all my others have already done. I continued my tireless search until the third week, when I received a euphoric and, by then, exhausted phone call from the broker saying he had found what I was looking for.

"Amanda, I need you to come here immediately. I can't hold it for long, but I guarantee you're going to love it."

"But I'm in the middle of a meeting at work now, Tim. I can't just run out of here." *I said trying to argue.*

"This is Manhattan, Amanda, you'll get used to it. If you can't come by 4 p.m., I'll unfortunately have to show it to another client, who is also interested in this apartment, but I'm giving you preference because I believe this is the apartment for you."

"All right Tim. Give me a few minutes and I'll call you right back, ok?" I quickly hung up and was slightly excited about the chance to finally put an end to my days on that dusty pull out bed in the guest room of my mom's house where I had been living for more than two months.

I hung up and called the only person more interested in my search for the apartment of my dreams than myself. My mother. She couldn't take any more of my crises, panic attacks, and cleanliness manias (make up part of my set of measures to prevent infectious-contagious diseases). She flipped when I told her I had made an explanatory handout that had to be followed – with my medications spread about her living room, bathroom, and kitchen. And every time the phone rang, she would go, irritated yet excited, because only the probability of Tim finding the ideal apartment could fill her with the hope of being able to get rid of me one day. And, it seemed that day had arrived at last.

“Mom?” *I asked, even though I was sure it was her on the other end.* “Tim called me and said he has finally found the right apartment for me. The problem is he needs an urgent answer and I can't leave the office now. (Before I could even finish the sentence, or had the chance to ask her to please go take a look at the apartment for me, she offered). *I'll go for you.* She said happily.

“Mom! If I didn't know you love me, I'd be offended, you know that? But thanks anyway. I'm going to call Tim and tell him you're going in my place. And when you are there, please call and tell me all the details about the place, ok? Don't forget anything. Observe every little detail... Mom... look at the details. *I insisted because I knew she might miss something.*

A half hour later, I already had my Zip Code and address in the Big Apple (64th Street – Upper East Side – Manhattan – NY). It was just eight blocks from Cornell

Hospital and thirteen blocks from Lenox Hill Hospital. In an emergency, I'd only take sixteen minutes to walk the longest distance, health permitting. Or nine and a half minutes with normal traffic, six minutes at night or on weekends. If I needed an ambulance, according to my calculations, and if the ambulance driver was not some snail, four minutes and twenty-two seconds would be enough for the paramedics to be knocking at my door. Perfect. More than enough time to save a life, and in this case, mine.

Decoration was comprised of a few pieces of furniture, all in light hues, well-lit and good ventilation. Some stuck up decorator could even call it *clean*. But, the fact is the decoration of my apartment is like that not because I follow some sort of minimalist trend. Perhaps, I follow the decorating style of a hospital! But, that is because it is much easier to identify and destroy a focus of contamination or some undesirable guest (rat or cockroach).

The neighborhood is excellent. It has several doctors' offices with every kind of professional. One Walgreens, two Rite Aids, three CVSs, two GNCs, one Pharmacy and more than a dozen Duane Reades. And even my favorite, East Side Drugstore. Five Starbucks guarantee my shots of caffeine and relaxation on weekends and an "Au Bon Pain" or an H&H Midtown Bagels East, on the corner of 80th and 3rd, to fulfill my carbohydrate ingestion needs. I had to take a good walk to get there, just for the pleasure of eating them, but even

with my thoughts on the fact that so many carbohydrates could lead to type 3 diabetes, I still run the risk.

That's how I try to stay alive, day after day. Living with normal problems and existential conflicts just like any other girl my age. But I also (try to) peacefully live with my disorders: hypochondria. That's my drug. It depresses me, and commands me, and dominates me. It is my vice, controlling, and asphyxiating me.

I know that all those stories they tell you about, you know, about disease maniacs, may even seem funny. I must admit they are truly funny and I have to confess I feel pathetic for being the reason behind the laughter. But, what can I do? I'm nosophobic, so excuse me, okay? And for those who don't know that hypochondria or nosophobia is a disease, here's a little information. It's right there, triumphant, in the manual of mental disorders. It's not just in my head! I read an article, in a renowned, serious newspaper, that 4% of the population that goes to doctors' offices and hospitals in the United States suffers from this. And 2% of the Internauts are "cyberchondriacs," using the web to research diseases or exchange medical experiences and discuss symptoms. I heard the total reaches 1% of the world's population. And if someone out there has any problem capturing percentages and thinks 1% is nothing, I repeat: 1% of the world's population finds nothing unusual in relating a mosquito bite to hepatitis B! "Isn't the disease transmitted by blood? Well? What's so absurd about thinking a filthy mosquito that feeds off people's blood could be a

bioterrorist?). Those same people think they are going to die in the next 60 seconds! Just like me!



4

It had all the ingredients to be a simple Tuesday, with plenty of sun outside the office, while I was stuck inside with the air conditioning blasting away against the back of my neck. I have always hated air conditioning. First, for the obvious reasons: it propagates potential respiratory diseases. Second, because I hate feeling cold. Also, the central air at the office was programmed by someone who must live in the North Pole, in some igloo with no heat. The person in question has no idea that thin women (and thank God I'm thin) feel colder than men do. Biology explains this: thin women have less fat, consequently less resistance to cold. Besides being more full-bodied, men have more muscle mass. The more heavy set ones, like those around here, have more body fat, thus more resistance, and don't feel much cold. Not like me. I feel cold, and a lot! And if I didn't take my sacred dose of vitamin C every day, I would always be coming down with a cold, even in the peak of summer.

When Julia called, it was already a little after 2 p.m. and I had just returned from lunch. I had lots of work waiting for me, and not the slightest desire to do

anything, except shoot the shit. So, at that moment, Julia was given my most undivided and sincere attention.

- "New what? Beautician? I asked as I checked my emails.

- "Yes, Amanda. I think you are the only girl on this island who hasn't heard of her." *she continued:* "She's Brazilian and she does artistic waxing."

"What's that? Does she dye our pubic hair bright colors or something like that?" *I asked, though still not very interested in the subject.*

A loud chuckle burst from my iPhone, leaving me nearly deaf.

"No. Amanda, when the subject isn't medication, directions for taking medication and new diagnosis technologies, you are the most uninformed person I know." *She taunted.* "She uses wax, the famous Brazilian hair removal system. Nothing new so far. But she is able to make incredible designs. It's really interesting. A friend of mine went there a few weeks ago and was really pleased with the flower she made, and it kept its shape for days."

"A flower. Wow!" I exclaimed sarcastically. I couldn't believe that crazy talk. I tried to remember why I was paying attention to the conversation. And then I did. Just because of my total lack of desire to get back to work, which consists of nothing more than trying to save the world from its predators. But instead of that, Julia was trying to convince me to go to a hair remover who used a millenary torture technique, in my opinion, so I could

have a flower designed on my intimate parts. Did anyone happen to see my mental sanity lying about somewhere?

"I already made my appointment. I'm going on Thursday. And I'm already thinking about the design I want. Maybe a star. I don't know..." *She said all excited.*

"Why should I participate in something like that? I don't have a boyfriend, and I'm not planning on going to a pool and I think... Honestly, it's absurd to pay \$70 plus tip for a horrendous experience like that."

"Amanda, think of it this way. You're walking down the street and suddenly feel bad. (She knew she'd get me with that one, and then continued.) You are rushed to a hospital and when you get there, there's this big, ugly nurse. She pulls down your pants without worrying about the content she's going to find. She doesn't even wonder if everything will be in order or not. (She paused for dramatic effect.) Then, she doesn't even worry about covering you with a sheet or towel. After all, it's more important to find out what's wrong with you. And then..." (I was forced to interrupt her.)

"I get it. My hairy intimate parts will be exposed for all to see."

"Besides, you'll feel 20 pounds lighter once you get rid of all that hair down there." (I could detect muffled laughter).

"Wow! Twenty pounds, I must really be in need of a diet. 20 pounds in one day sounds like a great start." *I replied, participating in on the joke.*

"Isn't it great?" *She was excited again.* "Can I make an appointment for you too, on Thursday?" *She asked.*

"No can do on Thursday. But give me your find of the century's phone number and I'll call her myself to make an appointment."

"Amanda, really try it. You'll look beautiful and you could ask her to design a heart. Who knows? Maybe it'll bring you some luck on your next conquest." (She laughed uncontrollably. I hate when she does that.)

I took down the address, hung up, and went back to work (at least I was trying to get back). But, besides my imaginary health problems, I'm also known for being extremely curious. And, I couldn't get the story of artistic pelvic hair removal out of my head. So I decided, after Julia's free and spontaneous pressure, that I should give it a try. And I even thought: "Why not? Who knows? Maybe I'll enjoy it. Who knows? Maybe after the first time, I may want to try something else. So, I called.

"Lucinda's beauty salon, Marcia speaking." "Hi, how are you, Marcia?" "Fine, thanks. Would you like to make an appointment?" "Yes, please." "Hair, skin cleansing or hair removal?" "Artistic waxing." (I felt ridiculous pronouncing the word "artistic".) "What hair are you going to remove? Groin, underarms, legs or full package?" "What's the full package?"

"Full package is the artistic groin, underarms, half legs and upper lip. When you get the package, you get a special discount, and you also get a refreshing gel to use the first days after waxing. What would you like?"

"Complete package... I think..." (I hesitated a moment, I don't know what this complete package is. I

didn't know if I'd be sorry about my choice, but I decided to risk it.)

"Name and phone number, please?" *I informed it to her.* "Is Monday, 5:00 p.m., good for you, Amanda?" "Yes, yes. That's great."

"All set. Lucinda will take care of you on Monday at 5 p.m. sharp. Thank you." (And she hung up as quickly as a delivery restaurant clerk who needs to hurry to take the next call before the customer gives up.)

The weekend went smoothly. I didn't have a heart attack so, no threat of an aneurism. The thought of convulsions was another thing I didn't have. I didn't even have to turn on the computer to get information about any new disease. *The New York Times* obituaries only had about a half dozen deceased, most of who had died of old age, purely and simply. The others had died in a car accident, four from the same family. A tragedy, no doubt, but no report of serious disease. Endemics, epidemics, or pandemics were also discarded for now. The world was a safe place for the time being. And that's a relief. There were also many announcements for Seventh-Day Masses and Ceremonies at synagogues. Nothing that really caught my attention.

I went to the movies with Lauren. She was able to get a day off from her domestic marathon. Eric had agreed, with a little "arm-twisting," that she needed a day off. Sophia's a doll, but to be a full-time mother is not an

easy mission. So, he stayed with her so we could go to the movies and have a “sisters’ day out.” Like in the old days. Ever since Lauren got married, our moments together have grown few and far between. It’s a shame. We used to be so close. We’d spend hours on end trying to be rebels or to save the world. We watched a romantic comedy, one of those that make you sick to your stomach it’s so sweet, with a predictable ending and moments when we almost cry, but a good movie. We ate lots of popcorn. I hadn’t done that in ages. I was even able to get Lauren to drop her eternal salad, vegetable and chicken diet to try my buttery popcorn and a little of my ice cream with caramel topping. She made a “yuck” face, but then asked for a little more. It was great. Great being with her. Great not thinking of anything but fun and good times. Great spending a little of my time with someone I love so dearly.

I returned home at 9 p.m., took a warm shower and put on my red pajamas with the white polka-dots. I brushed my teeth and put rollers in my hair so it would be curly the next day. I like my straight, naturally straight, hair, but sometimes I feel like a change. I had a salad for dinner; ate light. After all, I had already eaten a lot of junk when I was out and I didn’t need indigestion. But, just to be sure, I took an antacid before going to sleep.

As I got ready for bed Sunday night, I remembered I had made that appointment with Lucinda for Monday, the most famous Brazilian in New York after Gisele Bündchen. She was the miracle woman who would make me lose twenty pounds in pubic hair alone. And, besides that, she would help me conquer the heart of

some "handsome bachelor" running loose about town, if such a thing truly exists.

I remembered to put on brand-new lingerie to make a good impression. That was my second mistake. The first was to have chosen the complete package without any right to reimbursement should I back out. The second mistake cost me a pair of Victoria's Secret panties. In the end, the first mistake I found out much too late and it cost me a lot more than that. After all, there is no price for pain and despair.

It was finally time for me to meet Lucinda and her rewarding form of torture, which had made my friends line up just to give her big, fat tips on top of her pricey services. I had a very light lunch, a salad, vegetable mix, and tuna. I didn't know what was waiting for me so I chose to avoid foods that might have undesirable side effects, like gas, for example. I'm a hypochondriac, but I don't have to go about giving out free samples of all the gases that inhabit my body.

At 4:30, I finished things at work and left a note for my boss. I lied, like everyone else at the office. I said I had an appointment with a former revolutionary from Colombia. A really important guy who had precious information that could help me win a lawsuit I had filed against illegal deforestation in the Amazon. The guy had lived in the forest for several years and knew the region's problems well. *That was the story I made up.* At the end of the note, just: "Back in two hours." And, I left.

I grabbed a cab on the corner of 3rd and 72nd. The cabbie was a nice Indian man, with an enormous red

turban. We were there in no time. The salon was Downtown, on 14th Street, between 6th and 5th. I didn't even have to look very hard. It was clearly signed and the movement of women going in and out was impressive.

When I entered, I immediately ran into Marcia, the girl from the Dial-a-Torture delivery service. She gave me a sweet smile, yet on her face I could read: "Are you the next victim? Come on in and relax. Lucinda will torture you in a minute."

"Good afternoon. Do you have an appointment? What's your name?" "Amanda. I have a 5 p.m. appointment with Lucinda. I think I'm a bit early." "Yes, sit down and wait. Lucinda's with another client."

Her voice was incredibly powerful in person, and she had an arrogant and bossy attitude. She was that kind of girl who loves looking you up and down, head to toe. She wiggles her nose from one side to the other as she talks, as if she smelled something foul.

Less than ten minutes later, Lucinda appeared at the top of the stairs. The salon was large and it covered two floors. The hairdressers and manicurists stayed on the bottom floor, while the beauticians were on the second floor. The lady at the top of the stairs was tall and blonde, but, although I am no specialist, I could see the dye job was of poor quality. Always smiling and very pleasant, but what you deserve at those prices. She had to make up for it somehow, going beyond her talent of creating designs on her clients' well-groomed pelvises.

I have to trust her. I thought. But, on the other hand, it is just hair. It will grow back. If I don't like it, it's quite

simple. I've already gone more than a month without sex. I'll just go another two weeks until the hair grows back again, that's all. No one will have any knowledge of this episode if I don't say anything.

She made a signal. I thought it was for me, so I stood up. Then, she asked me to go on up and to follow her. And, so I did, following her to the room where I would be scalped. After climbing the stairs, I entered a spacious corridor. There were very tiny rooms on both sides, cubicles with semi-transparent glass doors. You could see nothing but shadows moving about. But, from behind the low doors, I could hear groans, cries for help (I think that was my imagination), excited conversations and feigning laughter. The film "Hostel" quickly haunted my mind. With each step I took towards my voluntary torture room, the butterflies in my stomach increased in number. Already nervous, I began to fear the worst. A crisis, right then and there, a nervous attack, a hysterical scene worthy of *The Exorcist*. I tried to control my mind. *"Take it easy Amanda. It's just a rite of passage into the world of mature, well-resolved women, hairless."* I thought. It worked. I was able to calm down and find out where all that was going to take me.

We arrived at one of the boxes. There was a cot, and some items, which were probably part of the ritual and indispensable for Lucinda. There were some hooks on the wall where I could hang my handbag and clothes. That's right, all my clothes. As soon as I entered the minuscule space fit only for two, me on the cot and her standing, Lucinda started giving me instructions and left

the room, perhaps for me to feel more at ease. Since it was the complete package, I was to remain only in my lingerie. After being ordered what to do, I timidly took off my clothes. I arranged them neatly on the hooks and lay down on the cot.

Lucinda returned a second later. She had some wooden spatulas in her hands and a small jar with some sticky, brownish caramel goo (with some ridiculously over styled name), I later learned was the famous hair-removal wax.

Without even looking me in the eye, she began her job, stirring the wax and asking: "Do you want a Bikini wax or normal?"

A thousand thoughts ran through my mind, but none that justified the question. I had no idea what she was talking about and in a purely arrogant act, because I didn't want to look stupid, I guessed: "Bikini." That was my third mistake. Right then I learned a very important lesson. Never answer a strange question, in a strange environment, unless you do so with another question!

"I'm going to begin with the pelvis, and as I do my job, you can concentrate on choosing a design. Have you thought of anything?"

"You can choose a design?" What's she talking about? Does she have some sort of obscene catalogue with several designs, sizes, and hair colors? Is this a salon or a Sex Shop? I thought. And she did. Right under the cot, there was a small cabinet where she kept her work tools. She opened one of the drawers and pulled out two

enormous photo albums with several models, probably clients, exhibiting her "art."

"Open your legs wide." *She ordered.*

"Hmm..." I consented although I didn't understand a thing.

There I was, completely vulnerable, wearing only panties and a bra, my legs in the lotus position, and here she comes wearing a surgeon's mask on her face and twine in her hands. I couldn't contain my thoughts and the images flashed through my mind again, as if I were watching a trailer for the film "Hostel" in my head. *Oh my God! What does that woman intend to do with the twine? Tie up my arms and legs so I can't run away?* As I went nuts and watched, my eyes popping out of my head in fear, she ran the twine along the sides of my panties, holding the front part down very firmly so it wouldn't interfere with her work, out damaging my panties beyond repair. Whew! I sighed in relief. There was no reason for concern except for the pair of new, beautiful and expensive underwear, which I would have to throw in the trash.

I skimmed the photo albums nervously, but without taking my eyes off her every move. She seemed not to notice my tension. And if she had, she showed no signs of caring. She went about organizing her supplies on the table that was there to help her. A warm pan with the brownish goo inside (the so-called wax that I had already ensured was disposable). Electric hair clippers, some new, wooden spatulas, in several sizes, an eyeliner pencil, and sterilized tweezers were all I could see. So far,

nothing my other ego, Amanda the Hypochondriac, had to worry about.

I pretended I was familiar with everything and made sure to choose the design quickly. That wasn't hard. My choice was the Playboy logo, which between you and me, I doubt she pays copyrights to use. However, I decided to forget the fact I was a lawyer and as such I should do everything within the law. After all, it would be a privilege for Playboy to have its logo designed on my intimate parts. And that would not imply, could not be considered misuse of image. (I imagined myself in a courtroom, defending this version to some cranky judge).

"Your hair is too long. I'll need to trim it a little before starting. That way it hurts less."

Hurts less? Why? Does it hurt a lot? No one told me this was going to hurt. A little, insignificant pain okay, but really hurt? I think I want to call my mom.

"Oh! Sure." I agreed, thinking... *Relax, make yourself at home.*

She carefully trimmed the long hairs. I remember thinking how deft she was and how meticulously she treated my privates.

Then, she pulled out the larger wooden spatula and began to spread that hot cream over my pelvis. I felt it burn. The smoke rose and the faint smell of burnt hair reached my nose. But, up until that moment, the feelings had all been good. Warm, relaxing, even pleasant. That's when she pulled for the first time and with every fiber in my being I pleaded: God kill me!

It was so fast and yet so fatal. I thought every inch of skin on my body had been ripped off with it. I imagined my pelvic muscle, visible, with blood shooting towards the ceiling. I tried to look through my half-closed eyes, but I didn't have the guts.

That's when Lucinda became aware I was new at this. I was white as a sheet and my breathing resembled the panting of a tired dog. She stopped for a few seconds to ask if I needed water, or if I would be able to hang in there until the end.

"Are you okay?" She asked with a maternal look.

"I'm fine. How about you?" I answered, out of it.

She laughed and went on with her business. I could only think that Julia's recommendation had been a provocation. She didn't want to go through this traumatic event alone. Therefore, she had included her so-called best friend in the little package. And I'm sure she said horrible things about me to Lucinda, because I am certain this woman hates me.

I felt so much pain at times I wanted to give up. However, the relief of a few painless minutes was sufficient for me to create courage and allow her to begin her medieval process all over again. Other thoughts came to mind, bewildered by such immense pain. I thought of the worst exams I had already taken in my short lifespan, and thus I was able to relax. After all, what is Lucinda's "art" compared to a lumbar puncture or an endoscopy?

"Girl, it's looking great." She said in her attempts to console me. "It is, isn't it?" I answered moaning, almost

crying. Trying not to make it too obvious, so she wouldn't think I was some sort of nutcase.

During a short moment of distraction, mine of course, Lucinda, demonstrating incredible strength, spun me around 180 degrees, using a really fast "ninja" maneuver. By the time I realized what was going on she was already waxing my perianal and labia area. Only God and I know how much that hurt. I felt a stubborn tear trickle down my face but quickly wiped it away so she wouldn't notice.

"I'm almost done here." She said with her face between my legs.

"Uh-huh..." What else could I reply, I thought.

A new mantra popped in my head and I began to pray, or better, to beg for this to be over soon. And when I thought the worst was over, she appeared with the damn tweezers in her hands.

"I need to use the tweezers here because a few hairs always hang in there, okay?"

"No! No! No! Of course, it's not okay! My soul is nothing but blood, and I can't begin to describe my skin. You are a crazy, unloved sadist and I'm an insane masochist who pays you to torture me! I don't think so! Nothing is okay in this godforsaken room!" I shouted, in thought.

"No problem, Lucinda. Go right ahead." And I smiled sheepishly because I knew I was lying and I knew she knew it too.

"There. Hurt much?" She asked, smiling.

Does this “crazy lady” actually think this is funny? I wanted to tie her to the cot and remove every hair from her body just using the tweezers. Very slowly, plucking every inch of her arms, legs, face, anywhere I could find even a single hair. From her big toe to the last hair in her nose. Her entire skinny body. Look her in her eyes and smile warmly, as if saying: “welcome my friend.” I vented my anger again, once more to myself.

“No, honey. Not at all.” I said trying to convince myself.

I didn’t even want to look at the result. I felt too exhausted from all the mental effort to take off running. Trying to convince myself the sacrifice would be worthwhile.

“Let’s do the rest?”

Rest? What rest? The truth cruelly filled my ears. I had agreed to the complete package, which included half-legs, upper lip and underarms. I looked from one side to the other of the tiny room trying to find the most dignified exit. Jump through the small window? I don’t think so. Surely, my hips would never fit through it. Or grab my handbag when Lucinda was distracted and take off through the door? Neither of the two seemed dignified enough. So, I decided to face it with an open chest, or better, open arms. It was time for the underarms.

I had already paid, suffered, and cried. What could be worse? And it was. Although my legs are longer and have thicker hair, the pain was relatively less than in the tiny underarm area, which didn’t come close to reminding me of how badly I suffered with the groin.

Hang in there quietly for another thirty minutes. When I was just on the verge of screaming: God take me away from here! Or Enterprise, teletransport me! I heard the news of my release: *"We're all done for today,"* she said triumphantly after another job well done. *"For today? For the rest of my life! I'm not coming back here ever again."* I thought with assurance. Suffering because I'm sick and need medical care and exams is one thing, but to suffer in the name of vanity, of futility, is something I don't believe in at all. It's against my principles. Honestly now. Some women do it every fifteen days. And, *I'm* the one who's nuts! Hah!

"I'm going to sprinkle some talcum powder down there and then leave the room for you to get dressed, okay?"

"Yes." By then I was basically monosyllabic.

As soon as she left the room, I jumped into my pants and put on my shoes at lighting speed. I grabbed my blouse and handbag, running towards the exit as I was still getting ready. Before breathing fresh air again, I paid and left a generous tip for Lucinda with the implicit promise to never set foot in there again.

When I was already on the outside, Marcia the arrogant called out my name three times, and on the fourth attempt I could no longer ignore her. She was less than three feet away.

"Amanda, you forgot your refreshing gel." She yelled.

"Oh! The gel. Thanks Marcia. How could I ever live without it?" I joked.

I threw myself into the first cab that stopped in front of me. I shouted the address to the cabbie who looked at me in fear.

I want two things during my next incarnation: to be a man and to be ignorant. I must say ignorance truly bliss. Those who are have no idea how wonderful it is. Look at me for example. Up until today, I had no idea a woman had to suffer so much just to keep things smooth and pretty. And, now that I know, I would have preferred dying rather than knowing.

I went back to work, walking with some difficulty. When I opened the door to my office and finally thought of sitting, I turned and saw my boss standing right in front of me with a silly smile on his face.

“So then? How did it go with the Colombian revolutionary?”

“Well. To begin with, he wasn’t Colombian, but Brazilian. And furthermore, he wasn’t a revolutionary, but a terrorist. I don’t think he’ll be much help. I didn’t believe in his stories and to be honest I hope to never see him again.

He left the office clearly disappointed. *I felt to blame for having exaggerated so much.* I locked my office door so no one could disturb me and went about spreading that tedious, refreshing gel on my red legs. It burnt more than hot chili pepper in the eyes. I was dying to call Julia and unleash my anger. But then I looked at

my bunny again, and this time I took a good look. "You know what, it actually does look good." I thought, now proud of myself. "Now, I just need a magician to pull it out of his hat! Who knows? Maybe that will solve my frigidity problem."



5

I had always gotten along very well with animals, until today, until this ill-fated Saturday morning. Utopically, it was to be my day off. Relax, take a walk, see people, take my clothes to the dry-cleaners, and buy fat-packed foods, guiltlessly, to stuff myself with over the weekend. That was the plan! Nothing special. Just a weekend of laziness. No concerns or commitments with work. Nevertheless, my castle of cards came crashing down and my plans unexpectedly interrupted by an unruly pit bull. It is now eleven-thirty in the morning, and here I am in the emergency room. With a very young and inexperienced resident stitching a “prêt-à-porter” with two bands on my leg.

When I woke up, I could never have imagined what was about to happen. My day started off like every other day. I woke up early, had my five minutes of paranoia after gazing into the mirror and realizing my skin was dry with small red blotches spread about my face. They didn't exist up until yesterday. It didn't take long for me to associate that with *Sjögren Syndrome* (a disease that causes extremely dry skin). Of course, I was

convinced that was the first symptom of early aging. My skin could be suffering a terrible process of acute dehydration. In a few months, I would be unable to cry, I would have no more saliva in my mouth, which would be full of cavities, and I would feel horrible pain in my joints. Soon after, I would be in a wheelchair due to a worsening of arthritis. Oh my God! That's how it happens. I know it! *I could see myself in total agony.* Five full minutes with my thoughts spinning about that unfounded theory. But, since both the dryness and blotches disappeared ten minutes after washing my face and using a powerful moisturizing cream, I rid my mother of another one of my morning crises.

I brushed my teeth and organized my clothes to take to the dry cleaners. Everything was great. I had planned to have breakfast at Viand, on 61st and Madison. I always go there on Saturday mornings for my morning meal and to chat with Fernando. He's a very friendly waiter who shouts out my name, announcing my arrival to the entire restaurant as soon as I appear on the outside of the glass door. I grabbed my bag of clothes and my handbag. I was just about to open the door when I realized I wasn't carrying my keys. So, I went back to get them from the dinner table, probably taking less than a minute. A precious minute that could have saved my day and my leg. When I finally exited the apartment, I ran right into the attack. Yup, directly into it. I opened the door, and there they were: the delivery guy, the dog, and the dog's owner. Up until then, I hadn't exactly understood what was going on. But, it didn't take long to

understand that the dog was attacking the delivery guy. And the dog's owner was attacking the dog, or something like that, and that I would be the next to be attacked. Lack of luck on my part? You can say that again.

Ever since I moved into this building, I have always had a peaceful coexistence with my front neighbor and his pit bull. Both are gorgeous, I must admit. But, if the dog's owner is as aggressive as his PET, I intend to keep my distance. The lovely dog was assaulting the FedEx delivery guy. It had already bitten his boot and was about to go for his jugular. That's when I showed up. I saved his life, and instead of thanking me, he didn't say one word and ran off. I didn't hear one thank you! He just left his packages behind, and me, at the mercy of the bloodthirsty dog. The guy just disappeared down the stairs. Result: as soon as I heard the slam of my apartment door closing behind me, the *monster* had already taken possession of my thigh. With its sharp teeth, it clamped down on a large piece of my leg between my hip and knee. It enjoyed my femur as if it were a juicy piece of meat. I didn't have time to understand the situation. Much less think of reacting! That hairy thing charged at me, its mouth salivating. I felt like fresh tenderloin hanging from a butcher's hook. The laceration was the size of the Great Fissure, in other words, impossible to calculate. And it wasn't even 10 in the morning!

While one mammal was trying to control its other mammal, which had already ripped off half my leg, the latter began to enjoy tearing apart my clothes. My Pink dryer's bag, which I had just bought less than two

weeks ago, was ripped to shreds. The bag had three pairs of jeans (two were Diesel), several quality and expensive sets of lingerie, nylon stockings, two Chanel suits with their respective skirts and a pair of Dolce & Gabbana slacks, some Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirts, a pair of GAP pajamas and sheets made of pure Egyptian yarn.

Just like the animal, it became impossible to control my “rebellious” side. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t contain myself. Words poured out of my mouth, ordering things that made perfect sense to me. In reality, they were part of my instinctive plan to save myself.

“Do you know how much bacteria that beast’s mouth has? I’m bleeding a lot. Do you think it hit my artery?” *I rehearsed a faint, but went on:* “I don’t have a chance. I have to get to a hospital in five minutes or it will be too late.” *I was shouting.*

“Calm down! Let me control him and I’ll call an ambulance.”

“Let that monster eat my dirty La Perla lingerie! I hope it dies of indigestion. And go call 911, now! Call Animal Control Services, the Secret Service, police, FBI and CIA. *I shouted, throwing my cell phone at his head.* “Let go of that animal and call now! If not... I’m going to bite you!”

He hesitated for a second, but decided to listen to me. By that time, he didn’t know which was the real danger, the pit bull, or I. As the dog continued to tear into my Diesel jeans, the annoying guy finished calling and

announced: "They'll be here in ten minutes. Try to remain calm."

Remain calm? Remain... huh..? What does he have in that hollow head of his? Rocks? Didn't he get it that in a few minutes all the blood that keeps me alive may be on the floor and my spirit in another solar system? Doesn't he realize that his beautiful puppy has just ripped off my leg? And looking at my lacerated leg, I still had to remain calm! I was thinking, wanting to poke his eyes out with the heel of my shoe.

"Ten minutes!" *I shouted at the top of my lungs.* "I could be dead in ten minutes. You're an imbecile. Didn't you tell them your little mutt mortally wounded me? When I die, because I know I'm going to die, you'll be indicted for murder! I'll go to hell, but you'll soon be joining me! You and your murderous mutt!"

Although I was nearly unconscious and fighting off fainting, I could hear the sirens from afar. I could recognize different ones. One was the police and the other an ambulance.

"I can already hear the ambulance. But what about the helicopter? I can't hear the helicopter? Didn't you call a helicopter rescue team? You're a dumb! I swear! I've never seen anyone as stupid as you in all my life!"

After that, I swear I can't remember a thing. The last thing I recall as I passed out were my hands sliding down the hall's beige wall, leaving a trail of blood as evidence to my suffering.

There are several speculative theories and poorly told stories. Someone not very trustworthy and gorged,

like the dog's owner, says I flipped out completely. He says I was shouting unintelligible things, like: "get the defibrillator, my heart is failing." Or "I need my computer. I have to check if this breed of animal transmits any specific disease!" Or else "I didn't update my will this week. I can't die like this, not in such a stupid manner. Why not a generalized infection? At least I would have time to redo my will." He also mentioned something like: "Julia was right. She had a feeling something bad was going to happen to me. Thank God I had my little bunny made. I won't be embarrassed at the hospital!" I honestly do not believe that version. Or the other, that says I started a medical monologue. One of the paramedics asked Brian, my neighbor, the dog's owner, if I was a doctor or a screenplay writer for the TV series *House*. I demanded exams, medications, and vaccines from the paramedics. Full of reason and scientific terms he says he can't recall, given the circumstances, nervousness, and tension. Others say I fainted. I fainted right there, by the stairs, as I was trying to control myself. I was breathing with difficulty, faster and faster, until I fainted. A guy from the ambulance, the first one to arrive, said I was already blue in the face, and that just before passing out I had told him, "I'm AB negative. The rarest type, don't forget, don't forget." And out I went, he says.

As always, my mom thinks all the theories are true. I think it's all a bunch of scheming and gossip made by curious people who have nothing better to do.

I've finally been allowed to go back home. Despite the trauma, I'm anxious to get back to my place. Not that I don't like hospitals mind you. In reality, I love them. But staying in a private room is one thing. Staying in the emergency room with a bunch of sick people is a whole other story.

I've always made a point of paying for a good health plan. I have Medicare Top, the type that covers private rooms in five-star hotel type hospitals. Big rooms with curtains, wide beds, and all that fancy equipment. They have all the cable channels. A large closet and an extra, and comfortable bed for a companion. And the bathroom? There's even a bathtub. Wonderful. It's like a vacation at a spa.

I tried to convince the doctors it would be best if I spent 48 hours under observation. But, since my wound, according to them, was minor and superficial, I could already go home.

"Amanda, your cell phone's vibrating. Want to answer it?" My mom asked as she stretched out her arm to hand me the phone.

It was Lauren, my kid sister, asking me if I was okay or if I would be in an induced coma for a few weeks. Of course, she was just joking as usual.

"Hi, Lauren. Yeah, I'm fine now. Thanks for your concern. Yes, huge. The monster ripped half of my right leg off. I swear. Ask mom." *My mother just kept shaking her head as she listened to the dialogue, astounded.* "Thanks for calling. Love you too." *And I hung up.*

The second I hung up, a doctor stuck his head in the door. He was one of the doctors taking care of my case. He was experienced and he wanted to give the final instructions before releasing me. He approached to talk, a bit tongue-tied and walking in a slightly funny manner but, all that mattered was that he was competent. He seemed concerned, wanted to provide the necessary explanations about my debilitated health, prescribe the medications and set up my return visit.

“Amanda’s fine. It was a superficial bite and only four stitches were needed. No nerve was affected. She’ll take the stitches out in a week, but she can already go back to work on Monday.” Just like that? A beast attacked me on my day off. I needed several stitches on my once perfect leg. I’ll spend my entire weekend in bed. I had more than five shots. And I’m not going to spend a single day in the hospital.

I saw the relief on my mother’s face. After all, this was my first real occurrence in years. She was shaken up and visibly concerned. Maybe because she knew, even before I did, that this episode would not end there.

After all, an animal bite can transmit a fatal disease, popularly known as rabies, or hydrophobia. The disease is transmitted by the animal’s saliva, if it is contaminated. The symptoms generally appear two years after contamination. It’s called rabies because the person or animal tends to have terrible fits of violence, get very irritated, and lose control. My mother was informed by the doctors and instructed to ask for the dog that had bitten me to be tested. She already knew I’d go nuts and

would spend the next two years just waiting for the disease to appear. I was given the preventive medication, a vaccine with the disease's antibodies and a tetanus shot. But, they were just preventive. If I had really been contaminated, nothing could be done. Certain death was definite!

I went back home and my mother insisted on staying with me over the weekend. She kept me away from the computer. She needs to ensure I wouldn't research anything about diseases related to dog bites. She talked to my neighbor who paid a friendly visit with flowers and apologies.

I asked her to answer the door and to tell him I was in a coma. As such, I couldn't accept his apologies, much less see him again.

"Good afternoon, I'm Brian. My... it was my dog... Attacked Amanda... Well, I... I'm really sorry. He said, embarrassed about what had happened, handing my mother the flowers.

"Mom, don't forget to tell him to take those flowers back. One murder attempt per day is sufficient." I shouted so he would hear me.

"Sorry, Brian. Amanda's not in a good mood. She's a little upset about what happened. You understand, don't you?" She said kindly. "But thanks for the flowers. The doctor said she's fine. She needed four stitches in her leg, but she's fine. Don't worry." Trying to console him. As if he was the one needing consolation.

"I understand. I'm going to work now, but if you need anything just give me a call. Here's my card. I mean it, if you need anything, just call." *Feigning concern.*

"Brian Marshall. Le Antique Restaurant. In Soho? I think I've heard about that place. Are you the manager?" *She asked out of curiosity.*

"That too. It's my restaurant. I'm the owner. But I can guarantee the food's good. The Chef is from Turkey, but he studied gastronomy in Paris. He has some incredible recipes. You should try it someday." He said, bragging.

"Who knows, maybe one day?" *She said and then smiled.*

"You are my guests. Accept that as my apology, since the flowers didn't have the expected effect." He was disappointed. I think he thought, what type of woman doesn't like flowers? Simple answer: the allergic ones.

He said goodbye and left, taking the flowers with him. Then I had to listen to my mother defend, and even worse, praise the guy, asking me if I had noticed how cute he was. Single, intelligent, loves animals, good heart. Full of predicates. The guy suddenly became the best catch in town. "I think not! Thanks," *I thought.*

"It wasn't his fault Amanda. The dog got restless because of the delivery guy. That happens. That's life." *She argued.*

"How do you know all that after a five-minute talk with him?" *I asked impatiently.*

"I saw it in his eyes." *She said smiling.*

Saw it in his eyes! Right. My mom's like that. She has this habit of thinking everyone's good. She looks someone in the eyes and if they aren't yellow (hepatitis) or red (pot), she immediately thinks they're a good person. If he has sheepish or "poor me" eyes, well... She quickly labels him a "good son-in-law." I can't take it!

I spent what was left of my Saturday in bed being babied by my family. Lauren, Sophia, and Julia also came over to care for me. On Sunday, I could feel my strength slowly returning to my body.

I got up at 10, which is very rare. I love to sleep, but I'm always out of bed by nine. I took a shower and when I had finished, Julia, who was at my apartment bright and early, helped me change the bandage. But, don't think Julia was interested in my health. She was dying to hear about Brian. She wanted details about the visit he had made. So, she and my mom delighted in romantically fantasizing with all of the details of my tragedy.

We went out for brunch, the three of us. We went to Café Dari, in Soho. The line was huge, but I was able to convince the manager that I couldn't stand around waiting for a table for more than 30 minutes. He kindly offered us the first table available. I was actually thankful for yesterday's incident for a moment. Spending hours in line at a restaurant stresses me out. On our way back, we grabbed a cab to the entrance to Central Park at 61st and 5th. We walked a little and sat in the green grass to rest.

I got back home while the sun was still shining. I got my work clothes ready for the next day and went to

bed early. I slept like an angel, no memories, and no nightmares about what had happened. I had apparently gotten over the episode.



About the author

Drica Pinotti, a Brazilian-born author, has been taking the literary world by storm with her witty perception of the modern female. With fifteen books published in Brazil and Portugal she is, now, debuting in America with her first romantic comedy, a hilarious New York fairytale titled “My Crazy (Sick) Love”.



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