

FERGUS ANTHONY



ONLINE C♥PID



Online Cupid
(Day 1)
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Online Cupid

DAY 1

Once upon a time...

A man stepped through a doorway and stopped. He felt foolish in his mirror shades. He almost took them off; instead he stood blinking in the darkness as he looked about the room, barely making out the metal shelves, the sink, the laptop computer on the old metal desk. Beside the desk, a printer sat on an old chair with trails of rust running up the legs. In the centre of the room, a woman sat awkwardly on a wooden chair. She seemed to be sinking into it, even as she leaned forward. A red velvet bag covered her head, and her legs were shackled to the legs of the chair. Her arms disappeared behind her back. Above her, a 40-watt bulb with a pink plastic shade cast a faint yellow light, like an island on the floor.

'Shsh,' the man said, 'it's OK. You're safe.'

The woman's head jerked up as he spoke and she seemed to follow the sound of his approaching footsteps. He stopped in front of her and reached out. He held his hand an inch or so from her head.

'I'm going to take the bag off, OK?'

She didn't answer and he assumed she was

just afraid. He pinched the corners of the bag and gently tugged, to avoid causing her distress; revealing more and more of her face, until she looked up at him, and the relief disappeared from her eyes.

He must have been six feet tall and had once been well-built, but now he ran to fat. He wore a cheap black polyester suit, with a black shirt and black tie. On his head, he wore a black fright wig, a few strands of which hung down over the sunglasses. She saw herself; tears gathered in her round, blood-shot eyes; her cheeks made hollow by the red ball gag in her mouth; the black straps that held the ball gag in place. Absurdly, she was struck by the fact that the ball gag perfectly matched the red velvet bag in his hand.

She shivered and the man moved away, not sure how to continue. He became conscious of the bag in his hand and looked for somewhere to put it down; finding nothing he turned back to the woman.

'Listen, em... really sorry about this, but, em... I have to cut away your trousers and knickers. OK?'

On the word 'cut' the woman tried to run, that is, her body prepared to run, twisted on the chair, even as her mind told her the truth of

her situation.

'No no,' the man said. He dropped the bag and reached out to reassure her, but didn't touch her because he felt that would be a violation. 'It's OK it's OK,' he said, 'it's nothing... icky! Look at me. Hey. Look at me.'

When she didn't, he reached out to touch her, to guide her face to his. The woman jerked her head away and looked down her nose at him.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I should have thought of it sooner.'

He looked away, conscious of the need to do or say something to reassure her.

He crouched down and gently placed his hands on her lap.

He looked her in the eye and did his best to put a smile into his voice. 'It's OK. I'm not going to kill you. I'm not going to rape you. I'm not going to violate you in any way. There's a bucket under that chair. I have to cut your clothes off so you can go to the toilet. OK? If you need to go, just let me know and I'll give you some privacy. Nod if you understand.'

After a few seconds the woman nodded.

The man smiled at her. She would learn that the man had only a handful of responses, and this was his favourite.

He took a pair of scissors from his pocket.

He took hold of one of the woman's trouser legs.

The woman stiffened, she tried to pull her leg away.

The man let go of the trouser leg and raised his hands in surrender.

'OK?' he said.

He slowly lowered his hands and took hold of her trousers again, rubbing the cloth between his fingers and thumb.

Again, the smile in his voice, 'These must have set you back a fair whack. Seems a shame to cut them, but, well, I suppose if I unlocked you, you'd, well...'

He shrugged his shoulders and offered a sheepish grin.

He began to cut through the cloth.

The woman's leg jerked forwards and the metal cuff at her ankle bit into her skin.

The man let her trousers go again; he began to lose patience with her.

'I'm doing this for your benefit, you know,' he snapped. He took a breath and counted to ten. 'I don't want to cut your leg open.' He took another breath and took hold of her trousers again. He began to cut.

The woman stiffened. For a few seconds, as

she listened to the scissors cut through the cloth, all she could think of was how much they cost: seventy-five Euros in Marks and Spencer. Cold metal touched her leg and she jumped; but he continued, cutting up past her knee where her trousers pulled tight against her skin. He cut more slowly now, gently pushing the scissors forward, making tiny cuts. As each new cut revealed more leg, he trembled inside, excited by the erotic possibilities of their situation. It was something he had never considered, and part of him wished he had thought of it sooner.

Looking down at him, the woman was terrified by his smile: he smiled because he believed they were falling in love.

He put the scissors down, realising she sat awkwardly because she had fallen into the hole in the chair. He stood up and walked around behind her.

'I'm going to lift you out of the hole now,' he said. He reached under her arms and joined his hands across her breasts. He felt his penis swell to a semi-erection and thrilled to the thought of it brushing against her back, although the chair was between them. 'OK,' he said, 'on three: one!' In a sudden movement, he pulled her body up and then eased her back onto the seat.

As he removed his hands from around her body, he stroked her breasts through her clothes, thinking that she wouldn't notice. He walked around in front of her and thanked her for her help. He crouched down, picked up the scissors and continued with his work. After cutting each trouser leg to the waist, the man put the scissors down and looked up at the woman.

'Lift your bum, please. I need to pull your trousers away.'

The woman did not move. She held his eyes until he was compelled to look away.

'I, I know this is embarrassing for you,' he said, 'it's embarrassing for me too, but if you don't lift your bum, you'll have to sit in your own mess when you go to the toilet.' She did not move and the man began to feel she was looking down on him. But he was not an animal. 'OK,' he said. 'I'm not going to leave you to sit in your own mess.' He looked at her again, hopeful that she would recognise his gentleness. 'Please?' Still she did not move. 'Suit yourself.'

He gripped her trousers with both hands and pulled. The woman jumped and would have fallen from the chair if she had not been chained to it. Still, she was sitting awkwardly

now, her left leg slipping from the seat, the shackles at her ankles peeling away her skin. She screamed through the ball gag.

‘Jesus!’ The man dropped the trousers and moved to the side, holding his hands out to catch her. He cradled her there for a moment before lifting her back onto the seat. He slowly took his hands away, afraid she might fall again. Her safety was his only concern. When he felt confident she wasn’t going to fall, he walked around behind the chair. He crouched and looked at her arms coming through the bars. He looked at her hands; she had beautiful hands, made more lovely by a pair of handcuffs with pink fur at her wrists. He wanted to touch her hands, to feel her touch, but he was afraid she might think he’s a creep. He had gone behind the chair because he thought he heard a bone snap. He gently felt his way down each of her arms. When he satisfied himself that she was unharmed, he stood up, hands on hips, and let out a breath.

‘What the hell were you thinking?’ His anger was an expression of concern. He remembered his father saying this to him when he was a child and had done something reckless. He walked around to face her. ‘What if I’d been holding the scissors? What if I’d

punctured a vein in your leg? What then? Jesus Christ!

He stepped back, breathing through his nose: another sign of displeasure he remembered from childhood. He took a moment to let her see what she'd done to him. He knew it wasn't enough merely to tell them; you had to show them; they had to feel it.

He crouched and picked up the scissors. He looked up at her, still the smile in his voice, and in his eyes. He wanted her to know: a fight did not mean lack of love, even a smack in the face would not necessarily be lack of love, but sometimes that was the only way to show the stupid bitch.

'OK,' he said, 'I'm going to cut through your knickers. Now please, *please*, don't move.'

He cut through her knickers at the hips and put the scissors on the floor. He lifted his face to hers and raised her eyebrows. He didn't want to ask the question, and so he raised his eyebrows again, hoping she would understand. She understood perfectly, but all she had was her refusal. If he wanted her to lift her bum, he would have to ask.

His head began to swim. The woman sensed his fear, and this made her afraid: he seemed like a trapped animal. He wondered what she

feared.

‘I need you to lift your bum, please,’ he said.

The woman struggled to lift herself out of the hole in the chair. The man took hold of the knickers at her hips and pulled. He saw her vagina and understood why he was afraid. His fear made no sense to him. He had seen her vagina before. He had touched it; he had kissed it; he had masturbated on it; on her tits; on her face.

He held her knickers up and examined them: ordinary white cotton with a small pink lace bow at the back, and a tiny wet spot at the crotch. He shook his head and smiled at her.

‘Not what I imagined, but still... You see? I didn’t touch you anywhere I shouldn’t.’

As he stood up, he picked up her trousers and the scissors.

‘I’m afraid you’ll have a windy bottom for a while.’ He laughed. He’d just thought of a joke that would help to ease the tension. ‘Just be glad your name’s not Eva,’ he said. He continued in a terrible Scottish accent, ‘Eva Windy-bottom.’ He laughed again but was disappointed that she either did not or would not get the joke.

He crossed the room to where metal shelves lined the wall. He put her clothes on the top

shelf. He turned to look at her a moment. What he saw disappointed him: it lacked drama, she was just a woman sitting awkwardly on an ordinary kitchen chair; still, maybe that was the essence of real drama: it wasn't dramatic. He tossed aside such pretentious nonsense, then pulled a chair from beneath the metal desk and sat down. He pulled himself into the desk, enjoying the sound of the casters on the concrete.

He turned to look at the woman again, then shrugged his shoulders and turned back to the desk. He opened the lid of a laptop computer and switched it on. While the computer booted up, he turned on the printer and loaded it with twenty or so sheets of paper. He tapped a few keys on the computer keyboard and the printer started; the noise shocked him, it always did. As soon as the printer came online, it stopped; a red light winked in the darkness.

'Fuck it!'

He turned suddenly to the woman and, grinning, shrugged his shoulders. Then, to excuse the vulgarity, he said: 'Out of ink.' He shrugged his shoulders again, embarrassed. He grabbed hold of the desk and pulled himself over in front of the printer. He carefully removed the paper and put it to one side, then,

exhaling heavy, frustrated breaths, he unplugged the leads from the back of the printer and removed the top. He was acutely aware of every moment spent on this petty job; aware that it made him look bad, as if he hadn't thought things through properly. He changed the ink cartridge and put the printer back together. When he replaced the paper and turned the printer on, he relaxed: he had passed another test.

He read the word, *Belladonna*, upside down, as a page spooled through the printer. He watched the operation until the second page had almost finished, then he picked up the first page and scanned it, checking to make sure there were no mistakes. When he satisfied himself that all was as it should be, he stood up and pushed his chair over to the woman.

He positioned his chair with the back towards her. He liked the image of the two chairs and the woman facing the same direction. He straddled his chair and felt pain in his legs. He wasn't sure whether to stay like that, to suffer for his art, or to get up and turn the chair. Finally deciding he was man enough to admit when he'd made a mistake, he stood up and turned the chair around, then sat facing the woman. He crossed his legs and held the

page up to his face. He scanned the contents. This was for her benefit; he didn't want her thinking he'd been sloppy.

'Belladonna,' he read. He took the page from in front of his face and looked at the woman. 'Deadly Nightshade. Do you know why you're here?' he asked. 'Nod your head if you do.'

The woman did not respond.

'Really? Come on?' he asked, confused. He didn't understand how she could not know what was at the root of the situation. 'OK,' he said. 'Here's a question: how many other people have you abused in your life?'

The woman tried speaking through the ball gag. The man raised his hand. He waited for her to stop before continuing, 'There are a few, preliminaries, to get through. Administration, that sort of thing. Wouldn't do if I'd picked up the wrong person now, would it?'

If it were not for the fact that he was the victim, he would have felt like a Bond Villain.

'Now, your name is Rose Healy. You're twenty-three years of age. You live in Ranelagh. You have a six-year-old daughter called Alexandria, but you call her Lexi, and she stays with your mother, Mary, when you're at work.' He looked up from the page and gave her a thumbs-up. 'Smart move that,'

he said, 'the cost of child care in this country is a disgrace.' He continued to read, 'You have a degree - a second-class degree - in architectural engineering,' He looked up from the page again. 'Too many parties?' he asked. 'You also have a first-class degree in - *blowjobs* - too many parties?' He emphasised the word *blowjobs* to show that he didn't mind.

He let the paper fall and sat back, taking her in. Her ankles looked a little thick, thicker than a real woman's ankles, but he let that go because she'd had a child.

He sat up straight and pulled the creases out of his jacket.

'Rose, I'm going to take that gag off now, and I'd appreciate it if you don't make a fuss. Ok? Good girl.'

He stood and walked around behind Rose. The smell of apples filled his senses as he bent his face to her hair. He was surprised he didn't notice it earlier. A rare happy memory from childhood almost stopped him continuing with what he knew he must do. Anger returned and he straightened up. He unbuckled the ball gag and gently removed it from her mouth.

Rose fell forward, gasping for breath. Her mouth suddenly filled with saliva and she spat. This unladylike behaviour offended the

man. He went back to his chair and sat down, waiting until she was ready.

‘Please,’ she said, ‘my daughter-.’

‘Your daughter is fine,’ he cut in. ‘Trust me. She’s with your mother. And just so we’re clear, I know the assumption is that I don’t see you as a person, and that’s why I can do this. So you’ll probably want to try to, connect, with me. That’s what you’re supposed to do in these situations. That’s what the movies tell you. “Make him see you as a person and he’ll let you go.” But, Rose, you’re overlooking one critical fact.’

He was beginning to enjoy himself. He paused, letting the tension build for the big reveal.

Rose watched him. She was weary, frightened; wanting to be more concerned for her daughter’s safety than for her own, but all she could think was that this man whom she had never met before was going to kill her.

When he felt the moment was ripe, he leaned in, smiling, ‘I already do see you as a person,’ he said, ‘just not a very good one.’

He waited for her response, hopeful that she would say something clever, something to let him know they were on the same level.

‘What do you want?’ She asked.

He sat back and folded his arms. The witty woman he had expected was not there. He added this to the lies she had told him.

'We'll get to that,' he said.

'No, please, I don't have any money.'

'MONEY? Look at me Rose, I make more money in a week than you make in a year.'

'Then what?'

'Respect, Rose. This is about treating people with respect.'

'I don't understand.'

'Then I'm sorry for you. And I'm sorry for your child.' He really was sorry for her; sorry that she had reached this stage of her life without learning the fundamentals of common decency.

'Please, please don't do this to me.'

'What have I done to you?' It was the reasonableness in his voice that scared her now. 'I have done nothing to you,' he said. 'You did this to me!'

'What? I did... What did I-'

He cut her off. 'Why did you contact me?'

'I don't... Who are you?'

He stood up, turning away, confused. Why was she doing this?

She begged again, 'Please? Why-'

A new energy in the room cut her off as he

turned on his heels to face her.

'Are you hungry?'

'What?'

'Did you have breakfast?'

She slowly shook her head, not sure what was going on.

'I brought some Danish pastries,' he said. 'It'll be just like your average Sunday. I know it's not really Sunday, but, well, I won't tell anyone if you don't.'

He turned and walked to the table. Rose watched him; she was more confused than ever.

'What do you want?'

The man stopped, he turned. He had the air of a child about him; a boy trapped in a man's body. He looked at the floor. She felt his excitement. He looked up at her, his face a sombre mask, 'I want,' he said. His lips pressed together: a squirming kiss. He gathered himself, 'OK.' He took a moment, '*I want the truth!*' He let out a little snort of a laugh and looked away. He had always wanted to say that line.

It was only now that Rose began to get a sense of just how unstable he was; she wondered if there was some way she might turn it to her advantage.

'About what?' she asked.

'What?'

'You want the truth about what?'

'Don't play games with me.'

'I'm not playing games.' She blurted the sentence to try and cancel out any murderous thoughts he might have had.

The man wagged a finger at her. He continued to the desk.

'Please.' Rose strained against the handcuffs. She begged again, 'Please. My daughter.'

'No no,' the man said without breaking his stride. He went to the sink and filled the kettle.

'How do you take your coffee?' he asked. He plugged the kettle in then turned to Rose.

'Well?'

'Please, I just want to go home.'

'I know, I know, and you will, once we've taken care of our little bit of business. Would you prefer tea?' He gave her a moment to answer, and then snapped at her, 'Tea or coffee? It's not a difficult choice.'

Her reply was barely audible, 'Coffee.'

'How do you take it?' This time, when she didn't answer quickly enough, he spoke with mild frustration. 'Are you going to be like this all weekend?'

Rose offered a weary, 'Milk, two sugars.'

The water came to the boil and so the man put two desert spoons of coffee into a cafetière. (These were things he had brought from home so that she would be comfortable.) He filled the cafetière with water and then turned to face Rose. He leaned against the counter with his arms folded.

‘You always have to give it a little time,’ he said. ‘Still, it’s worth it, isn’t it? Real coffee. I hate instant coffee. It’s more chicory than coffee, go through you like water.’

Rose remained silent, trying to figure him out. He seemed somehow smaller. She looked around for anything that might tell her where they were, for any way of escape. She started to squirm.

The man held up a wooden chopstick. He smiled.

‘Always use a wooden stirrer,’ he said.

He turned back to the cafetière and stirred the coffee, then put the lid on and slowly pushed down on the plunger. He filled two mugs with coffee and put them onto a tray. He went over to his satchel and took two Danish pastries from a plastic bag, (the bag was filled with cakes he didn’t want Rose to see) and put them on a small plate. He put the plate onto the tray and then carried the lot over to Rose.

He looked at her squirming.

‘Are you Ok? Do you need to use the toilet?’

‘Yes.’

He was suddenly embarrassed, ‘I’ll give you some privacy,’ he said. He put the tray down on his chair. He walked across to the large metal door and pulled back the bolt. The room filled with the loud screeching of metal on metal as the door opened.

Rose, afraid this may be her only chance, screamed, ‘FIRE! FIRE! HELP! FIRE!’

The man waited until she had finished screaming and then closed the door. He pushed the bolt into place and stood waiting for Rose to realise what had happened. He wanted her to think about the implications.

‘You finished?’ he asked.

He went over to Rose, walking slowly, savouring the sound of his footsteps. He stopped in front of her and smiled. He waited until he could feel her fear.

‘You didn’t honestly think I was that stupid? Did you?’

‘Please?’

He softened. He hated that this situation was necessary and wanted her to be as comfortable as possible. ‘Do you need to use the toilet?’

She nodded.

'Right,' he said. He pulled his chair a little closer to Rose, then picked up the tray and sat down, resting the tray on his lap.

'I'm sorry Rose, but if you need to go, you're just going to have to go in front of me.'

He picked up a mug of coffee and drank, then tucked into one of the Danish pastries.

Rose looked at him. She had tears in her eyes, but was afraid to cry in case that set him off and he killed her.

'I'm sorry,' she said, 'Please, just, please, just tell me what you want.'

'You know what I want.'

Rose searched his face for any sign of - anything - she didn't know what she was looking for. She stared back at herself from the mirror lenses.

He put the coffee and Danish down on the tray, and then put the tray on the floor.

'I'm going to show you something,' he said.

He stood up and went to the desk. He unplugged the computer and carried it back to Rose.

'Look up.' He sat down.

'What?'

He pointed to the ceiling.

Rose tilted her head. She saw something that

disturbed her and looked back at the man. He turned the computer screen towards her and pushed a key.

On the screen: a bird's eye view of Rose and the man in their tiny island of light. They looked like they were sitting in a nightmarish love-seat.

She lifted her head, not sure what to make of the image.

'You want to be famous?' she asked.

The man slowly shook his head, a tolerant smile on his lips.

'Then why?'

'This isn't being broadcast,' he said. 'I'm recording this. And when I'm finished with you, I'm going to send it to that company you work for. I'm going to show them what happens... You see, I know that to you, I'm just a paycheque. I didn't, I didn't know that, but I do now.'

'I don't understand.'

'Yes you do.'

Rose began to protest, she really didn't know what he was talking about. He held up a finger, the same tolerant smile on his lips.

'I'm just a paycheque to you, but they, those people who employ you, they are the cause. They are the reason that little slags like you... I

wasn't one of those people that write to you looking for a blowjob. I wasn't even looking for you, but you were the one - you came to me... you came to me.'

'No, no, it wasn't me.'

'No no.'

'Please!'

'Be quiet.'

'No you-.'

'SHUDDUP!'

He stood as he shouted, kicking the chair away from him and almost dropping the computer. He waited, breathing heavily through his nose. He went to the desk, put the laptop down and reconnected it. He went to the chair, picked it up and carried it back to Rose. Very gently, he set the chair down and stood behind it, leaning his hands on the back; waiting; waiting. He didn't know what else to do.

Rose looked at him, pathetically, 'Please?'

Still he waited. He waited until he could no longer take the stillness in the room. He walked around to Rose and kneeled before her. He put his hands on her knees.

'You chose me,' he said.

He waited.

'You sent me pictures.'

He waited.

'Pictures of you.'

He waited.

'Naked pictures of you.'

He waited.

'Pictures that you took with your phone.'

He waited.

'You sent them to me with the promise of more, if I bought an upgrade.'

He waited.

'I wasn't even looking for that.'

He waited.

'I bought an upgrade, so I could connect with you.'

He waited.

'On a human level.'

He waited.

'And then, as soon as I bought the upgrade.'

He waited.

'You, and all of them, dropped me.'

At some point during his tirade, Rose began to cry. He didn't understand why. He studied the progress of her tears.

'Are they for you or for me?' he asked.

'I don't want to die.'

'Who does?'

Rose closed her eyes, turning her head away as a burst of piss hits the bucket under her

chair.

'Don't worry Rose, I told you, I'm not going to kill you.'

The man stood up. He brushed the dust away from his knees. He went to one of the shelves that lined the room and took down a roll of toilet paper and a pair of rubber gloves. He went back to Rose.

'I'm going to wipe you. OK?'

Rose nodded.

The man pulled the gloves on and hunkered down.

'I used to do this for Mammy,' he said, then realised how that might sound and quickly added, 'I mean, she couldn't do it for herself. Nothing icky.' Then, to justify himself, and his mother, he said, 'She was dying.'

'I'm sorry.'

The honesty in her voice caught him.

'I was fourteen,' he said. 'I'd just got my first pubic hair, and then I was looking at hers.' The memory shook him and made him afraid, and so to save himself, he said, 'I still don't know who sent it to me.'

He waited for her to laugh. When she didn't he explained, 'That was a joke - I got my first pubic hair - I don't know who sent it to me. A joke!' He gave her another opportunity to

laugh, and then said, 'No, I do know. I know who sent it to me.'

He laughed awkwardly then. He picked up the roll of toilet paper and ripped off an arm's length. He held it up to show her.

'I need you to open your legs. Please? Rose?'

Rose opened her legs a little. He reached in and wiped her vagina.

'Thank you.' He dropped the toilet paper into the bucket and stood up. He went back to his chair and sat down. He took the gloves off.

'I'm glad you don't shave yourself... down there. That was one of the things that attracted me to you... when I saw your pictures... Are you hungry? Did I ask you that already? Yes, I did.'

He picked up the tray again and set it on his lap. He dipped a finger into her coffee.

'This is a little cold, but it'll have to do for now. You shouldn't have started screaming.'

He held the mug to her lips and tilted it, forcing Rose to drink, and making her wonder how much of her urine was in the coffee.

He was careful not to let her have too much, and after each drink, he put the mug back on the tray and fed her part of a Danish pastry. He continued to chat as he fed her.

'Isn't it amazing too the way we get used to

things. When I started work, I don't think anybody in this country had even heard of Danish pastries. Now they're all over the place. We didn't really have coffee breaks either, we had tea breaks.'

When he decided she'd had enough breakfast, he gave her a final drink of coffee and put the mug back down on the tray; he put the tray down on the floor and picked up the toilet paper. He ripped off a few sheets.

'I'm just going to wipe away the crumbs.' He dabbed at the corners of her mouth. 'Don't worry, there's no perfume or anything on this. I'll never understand why people spend a lot of money on toilet paper. You're going to wipe your bum with it, not decorate the house. There you go.'

He reached under her chair and pulled the bucket out.

'Back in a mo,' he said. He went across and out through the open doorway, returning almost immediately without the bucket. He looked over at Rose and was struck by her beauty.

'You know, I never noticed before, but you're very pretty. You've got very good bone structure.'

Rose didn't answer. He walked across to his

chair and sat down, then pushed away from her; he studied her for a moment. He pushed himself into the darkness and took his sunglasses off. Rose strained to see what he looked like, but his face was just a long shadow.

‘You know, in the old days, painters, artists, fine artists, Picasso, Michael Angelo, those guys; they’d keep a skull in the studio. I imagine you’ve got a really nice skull.’

Rose panicked.

‘Jesus Christ!’ He put his sunglasses back on and moved over beside her. ‘I’m not going to cut your head off! I’m just saying! It’s a compliment! I can imagine some artist putting your skull on a shelf.’ Then, almost to himself, ‘I wonder why they do that?’ He looked up at Rose, ‘Brings them luck, I suppose,’ he said.

He stood abruptly. ‘I’ll tell you what I’m going to do for you now Rose. I’m going to do, for you, what a teacher once did for me.’

‘What?’

‘You’ll see.’

He stood up and went over to the printer. He picked up some of the pages that were lying there; each contained a picture. He flipped through the pages; beautiful images, he turned his head to Rose, looking at her

sideways. He said, 'You'll thank me for this one day.'

He went over to his chair, wheeled it back before Rose and sat down. He held one of the pictures before her face.

'Do you recognise that?'

Rose pulled her head back and he moved the page a few inches from her to help her get a clear view. The photograph showed a woman face down on a bed; her white, fleshy body disappeared into a mass of red hair.

Rose shook her head.

'Look again.'

Rose looked again at the picture but didn't know what to say, she didn't know what he wanted. He shook the page in her face.

'That, is your, bottom.'

The man sat back, slumped a little in his chair, holding the page in his lap. He looked down at the picture. He looked up at Rose and offered her a broken smile.

'This was the first picture you ever sent me.'

'I never sent that.'

He looked at the picture again. When he spoke, it was almost to himself.

'I remember it was November. It was bucketing down. There was a full moon. I was watching videos on - I mean it was couples -

putting their own stuff up - I wouldn't watch anything - icky. But anyway, I thought I'd better check my mail... my ears were on fire, did you ever get like that? I thought there might be something. Usually there's not, but this time there was.

He held the picture up to Rose.

'A full moon!' he said.

He sniffed and Rose realised he's been sniffing on and off for as long as they had been there. At first she hadn't paid any attention because he didn't look or sound like he had a cold; now she wondered if he might have a Cocaine habit. The thought increased her fear for her safety. He piled her fear higher when he asked, 'What drugs do you take?'

'Drugs?'

'Drugs! Yes, drugs! Apart from tea and coffee and cigarettes - you don't smoke, do you?'

'No.'

'Good.' For a moment, he was lost in thought. He looked as though something was happening to him. 'You didn't smoke during your pregnancy, did you?'

Rose slowly shook her head.

'Good,' he said. 'That can have a detrimental effect on the foetus.'

Rose spoke softly, worried that anything she said might be taken as a threat, 'I don't take any drugs.'

The man sat up straight. He searched her face.

'Are you lying to me?'

'No.'

He gave the impression of considering this, then rifled through the pages in his hand, selected one and held it out to her.

'This is a screenshot, of your page, your profile page, on CumSweetly.com.'

Rose scanned the page. She had never heard of a website called CumSweetly.com. Her eyes lighted on the profile picture. It was her portrait, the same smart/casual look she used for her LinkedIn account. Without her being aware of it, Rose's head was shaking, denying what was before her.

'Then how do you explain it?'

'I can't,' she said.

'Exactly.' He put the picture with the others in his lap and sat in triumph.

'It's the internet,' Rose offered.

He nodded agreement. 'I thought that, but then, why would they send me your picture? Your naked picture? Why would they send me your information? Why? Why would they put

us together when they know that we live in the same city?' A thought occurred: something he had not yet considered; he offered it to Rose, half hoping that it was a way out for both of them.

'You're a prostitute?'

'I am not a prostitute!'

Embarrassed at having made the suggestion, he quickly moved to exonerate himself. 'Oh no no no no no. I'm not saying you are a prostitute, I would never do that. I mean, it's OK if you are. It's a perfectly valid lifestyle choice. There's nothing wrong with it ... if you are ... it's just ... I could understand if you were. But it's just, why would a prostitute be on a dating website? There are websites for prostitutes.'

Despite herself; despite the horror of her situation, Rose found something funny in this awkward man who had taken her prisoner.

'I'm not a prostitute,' she said again, but softly now, as if she were explaining something fundamental to her child.

'Good. Good. I'm glad,' he said. 'Because, those women, nobody should have to go through what those women have to go through.'

'No.'

'Imagine those fat bellies rolling on top of you.' He shivered. He picked up another page and read: 'Love your profile. Drop me a line if you wanna hook up. You sound right up my alley. If you wanna cum, spelled c-u-m, there, send some pics of your beautiful prick and we can take it from there.' He looked up from the page, more sorry than angry. 'Pics of my beautiful prick? I mean, wh- wh- what makes you think you can treat people like this?'

'I didn't send those messages.'

'I suppose you didn't send the photos either?'

'I already told you.'

The man lifted another page from the pile on his lap.

'What about this?'

He held the page at arm's length, waited a moment and then flicked it at her. He picked up another page.

'This?'

He held up a camera phone selfie of Rose in the nude, again he flicked the page at her.

Rose turned away, crying now.

'Or this?' Another camera phone selfie of Rose in the nude. He flicked the page at her.

'Please,' Rose begged. 'Please, I don't know who did this to you. But it wasn't me.'

The man dropped the pages to the floor. He stood up and kneeled before Rose. He was sorry to see her tears; that wasn't what he wanted. He rested his hands on her knees to offer comfort.

She pulled away and he put his hands up, as if in surrender. He looked around at the pictures on the floor. He picked up one of the camera-phone selfies and held it up to Rose.

'Rose.' His voice was soft. His heart filled with compassion for this woman in pain. 'This is you. You can't deny that.'

'I'm not.'

'You took those pictures.'

'Yes.'

'And you sent them to me.'

'No.'

The man sat back on his heels. He decided she was being obstinate on purpose.

'OK,' he said. He stood up to look down on her. He went to his chair and sat down. He looked at the picture in his hand. She wasn't even his type, her arse was too fat. He thought about a stand-up comic he'd once seen: 'We men, well, most men, not just little people; we'll take a fat-bottomed girl over a flat-bottomed girl any day of the week, especially if we're in between the two of them.' He

laughed. That was when he realised he had a type. He crushed the picture in his hand and let it fall.

‘OK,’ he said again. ‘OK.’

Neither one could say how long they sat there. At some point the theme tune from *The Lone Ranger*, played on a glockenspiel, filled the room.

The man turned to where his iPhone was lit up beside the computer. A moment later he stood up and walked over to it. He picked up the phone and pressed the screen. He went over to Rose and picked up the ball gag.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I have to go. Work.’

He walked around behind her and tried to put the ball into her mouth. She fought against it and he had to pull on the straps to force the ball between her teeth. He buckled the strap behind her head, and then walked around to face her; to let her see his disappointment with her for making him do all the work.

He went to the desk and collected a few things. He put them into a satchel, and then checked that everything was unplugged.

He went back to Rose and winked to let her know that he still liked her. He took the red velvet bag from his pocket and put it over her head, pulling the bottom open so she would

have enough air; he wanted her to be comfortable.

He went over to the metal door and flicked the light switch, throwing the room into total darkness. He felt for the bolt and a moment later, pushed it across and pulled open the door. Twilight slipped into the room. He stood amazed. He hadn't realised they had been there so long. He looked over at Rose. There was something beautiful about her sitting shackled to the chair, with the bag over her head.

He took out his phone and snapped a picture for his private collection.

'I'll see you tomorrow, Rose.' He went out and locked the door, leaving Rose to the darkness and the sound of rats.

Would you like to know how it all turns out?

The ebook is available [here](#).

[Cover Art](#)



Online Cupid

The painting is titled Gold. It was made in one session in 2009. There are three cuts at the top of the canvas, I'm still not sure what they mean, but I felt they added an extra *something*. For the cover I digitally added shadow to the edges of the painting.

It's available as a fine art print.

For details click [here](#).

About the Author

Fergus Anthony was born in Ireland in 1969. Amongst other jobs, he has worked as a kitchen porter, a janitor, a tour guide, as a general labourer in construction. He lives in Dublin and works in community theatre.



The logo is called Heart&Mind and is based on a woodcarving I made in the 1990's.

It's available on a T-shirt [here](#).

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