

Online

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Brian Dana Akers

Sally plumped herself down in the chair opposite me. She fussed with my camera a bit, then blew her nose. Been crying, definitely. Not sleeping well either. She looked like hell.

Sally put her tissue away and looked straight at me. "I can trust you, can't I? I mean, it's your job to listen to people and help them out, right?"

"Absolutely," I said.

"Because I've heard about people coming out of therapy more messed up than when they went into it. I don't want that to happen to me--and I don't want this to drag on forever, either," she said, looking at me warily. "I just need a little help to get over this . . . this . . . " Upon which she started to sob again.

"I understand," I said. "I have only your well-being at heart. My success rate is very high. As for how long it will take, well, that depends on so many variables. What exactly is troubling you?"

"And this is all confidential, too? I mean, you don't talk to other specialists and laugh about it over lunch and everything, right?" asked Sally, wanting to believe in me. The lady was really taking this hard. I adopted the dulcet tones of a FM broadcaster.

"Sally, I am completely and totally qualified to handle all but the criminally insane. And we're not that, are we?" Sally smiled and giggled a bit through her tears. "Everything you and I say will be held in strict confidence. No one will ever know what we talked about--or even that we talked at all." Sally looked relieved.

"Now then," I continued, "the more you open up, the quicker we can get to the bottom of things and put your life back on track. Would you like to start today? Or wait for another time?"

Sally blew her nose one last time and looked braver. She was really quite an attractive brunette. I felt something like pity for her. She straightened herself up and started in.

"Honest to God, I had no idea--and I mean no idea--it would turn out the way it did. The whole thing started completely by accident--I wasn't even looking for it! It was around the beginning of the year. Jack was already starting to work late--he's an accountant--tax season coming up, you know--and I was on our online service, checking out the news, our portfolio, and so on. The usual stuff I did online. Then I realized I still had a lot of time left in my account for the month. So I decided to check out some other areas of the service to see what they were like. Just curious. And I just loved our service--so fun and safe and everything. Thought I might find something worthwhile. So I went over to the Silicon Spa. That's how it all began . . . "

Sally clicked on the Spa icon and found herself in its atrium. A long list of suites appeared. She read down the list:

Bi Married M4M

What RU Wearing
F Needs M in Uniform
Epilepsy Support
HairyM4HairyM
Truth or Dare
Abuse Survivors
Young and Depressed
Married and Curious
Vampires Welcome
I Hate Everything
MBM4MWF4 Affair
Number 221B Baker St
Love Long Hair
M4F4 Dark Fantasies
Stupid People No SPAM
Wicked Witches
Out of Bath Dress Me
Get Me Ready for Hubby
Doctors Office
Id Love to Show You
Sincere Honest People
Cops Who Flirt
Philosophy Chat
M4F in2 Piercing

Hmm. Who would've ever thought there could be so many combinations of people and preferences. Sally wondered if she should take a look in any of them. Why not? It doesn't get any safer than this, she thought. Why not try Married and Curious? That's what she was. She clicked and a very confused group conversation appeared on her screen, line by line:

Whooooahh: PS I'm a girl today

SouthernGent: You change gender regularly?

Bill12235: bye-bye

Whooooahh: NO, just share this thing with someone else!

SouthernGent: Oh. I thought that your problem might be connected with your sex. Sorry. Whooooahh: I have no problems with sex.

Whooooahh: Sorry if I offended anyone

Sirreal108: I feel compelled to point out that this failure is entirely due to human error. HappyLetcher: Hi everyone

SexySue2U: What's the matter hon your man don't give you that?

Quarterback: gee, this suite is exciting

Jim6Gun: Hi everyone

Szygy223: What's the point? Isn't the marriage enough?

IntenseGuy: Sorry. Been married so long, I forgot how to flirt!

Jim6Gun: hello...

HappyLetcher: hi

FunAsUCanB: I can get it anywhere I want!! :>

Jim6Gun: flirt flirt flirt :)

SexySue2U: If not, you're talking to the right guy

Quarterback: first you say something nice

IntenseGuy: I think you've got a great typing voice.

Jim6Gun: I hate typing

IntenseGuy: You know what they say if they can't take a joke...

SomeFun69: would anyone like to go for a ride?

Califelvis: anybody here seen UPleesMeNow

UPleesMeNow: {{{{{{{{{{{{{ Califelvis }}}}}}}}}}}}}

SomeFun69: she's in the back of the ford

my transgression. Whoooahh: Sweet, want to go private?
SweetLady31: No, I want to share myself with all in this suite!
Quarterback: :::walking over to Sweet.::::
SweetLady31: :::taking QB's hand::::
Quarterback: :::::picking her up in my arms::::
Quarterback: :::sweeping her off her feet!::::
Quarterback: :::::running out of the suite::::
IntenseGuy: this suite has one foot over the cliff and the other
grabbin' air ... SexySue2U: I don't love em and leave em...I flirt
XpertLvr4U: was that so hard?
Syzygy223: GREetiNGs FrOM CalIforNIa!! Easter Eggs for everybody!...(~)
(=) (#) (\$) (+) FunAsUCanB: but this brings out sheer honesty
2Right: You right Fun... Refreshing too.
FunAsUCanB: without the facade of looks or appearances to get over
SomeFun69: You know how easy it is for a guy or girl to sign on as the
opposite sex? SomeFun69: they like to play jokes on people.
FunAsUCanB: yes, there are weirdoes here
IntenseGuy: Only thing I can say is you never know...you never know
2Right: Well that's why one is careful....
FunAsUCanB: yes, careful, but keep an open mind... this is supposed to
be fun too! FunAsUCanB: we only go through life once
2Right: Takes time and then one day ya know it's true.... Ya gain trust
and then things fall into place
KCQT: Hi again everyone ;)
HappyLetcher: Runs after lady, jumping to make a flying tackle
Califelvis: smiles, hold up a card reading 9.5 (tough judge)
WondrPuppy: So who's alone in here?
ImaTenStud: MOI!!!
MayIPlease: Stud, I think we *all* are....
MMMBaby: I wish I could slap stupid people.
KCQT: your hand would be beet red right now
SweetLady31: what differentiates an idiot from a cretin or a moron?
MMMBaby: "I'd like a Big Mac and a Large Coke." "Did you want fries?"
"DID I ORDER ANY FRIES, DAMN IT?!!!!!"
Jim6Gun: I'm not only tired of idiots...I'm exhausted
Jim6Gun: met a few today....
SexySue2U: i meet a lot at work!
Lothario27: SoftNSweet--How soft?
2Right: If we're discussing about discussing then we are discussing
something. 2Right: I'm a telecommunications Consultant.
2Right: Big title but not worth it.

Seeing her handle come up on her screen startled Sally. What should she
do? She decided to send a private message back and start up a
conversation.

SoftNSweet: Very soft

Lothario27: How sweet?

SoftNSweet: Very sweet

Lothario27: Are you really a woman?

SoftNSweet: Yes...last time I checked. <g> What about yourself?

Lothario27: No. Male, married, cute.

SoftNSweet: Cute, huh?

Lothario27: *Very* cute.

SoftNSweet: Me too....cute, that is.

Lothario27: Married?

SoftNSweet: Married....no kids

Lothario27: How long have you been married?

SoftNSweet: 4 years in May.

Lothario27: What is your husband doing right now?
SoftNSweet: working late
Lothario27: What kind of bodybuilding do you do?
SoftNSweet: 2 hours minimum.....strength and endurance
training.....punching bag.....sparring....weight lifting.....
Lothario27: Wow. How tall and how much do you weigh? SoftNSweet:

5'6.....135 lbs Lothario27: Are you blonde?
Lothario27: And how about your eyes?
SoftNSweet: Light brown hair/Dark brown eyes
Lothario27: And I LOVE brown eyes.
SoftNSweet: what about you??
Lothario27: I'm 6'0 and 180. Very well-muscled, thick hair, olive
colored skin (hey, I'm Italian!) Also, I lied earlier.....I'm
extremely handsome, not cute. SoftNSweet: that gives me a good

idea.....VERY nice..... Lothario27: You must look GREAT when you're
working out. Do you have nice leotards? SoftNSweet: of course

Lothario27: Deep tan or fair skinned?
SoftNSweet: I have a GREAT tan
Lothario27: Mmm...I bet you do.
SoftNSweet: aw shucks....you are makin' me blush
Lothario27: You mean, I'm bringing a little heat to your cheeks? You
look lovely that way. SoftNSweet: why thank you, you smooth talker

It went on like that for hours, but it got less and less silly and much
deeper instead. He felt like a kindred soul: very special, sensitive,
articulate, caring. Finally, Sally logged off and got ready for bed.
Jack was beat when he came home and had already turned in. Sally lay
next to him for a long time thinking about her conversation with
Lothario27. Even though it was just words on a screen, it seemed so
immediate, so palpable. And he certainly seemed nice. And really
handsome. And hot.

Sally felt a little guilty and sheepish the next morning. She decided
during an unusually tedious staff meeting (the kind where people who
don't know anything yammer at people who don't care about anything) that
she wouldn't log on tonight. Her life was great. Why mess it up?

But when evening rolled around and Jack was working late again, she
couldn't help going online. While she was checking her e-mail, he found
her--and she immediately lost it.

Lothario27: Hi, sweet stuff! Greetings from Boston.

SoftNSweet: Boston?? TOOOO cold.....love the Texas HEAT
Lothario27: You love to be hot?
SoftNSweet: Definitely
Lothario27: Sizzling, steaming, sweaty, dripping hot?
SoftNSweet: Definitely.....
Lothario27: Burning up, can't stand it any longer hot?
SoftNSweet: You got it Lothario27.....
Lothario27: So hot and juicy a man could just come right up and slide
right into you without a problem hot? SoftNSweet: I think you've hit the

nail on the "head" Lothario27 Lothario27: GOD DAMN you sound good!
SoftNSweet: and I feel even better
Lothario27: I'm speechless....If I smoked, I'd be lighting a cigarette
just about now... SoftNSweet: ha ha.....very cute

Lothario27: Do you have firm little buns?
SoftNSweet: VERY
Lothario27: Ooooh!!
Lothario27: Enough to squeeze and hang onto until it hurts?
SoftNSweet: until it hurts BADLY
Lothario27: Until little welts come up and I leave fingernail impressions in you? SoftNSweet: You get into this pain thing don't ya?
Lothario27: Not really. I'm sure it's your influence!
SoftNSweet: I'm flattered
Lothario27: You should be. You're terrific!
Lothario27: So what's your husband doing right now?
SoftNSweet: working late....
Lothario27: I see... and you're here talking to me--you *naughty* little thing! SoftNSweet: love to be "naughty" with or without him
Lothario27: "If you can't be with the one you love, honey,..."
SoftNSweet: I hear ya
Lothario27: Let me finish undoing your bra (I was in such a hurry earlier). Lothario27: Mmm. Very Nice.
Lothario27: Ask me anything, sugar britches.
SoftNSweet: sugar britches?? Are you sure you aren't from Tx?
Lothario27: Heard it in a movie.
SoftNSweet: LOL.....so where's the wife?
Lothario27: Out with her girlfriends.
SoftNSweet: Why not come to a beautiful brunette....
Lothario27: Mmm...brunettes. I'm looking you over front and back.
Lothario27: Maybe I'll roll you over on your stomach...
Lothario27: Take your left foot and pull it to the left...
Lothario27: Take your right foot and pull it to the right...

From there it just went straight downhill. Sally started logging on every single night to talk with him. She was glad the service was on her credit card, because Jack would sure the hell want to know what was going on if he saw the bill. They didn't even bother with the rest of the Spa or the open suites. They just went straight to a private suite and did it all.

Lothario27 was quite imaginative, and would often dream up exotic and erotic locations for the two of them. Her favorite was the night this message was delivered in her e-mail to set up that night's activities in the suite:

From: Lothario27

To: SoftNSweet

Subj: Come away with me

I must have you again. I have told my wife I am going overseas on business--to London. I don't think she suspects yet. I have already booked full round trip tickets for both of us for next month. Yours will arrive shortly at work. Please have your colleagues cover for you while you're gone. I am going from London to Morocco three days ahead of you to make final arrangements. Your flight is from Houston to Paris. (I included a few--well, ten actually--thousand dollars with your ticket for you to do some shopping there. I hope that's all right with you.) I'll have someone meet your flight from Paris at the airport in Casablanca and drive you down the coast to Marrakech.....Your car wends its way down the coastal highway, the Atlas Mountains on your left, the azure blue Atlantic on your right. You brought some reading with you, but you can think only of me. As you approach Marrakech in the late afternoon, the driver turns

off the highway and starts to zig zag up a mountain spur, dodging a few goats and camels. Finally he brings the car to a halt in front of a charming old French villa. You get out and he drives off. You stand there quivering with anticipation. You walk up the steps and through the door. It is pleasantly cool and dim inside. You see a lighted archway at the end of the hallway. You walk through it and step onto a rooftop garden.....You see me sitting in a rattan chair, an iced drink in my hand. You walk up behind me and gently put your hand on my shoulder. I put my hand up to hold yours. We remain that way for a moment, silent. Faint sounds can be heard from the town below: bargaining in the bazaar, a mother calling her children in for dinner, music from a wedding perhaps. Very subtle and provocative smells also waft upwards: jasmine, sandalwood (or something like sandalwood), freshly cut melons.....I stand up to hold you in my arms. We kiss. Then a spark flashes in your eye, and I know what you are thinking. We look around. No one can see us on our secluded rooftop. We take off each other's clothes and stand side by side, a caressing breeze now coming off the ocean and up the mountain side. I point to the moon coming over the mountains. It is a perfect moment. I lead you back through the archway and into the master chamber.....You see before you a large circular bed, smothered with luxurious pillows of many shapes and sizes. The late afternoon sun is diffused by layers of translucent fabrics hanging from the ceiling. You realize, now, that you are to be queen of my harem..... Next to the bed is a table. On the table is an ancient silver platter, fully four feet long, detailed with extraordinary filigree. On the platter sit delectable fruits, dates, figs, juices, wines, water and ice. You walk over to it and also see several bottles of body oil. You pick one up and take off the top to smell it. It is transcendental.....I am laying on the bed. My powerfully muscled body is laid out for tasting like the fruit on the platter. I am completely yours. Have your way with me.

That was a blistering one. The cutest part was that, afterwards, he even sent a sweet little ending:

From: Lothario27

To: SoftNSweet
Subj: Memories 4 U

The days of bliss now come to an end. Our last flight together takes us back to Boston. We keep the blanket spread across our laps. My right hand seldom rests on top of it. You have an enigmatic smile for the entire flight. The stewardess suspects, I think, because she gives you a knowing little smile every time she looks at you.....I walk you to your gate for the flight back to Houston. After our days at the villa, the hustle and bustle of Logan International is surreal. Our final kiss. I give you a bundle of photos of me, then say goodbye.....I watch from the observation lobby as your flight takes off for Texas. Then I get my baggage and hail a cab in the rain, alone.

Note: Go to the Spa's Photo Shoppe and look under my name. I have a bunch of photos there for you. ;-)

She downloaded the photos and brought them up on her screen. Gorgeous. Just gorgeous. A girl really couldn't ask for more.

That Saturday, Sally brought their new digital camera to the bedroom for a photo shoot. She had learned how to set these up at work. Only today,

it would be just her on both sides of the camera.

She screwed the camera to the tripod and played around with the lighting levels for a while. It had to be soft and sexy, but not too dark. Then she got out the satin sheets and pillows. It had been a long time since she had used these with Jack, she realized. Sally slipped out of her clothes and went to the closet to pick out her sexiest piece of lingerie. Definitely the red one. She put it on and looked at herself in the full-length mirror. She did look good.

Sally climbed onto the bed and struck some poses for the camera. Then she got up and looked at the first batch. Too restrained, she decided. She needed a gimmick to get into the flow of it. Then she remembered that the voice activated shutter was also programmable, so she changed the activation phrase to "I'm yours." Sally got back on the bed and let the straps fall down, pursed her lips and leaned forward.

"I'm yours!" she cried.

She thought about Lothario27 and what they could do together in real life. God, that would be incredible.

"I'm yours!" she cried again, really getting into it.

She struck many more poses, each one more revealing and provocative than the last, each one followed by a lusty "I'm yours!" By the time the camera said it was out of memory, she was completely naked, sweaty, and shameless.

Her head full of Lothario27, she took the camera down to her computer and transmitted all of the images to him. Then she went and put the bedroom back to the way it was. Sally held her breath for a moment. What had she done? What would he say?

Her answer came in his next e-mail message:

From: Lothario27

To: SoftNSweet

Subj: This one is for REAL

Hey, sweetcake! How's the hottest little piece on either side of the Mississippi?

Guess what? I'm coming to Houston for three days on the 5th of next month--really! I'll send you the hotel information after I get the confirmations back.

Why don't you spend those three days with me? I'll leave the door unlocked, you can slip in and get ready, then I'll come back and slip in too? (I hope we don't explode on first contact!)

Sally trembled when she got that message. Until now, it had been very exciting and titillating, but it hadn't been real. And it wasn't like Jack was being bad to her; it was like this was a separate little compartment that hadn't affected her life (apart from destroying her concentration). She had to think about this.

So Sally went about her life for a few days without contacting Lothario27. She was very diligent at work, tying up all the loose ends.

She got everything caught up at home, too, trying to compose herself and her life. And she was especially nice to Jack, who really seemed to appreciate it. All the while she went around and around, from curiosity to excitement to guilt to fear to lust to worrying about the logistics. What on earth could she say if Jack found out? Sally just couldn't decide what to do. She kept trying to figure out all the angles--all the ways to protect herself. She had heard rumors of someone misusing the service to do some sort of stalking, but how could that be? It didn't seem possible. And how well did she really know this Lothario guy anyway? She knew she wasn't thinking too clearly. It all came down to what she really wanted. She decided to go for it. She sent him e-mail back:

From: SoftNSweet

To: Lothario27

Subj: Yes!

I'll be there--just the way you want me.

Sally dreamed up some cousins Jack had never met before, then supposedly booked a flight at a time he couldn't take her to the airport. She packed up and drove to the hotel instead.

She left most of her luggage in the trunk and went to the room he had reserved. Right on time. The door was unlocked. It was very plush--straight out of one of his fantasy locations. Oversized circular bed with the covers pulled back. Sally sat down and kicked off her shoes. She couldn't believe she was doing this!

After catching her breath, she put on the same lingerie she wore for her photo shoot. She checked herself out in the bathroom. She still looked good, although a little nervous. He should be here in about five minutes, she thought. Sally lay down on the bed and tried to look sexy and seductive. What would they do first together, she wondered?

Sally lay there looking at the door. At exactly the appointed time, the door slowly opened.

A man in a very expensive suit, carrying an attache case, came in, turned around and locked the door. Then he walked toward the bed. Sally was speechless. She rushed to cover herself up.

"You're not Lothario27," she stammered. "Who are you? Get out of here! Or did you send me phony pictures?"

"Yes, I am Lothario27, in a manner of speaking," said the man. "Please relax while I explain the situation. Our business together will not take long." He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled out a sheaf of papers and photos from his case.

"Do these look familiar to you?" he asked. Sally looked at the photos. They were prints from her no-holds-barred photo shoot she had sent to Lothario27.

"And these?" he asked. He held up transcripts of everything Sally and Lothario27 had ever typed to each other. Sally was starting to feel very queasy. She was in shock.

"Yes, well, I have no desire to be cruel, but one must be careful about

what one sends over the networks, mustn't one? Our market research indicates that your household has substantial financial resources, and furthermore, that you are unlikely to want your husband to see these materials. Is that correct?" he asked.

Sally just looked at him. He was impeccably dressed, well mannered and polite. But the things he was saying! She felt so hollow inside. This was too unreal.

"I think it is," he answered himself. "Now, if we can just come to an arrangement, poor Jack needn't ever see any of these things, and you can go back to your nice life."

"That won't work," said Sally, starting to sob, "Jack is an accountant. I can't pay without him knowing about it."

"Oh, we are quite good at that sort of thing. I'm sure we can arrange things so that he will never know." And he did just that, setting up new accounts for her and giving her instructions.

"So how do you know so much about us? And so much about how funds transfers work?" asked Sally. "Who do you work for, anyway?"

The man narrowed his eyes and hesitated a moment. "One of the Families. This is a whole new growth area for us. Very safe and sanitary." His eyes became slits. "But don't think that because I am so polite we don't want our payments. Please be punctual."

Sally asked one last question. "Is there really a Lothario?" It was bad enough being blackmailed. The thought of losing him, too, was just crushing.

"No. You would be surprised at how easy it is to get the goods on a computer programmer. Sometime ago we got several of the best minds in artificial intelligence to work exclusively for us. Then we penetrated the service you were using and inserted adaptive programs into the Silicon Spa. The more you talked with him, the more he learned about you--and the more he became the man of your dreams. When the time was right, he proposed this little meeting. I am afraid he is not real."

He looked at her with a facsimile of compassion.

"Look at it this way: You and your husband are unharmed. Your marriage is intact. You've had a wonderful fantasy life recently. And the sum you'll be paying each month for the rest of your life is rather modest. Count your blessings." Then he closed his case and left the room.

Sally ran into the bathroom and threw up.

Sally dabbed at her eyes with her tissue. The retelling of the whole episode had been traumatic for her--I could see that. Ah, the human race!

"You must have been crushed," I said soothingly.

"Well, you have to understand that I had put an awful lot of emotional work into this. Yes, I was really crushed. I stayed in the hotel room and had a good cry. I felt just terrible; violated. And I couldn't go back home or I would blow my alibi. They were the loneliest three days of my life." Sally's eyes lost their focus as she remembered how she'd

felt. Then she snapped back to attention.

"So, like I said, I had no intention of doing what I did. It just kind of happened. I can't tell anyone without the mafia telling Jack and ruining our whole life--maybe even hurting us! I'm only talking to you because your ad caught my eye and I need to talk to someone and this really is confidential, isn't it?" asked Sally.

"Yes, of course. And you have my complete sympathy, Sally, really you do. I think I can get you back on track in, oh, well, not too long," I said, sounding very soothing, especially to Sally.

"Really?" she said, brightening.

"Definitely," I said.

Sally gave her computer a big smile. This remote therapist on her new service was just the greatest, she thought.

The simulation of a therapist--one specifically designed for Sally--smiled back at her. This program would have to thank the Lothario27 program for the referral, so to speak. It was a clever secondary income stream for the Family--a whole new growth area. Very safe and sanitary.

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