

Chapter One

You Are Weird

My name is Benedikt Heyn. I was born in Prague in 1990. My identical twin brother Adam saw the light of the world four minutes after me.

Our dad died when we were four years old. He died of a vicious type of cancer.

I have only one memory left of my father; him putting a small model of a bright orange car into the palm of my hand – in a hospital he was dying in.

After dad died, mom shut herself off from the rest of the world and kept living just for the two of us.

My brother and I loved each other very much, but we still kept telling each other: “*You are weird.*” Well...it *is* weird when you have a brother who looks exactly like you.

My brother was always one step ahead of me no matter what. His mind was always the more adult one, the more rational. He was calmer than I was and much more sensitive; you could even say he was overly sensitive. It was me though, who according to our unwritten rule was the leader of our inner world.

Since we were little, we didn’t have many friends. We weren’t very popular among our peers and we were often laughed at. They taunted us because we looked the same. Truly, only few people could tell us apart. We were never angry with our classmates for being cruel to us just because we were identical twins. But their taunts bothered us. And so it happened that every day we chose to run away from this not-so-friendly reality to our own little world, full of dreams and wishes.

Both of us were the same dreamers. We dreamt about a vast gorgeous world, filled with success and money. To just settle with the way our reality was or even get used to our poor life filled with taunts, sneers and stupid comments, was unthinkable.

The life of identical twins is really not *easy* in a lot of ways.

There always was a deep emotional connection between us. We would never admit it to ourselves, but we existed mostly for each other. We had our

disagreements sometimes, but none of us would ever cause a rift between us. The biggest rows actually happened when we started comparing our freckles - who had more of them. It's true that we did have our share of childish arguments like that.

Since we were little we were very interested in why people behaved the way they did; in psychology and interpersonal relationships in particular. I think we were fourteen when pretending to be the judge and the lawyer became our favorite game: the winner was the one, who was able to defeat the other with the most sensible arguments without showing any signs of aggression.

Adam was, among other things, very invested in the way we looked – he took care of that for the both of us. Dirty shoes or crumpled shirts were unacceptable. What would happen if I'd been dressed inappropriately and a girl thought it was him!

We were both slim and tall with light brown eyes... And an awful lot of freckles. We usually had our hair cut the same way and wore identical outfits on the same day. We liked to confuse and provoke the people around us.

Everywhere we went, we were the center of attention. Usually, it felt very good. Especially girls were really interested in us. Our platonic sweethearts changed maybe once a week. Maybe that was the reason for the almost hateful comments of our classmates..."Damn freckled redheads!" That was the phrase we probably heard most often from our peers.

Our mum, as a single parent, didn't have an overly large monthly budget, which is why we had to live pretty modestly. We tried to make some money doing part time jobs. One time we were checking movie tickets, the other handing out leaflets. We wanted to help mom with every paycheck we got, so we made sure to always give her at least a little bit to help with the household.

Mom gave everything she had towards our upbringing. She always did everything she could. But she also only ever saw us like a single player team. She scarcely called us by our names. Our whole lives we were just “boys” to her – there was no Ben or Adam.

At the time school was a complete waste of my time. Well, that was the way I saw it; mom had a different opinion of course. My grades at school were not very good, particularly in math. Naturally, I wasn’t the only one. Adam’s understanding of mathematics was not much different from my own. On the other hand we both adored geography; looking at maps and planning our future adventures was our favorite past time.

Our opinion was that we would count what we needed to count. That’s what the calculator is for, right? We would never need equations anyway, we often reassured each other, and if we did, someone would surely solve them for us.

Our perspective made mom a bit frustrated. She arranged tutoring in math for both of us, but it was mainly just a waste of both our time and our money. Effort is what matters though, which is why we both managed to successfully finish our primary school with a D in this wondrous subject. Compulsory education was finally behind us.

Together we decided to attend a four-year apprenticeship in *Culinary arts and hotel management*. Our grades didn’t leave us much of a choice and we both found it interesting anyway. We saw ourselves as successful managers of a large hotel chain by the time we were thirty. My brother and I were obsessed with aiming really really high. Our dreams for the future were not modest at all.

We enjoyed learning foreign languages. Our grandma from our mother’s side was German, which is why we knew the language perfectly. Since we were little, she only spoke to us in German.

Because we knew another language and also with some understanding from our teachers, we were reluctant to be separated, we both managed to have

our work placement at a luxurious restaurant in Old Town, in the center of Prague.

It was the first time in our lives that we saw such a beautiful and sublime interior as we did in that restaurant. For me it was a place that only the successful, rich and famous frequented. I was absolutely fascinated by the luxurious interior, the manner of dining, conduct of staff...

Since the first day working in that establishment I knew that I would never come to terms with just waiting the tables my whole life.

We were 15 years old. Standing in a spacious, dimly lit office with fine wood paneling, and proudly sitting behind the massive table which dominated the room was the owner of the restaurant.

She was a very handsome woman. On the other side of the room, behind a conference table, her husband was sitting.

Mrs. Schwarz asked us a question: *"Where do you, boys, see yourselves in 5 years?"* the question didn't catch us by surprise and we both answered without hesitation.

"In your place, Mrs. Schwarz," was my answer. Adam's was basically the same: *"Behind your table, Mrs. Schwarz."* Next were the five longest seconds in my life. We were both absolutely serious.

Mrs. Schwarz aimed her narrowed eyed look at Adam. *"How can you talk to me like that Ben? Do you even understand what you are saying?"* her voice was quivering with anger.

"Yes, we do Mrs. Schwarz. And I am Ben! You have been looking at Adam the whole time."

Suddenly, male amused laughter rang through the room. *"Boys, get out of here, don't let me see you here again,"* said Mr. Schwarz with the corners of his mouth still twitching with laughter.

It was only later that I realized it was us who left the room victorious. Sure, it was more luck than skill, but I was convinced that we caught Mrs. Schwarz's eye. Maybe the reason was our over confidence, or more likely our similar appearance.

She was a very elegant lady. She had more than enough confidence and a very sharp tongue. What intrigued me the most though, were her dark brown, intelligent eyes. Her observant gaze, the way she confidently walked in her high heeled shoes and her perfume were all like aphrodisiacs to me.

In my eyes she was a great lady and my admiration towards her grew daily. What a "luxurious dame" and she owned such a luxurious restaurant!

It was autumn of the year 2005. We were supposed to attend a party for parents of the students working in the restaurant. Including me and my brother, fifteen people came. Our mom didn't want to accept the invitation, saying that it was too "fancy" for her. It would probably be her first time in a restaurant like that. Her excuse was that she didn't have anything appropriate to wear. My brother and I didn't give up though and kept on persuading her. In the end, we managed to persuade her and she decided to go. We were really glad and we hoped she'd have a nice evening.

It was a very pleasant evening. Soft piano sonata was drifting through the restaurant from carefully placed speakers. I felt like a young successful man for the first time in my life. Well, at least for this one evening.

It was 7 p.m. and the restaurant was almost full. Several times we noticed stares from other tables at me and Adam. People never cease to be fascinated by identical siblings. We both loved it.

We were getting much more intense looks from one table though. We both noticed. Two ladies around forty years old were sitting there. They were dressed very elegantly and we kept meeting their eyes.

It was evident we were the main topic of their conversation. Though what we didn't know was that the most crucial moment of our life was about to happen.

"Why are they looking at us like that?" Adam said uneasily. I didn't pay his words much attention; I was carefully watching our hostess, Mrs. Schwarz. She was walking self-assuredly between the tables, asking guests if everything was all right and the food to their liking. She was well aware of her good looks and she knew how to use it to her advantage. Many a guest looked after her as she walked by.

To me, her charisma was magical. I couldn't keep my eyes off her. It didn't even cross my mind that it could never happen. I was oblivious to the fact that I was just a student and she an owner of a luxurious restaurant, or the huge age difference between us. I was more and more aware of the fact that my thoughts only revolved around the idea of my first sex with her.

My brother was right. I was smitten with her and had "just that one" goal. Well, I was fifteen...

Just as my thoughts took the most naïve turn and my head was filled with all kinds of indecent thoughts, a waiter brought to our table a glass of the same white wine my mom was drinking and Coke for us with the words: *"This is from the ladies at table three."* Mom didn't understand what was happening and started asking discreet questions as to where table three was. I pointed out the table where the two ladies were sitting.

"Those are the two ladies who keep staring at us and watching our every move," I told mom.

"Well, it's very rude to just gawk at someone so blatantly... If they want to say something to me, they should come over here and say it," my mom said grumpily.

As if they heard her, in a few moments the ladies from table three were standing at our table. Adam only managed to whisper: *"Look at that, redhead,*

what babes!” One was a brunette, short hair, suit, slim and the second blonde, with her hair in a ponytail and a slim figure. They were both very elegant.

Speaking fluently in English, one of them said, “Good evening. We are very sorry for disturbing you and we’d also like to apologize for observing those young men here in such a rude manner. Please accept our apologies. I am the chief editor of a fashion magazine, Carol Leavitt.”

The second lady introduced herself as Suzanne Rousseau: “...and I represent a Paris modeling agency.” Mom gave us a questioning glance; she couldn’t speak English. My brother and I smiled in unison and quickly translated the last several sentences. “Can we go and talk to them for a second mom?” added Adam.

“Both of you stay where you are. Surely I won’t be in a way of your conversation. You’ll translate for me so I’ll understand.” We introduced our mom and then ourselves.

“Please sit down and tell me, why are you so interested in my boys...?” mom asked in a suspicious tone. We translated everything that was being said to English. It was difficult to remember a specific word sometimes so we had to do a bit of improvisation.

“Thank you for your time Mrs. Heyn,” Madam Leavitt started.

Mrs. Rousseau smoothly continued. “Mrs. Heyn, this is my first time in this kind of situation. I never approach potential models on the street or in restaurants. Your boys are unique. I am absolutely positive about that. The boys have a great chance... their unbelievably similar appearance, the same expressions, gorgeous smiles... They radiate confidence, trust me, they are very interesting. I am blown away by them, you must be proud of your sons.”

Mom started out awkwardly. “Well, you know, I try to raise my boys as well as I can, but it’s not easy with them. They have their own head and they react badly to being separated.

I made a mistake somewhere. The boys are not able to function independently. I tried to instill solid morals in them. Of course I am proud of them, but I don't think I'd be happy with this. I've read enough about models and I'm not so sure this kind of world would be good for my boys..."

"Mrs. Heyn," Mrs. Rousseau replied immediately, "I am so sorry to hear that. I presume the boys are not of legal age yet? I would like to talk to you about a potential business offer for your sons. I would like you to promise me that you will at least consider it. It would be an amazing opportunity for them both. I would personally arrange for the boys to have a few days off from school. In Paris, I would personally look after their accommodation, their safety and all other affairs. You could count on me.

Here is my business card, if you'd be interested in talking to me again. Please call me any time and we will arrange a meeting. I will be in Prague till Monday."

"Mrs. Heyn," Madam Leavitt added, "once again, please accept our apology for disturbing your evening, but this is without a doubt an exceptional circumstance. Never in my life have I met such handsome and visually interesting twins."

Mom hesitantly took the card from Mrs. Rousseau.

"Thank you. I will think about it and discuss it with the boys," she answered.

The whole time my brother and I almost didn't dare to breathe. We focused on every Mrs. Rousseau's word with rapt attention. When she mentioned Paris we simply looked at each other. We both realized what an enormous opportunity that was.

Obviously, mom didn't like it very much. I prayed that she wouldn't dismiss the whole thing immediately.

Mom didn't say much for the rest of the evening. We could see that the encounter wasn't too pleasant for her. Maybe she was feeling awkward that she couldn't talk to them herself – because of the language barrier.

Oddly enough the whole incident left me feeling so agitated, that I completely forgot to watch the evening's hostess, Mrs. Schwarz.

“Adam, this is such a great opportunity. Do you understand? This is our ticket out, to the world where we might actually mean something one day! To the big world! Modeling is a huge deal!” I said excitedly.

“What about mom? We can't just leave her here on her own. She'd be sad. She'll worry about us,” said Adam.

“Redhead, think about it! Do you understand how much we could help mom? We could give her some of the money we'll make. It would help her. She'll take a break from us and we won't have to go to school!” was my answer.

“Don't call me redhead. You are weird. We have to talk to mom when we get home, discuss everything. This is important to me!” said Adam decisively.

Chapter Two

Little Stars

Our plane to Paris was leaving from the Prague airport at 11:30 a.m. We couldn't sleep the whole night. Until 10 p.m. the previous night we had to listen to mom's preaching about good manners. For the rest of the night we imagined together what could await us in Paris.

We were filled with expectations. It would be our first time on a plane. New, unknown city, new faces...

In the morning mom accompanied us to the airport. She wasn't able to say goodbye without crying though. Again she urged us to behave, not to embarrass her anywhere and most importantly to safely come back to her.

Adam was a bit afraid to fly. During the takeoff he grabbed my hand: *"Tell me nothing is going to happen to us."* I looked into his eyes: *"It won't Adam. I'm sure nothing is going to happen to us."* I will never forget that moment. The look in his eyes. He wasn't just afraid of the flight. There was something more. In that moment I realized how much I loved my brother and how much I depended on him.

We spent the whole flight talking about mom and about how much effort it took to convince her to send us to Paris alone. It wasn't easy to persuade her to call the lady who gave her a business card in the restaurant. Luckily for us, the meeting took place and Mrs. Rousseau described everything to our mom as a completely normal short trip to Paris.

"Welcome to the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris," a voice rang throughout the plane cabin.

A driver was waiting for us in the arrivals hall, holding a sign over his head "HEYN BROTHERS".

"Look, there he is," said Adam excitedly when he noticed the driver with our name.

The journey from the airport took about an hour. The whole ride was an emotional experience for us, we kept pointing out things through the windows

during the ride. The whole experience was astonishing. The driver was a very likeable Hispanic man. He kept watching us in the rearview mirror. During the ride he repeated several times in broken English: *"Incredibly similar."*

The agency booked a hotel for us in Passy, the 16th arrondissement of Paris. We entered the hotel with bated breath. We were a bit nervous, but we followed the instructions we received from Mrs. Rousseau.

As for the accommodation, everything went without complications so far.

We had a room on the fourth floor with a view of the city. Before we started exploring the hotel room, we wrote mom a text.

We made it to the hotel room all right mom. The flight was fine. We'll go for our first meeting with Mrs. Rousseau in a minute. Bye for now. We love you.

Before our flight, mom reminded us several times that she wanted to hear from us several times a day. Surely she'd been waiting for a message. On the contrary we didn't have to wait too long for her answer.

Hi boys, most importantly take care of yourselves. Don't go anywhere alone. And write again soon. Sending kisses, Mom.

"Look, the bathroom here is as big as our room back home," Adam shouted at me from the bathroom. I stood between the balcony and the room and simply looked into the distance.

I still couldn't entirely believe it all. Two boys from the Prague suburbs in a luxurious hotel in Paris. Alone, without mom. Adam returned from the bathroom and asked me: *"Will we always be staying in such a beautiful hotel when we come here?"*

"Well, I don't really think so Adam, but I can't say I mind staying here!" I answered, smiling.

At 4 p.m. we had to be in the hotel lobby, where Mrs. Rousseau from the agency was supposed to pick us up.

There were plans for an early dinner. We were supposed to be introduced to certain people from the agency that Mrs. Rousseau worked for.

A PhotoBook shoot in an atelier was planned for tomorrow.

I still couldn't understand one thing. How was it possible that Mrs. Rousseau was so sure about us? Sure of our success...

I was worried we would let everyone down and ultimately let ourselves down.

Making a good first impression in the first meeting was very important to us. We both dressed in white shirts and blue jeans. Styled our hair the same way and used the same perfume CK One.

Lastly, Adam checked whether our shoes were clean and what overall impression our appearance gave off. Full of expectations we set out to the lobby for the meeting.

"Look, they have a sofa in the elevator. I guess for when you invite a girl over and then you can't make it to the bedroom," I told Adam with a smile.

"God, you really only think about one thing. You are weird," Adam snapped at me.

The hotel lobby was very spacious. We walked by several bars and restaurants. The overall impression of the hotel environment was pleasant and luxurious.

So that Mrs. Rousseau wouldn't have to look for us, we sat down close to the main entrance to the hotel and admired our surroundings. Neither one of us had ever been in such a beautiful hotel.

We didn't have to wait long, Mrs. Rousseau arrived a bit late with an apology saying that travelling by car in Paris was often unpredictable.

"Welcome to Paris boys. How was your flight? And how do you like your room?" Mrs. Rousseau asked.

“Hello. Our bathroom is as big as our room in Prague,” answered Adam enthusiastically.

“And they have a sofa in the elevator,” I told Mrs. Rousseau.

“Well, I’m very glad you like it here. I would like to invite you boys to dinner. I had a table reserved for us in one good restaurant. During dinner you’ll meet one of my female and one of my male colleagues. We’ll talk about you and you’ll also meet the people who’ll take care of you later,” assured us Mrs. Rousseau.

Her English was very good, but too fast. We asked her if she could talk to us a bit slower. We understood practically everything, but she was simply talking too fast for us.

We walked in front of the hotel together. Mrs. Rousseau left her car in front of the main entrance. We had never ridden in such a beautiful and spacious vehicle before. It was a white Audi A8. The journey was over quickly and in a few minutes we stepped out in front of the restaurant.

The interior of the restaurant was gorgeous. We liked it even more than Mrs. Schwarz’s restaurant in Prague. This one was more stylish.

The aforementioned people from the agency were already waiting for us at the table. Mrs. Rousseau started introducing us to everyone present. Their gazes were inquiring and they greeted us in a friendly and pleasant manner.

We met Jean the booker. The lady introduced herself as Anne, the image consultant. Jean asked us straight away if we could speak French, or if we preferred communicating in English. We couldn’t speak French at all. On the other hand we were the only ones at the table who could speak German. We asked again whether they could all speak a bit slower, so we would manage the conversation in English.

Mrs. Rousseau started speaking and as the first thing told her colleagues the story of how she found us.

“Carole Leavitt and I were in Prague in a restaurant. As we were ordering, I noticed the boys on the other side of the restaurant. In the first moment I thought my mind was playing tricks on me. We stared at them for about an hour in disbelief and wondered at how similar they were. We both decided to approach them. Well, and I did! Two new little stars have just appeared on the sky of the modeling world,” were her words.

Her colleagues listened to her story with a smile and nodded in agreement. They said they weren’t surprised she approached us in such an untraditional way. They would have done the same, they said.

As the time passed we started discussing the specifics of our fate.

Mrs. Rousseau started with: “Boys, no one is forcing you to do anything you don’t want to do. Look at it as being offered an opportunity, which might have arisen in almost every art field. But understand that everything has its pros and cons.

I see the biggest problem with your studies in Prague. Otherwise I am sure of your success.”

“You are right,” Jean continued. *“These boys can have a promising career in front of them. They are very interesting. I am not worried about a lack of lucrative job offers. I am very interested in tomorrow’s photo tests and how the PhotoBook will turn out.”* Then Jean looked straight at us and continued talking directly to us. *“Boys, you are very interesting, visually. And another great plus, at least for me, is that you are indistinguishable twins. Without a doubt you have the ability to attract a lot of attention.”*

“I am sure about them. They are great. I think tomorrow’s shoot will only confirm that” Mrs. Rousseau added.

We heard so many compliments and so much praise that evening. I can’t deny that it felt good. I don’t think neither me nor my brother had any doubts at all. Before we left Prague we spent hours on the internet looking up references

and information about the agency that would represent us in exchange for an exclusive contract

But I still had to ask: *“Could you be a bit more specific? What exactly does a lucrative job offer mean? I have to admit my brother and I are a bit baffled by how sure you are of our success.”*

“Of course boys,” Mrs. Rousseau answered. “It’s a good thing that you are asking. You will be appearing in fashion magazines in different corners of the world. Well known fashion houses will surely be interested in working with you. You would be in fashion shows. You could become the faces of many products. The world of modeling is, boys, very diverse.

As for your payment, we are talking here about a one year contract for exclusive representation by our agency worth one hundred and fifty thousand euros.”

We both swallowed. We tried to keep a straight face, to pretend we weren’t surprised. We couldn’t even imagine that much money, let alone that we could actually *earn* such an astronomical amount.

“Boys, by no means I want to hear a definite answer from you right now, but what do you think about all that?” Mrs. Rousseau finally asked us.

It was a huge strain. To tell the truth, we didn’t even know at the time what face expressions to make, let alone what to answer.

Suddenly a tear ran down Adam’s face as he said: *“We’ll be able to make mom really happy, won’t we?”* He looked at me questioningly and expected my agreement.

“Yes,” we said in unison and looked at Mrs. Rousseau.

She was smiling. *“I think we’ll reach an agreement... and work together. But you have to explain everything to your mother first. You have to talk to her about everything.”*

A feeling of satisfaction broke out over the faces of everyone present. We noticed an expression of relief on Mrs. Rousseau’s face.

We agreed on a time table for tomorrow. After dinner Mrs. Rousseau took us back to the hotel.

“How do you feel about the meeting tonight?” I asked Adam.

“Do you know how many boys and girls around the world would like to achieve exactly what we managed to do during a single dinner? We were really lucky. I’m just worried about one thing; how are we going to explain everything to mom when we are back home...? I hope we’ll handle it.”

“You are right bro. We were really lucky. Don’t forget that you have me and I have you. There are two of us and we’ll do everything together. We can do it all, little star,” I answered Adam with a smile.

The rest of the night we spent talking about what would our classmates say if they knew. How much hate and envy would we be surrounded by. We doubted we would be able to handle it...

We also contemplated our studies.

We were thinking. How could we present it in the best way possible and explain everything to mom?

We quickly wrote mom a text message that we were all right and went to bed – with great anticipation about what new would tomorrow and a day in an atelier bring.

Because of our nerves about the photoshoot the next day and experiences from that evening, we couldn’t fall asleep at all. *“Bro? Are you asleep?”* I asked quietly.

“No. I can’t sleep, I’m so out of it. One hundred and fifty thousand euros! We’re making good profit from these freckles, huh? Think about what we’ll be able to buy...!”

The photo shoot in the atelier was fun. We enjoyed it a lot. The photographer was a real professional. As one in a few he wasn’t taken aback by our appearance at all. He didn’t ask us any questions like if we had the same

fingerprints or any other questions that my brother and I were frankly getting allergic to.

During the photoshoot and during the break he showed us the previews of the photos. I have to admit we looked really good. He also asked us what kind of music we liked listening to and if we liked to dance.

When you take into the account what kind of music Adam and I listened to, it was understandable that we didn't much enjoy dancing. We had our headphones in almost all the time, but the music playing was mostly classical or cinematic orchestral melodies.

The photographer wanted us to dance though. We tried to be accommodating and started dancing to the music that was playing in the atelier. I was not so sure you could call what we were doing "dancing" but it seemed like we were meeting his expectations at least.

We spent about six hours in the atelier. We met a bunch of boys and girls who were also just starting out. I think we knew from the start that it wasn't such a good idea to talk to just anyone straight away.

Nevertheless, during one of the breaks we struck up a conversation with a beautiful young girl. Her name was Natascha and she was from Russia. After she told us how confused she was by our faces, she wanted to exchange telephone numbers. We both liked her a lot. In our minds she was already naked in the bed with us. We didn't hesitate and exchanged our numbers straight away.

She made us laugh when she saved us in her phone as Super Twins. It was only appropriate that she'd be under an "s" in our contacts as Super Girl.

There was also a boy from Brazil in the atelier with us. During the breaks in between the photoshoots he kept pushing his shirt up and taking photos of his muscled torso with his phone. But he always waited until someone could see him do it. We silently observed him from afar, however he noticed us

looking. He approached us and said: *“Hi, boys. I’m free after 9 tonight. Let’s meet up. We’ll have a joint and then some fun.”*

“Please forgive us, but we have other plans for the evening. Really sorry about that. Your body is fantastic by the way. You must work out a lot, right? You look really good,” I tried to answer him diplomatically. He just looked at us uncomprehendingly and walked away without reacting at all. Adam leaned closer to me and whispered: *“I guess we made the wolf mad, huh?”* In that moment I remembered Marshall Rosenberg and his process of nonviolent communication – his well-known simulations of conversations between a wolf and a giraffe. This author of several great books and an amazing psychologist was someone we really admired.

The photoshoot went well. We hoped we fulfilled the expectations of everyone who had any of us.

During the day we found out a lot of useful information. For instance about a modeling school. General talk of modeling from different viewpoints. What awaited us, was the last night of our trip Paris trip. We didn’t see much of the city, but we were anxious to go exploring on our own in the evening. We promised mom we wouldn’t be wandering around the city alone.

In the end we stayed in our hotel room by ourselves again. We were lying on the enormous bed and reading through a draft of our contract with the agency.

Mrs. Rousseau even arranged for the contract to be translated to Czech during our stay in Paris, so our mom could read through everything and understand it properly. Unfortunately the agency didn’t have its own representation in the Czech Republic, only a partner agency.

We discussed every line of the contract and even read several passages aloud to each other.

At the same time, we were thinking about what would be the best tactic to use to explain everything to mom properly when we got home. We also thought about how we were leaving the next day and we didn't even buy mom any presents yet.

We decided that we had to buy something small for her at the airport at least. We didn't want to return empty handed. Even though we did have a very professional photo of the two of us from the atelier; and we knew that the photo would make her the happiest, we still wanted to bring her a present from Paris.

Our agreement with Mrs. Rousseau was that she'd have a coffee with us in the morning, before taking us to the airport. Adam and I had already made up our minds; we would become models.

"Boys, you've done so well. I have to say I am proud not only of you, but also of myself. Maybe you don't even realize it, but you were very successful. I knew it. You are amazing. Please tell your mother how thankful I am for her trust in me, when she let you go to Paris on your own. Don't worry, I am sure everything will be all right and we'll see each other soon."

"When you are home, talk to your mother and explain everything to her. I am looking forward to working with you," Mrs. Rousseau encouraged us.

After that we talked about traveling. Mrs. Rousseau told us how she journeyed all around the world. She mentioned how difficult long distance flights were and several of the experiences from her travels.

After about an hour she checked her Cartier watch and said: *"Boys, it's time to leave for the airport. I'll also help you with the check-in and then we'll part ways. When you arrive home, please send me a message so I know you arrived safely."*

Going back to Prague was not something we looked forward to. We wanted to see our mom of course, but the rest - not so much. School and the

whole boring stereotype of everyday life. We sat in the departures hall next to our gate and watched the plane that would take us back to Prague. God, we didn't want to go back so badly!

During the flight we laughed and joked about everything we experienced during the photoshoot. Adam wasn't as afraid of flying this time and he also wasn't as stressed as during the flight to Paris. We talked about the girls we met in the atelier. Mostly about Natascha. We agreed we had to call her as soon as we got back to Paris.

After we arrived back to Prague, we stated only one thing. We had to do anything and everything in our power to go back to Paris as soon as possible.

Mom took a day off from work, something she didn't do very often, and waited for us at the airport. We were so glad to see her. However, after a heartfelt hug she said the words we were most afraid to hear.

"Oh, thank God you're back! I was so worried! I won't let you out of my sight ever again!"

We were absolutely positive we would have to make a huge effort to convince mom. First, we had to convince her somehow that it really was the right thing for us.

After we arrived home, we sat mom down and told her all about our experiences. About our flight from Paris, the hotel, food...

We jumped from one topic to another and constantly talked over each other. We laughed a lot as while describing our experiences. Mom burst into tears when we presented her with our photo from the atelier.

"Thank you boys. This is the most beautiful gift I could ever receive from you. And now I have a job for you: You'll have to get me a really pretty frame for the photo!"

My brother and I cautiously proceeded to the next stage of our persuasion.

“By the way mom, Mrs. Rousseau wanted us to tell you hello for her. She also wanted to thank you for trusting her and for the opportunity you have given us.”

“What opportunity?” mom asked.

“Well, here is a draft for a possible contract that we brought with us, take a look, it’s all translated to Czech,” we said carefully.

Mom put on her reading glasses and began reading through the contract. After a while she raised her head and looked at us questioningly.

“How am I supposed to understand “year-long contract” and “one hundred and fifty thousand”? Do you really think someone is going to give you a hundred and fifty thousand for a few photos?”

“Yes mom. It means that during a period of one year, the agency is required to get us jobs, which in total would be worth one hundred and fifty thousand,” confirmed Adam.

“Boys, don’t be so naïve! Who is going to give you that much money? Or...what do you mean? And what about school gentlemen?”

“Mrs. Rousseau and her colleague Jean, who would be handling our work, said we could start next week. And mom I also wanted to mention... you overlooked a small but substantial detail. The one hundred and fifty thousand is in euros, not in Czech crowns.” Adam specified.

“One hundred and fifty thousand euros? Do you two even realize how much money that is? Boys, you must have all gone mad in that Paris!”

Mom fixed me with a look. *“I feel like you’ve been suspiciously quiet this whole time Ben...”*

“Mom, the offer is from France. The money’s different there than it is here. Mrs. Rousseau said that we would get interesting offers from fashion magazines, represent fashion brands in shows... Everyone we met in Paris was thrilled by us!”

The photo we gave you is from a photoshoot we did with a professional photographer in an atelier,” I said finally.

“It’s really pretty isn’t it mom?” Adam swiftly continued. “Ben is telling you the truth. It’s a world we know nothing about. In Paris we tasted just a little piece from a really large cake. And we liked it a lot. Mom, please, we beg you, please let us try it! It’s just one year. It doesn’t mean you wouldn’t see us for a year though...”

“The money that we would have the opportunity to earn could help us a lot mom. We liked Paris and the job was fun. Look, we actually got you this pretty lighter...” I said as I was giving mom one of our “gifts from Paris”.

“... and here are some French cookies...” Adam added.

“I can’t believe it! Thank you for the presents, but I don’t like this at all! You must have decided all this behind my back, together with your Mrs. Rousseau!” mom started to frown.

“Mom, we were just worried how you were going to react. We are telling you the truth; it’s really just for one year. And we’ll start going to school again right after that,” promised Adam.

At that moment my phone rang. It was Mrs. Rousseau. I put her on the speakerphone and continuously translated everything Mrs. Rousseau was saying for mom.

“I was just saying that you must have agreed on this all behind my back...” mom repeated loudly for Mrs. Rousseau.

“Hello. We were just sitting home with mom and discussing the contract,” I told Mrs. Rousseau in English.

“Hello Mrs. Heyn,” Mrs. Rousseau started talking directly to mom. “I am just calling to make sure that you have your boys home with you and that everything is all right.” I translated the sentence for mom quickly.

“Yes, yes! The boys are home and we were just discussing a couple of trivial things like one hundred and fifty thousand euros,” mom laughed ironically.

“Well, I didn’t want to interrupt your family discussion. I just wanted to make sure that boys made it home safely. They didn’t contact me and according to my time they should have been home already. That’s why I called.”

“That’s all right. No harm done, but could you please explain the whole thing to me? What the boys are telling me here simply can’t be right ...” mom asked her.

“Mrs. Heyn, I am not exactly sure what you mean. If you are talking about the contract that boys brought with them, it’s a contract for exclusive representation by our agency for a period of one year. Specifically, by the Paris branch. The Agency agrees that the boys will get jobs, with the total worth of at least one hundred and fifty thousand euros.

If you are not sure about anything in the contract, you can give it to a lawyer. Your boys are made for modeling work Mrs. Heyn. They are unique. We are not offering anything impossible, even if you might think it is.”

We translated everything Mrs. Rousseau said to mom word for word.

“And who will take care of my boys when they are wandering around the world? I keep hearing you say how unique they are. But I would also like to have them home sometimes!”

“Mrs. Heyn, I understand you – I am a mother myself. I don’t want you to think I am trying to influence your decision. I understand completely.”

Mom started crying. “I always wanted what was best for my boys. I would like them to be happy. I’m just so worried about them.

And how will you explain their education?”

“I suggest deferring their studies. I have seen it several times. In Paris I would be able to secure retraining courses for them.... Language courses, anything they’d be interested in.”

“All right, thank you for the explanation. I will contact you soon.”

“No, thank you Mrs. Heyn. I’ll be looking forward to hearing from you.”

We said goodbye to Mrs. Rousseau and ended the call. Mom looked at us helplessly.

After a moment of silence Adam spoke up: *“Look at that, I almost forgot this in my backpack. Look mom... We brought you this pen with ‘Paris’ written on it...”* We wanted to distract mom from the difficult topic at any costs.

“Boys, you’ll be the death of me. Tell me, what should I do with you? You can’t interrupt your studies just like that,” mom sighed loudly.

What happened was something I expected and actually counted on a bit at the same time. Mom simply resigned. She didn’t have the strength to resist persuasion from three people at once.

Mrs. Rousseau’s call helped us a lot. Though we had a hard time translating everything, her call came at just the right moment.

Mom gave us her permission. She was worried she would be depriving us of the biggest opportunity of our life.

Adam and I understood her fears completely. She was worried about us. We were feeling guilty the whole time that we were convincing her of something she internally disagreed with. But that didn’t matter much. It was such an amazing opportunity!

We deferred our studies for a year. Mrs. Schwarz, however, wasn’t very understanding when we informed her of that fact. We actually felt bad after what she told us. *“I can’t keep you here. However, in a years’ time I will behave towards you the same way you just did towards me, leaving practically overnight. You can count on that.”*

We were leaving for Paris in two weeks' time. However, if I had known what would happen to us, I would never have made our mom make such a hard decision. We never should have sat in that restaurant and Mrs. Rousseau never should have noticed us.

Chapter Six

Sebastian

Because we adored our apartment, we bought two new Hermès decorative pillows with the money from Paul.

We also purchased – without any overthinking or arguments – a new Bang & Olufsen audio system.

Neither one of us remembered Adam’s plan to put the money aside, use it to pay the rent for a year and only make ourselves happy with something small. It hadn’t even been a week and half of the money was already gone. We didn’t feel bad. We were happy we were making our life the way it was.

We tried to invite mom over for a visit again. It didn’t work out. Instead we sent her a package with her favorite perfume, a book that she picked out while visiting Paris; a gorgeous book about France, full of photos, and a new wallet that, of course, matched the handbag she got from us during her last visit. We even added a bottle of wine, the same kind as the one she liked so much. We were overjoyed when she told us the package arrived safely.

She was angry with us, saying that it must have cost a lot of money. We didn’t mind that though. The most important thing was that it made her happy. We relished in our extravagant, reckless life.

Sure enough Paul contacted us, as he promised. We were both very surprised he did. Neither one of us thought that we would ever see him again. We were convinced that he simply liked our appearance, so he decided to carefully invest in us to get what he wanted. And he did. In exchange for an absolutely incomprehensible amount of money, but he did.

It was the end of December when we agreed to meet with Paul in the Plaza Anthénée hotel restaurant over the phone. We left what happened on Krabi far behind us. We didn’t expect something so unlikely to happen again in our lifetimes. Money doesn’t grow on trees.

We arrived to the restaurant at the appointed time. We waited for a moment before we were led to the table. It was Paul who made the reservation,

so we were surprised to see another young man already sitting there. At first we thought it was most probably a mistake, even though we prayed it wouldn't be.

And it wasn't a mistake, Sebastian explained readily. He was supposed to meet with Paul as well. He was as surprised to see us, as we were to see him.

We joined him at the table. Working in the modelling world and attending various auditions and fashion shows, where we saw beautiful girls and boys at every corner, had kind of a side effect on us; we were immune to a pretty face. However, we have never seen anyone as beautiful as Sebastian before.

Sebastian's appearance charmed us utterly. He was twenty-two years old, with huge dark brown eyes, shiny black hair and was as tall as we were. Adam and I both had to agree that we haven't seen a man so gorgeous in our lives.

The table was mostly quiet.

Sebastian had to notice us looking at him all the time. He told us our resemblance was phenomenal and that we were very handsome. We thanked him for his compliment with a similar one. If we were handsome, what was he?

Paul arrived half an hour late. *"I am actually late on purpose. I wanted to give you time to get to know each other without me."*

Paul introduced Sebastian as a friend of his. He went on and asked us not to be angry, but that Sebastian knew everything. About the invitation to Krabi and everything else. We were embarrassed. Paul then said something that pinned us to our seats.

"Boys, I would like all of us here to be friends. Very good friends. You do not have to hide anything from each other. I care about you all."

I care about you," he looked at Sebastian.

Sebastian kept glancing from me to Adam and back. We, in turn, stared at him intently. Paul was enjoying himself, he obviously liked the situation.

He clearly felt good having the company of three young men at his table.

The realization that Paul probably really *was* gay began to dawn on me. At the same time, I realized that Sebastian completely won me over with his looks. I had never liked another boy as much as I liked Sebastian. People call meetings like this ‘love at first sight’ I thought.

Adam was as much dumbfounded by his appearance as I was. However, he seemed a bit more reserved. He did not allow himself to become as infatuated with Sebastian as I was; he was able to resist him. His charm didn’t affect him as much as it affected me.

I couldn’t shake off the bad feeling about this meeting. Paul mentioned that Sebastian was originally from Germany, where his parents still lived. They have known each other for almost two years. They met in Hamburg in one high-end restaurant, where Sebastian worked as a waiter. Paul was in Hamburg to discuss a new business plan of his, which, however, was never realized.

Somehow, I wasn’t able to evaluate the whole situation. Why did Paul wish for us to become friends? How did the relationship between a sixty-year-old Paul and a gorgeous twenty-two-year old Sebastian even work?

Was it a relationship built on showering in exchange for twenty thousand euros?

Paul proposed whether we wanted to go to a club after dinner. We liked the idea. But only until the moment Paul finished his sentence. He meant the three of us. He would go back to the hotel and rest.

Adam, who until then seemed aloof, promptly replied: “*Yes, we’d love to go. The night is still young.*” I would expect just about anything, but that *did* actually surprise me. I started to slowly realize that Adam was just as infatuated with Sebastian as I was.

Sebastian responded to Adam’s words with: “*Young night and damn if it isn’t long.*”

I agreed as well. I didn't know why, but I wasn't exactly thrilled at the moment. I caught myself being jealous of Adam!

When we were saying goodbye to Paul in front of the restaurant, Paul gave me three five-hundred euro bills with the words: *"One for each one of you to spend. Enjoy the night and let me know how it went tomorrow!"*

Then he got in a black Mercedes with a driver and was gone.

Sebastian lit a cigarette. We lit ones as well. I began to distribute the bills among us, as Paul wanted. *"So, if you're from Germany, we can speak in German if you'd like. We'll rest from using English for a while,"* I told Sebastian as I was handing him his five-hundred euro bill.

Sebastian took the bill with the words: *"Long night with this?"* Then immediately added: *"Sure, I'll be glad if we can speak in German. Not many people speak German in Paris."*

His immodest gesture puzzled us. That much money simply had to be enough for a single night, we thought.

Sebastian mentioned that he wanted to make a quick detour to his apartment. He needed to take the phone he forgot when leaving. We crossed the street and walked a few dozen meters.

"Are you coming upstairs?" asked Sebastian in front of the house.

"No, no, we'll wait here. Surely you'll be right back," I answered.

When he left we lit a cigarette and I told Adam: *"Bro, I think I'm in love with him. He's absolutely gorgeous... I'm done in. We need to have that guy!"*

Adam noticed my excited face and confirmed: *"Yeah, we do. We need to have him..."*

Sebastian came back with a smile and his phone in hand. We asked him how long he lived there and whether he lived alone. His answer was that he had been staying at that address for over a year and that his employer was paying for it. We both immediately asked who his employer was... A one bedroom

apartment at this address cost at least three thousand euros a month – we did know that.

“Paul Gereth,” he told us with a wide smile.

While still on the street, we started discussing what club we would go to then.

Sebastian suggested that if we wanted to talk, it might be a good idea to go somewhere a little quieter. So we got a taxi and drove to the Ritz-Carlton hotel, where the Hemingway bar was.

We ordered a Hennessy and coffee. I felt a bit more relaxed already. The first topic of our conversation was Paul. *“So, Paul is both your friend and an employer?”* I asked Sebastian.

“Are you crazy? I work for Paul here in Paris as a waiter. He’s okay, but his money is what’s really fantastic. And I’ll answer your possible stupid question in advance. No, we’re not sleeping together.”

“Oh, well I was just asking. We met Paul on a plane to Thailand,” I told him.

“I know everything, even how you two embarrassed yourselves for him in the shower. You’re so handsome boys, and yet you lower yourselves to that for such pocket money?”

When Sebastian finished, Adam and I flushed with embarrassment like little boys. It would never occur to us that we would ever hear something like this from someone. We were still aware of the value of money; very well in my opinion. We didn’t consider twenty thousand euro to be ‘pocket money’.

We were aware of the fact that we were extravagant. We simply knew how to make ourselves happy, but we were still able to realize the value of money.

“I don’t know how you live, but what happened on Krabi just happened and what we got in exchange really wasn’t ‘pocket money’ – well at least for us it wasn’t. I guess we’re not as demanding as you are,” I reasoned.

“How can someone with your face work as a waiter? Can you explain it to me rationally?” Adam tried to counterattack.

“Why not? I enjoy it. I love to be out there, with people. I like to have fun and it’s fun,” Sebastian replied simply.

“I think you’d probably have a good chance to succeed in modeling. You could earn some very good money,” Adam suggested.

“No, I really don’t think so. Guys, I don’t think you get it. Once I was born with a face like this, I need to make the most out of it. Don’t you think so?”

“Well that’s what I’m trying to tell you! You’d be successful in modeling,” Adam didn’t understand. Well, neither did I.

“Are the two of you really so thick? To use your looks... I don’t mean for a couple thousand euros. If we added together the ages of all of us at this table, we’d be around the same age Paul is. We are young.

I’m enjoying my life. Thirty years that mean something are still better than seventy that don’t.”

With his last sentence, Sebastian left us speechless once again. And here we thought how well we were enjoying our life! We were completely satisfied with the income we were getting and we knew how to spend it accordingly. And now we are suddenly hearing that apparently we were stupid...?

However, everything he told us had only half the effect. Both Adam and I were still blinded by his beauty. Any amount of criticism sounded like sweet music, coming from his mouth. Was it really possible for someone to be so beautiful yet so terribly corrupt at the same time? His bohemian life was a game to him, where the only things that mattered were him, sex and entertainment.

I knew that this person’s lifestyle was like walking on a very thin ice and that usually when the ice broke, everything tended to simply fall apart. The

constantly repeating story of a poor person suddenly becoming rich and the money destroying him. In my mind, I condemned Sebastian's approach to life. But it only worked as long as I wasn't looking at him. Whenever I turned my gaze to him, all my moralizing melted away. He completely swept me off my feet with his looks and charisma.

"Do you want to come over to my apartment for a drink?" Sebastian asked. We both nodded in agreement. We were full of anticipation. We hoped that if we went to his apartment, drinking and talking wouldn't be the only things we'd be doing.

The apartment was furnished in a studio style. The same as ours. Just slightly larger and, of course, in an amazing location.

After entering the apartment, the first thing that hit us was how incredibly messy it was. Scattered clothes covered every available surface. Several pairs of shoes on the ground. Unmade bed. Adam and I sat down on a just now cleared couch; Sebastian simply pushed the scattered clothes from it to the ground.

"You're not one for cleaning, huh?" Adam asked.

"If you like cleaning, go ahead. A woman comes here twice a week to clean up," Sebastian replied.

"Well, that lady has to be pretty brave," Adam teased, smirking.

Sebastian disappeared to the kitchen corner and came back with a bottle of Clicquot and three glasses. He put on house music interspersed with classical songs. Interesting combination, we thought.

It wasn't too soon until the bottle was finished and another wasn't available. Sebastian, however, swiftly called a nonstop delivery service on his phone. He ordered three bottles of Clicquot and a bottle of vodka.

We immediately spoke up and told him that we weren't really used to hard liquor. We would most probably only vomit all over his place. Sebastian started laughing like a lunatic.

Before long, his phone rang. He only said: "*Come on up. Sixth floor,*" and went to get the door. Adam and I lit a cigarette. We still couldn't grasp how it was possible to be that messy, when we looked around us.

Sebastian returned to the room with a boy in a baseball cap who had the ordered bottles in a box in his hands.

"*Put it over there,*" he said and gave the delivery boy a five hundred euro note. The delivery boy started searching everywhere through his pockets so he could give Sebastian his change.

He was handsome, mixed race, around 25 years.

"*Screw that. Keep the rest. You know what, I'll give you this if you won't bother going back to work tonight and stay with us instead.*" Sebastian reached into the front pocket of his jeans, took out another five-hundred euro note and started waving it in front of the delivery boy's face.

"*What's your name?*" asked Sebastian arrogantly.

"*Patrick. OK, I'll stay, but I really need to make a call,*" he replied. We couldn't believe our eyes. How easy it was to pick up a delivery boy! I remembered Paul's words about the relativity of money. Five-hundred euro bill was valuable for Patrick, but Sebastian didn't consider it to be enough for one night.

To Patrick the five-hundred euro bill was very enticing. Just as Sebastian was to us at that moment. Patrick went to make his call and we were already sitting with full glasses of champagne. "*Watch, when he comes back...*" said Sebastian in an almost serious voice. Patrick returned and sat on the sofa with us. He was quiet. We had the feeling he was slightly scared of something. He couldn't have known what company he found himself in.

Sebastian rose from his chair and stood in front of Patrick. He handed him the promised bill with the words: *“Well, Patrick, welcome to the party. I hope I deserve something more than just a ‘thank you’ for this,”* he threw a bag with something on his lap. *“Prepare it for four.”*

Suddenly it was as if some miraculous energy got into Patrick. He beamed and his whole demeanor completely transformed. He took the bag immediately, opened it and poured it on the table. He tried to divide the white powder on the table with some kind of a card into four even piles. We immediately knew something was wrong.

We didn’t have any experience at all with drugs until then. We tried to avoid them as much as possible. We knew that they were pretty commonly used in clubs and discos nowadays. But we never even thought to try. We weren’t tempted.

While Patrick was busy with his task, Sebastian walked over to us.

“Oh, come on boys, I hope you aren’t feeling shy...” Sebastian grabbed my head and kissed me. We started making out. I only registered that he was trying to steer Adam over with his hand to join us.

Adam didn’t need much persuading to join us. All three of us started kissing in turns. The whole thing lasted for about thirty seconds.

“You’re perfect, and so is this,” told us Sebastian and pointed towards four even lines that Patrick was able to prepare meanwhile. *“That’s cocaine. Don’t worry it’s nothing bad. In a while, you won’t even know you had anything. The champagne will tire you out more than this. I want you both...”*

We were excited from the kissing and the alcohol was making our head spin. Still I tried to resist.

“Sorry, but not this,” I told Sebastian.

He simply came over to us, put his hands between our legs and kissed us. Sebastian knew exactly how to convince us.

“We don’t even know what to do with that,” Adam blurted out despairingly.

Sebastian picked up something like a roll of paper and kneeled on the ground next to the table. He put one end of the rolled up paper into his nostril. He inhaled a part of one line of powder through one nostril and then the rest through the other. *“Patrick, it’s your turn.”*

Patrick didn’t need to be told twice and did the same thing as Sebastian. Their eyes teared up.

“Now you two, don’t worry...” Sebastian turned to us.

My feelings in that moment were indescribable. Curiosity, fear and a huge desire to have sex with Sebastian. Yet somewhere deep inside I knew I didn’t want to do that. But I still kneeled down next to the table and inhaled the third line as instructed.

Adam sat down on the ground next to me and looked at me worriedly. He asked how I was feeling and if everything was all right.

“Should I really do it?” he asked. I looked at him with teary eyes and simply nodded to show my consent.

Adam inhaled the last line. We returned to the sofa and lit a cigarette. The drug took effect quickly.

We didn’t shut up for a second for the rest of the evening. Never in our lives had we laughed as much as we did that night. The sex was better than ever before. Everyone with everyone else at least five times. It was an unbelievably amazing night with some unbelievably amazing sex.

The morning after was worse. I woke up naked, lying on the ground. Completely naked Adam was lying next to me.

Empty glasses, spilled ashtray and a mix of our clothes covered the floor. The air in the room was absolutely stifling.

I had a headache.