



Untold tales from the
**MEMOIRS OF A
RELATIONSHIP
ASSASSIN**

David Wailing

Roulette

“Let me tell you a little story about me,” she said. Like I had a choice.

“What you have to understand about *me* is... I really love my life!” She announced this as if it was a shocking thing to admit. “I really do! Is that wrong? There’s a part of me that just doesn’t want anything to change for me. Anyone who knows me will tell you I’m really serious about my career, and my own personal goals and plans... I’ve got some amazing plans, but there’s no way I could tell you them all in just five minutes!”

I sat opposite her, smiling, watching, listening.

“For me, *my* thing is, I find it really difficult to let anybody in. I know that’s sort of the point of being here, but when it comes to *me*, I worry that finding someone special would really mess me up, and not give me enough time for me. Anyone who knows me will tell you how much I need my ‘me’ time. Do you know what I’m saying?”

“Sure,” I nodded.

That was all I had to say. It was all she wanted to hear.

For the next few minutes she talked in a similar vein, while I stared into her eyes as if fascinated. Actually all I was doing was counting how many times she used her favourite words. ‘Me’ got the bronze with 59, ‘my’ clocked in at 73 but it was ‘I’ that was the clear winner with

a total of 103 uses. Not bad for five minutes.

The badge pinned to her blouse said ‘Rosaline’. It wouldn’t have been large enough to write ‘The Centre Of The Universe’ on it.

When a voice called out that there were thirty seconds left, she looked startled. “Oh my God, really, already? That went so quick! Listen, I’ve really enjoyed talking with you, I don’t suppose you’d like to go for a drink with me after?”

“Sure.”

“I mean, if you want to, I know there’s a lot of women you still have to meet. I know *I’m* nothing special!” she added with a bright laugh. Like you do when you think you’re telling a massive lie.

I agreed to meet her for a drink, just as the ringing of a hand-held bell cut off the chatter all around us.

“That’s five minutes, everyone!” a voice called. “Time to spin round!”

I smiled goodbye at The Centre Of The Universe, who was beaming happily at me as I stood up from our small table. Like all the other men there, I stepped to an identical table on the left, sat down in the chair and said hello to the woman sitting opposite. A little nervous laughter rang around the room, since that had been the opening five-minute session and we were all moving on for the first time.

Welcome to the Other Halves
Valentine’s Day Speed-Dating Event!
My name’s Scott Rowley, your

relationship assassin for the evening, and I'm here to kill something stone dead.

Not that anyone knew this yet. But they would. Very soon.

I had to admit, this whole set-up was pretty slick. But then it was being run by Other Halves, the most popular online dating service in the country, now branching out into real-time speed-dating. They had taken over the entire lower floor of The Glasshouse, one of the more upmarket restaurants you'd find in London's West End. Oak panelling, chrome fittings, warm lighting. Don't you just feel romantic already?

There were eighteen small tables, each with a chair on either side, arranged in a

perfect circle around the large room. The ladies stayed seated with their backs to the wall, while the gentlemen rotated to the left. We were allowed five minutes to chat, before moving on to the next. Each of us had little scorecards to make notes on, and after the event was over and everyone handed them in, the website at www.otherhalves.com would send messages to mutually interested singles. There were facilitators standing outside the circle, grinning encouragingly. Nearby was a well-stocked bar, where friends of the speed-daters had clustered to watch. They were playing Abba songs in the background, but the sound of thirty-six men and women looking for love was louder.

We all wore badges. Blue for men, pink for women, each with a number on it from 1 to 18 and a name. Numbers don't matter, but names are important. My badge said 'Chris'. Straightforward. Easy to remember. Good-old-down-to-earth-Chris, or intelligent and sophisticated Christopher with an Oxbridge degree, if you prefer. Depending on what you were looking for.

The smile on my face was the only genuine thing about me. Whatever each woman wanted, that's what I'd be.

That's what I do.

I sort of admired the efficiency of the whole speed-dating system. Romantic? Not really, but who had time to wait for romance to land in their lap? These

people were busy professionals. When Valentine's Day rolled around each year to remind them they were single, they turned to the experts to fix it. Everyone had paid forty pounds to be part of this exclusive event, so were guaranteed to meet a similar class of suitor. Worth every penny. (Of course I'd be claiming this back as expenses from my client, along with the six bottles of beer I planned on having once my mission was completed.)

Choice. That's what it's all about nowadays. You don't want to be limited to dating whoever you randomly bump into. Everyone wants a range, a menu, an option. Everyone wants choice.

I wrapped up my five minutes with the next lady, who I'd instantly marked as

an animal lover thanks to the cat brooch (and hairs) on her cardigan. I told her I owned two Golden Labradors and three cats (a fussy Persian Blue and two noisy Siamese - remembering the cats owned by Mrs Trussler, who I wished I could forget). Then I sat back to let her gush about her own menagerie. Her eyes were gleaming as I got up, perhaps hoping she'd struck gold at last. Puppy-dog eyes.

Abba's 'Take A Chance On Me' was just ending as we changed again, spinning like a human roulette wheel. That's what this must look like from the outside, I realised. Pink and blue instead of red and black. Spin the wheel. Make your choice. Chance, take a chance, take-a-take-a-chance-chance.

I saw my target, three tables away on my left.

I'd glanced at her a few times during the evening, always careful to keep her in the corner of my eye, and it had been the same story each time: enjoying herself loudly with every man who sat opposite. She was as expansive as she was beautiful. You know the type. Smiler. Laugher. Toucher. Flirter.

Not roulette, I thought with a tiny smile. Russian roulette. Eighteen-chamber Russian roulette, clicking round and round, seventeen empty chambers and one bullet.

Me.

The wheel turned, the game played, bringing me closer to her.

A plump black lady, around thirty-five

with expensive hair, now sat opposite me. Peering at me through expensive glasses, tapping expensive fingernails against the table.

“And what do you do?” was her opening question, an expensive pen in one hand poised above her notepad. I noticed her questions were already written down. Job interview. Her badge said ‘Penelope’ when it should have said ‘The Boss’.

I hesitated and then, inspired by the fact that ‘Money Money Money’ was now playing, folded my arms confidently and told her I part-owned my own company. Now she looked at me properly, her smile widening. (Irony alert! This was actually true. Not that she needed to know what we did at

Infidelity Ltd.)

I diverted further questions by throwing out some bait. “You look like the sort of woman who likes to take charge and get things done properly. Am I right?”

She bit. Floodgates. Three solid minutes of The Boss’s cast-iron opinions.

On her own character: “I’m tough when I have to be, I can be quite remorseful.”

On dating: “I’ve tried online dating but it’s not for me, I have to meet people organically.”

On time-wasting: “I never sit around thinking about my past or examining myself, I’m not one for anal-glazing.”

I managed to cage my laughter behind

my teeth. One thing The Boss obviously wasn't in command of was the English language.

She asked if she could take my picture with her iPhone – “For future preference,” she said. I agreed. Why not? Once the blonde dye was washed out of my hair and eyebrows, and my bright blue contact lenses were removed, she wouldn't recognise me again if I fell on her from the sky. Nobody there would.

Before our time was up, she managed one more question from her list, asking what quality I disliked in others. I looked her right in the eye and said “People who aren't as clever as they think they are.”

“Oh, me too,” she agreed, making a

note on her pad. “I’m in full concurrence with you on that.”

Our five minutes ended. The wheel turned. My target was now two tables away.

“What did that first woman say to you?” This was from ‘Marcelina’, or as I was about to discover, ‘The Sniper’. She was very thin, East European, with black super-straight hair and eyes that could cut diamonds.

When I replied that she’d just asked me the usual stuff, The Sniper leaned across the small table and hissed “She’s got the look of a shoplifter about her, though, don’t you think?”

She didn’t ask me anything during our five minutes. She just took potshots at the other women sat around the circle.

She claimed one of them had “The dress sense of someone on first name terms with the staff at her local TK Maxx.” Another had “Body off Baywatch, face off Crimewatch.” Her voice dropped further as she nodded sideways at The Boss. “Did you notice? Her neck is wider than her head. It is, though. She’s like a size 6 head on a size 8 neck.”

I laughed along like a good boy, and then won her over completely by saying that I’d spotted her straight away that evening. “Not too difficult, seeing as you’re the only attractive woman here. You’re like a gazelle trapped in a herd of buffalo.”

She believed it. Because she had to.

The wheel turned. Next table. Target minus one.

It took me all of two seconds to get a handle on this one. Flowery dress. Blonde hair in beads. Crystals. Bracelets. The sort of woman who picks her own fruit, makes her own jam and owns fifty different jars of herbs. A badge saying 'Helen' hung lopsidedly from a matronly bosom.

"We've... have we met?" I asked breathlessly, eyes wide.

She blinked. Rabbits. Headlights.

"Um, don't think so...?"

"Yes. No. Yes, yes we have. Can't you..." Abruptly, I shot both hands out across the table, holding them palms-down over her bare forearms. "Can't you feel it? Maybe not in this life, but..."

All the fine hairs on her arms rose up from a sea of goosebumps, brushing my

palms. She took a quivering gasp, looking at me as if I was glowing in the dark. “Oh... you’re something special,” I breathed.

She believed it. Because she had to.

After that, I just had to look awed while ‘Moonbeam Zodiac Astral-Plane Mystic-Dreamer’, as her badge should have read, poured her twinkling soul out to me. She told me that her horoscope had said someone significant would enter her life today. She told me she could read people without words. She told me I had a clear, pure aura, that I was honest and truthful.

“You’re someone others trust, aren’t you Chris?” she said with a beatific smile. “You’re that kind of a man.”

“I wouldn’t know how to be anyone

else,” said ‘Chris’.

Outside the circle, the facilitator rang the bell again and called out “Five minutes! Round we go, ladies and gentlemen!”

I stood up, waiting while the guy to my left vacated his chair. He didn’t seem to be in a hurry, and I could understand why. The slender, gorgeous, brown-haired woman he was saying goodbye to was still flirting with him, telling him not to forget her, don’t be a stranger, mine’s a vodka and tonic remember!

Finally he moved on and I sat down. Straightened my tie.

Target acquired. Safety off. Live round.

“Hi!” I said brightly. “My name’s – ”

“I know who you are,” she said. “You

bastard.”

I froze. Blood running cold.

“Wait... what? Listen – ”

“Shut up. Just shut up right now.” She leaned forward across the table, flint-grey eyes glaring right into mine. Point blank range. “I know exactly who you are, so you can just *shut the fuck up.*”

I sat there like a statue, heavy as stone. Around us was the constant babble of men and women meeting for the first time, competing with the tune of ‘S.O.S.’, but right then it felt like our table was locked inside a silent bubble of thick, unbreathable air.

She couldn’t... how could she possibly know the real me?

I choked out a laugh. “Okay, listen, you might have confused me with

someone else...”

“Liar,” she said.

“Pretender,” she said.

“Fake,” she said.

Oh shit. How could she *know*?

“This isn’t you.” With a sneer, she gestured up and down at me. “I doubt your real name is even Chris, is it? And I can tell you’re not a natural blonde.

You’re totally bloody... *bogus!*” she spat.

I swallowed, blinking, suddenly aware of how hot it was. The heat of the spotlight. My target knew she was a target! Game over. Mission aborted. I’d screwed this up –

“I’ve been watching you.” She was still leaning towards me, voice too low for anyone at our neighbouring tables to hear. “I can see what you’re doing.

Changing yourself every time, I can see it! Your body language and your face and probably your voice as well, it's been different at every table. You're just playing with us, aren't you, it's all just a stupid bloody game to you! These people are trying to meet someone special and along you come like a chameleon, pretending to be whatever they like... you're just trying to get us all to fancy you, aren't you? Trying to be the big impressive stud!

“I know men like you, ‘Chris’,” she added, making finger-quotes in the air. “You’ve probably spent so long pretending that you’ve forgotten who you really are anymore.”

I sat there, mask off, while her words hit home. Punching into my heart.

I was a liar.

A pretender.

A fake.

There was a moment when I felt like a little kid being caught out, like an adult had just seen right through me, and was telling me a truth that was too big to run away from, that brought tears to my eyes.

The music changed to 'Knowing Me, Knowing You', as I thought: She knows what I am.

What are you, Scott? You're a relationship assassin. You know this. You know she's dead right about you, but you don't care. Because that's what you do.

You are what you do.

I took a deep breath and said "You

shouldn't be so quick to judge, Sandra. People in glass houses, and all that. I know a lot about you, too."

She shook her head, staring at me with disgust. "I'm not interested in what you think you know."

"Well, I just called you Sandra, for a start. Doesn't that interest you?"

Bang. My words hit home. She did a tiny jump in her seat, like she'd just caught static electricity off it. Her hand flew to the namebadge on her blouse. The one that said 'Christine'.

The one that should have said 'Liar Pretender Fake'.

"I know who you are too, Sandra." I leaned across the table, meeting her wide eyes as she slowly sat back. "Today you're Christine, but at the Dates 'n'

Mates speed-dating night last Wednesday in Vauxhall, you were calling yourself Alexandra. And at the ‘Off The Shelves For 2012’ party in Westminster on New Year’s Eve, you were Suzanne. Isn’t that right? And it wasn’t just the name that was different, was it? Alexandra was a very classy lady, almost stand-offish with every man she met, although that seemed to work quite well for her, they all wanted to melt Alexandra the ice queen. Suzanne was a different kettle of fish though, eh? What a tart! I think she kissed every single bloke there, didn’t she?”

“Huh-how could you – ”

“Hope my beard didn’t give you stubble rash.”

Her jaw flopped open. Lovely grey

eyes scanned my face, hunting for a beard I no longer had, a pair of golden-rimmed glasses I no longer wore. But otherwise, the same face she had seen and talked to, and even kissed, twice before.

“You!”

“I know women like you, ‘Christine’”, I added, making finger-quotes in the air. “You’ve probably spent so long pretending that you’ve forgotten who you really are anymore.”

Horror on her face. She started to move – but my hand snaked out and gripped hers, freezing her in place.

“Let me tell you a little story about you,” I said. Like she had a choice.

“Mrs Sandra Claire Renfrew, née Smith, thirty-three years old, no

children, homemaker, part-time volunteer with Oxfam, married to Dr Robert Renfrew, a forty-two year old genetics researcher. Last year he was awarded a highly-paid research post at the University of Edinburgh, his home city. At the Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, to be precise. But Mrs Sandra Claire Renfrew refused to move out of their lovely house in Crouch End which they bought only three years ago. Maybe it's because she's a Londoner. So ever since last September, Robert has been working in Edinburgh and occasionally coming back to visit his good lady wife.”

As she listened, her head twisted from side to side in disbelief. She looked like she might be sick.

“During that time, all alone in London, Mrs Sandra Claire Renfrew has been keeping herself amused by going to speed-dating events like this one. Meeting dozens, maybe hundreds, of new men. Talking. Flirting. Kissing.” I shrugged. “At least, that was as far as you went with me, but maybe with some others you...?”

“No!” she snapped. “No, I’ve never done anything more than...” She clamped her mouth shut, realising she’d just confirmed everything I had said.

Not that it mattered. I’d been watching her for weeks.

“Dr Renfrew told me he isn’t a suspicious man by nature,” I went on. “But even he could tell that something was different about you. Obviously he

didn't know that you were pretending to be different women entirely. But he suspected something was going on. And that research post is very well-paid indeed. There's not much else for him to spend his money on, except private detectives to follow his wife around, and lawyers to advise him on divorce settlements..."

"Oh God!" Sandra looked on the verge of panic. She struggled to stand up – but I grabbed her other hand and pulled her across the table towards me. If anybody else in the circle was watching, it probably looked like we were making a real connection.

"It's all right! He hasn't done any of that yet," I told her. "He's just hired me to find out what's going on. If it's over

between you, he wants to know precisely why. He said he needs details.”

Sandra stared at me, then nodded.

“Yes. He always... he has to know every tiny detail about everything.”

I smiled softly. “Bet that’s a right pain in the arse sometimes.”

Despite herself, a half-laugh escaped her. She stared into the middle distance, as if remembering.

“Thirty seconds, everyone!” called the facilitator.

I squeezed her hands. “Listen to me. I don’t think Dr Renfrew wants his marriage to be over. But he needs to know if it is. He doesn’t know what you’ve been up to yet. But he *does* want you to make your decision.”

He wasn’t the only one. This had been

on my mind too. I'd been uncertain about taking on the Renfrew Case (as this was logged in my company database) in the first place. Sandra was clearly addicted to the adrenalin and excitement of first dates, of meeting new men and being reminded she was still an attractive woman. But technically, she hadn't properly cheated on her husband yet. Lied by omission, yes, but was it proper infidelity? She had to decide. Time to place her bet.

“Choose,” I said. “What would you rather lose – the dating or your husband?”

Sandra's eyes had been darting back and forth, like a gambler watching the roulette wheel spinning round and round. Chance, take a chance, take-a-

take-a-chance-chance.

But now her eyes filled with tears, and I could see that she was definitely remembering something. Something about him, that only she knew. His habits, his phrases, his expressions. Imagining never seeing them again.

Sudden emotion crumpled her face.

“...*Robert*,” she cried.

A bell chimed. “Time’s up!” called the facilitator.

I let go of her hands. Switched off the microcamera built into my wristwatch, unstrapped it and handed it over to her.

“All the evidence is on there. I haven’t made any backups.” I stood up to move to the next table. “Nice to have met you, Mrs Renfrew. Give my regards to your husband when you see him.”

There was the usual bustle and chatter as the wheel of people rotated, and the song changed to ‘The Winner Takes It All’. But there was no winner tonight. The ball had landed on zero. All bets were off. Obviously I’d still claim expenses (especially for that wristwatch – surveillance equipment doesn’t come cheap), but I would refund my client’s fee first thing tomorrow.

Mission aborted. And here’s why.

Rule One: Never kill a relationship that isn’t already dead.

It was one of the guiding principles of Infidelity Ltd – not to break up two people still in love. If a relationship is still healthy, I walk away. I don’t break this Rule for anyone. Not since

...Becky...

not since the Hargreaves Case. Never again.

Sandra sat in silence, as the next man after me took my place on the chair and said hello. She was staring down at the watch in her hands. Abruptly she stood up, grabbed her handbag and strode off, heels click-clacking like an empty gun being fired. She crossed the room towards The Glasshouse's exit, pulling her mobile phone out as she walked, wiping her face with the other hand.

There was a shocked murmuring for a moment. But then the facilitators turned to the little crowd of people by the bar, and before long a young woman was squealing and running into the circle, brandishing a pink namebadge.

She slid into the chair Sandra had vacated, beaming excitedly at the startled man opposite her. Another eager player. Game on.

I wasn't going anywhere. Even when you've lost the game, you can still practise your skills. And there was plenty of practice there for a relationship assassin.

The pretty Asian woman sitting opposite me was all nervous smiles and tight shoulders. I gauged her instantly. Shy. A listener. She wouldn't say anything until I took the lead.

Phew, it was going to take at least four minutes to make this one feel like she was The Centre Of The Universe, but I was sure I could pull it off.

“Let me tell you a little story about

me,” I said. Like she had a choice.

About the Author

David Wailing writes modern fiction, a blend of mystery, thriller and humour. The key theme of David's novels is 'identity' - people pretending to be something they're not. All his work is focused around characters that fake being someone else or take on others' characteristics.

At present David has three novels available as ebooks: Fake Kate, Bang: Memoirs of a Relationship Assassin and Auto.

He is currently writing further stories in the Auto Series.

David lives in North London and swears you are not his next target.

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BANG
Memoirs of a Relationship
Assassin

A novel by David Wailing

**DON'T NEED THE OTHER HALF ANY
MORE?**

TAKE THEM OUT.

So, you've hired a detective agency to prove your partner is cheating on you. But there's no evidence to be found.

Who you gonna call?

Me. I am the assassin. Your friend.

Anything your other half secretly desires, whatever makes her give in to temptation... that's who I'll become. Get close to her. Take her out. Bang. That's what a relationship assassin does.

Infidelity for hire!

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Rules that were blown away when three extraordinary women – the seductress, the celebrity, and the office girl – turned my world inside out...

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