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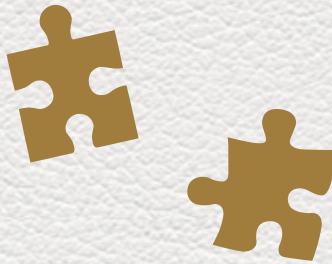
Exclusively For

NEIL STRAUSS

**THE  
INNER  
CIRCLE**

*The*  
**TRUTH**

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BOOK  
ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS



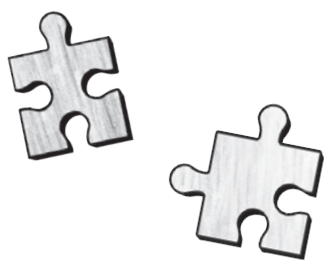
**Neil Strauss**

*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*THE GAME*



*The*  
TRUTH

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BOOK  
ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS



Neil Strauss



DEY ST.

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# WARNING

The following pages contain one of the most terrifying and obscene words in the English language: *commitment*. Specifically the type of commitment that often precedes or follows love and sex.

A lack of commitment, too much commitment, a poorly chosen commitment, and misunderstandings about commitment have led to murders, suicides, wars, and a whole lot of grief.

They have also led to this book, which is an attempt to figure out where so many people go wrong, again and again, when it comes to relationships and marriage—and if there's a better way to live, love, and make love.

This, however, is not a journey that was undertaken for journalistic purposes. It is a painfully honest account of a life crisis that was forced on me as a consequence of my own behavior. Like most personal journeys, it starts in a place of darkness, confusion, and foolishness.

As such, it requires sharing a lot of things I'm not proud of—and a few things I feel like I should regret a whole lot more than I actually do. Because, unfortunately, I am not the hero in this tale. I am the villain.

# **WARNING FOR INGRID**

**If you are reading this,  
please stop now.**

**Do NOT turn the page.**

Ingrid,

If this is you, really, don't read this.

Don't you have email to check or something?  
Or have you seen the video with that  
cat who's doing a human-like thing? It's  
hilarious--maybe you should watch it. This  
book isn't very good anyway. I've written  
others that are much better. Go read one  
of those.

Seriously, stop reading now. THIS IS YOUR  
LAST CHANCE.

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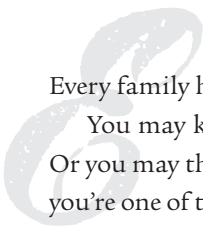
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# the Hand You are Dealt Face Down





Every family has a skeleton in the closet.

You may know your family's skeleton. You may even be that skeleton. Or you may think that your family is different, that it's the exception, that you're one of the lucky ones with a perfect set of parents and no dark family secrets. If so, then you just haven't opened the right closet door yet.

For most of my life, I, too, believed I was one of the normal ones. But then I found the right closet door.

It was in my father's room. The door was white, with chipped paint along the outer edge and a brass doorknob burnished by my father's large hand. I twisted the knob, emboldened by the hope of finding pornography, my hand over the mark of my father's.

I was a late-teenage virgin, my parents were out, and I craved the female skin I so desperately lacked access to in real life. I'd found a *Playboy* and a *Penthouse* in my father's magazine stack before, so it stood to reason that in a deeper recess of his room, there existed a superior form of pornography: the kind that moves. Real porn.

In the back of his closet, beneath rows of blue cotton-polyester dress shirts with monogrammed pockets, dulled nearly white from years of washing, I found three brown grocery bags filled with VHS tapes. I sat on the floor and examined each one meticulously, careful to return them in the exact reverse order in which I'd removed them.

There were no videos labeled as porn, but I knew my father wouldn't be that stupid with my mother around. So I set aside all the unmarked tapes. Since I was never allowed to have a television set of my own, I brought the videos into the family room, where there was a small TV and VCR, old presents from an old uncle.

I felt like I was about to explode.

I loaded the first video, and was disappointed to find a Dizzy Gillespie jazz concert recorded off PBS. I pressed fast-forward, hoping it was just

camouflage for a nubile blonde-on-blond scene. But what came next was an episode of *Newhart*, followed by *Masterpiece Theatre*. It was spectacularly unmasturbatory.

The next tape was a recording of *The Philadelphia Story*, followed by a tennis match, and then nothing but static.

I placed the third videotape into the VCR and watched it sink slowly into the machine. I pressed play, and as soon as I saw what was on that tape, my excitement instantly drained, my skin went cold, and my image of my father as a meek, passive businessman changed forever.

I saw images I didn't even know existed in this world.

And suddenly, as if I'd accidentally opened a theater curtain to reveal the rigging, I realized that the reality of my family was very different from the façade.

"Promise you won't tell anyone, not even your brother or your father," my mother instructed when I asked her about what I'd found.

"I promise," I reassured her.

And I never told anyone what I learned that day about my father's secret life.

That is, until that secret became an acid, corroding my relationships. Until it burned straight through my sense of right and wrong, leaving me alone and despised. Until it landed me in a psychiatric institution, where I was told that for my own sanity, freedom, and happiness, I needed to break my promise and reveal the contents of that tape.

And so I faced a decision: How far would I go to protect my parents? Is it better to betray the people responsible for my existence or to betray that existence itself?

It is a decision that everyone, at some point in life, must make.

Most make the wrong one.

Maybe your dad is living a double life. Maybe your mom is. Maybe one of them is secretly gay or cross-dressing or having an affair or paying for hookers or going to strip clubs or watching Internet porn or just not in love. Maybe both are. Maybe it's not your parents, but you or the person you love. But somewhere, there is a skeleton. And that skeleton has a penis. And it will fuck your life.

door

1

# INFIDELITY



# STAGE I

## ▪ Wounded Child ▪



WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW,  
CONTROLS US.

---

—JAMES HOLLIS  
*Under Saturn's Shadow*



Across the aisle from me on the plane is a thin girl with black hair. She could be anywhere from seventeen to twenty-three. And she has *it*: dark eyeliner, fake lashes, a small round tattoo on her lower back, pink headphones, and the permanent pout of someone who is angry at Dad but will fuck any insensitive asshole who reminds her of Dad.

Next to me is a middle-aged woman with large imitation designer sunglasses and a sundress showing milky white cleavage. In just twenty minutes of conversation, and with the artful positioning of a complimentary airline blanket, maybe I could have my hand inside there.

In front of me is a thin redhead with a beat-up face. Probably an alcoholic. Not my type, but I would.

Inside my head, there is a map. And on that map, there is a small LED bulb marking where every reasonably attractive or slightly sexually compelling female is sitting. Before the plane has hit cruising altitude, I have already thought of ways to approach each one, stripped her naked, imagined her blow-job technique, and fucked her in the bathroom or the rental car or her bedroom that night.

This is it: the last time I'm allowed to lust, the last time I'm allowed to even entertain the thought of sleeping with a new woman. And my mind is going crazy. I'm attracted to everyone. Not that I ever wasn't, but this time it hurts somewhere deep—in the core of who I am, of my identity, of my reason for living.

I have nothing with me: no computer, no cell phone, no technology. They are not allowed where I'm going. It feels liberating to be alone with my thoughts—most of which involve debating whether to start a conversation with the aforementioned, possibly jailbait girl in the row to my right or the pock-faced redhead in front of me.

When the plane eases to a stop at the gate, a bespectacled man stands up and makes his way to the aisle. He looks the black-haired girl up and down. He is not hitting on her; he has stared at her too long for that. He's

capturing the image, imprinting it in his memory to save it for later, when he can use it.

Why am I putting myself through this? I wonder. This is normal male behavior. That guy's probably worse than I am.

As I walk through the terminal, I pull a folded piece of paper out of my pocket: *Your driver will meet you as soon as you pass security. He will be wearing a badge with a D, so as not to identify where you are going.*

Suddenly, a guy in his twenties—at least six feet tall, muscular, square jawed, basically the opposite of what I see when I look in the mirror—freezes in front of me. His mouth drops open, like he's seen a ghost. I know what's about to happen, and I want to get rid of him. He is not my driver.

"Oh my god, are you . . ."

For some reason, he can't seem to get the next words out of his mouth. I wait for him to spit it out, but nothing happens.

"Yeah," I tell him.

Silence.

"Well, nice to meet you. I have to go meet a friend." Fuck, that's a lie. I swore to stop lying. Lies just roll off the tongue so much easier than the truth sometimes.

"I read your book," he says.

"Just recently?" I ask, for some reason. Walking away from people who show interest is not one of my strong points. That's why I'm here. Along with the lying.

"No, three years ago."

"That's great." He doesn't look like the kind of guy who ever needed my advice.

"I met my wife because of you. I owe you everything."

"That's great," I say again. I think about the prospect of marrying someone, of spending the rest of my life with her, of not being allowed to fuck anyone else, of her aging and losing interest in sex and me still not being able to fuck anyone else. And the next words just slip out of my mouth: "Are you happy?"

"Oh yeah, totally," he says. "Seriously. I read *The Game* while I was in the Army in Iraq, and it really helped me."

"Do you plan on having kids?" I'm not sure what I'm doing. I think I'm trying to scare him. I want him to show a little fear or hesitancy or doubt, just to prove to myself that I'm not crazy.

"My wife's actually about to give birth to our son," he says. "I'm flying home to see her."

His answer hits me right where it hurts: in my self-esteem. Here I am, incapable of having a relationship and starting a family, and this guy read some book I wrote on picking up women and three years later he's got his entire life figured out.

I make my excuses and leave him standing there, no doubt thinking, He's much shorter than I imagined.

On the other side of security, I see a man with a gray ring of hair around his head and a badge with a *D* on it. He must see all kinds of people rolling off the plane, either half dead or wasted or trying hard to pretend they're a normal adult, which is, I think, what I'm doing.

I feel like an impostor. There are people who need to go to this Level 1 psychiatric hospital because without it they are going to die. They're going to drink or snort or inject themselves to death.

All I did was cheat on my girlfriend.



## Los Angeles, Six Months Earlier

They say that when you meet someone and feel like it's love at first sight, run in the other direction. All that's happened is that your dysfunction has meshed with their dysfunction. Your wounded inner child has recognized their wounded inner child, both hoping to be healed by the same fire that burned them.

In fairy tales, love strikes like lightning. In real life, lightning burns. It can even kill you.

My girlfriend is sitting on the floor of the guesthouse where we live, packing to go with me to Chicago today. It's her birthday. She's going to meet my family.

I look at her and appreciate every inch of her, inside and out. "I'm excited, babe," Ingrid says. She is pure joy, pulling me out of my dark, solipsistic world every morning. She was born in Mexico, but to a German father, and somehow ended up living in America and looking like a petite Russian blonde.

And so she embodies all the elements: the intensity of fire, the strength of earth, the playfulness of water, the delicacy of air.

"I know. Me too."

I try to push the night before out of my head. There is no evidence of it anywhere; I made sure of that. I showered. I checked the interior of the car. I inspected every item of my clothing for stray hairs. The only thing I can't clean is my conscience.

"Should I bring these shoes?"

"It's only five days. How many pairs do you need?"

Sometimes I get annoyed by how long it takes her to get ready, the amount of clothing she needs to pack for even the shortest trips, the way her high heels prevent us from walking more than a few blocks when we go out. But deep down, I love her femininity. I am a slob and she gives me grace. When I told her last night that I had to go see Marilyn Manson, a musician I'd written a book with, about a new project, I looked into the hazel-green of her eyes and I saw love, happiness, innocence, peace.

Yet still I went through with it.

"So how was last night?" she asks as she struggles with the zipper of her suitcase.

"It was kind of frustrating. We didn't get much work done." That's for sure.

As she places a small, confident hand on top of the overstuffed bag and pushes the two rows of zipper teeth into contact, I can't help but think of two separate lives being forced together—and how, if just one element pops out of place, everything starts to fall off the tracks.

"Aw, babe, you can sleep on my lap on the plane, if you want."

She is reliving her mother's relationship with her cheating father. I am reliving my father's secret sex life. We are repeating a pattern handed down by generations of lying, cheating assholes and the poor fools who trust them.

"Thank you," I tell her. "I love you." At least I think I love her. But can you really love someone if you just fucked one of her friends in the parking lot of a church, and now six hours later you're lying to her about it? My mind is so clouded with guilt, I don't know anymore. Somehow, I doubt it.

There comes a time in a man's life when he looks around and realizes he's made a mess of everything. He's dug a hole for himself so deep that not only can't he get out, but he doesn't even know which way is up anymore.

And that hole for me is, and has always been, relationships. Not just

because I cheated on Ingrid, but because yet another fairy tale is teetering on the brink of an unhappy ending.

The last fairy tale concluded with my ex locking herself in her apartment with a gun, and yelling that she was going to splatter her brains all over the wall and I shouldn't go to her funeral.

But this one is different. Ingrid isn't crazy, she isn't jealous, she isn't controlling, she's never cheated on me, and she's talented and independent, working in a real estate office by day and designing swimsuits by night. I'm ruining this one all by myself.

And that's because I am the king of ambivalence.

When I'm single, I want to be in a relationship. When I'm in a relationship, I miss being single. And worst of all, when the relationship ends and my captor-lover finally moves on, I regret everything and don't know what I want anymore.

I've gone through this cycle enough times to realize that, at this rate, I'm going to grow old alone: no wife, no kids, no family. I'll die and it will be weeks before the smell gets strong enough that someone finds me. And all the shit I spent my lifetime accumulating will be thrown in the trash so someone else can occupy the space I wasted. I'll have left nothing behind, not even debt.

But what's the alternative?

Most married people I know don't seem to be any happier. One day Orlando Bloom, an actor I'd written a *Rolling Stone* profile about, came over to visit. At the time, he was married to one of the world's most successful and beautiful women, Victoria's Secret supermodel Miranda Kerr, making him one of the most envied men on the planet. And the first thing out of his mouth? "I don't know if marriage is worth it. I don't know why anyone does it. I mean, I want romance and I want to be with someone, but I just don't think it works."

My other married friends haven't fared much better. Some even seem content, but after a little probing they admit to feeling frustrated. Several cope by being unfaithful, others white-knuckle it, many surrender passively to their fate, and a few simply live in denial. Even the rare friends who've remained happy in their marriages admit, when pressed, to being unfaithful at least once.

We expect love to last forever. Yet as many as 50 percent of marriages and even more remarriages end in divorce. Among those who are married,

only 38 percent actually describe themselves as happy in that state. And 90 percent of couples report a decrease in marital satisfaction after having their first child. Speaking of which, more than 3 percent of babies are not actually fathered by the male parent who thinks he did.\*

Unfortunately, it's only getting worse. Thanks to technology, we now have more dating and hook-up options than at any other time in human history, with countless desperate men and women just a click or swipe away, making fidelity—or even committing in the first place—yet more of a challenge. In a recent Pew Research survey, four out of ten people believed that marriage was an obsolete institution.

Maybe, then, the problem isn't just me. Perhaps I've been trying to conform to an outdated and unnatural social norm that doesn't truly meet—and has never met—the needs of both men and women equally.

So I stand here, packing for Chicago, riddled with guilt and confusion, with one foot in the best relationship I've ever had and one foot out of it, wondering: Is it even natural to be faithful to one person for life? And if it is, how do I keep the passion and romance from fading over time? Or are there alternatives to monogamy that will lead to better relationships and greater happiness?

Several years ago, I wrote a book called *The Game* about an underground community of pickup artists I joined in search of an answer to the biggest question plaguing my lonely life at the time: Why don't women I like ever like me back?

In the pages that follow, I attempt to solve a much tougher life dilemma: What should I do *after* she likes me back?

Like love itself, the path to answer this question will be anything but logical. The unintended consequences of my infidelity will lead me to free-love communes, to modern-day harems, and to scientists, swingers, sex anorexics, priestesses, leather families, former child actors, miracle healers, murderers, and, most terrifying of all, my mother. It will challenge and ultimately revolutionize everything I thought I knew about relationships—and myself.

If you're interested in getting more out of this odyssey for yourself, notice the words and concepts that most excite or repel you. Each gut reaction tells a story. It is a story about who you are and what you believe. Because,

\*Sources for these and other facts in this book can be found at [www.neilstrauss.com/thetruth](http://www.neilstrauss.com/thetruth).

all too often, the things that we're the most resistant to are precisely what we need. And the things we're most scared to let go of are exactly the ones we most need to relinquish.

At least, that will be the case with me.

This is the story of discovering that every truth I've desperately clung to, fought for, fucked for, and even loved for is wrong.

Appropriately, it begins in a modern-day insane asylum, sometime before I escaped against medical advice . . .

**Don't forget to pre-order the full book  
and claim the rest of your bonuses at  
[www.neilstrauss.com/october](http://www.neilstrauss.com/october)**