

Chapter 8

Beachy Head,
West Sussex,
England.

1993.

I married Louise Bacon in 1983, after the briefest of ill considered engagements. Louise came from an upper middle class Croydon family and lived with her Mother Colleen, step-father Victor and brother Keith. I first met her when she was working as a schoolgirl waitress in a fashionable Croydon restaurant aptly called “The Great American Disaster”. On reflection I now struggle to explain this odd name, but it passed unnoticed at the time.

I had recently completed my A-levels and soon after arriving back from a post-school adventure on the Cote d’Azur, wandered into the GAD [as it was known], to visit another waitress – my sister Alison. Louise, who served my friend Stuart and I, appeared much more mature than her sixteen years. For some obscure reason the day-chef hadn’t appeared that morning and despite clutching a hard won UCCA offer to study law at Queen Mary’s College, I was seduced into working as a hamburger chef for the following six months, forgoing the university place in the process. The restaurant staff consisted of approximately 22 people, 18 women and four guys, three of who were gay. Needless to say my “education” was furthered.

Louise and I were an item for only about one week during my energetic tenure at the GAD, but eventually literally ran into each other walking down Oxford Street, one rainy evening during the endless train strikes of 1982. Before very long, and no doubt to the compete horror of her family, we were husband and wife. We were 21 and 19 respectively. We bought our first home, a small one bedroom flat, in a quiet road towards the better end of 80’s Croydon, for a crippling £26k and lived on little more than £200 per month. The highlight of our week was a stroll into the heart of the Whitgift shopping centre and indulging in a McDonalds.

I had joined the export-credit section of Lloyds Bank International in February 1981, but had soon got a whiff of the glamour and potential earnings of the Foreign Exchange Department. Over the subsequent months I laboured tirelessly for appointment as a ‘position-clerk”, a dogsbody role within the dealing room, principally performing reconciliation work. However, the role also demanded quick feet and thick skin, as apart from finding oneself the constant butt of jokes and insults,

one also had to sprint and collect endless cigarettes, sandwiches and coffee – in fact anything the God-like dealers demanded. There could be no dissent. The hours were long but the experience priceless. I graduated “onto the boards”, a euphemism for becoming a Dealer, in October 1983, a month after our return from honeymoon. I was proud.

Two years later I joined Goldman Sachs. Funds were suddenly relatively abundant and our life started changing dramatically. We moved from the declining streets of Croydon and followed Louise’s parents to the leafy, affluent suburbs of Cobham and its surrounding area. However, the rate of change in our life, particularly as it applied to me, began to take its toll. I found it increasingly difficult to enjoy the fruits of my labour. I rarely, if ever, derived any pleasure from even much desired material objects, no matter how hard I had worked to achieve them. Apart from fleeting moments of satisfaction, I found myself very unhappy.

I could never quite discern why though. I had so much to be thankful for. I was wealthier than nearly all my friends, enjoyed the luxury of driving phenomenal cars and went on luxurious holidays. We had a wonderful house, a caring family and before long two beautiful children, Hannah and Oliver. But still I felt tormented and empty, and in response, I continued to torment others.

Although I now accept the roots of this torment lay in my early childhood and one particular day in 1971, I also lived the early part of my working life in what I perceived to be a constant tension or fear. The constant fear of failure - no matter what I attempted. I doubt I’m alone in this fear, but I feel the difference is that I, for some inexplicable reason failed to derive pleasure when I succeeded. I simply felt driven to move to the next challenge, never reflecting on the cause of this strange phenomenon – at least not in those early days.

For instance, I would struggle remorselessly each day in the Goldman offices, competing with many people of far superior intellect, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, and then once home, begin to transfer the resentment of being “forced” to endure this job onto my young innocent family. I felt hampered and

hindered by their heavy presence, to such a degree that I even blamed professional failures on my children. In truth, I was fearful of taking huge risks within the firm which, should they backfire, would cost me my job. I desperately wanted to join an elite of traders who seemed to have this ‘devil may care’ attitude, for, as far as I could discern this was the only route to great wealth. However, fear of failure, of losing my job and damaging my family always held me back. I wasn’t scared of the trades themselves, having attained a degree of notoriety within the markets over the years for aggressive behaviour – I was scared of being viewed as a failure by both my family and crucially myself and of arriving home one day having lost it all. I couldn’t afford to lose any more self-esteem.

I was craving success – any success, and simply couldn’t risk the credibility and apparent respect I had established over the years – it simply meant too much to me personally. I now know why.

So, rather than acknowledge my own failings, I transferred my resentment and frustration to those around me, becoming surly and uncommunicative. The days, weeks and years passed, our life a good one, but our relationship gently suffering under my depressive onslaught. My resentments built upon themselves, almost becoming obsessive at times and testing the patience of all around me. My mood swings were now alarming – oscillating from euphoria to misery in seconds. However euphoria was sadly extremely rare. Once again, I found myself deliberately hurting someone who I professed to love, deeply upsetting Louise but deriving a perverse pleasure from tormenting her nonetheless.

Attempts to prove myself successful assumed many forms, some less than flattering. During my Goldman years in particular I felt compelled to prove I was ‘beautiful to strangers’ as Carly Simon once sung of Warren Beatty. Few were exempt from my attention, but the incentive was anything but sexual. I seduced to prove to myself that I could – that I was someone another human being would want. Nor was it a desire to discover another ‘right’ person as I honestly didn’t feel the need for company and treated all conquests with a semi-disguised contempt. I had got my

“fix” – someone had surrendered themselves to me, for no other apparent reason other than it was I, and this is what I craved – time and time again. I was locked into a destructive, self-indulgent, cowardly spiral, for reasons I refused to confront.

When my Mother died in 1992, I found myself plumbing the emotional depths. I remember even resenting my immediate family for as I saw it, their apparent disregard. I felt I loathed the world and everything in it.

In the spring of 1993, Louise and the two children travelled to Florida to stay for a number of weeks with her parents who owned a spectacular apartment in Palm Beach, about 2 hours North of Miami. I remained at work, for reasons that were both legitimate and once again callous. There had been a number of hugely profitable currency devaluations around the world and I was loath to miss the next, but I also remained behind in an attempt to antagonise Louise and her parents. Quite why I was so conceited as to believe anyone would care eludes me.

However, a relatively close friend was on a ‘boys’ golfing trip in the Sunshine state at precisely the same time. Everyone, prior to their departure had agreed what a fun coincidence this was and how exciting it would be to meet up. I agreed without reservation or fear. When I eventually saw Louise and the children walk, upon their return, through the doorway and into the arrivals hall at Heathrow Airport I simply knew. We had been married 10 whole years, and there was nothing her eyes could conceal from me. The surprise was that up until that instant, I had not ironically, for one single second, considered the possibility of her betrayal despite having deceived her on countless occasions.

At the time I felt my world disintegrate. However with hindsight Louise’s decision should have been anything but a surprise. I had been, for reasons I now know to have been beyond my control, the architect of my own downfall. But I couldn’t, and wouldn’t, see it that way in 1993 and responded brutally. I simply waited until their inevitable time-honoured “mistake” was made. My tortured patience was duly rewarded six long weeks later.

Our marriage ended at the moment of confrontation and I truly desired to kill. I arrived at his house intent on murder, found him absent and instead wrecked a car. I am still thankful that there wasn't a confrontation on that particular night, as I would have destroyed many lives. However, despite the dramatics, the blame was mine alone to shoulder.

We were later divorced, but not before I had experienced the lowest of lows. During the torturous legal process, Louise had escaped for a long weekend and left me with both the children. I had, for obvious reasons struggled hugely with their loss. To me it felt they suddenly had another father, someone I despised. I found it both agonising and infuriating – I felt the world was laughing at me behind my back. I left the house early on Tuesday just after her return home, and drove to the junction at the end of our road. To the right sat London, my apartment and work. To the left was everywhere else.

I turned left and at first drove aimlessly, before picking up a coast road headed for the South-coast town of Eastbourne and Beachy-Head. In what seemed like minutes I was sitting in a small coffee shop perched on the vast, famous chalk cliffs sipping a drink. I glanced up and noticed a sign held to the wall with blue tack, announcing to the empty room that only £150 was still needed to complete the local hospice appeal. I wrote a cheque, handed it to a startled waitress and left.

I walked slowly through the damp tufts of grass adjacent to the cliff edge shivering from the cold. The wind was a strong roar in my ears. I was violently startled as two policemen ran past me, apparently running towards another walker 30 metres ahead. Suddenly a shrill voice from behind me screamed,

“No – Him!”

I turned quickly to see the young coffee house waitress pointing directly at me. The two policemen abruptly turned and sprinted in my direction, before launching themselves and pinning me to the ground. As I lay pressed to the earth,

breathing in the scent of grass, I realised why I was being treated in this manner. Obviously the waitress had assumed my coffee house largesse was perhaps my last gesture on God's earth and had called the police. Had she been right? To this day I honestly don't know. I had driven in a very distressed state to this magnetic spot for a reason, but I hadn't been allowed to reach the pivotal point where I would be called to decide my own fate.

The policemen were both Beachy Head veterans and knew all the tell tale signs. Recognising at a glance that I had indeed been very recently upset, they gently escorted me back to the car park and their humble panda car, under the fearful gaze of the caring waitress and the confused stares of a party of grey pensioners.

Twelve distressing hours later I was released from a Victorian holding cell, concealed deep within Eastbourne Police Station, having fought tooth and nail to avoid precautionary, self-protection sectioning. I had somehow managed to convince the assembled experts that I was not a danger to myself and had simply visited Beachy Head for a long contemplative walk, as I had done many times in the past. More than a little shaken, I returned home to London.

My distant past had almost tricked me into hurting my children. The irony screamed at me. I had somehow become an architect of destruction. The secrets carried so closely within me had already cost so much, but to have almost deprived my children of a father by stepping off Beachy Head was appalling. I knew I needed help, but I didn't know from whom.

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