

WINGMAN

Okay, straight up, my name's Ross and I've got this super power (don't scoff) where I am literally the ultimate wingman. I can pull, tune and get any girl I want—for my mates. Unfortunately, none of these girls ever want to go home with me. Whatever. I'm making a killing from it, so it's not all bad.

It's not like I'm repellent or anything, I just have this ability to hook two people up. I attract whatever girl I want—and I mean Whatever, not just your basis five's and six's—over to our group of guys, or whichever client I've taken out for the night. If there are beautiful girls within eyeshot, they simply can't resist coming up to me. But, I immediately get friend zoned. Sucks. The girl latches onto me and asks a thousand questions. Then, once I've built a rapport with one (seriously, like two minutes of talking and they're my bestie), I introduce them to whichever one of my mates called dibs, or, if it's business, the guy that's paying me the big bucks. As soon as I make this introduction, the girl basically falls in love. I don't know why. It's freaking weird. And this isn't just a Regular Occurrence—I've never failed. Even when it's a mate of mine who's honestly a two and I invite a girl over who is a dead-set stunner, once I introduce them—bang. Done deal.

I swear I'm not like a Quasimodo or anything. I'm 6'2" and even though I'm not built like a brick shithouse I'm not that much of a runt. Actually, that's a lie. I'm pretty skinny. No matter, I've got brown hair—one of those stylish cuts where it's short on the sides, long and slicked back in the middle—blue eyes and, wait for it, Dimples. So come on ladies, what the hell's wrong with me?

My biggest piece of baggage, you ask?

I'm still a virgin.

Faaaaaar out it sucks so much. Can you imagine my life, really? Can pull *any* girl. Only to have them NEVER be interested in me sexually. But I can grant any of my mates the pleasure of having them for an evening. My powers don't work over more than a few days, so either the girls come to their senses and run away screaming, or they become A Couple. Unnnngghhh.

Being the computer genius that I am, I decided that I'd market my talent online. At first business was slow. Seriously, as if you'd believe some guy could pull any girl for you unless he looked like Henry Cavill. So I got my mates to do some testimonials and spread the word. Gradually I booked more and more clients. Now I'm swamped with dudes wanting me to pick up girls for them.

At first I kind of thought I was being a Massive Douchebag. Objectifying women, using my powers to take away their free will etcetera, etcetera. I sound like a typical jock or some shit. The truth is that I started doing it for my friends who just had no luck with girls and were terrified of any Female Contact. It helped boost their confidence and self-esteem. That's how I marketed myself—for the guys who have no luck with women, I am your man! And it started out that way. But then the high rollers came to town. The guys who make ridiculous amounts of money and hire me to go out with them once a week to pick up. These are the guys who aren't ugly, but they probably aren't a girl's first choice either. And they have confidence in spades—it's the money. This in itself is a turn-off for girls—average guy saunters over and treats them like shit, acting like he's god's gift to women and all that. These guys usually end up buying their sex off the street or picking up gold diggers. I, on the other hand, can provide them with a smorgasbord of women to choose from and it *feels* genuine, if only for a limited amount of time.

Please don't judge me. I hate it. But I don't know how to stop. I took on a few of these rich-arse clients because my bank account was down to two digits. Once I'd had a taste of these money-bags I stopped taking them on. Word spread that I was only in the business for guys that genuinely needed help. So now my inbox is flooded with emails, everyone claiming to struggle with that dreaded Woman Species. Half of them are fake. Just those high rollers bullshitting me. But I can't tell until I meet them. So I gave up. I take on whichever clients I think are actually desperate when I get the chance, and go out with The Regulars each week.

Tonight I'm wingmaning Martin. And no, he's not one of the strugglers, despite his name. He's a dick. But he pays *so-ho* well. For one night's work, which is only about two hours, I get \$500 cash in hand.

So I've suited up, classic tonight—black pants, jacket and slim tie with a white shirt—and am heading to some fancy restaurant in the city for dinner. Just hopped in my car and the drive's about ten minutes, so, in the interim, I'll walk you through my usual week of clients.

Monday morning—brunch with Tom. Pay: \$500.

We usually hit up a cafe, grab some type of Brie And Smoked Salmon Panini and I introduce him to one of the waitresses. We tend to only visit each cafe once. Heh.

Monday evening—I save this time for newbie's. Pay: \$200.

We go to dinner and the choice is entirely up to the newbie. 'Cause you've got to think these things through. If I said, 'Hey man, let's meet at this wicked Thai place,' and the guy isn't that attracted to Thai girls, then I've just wasted his time. The origin of the cuisine usually dictates the waitress' nationality. *Usually*. Better to play it safe though.

Tuesday midday—lunch with Chris. Pay: \$500.

Chris is alright, I suppose. He's not arrogant, he's just... odd. Like, you-could-possibly-be-a-serial-killer, odd. So we go to this underground music store where goth and emo kids hang out. Chris is twenty-eight. For my own bloody piece of mind I won't go near anyone under eighteen. But Chris likes them young, white, alternative and skinny.

Tuesday evening—dinner with Tao. Pay: \$500.

He's out here for business, six months or so. Originally from Hong Kong. He'll take anything that breathes. Easily done.

Wednesday morning—brunch with Andrew. Pay: \$500.

Andrew's cool. He was actually a genuine sucker with girls. Coincidentally he has money. We are both happy.

Wednesday evening—clubbing with Julie. Pay: \$100 (I like Julie).

Yes A Girl. Ohhh my lord. Julie is fun. She's beautiful, but not confident at all. She also tends to wig out of situations that might turn out to be awesome. We go to this gay club that's always pumping on a Wednesday for some strange reason. We grab drinks, talk and dance until she spots someone who takes her fancy. Julie hates taking advantage of these girls. But she's only ever been with women from me introducing

them to her. It's so nice to see her self-esteem growing. Soon she'll realise she won't need me at all. I'll miss her, but she never needed me in the first place.

Thursday midday—same deal as Monday evening, newbie time. Pay: \$200.

Thursday evening—dinner with Jonathon. Pay: \$500.

Jonathon is tolerable. Likes older women—cougars. Mid-thirties, single, look amazing for their age and desperate. It's his thing.

Thursday night—clubbing with Luke. Pay: \$500 (I'm a busy bee from Thursday on).

Luke is the definition of Male Douchebag. I'm going to get rid of him soon. He treats women like pieces of meat. Actually, I'll text him now. Sorry dude, you'll have to fend for yourself.

Friday midday—lunch with Scott. Pay: \$500.

So we go to a karaoke bar thing and he *always* gets me to pick up the same girl. He's totally in love. And it seems to be unrequited. Poor guy. He's not that bad.

Friday evening—Mates! No pay, obviously.

Yeah just the usual, hanging with the boys, dinner and drinks, beautiful waitress, introduce, can already hear the foreplay. Blah blah BLEH.

Friday night—clubbing with Matt. Pay: \$500.

Matt equals super nerd. He's that exact stereotype you have in your head right now, I swear, the hair, the glasses, the outfit, the demeanour—it just screams I AM A VIRGIN. Even though he's not—any more—thanks to yours truly.

Saturday midday—lunch with James. Pay: \$500.

James is, um, large. And sweaty. He needs me.

Saturday evening—dinner with Martin. Pay: \$500.

And here we are! Yep, it's Saturday night and I'm going to dinner with A Guy. My life in a nutshell.

Anyway, if you're any good at maths you would have calculated that already I'm on \$5,500 a week. And after Martin, I have one more client who also pays \$500 a pop. So, I'm on six grand a week. I have a Really Nice place.

Let's see where Martin's booked for tonight. *L'affamé*... my mediocre French translates that as 'the hungry one.' Knowing Martin, that will be in the metaphorical sense.

"Hey, Ross, my man! How are you?" the aforementioned dick greets me.

"Hey, nice place," I reply, gesturing to the restaurant that he's steering me towards.

"Yeah, came here the other night for a business meeting and there's this waitress... Jeez, you've got to see her, hot as anything." He holds his hands in front of his pecks, squeezing imaginary boobs.

"You couldn't get her number on your own?" I ask, not even trying to hide my dislike of the guy. Hey, he totally knows it.

"It would have been unprofessional for me to try in that environment," he says, although I can see through his lie. He's bloody persistent with the women he wants.

"Yeah, didn't think of that," I say, just to placate him.

We're inside now, about to be greeted by the person who greets you at restaurants. I go out for dinner so much, why can I not remember what this person is called?

"Reservation at eight for Martin," Martin says, as though he is a Very Important Person.

"Right this way, gentlemen," the people greeter says, giving us a polite smile and swishing around in a practiced turn.

"She can be for next week," Martin whispers to me as we are shown to our table, not taking his eyes off her arse.

I grimace. Right now, I really hate myself.

"Let's just focus on the girl you came here to see for now, okay?" I say as the people greeter leaves.

We sit in silence as we each contemplate the menu. It used to be awkward, but after so many nights out together, we're used to it.

"That's the one," Martin says, interrupting our reticence.

I turn to my right and see a waitress walking towards our table. She's definitely Martin's type. Heavy make-up, fake hair, fake boobs. She looks out of place in this restaurant, even though I can tell she's toned down the hair and make-up for work.

"Good evening gentlemen, what will you be drinking this evening?" she asks.

"A bottle of Moët," Martin says.

I almost, *almost*, face-palm myself and groan out loud. Champagne? Really?

"Could we look any more gay, Martin?" I ask as the waitress smiles and walks away.

"I like champagne, and besides, you always get me the girl, so screw what anyone else here is thinking."

"Urgh," I grumble.

She returns not long after with our Moët and pours it with a sly smile. She totally thinks we're Together.

"Are you ready to order?" she asks.

"Yes, I'll have the duck," Martin says.

"I'll, uh," I hesitate, torn between two dishes.

"Make that two," Martin says. The waitress nods and walks away.

"What was that, man?" I ask, pissed that he ordered for me.

"You were taking too long. And the duck is delicious."

"Whatever," I say, standing up. I make my way toward the kitchen, where the waitress is placing our order, wanting to get this over with. "Hey," I say as I reach her.

She looks me up and down. "Did you want to change your meal preference?" she asks with an eyebrow raised.

“No, the duck will be fine thanks.” I can see her pupils dilating. My magic is working.

“What’s your name?” she asks, pressing her hand to my forearm.

“I’m Ross,” I reply. “You?”

“Cara.”

“Nice to meet you, Cara.”

“It’s so weird, I feel like I’ve met you before, or that I know you from somewhere,” she says, laughing behind her words. I am *such* a charmer.

“Probably just a familiar face.” I smile back at her. “Have you worked here for long?”

“No, just a few weeks now. I moved to the city not long ago. Where do you live? How old are you?”

“I live about ten minutes north of here and I’m twenty-four.” They always ask so many questions. “What brought you here?”

“Oh, just my boyfriend,” she says, waving in an offhanded manner.

Uh oh. Alarm bells. I am NOT a home-wrecker.

“Oh, cool. Well, I’ll let you get back to work then.” I turn to leave but she grabs my arm.

“Wait, you seem, like, really awesome, I’d love to talk some more.”

“You’re at work.” I let a hint of sarcasm enter my tone. “I wouldn’t want to get you in trouble.” I shrug off her grip and head back to my table. Martin looks at me with an expression of impatience. “Sorry, Martin, no can do with that one.”

“What?” he asks, his eyes flash.

“She’s got a boyfriend,” I reply.

“So?”

“Look, when we first met, I gave you the ground rules. No one under eighteen, no one with a boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé or husband, or anyone that’s high or drunk. And no virgins.”

“Ross, come on, we’ve been doing this for ages, just this one time.”

“No.” I make sure my voice is firm.

“Jesus you can be a pussy.”

“I just have morals and don’t treat women like they’re my property.”

“Don’t get on your high horse, mate. You’re worse than me,” Martin says, hackles raised.

“Oh yeah?” I counter, badly.

“Of course you are. You make money off taking away people’s free will.”

“It’s not supposed to be like that,” I say, trying to force some strength into my voice to make it sound convincing. I fail.

“Screw it then. I’ll settle for the Maitre’d.”

The fact that Martin knows what the people greeter is called just pushes me over the edge.

“No, actually, I’m done,” I say in a dramatic tone. I throw the napkin on the table and leave, making sure that everyone thinks we’re A Couple.

Once outside I feel a little better about myself. I just turned down a free dinner and \$500 because I stuck to my morals. But very quickly, that sense of relief disappears. I’m heading out clubbing in an hour and a half to take away some other helpless girl’s free will for another client.

I suppose that, at first, I didn’t let it get to me because no girl had ever shown an interest in me other than friendship. Even though Cara seemed keen just before, it’s always just excitement. Whenever a girl interacts with me, no matter how flirtatious they come off, in their head it’s always platonic. And I was sick of it. So I thought, ‘Fuck it, I’ll use my

powers to help my friends because girls *suck*.’ And even though I’m still sick of it, I’m realising that what I’m doing is wrong. And it’s eating me alive.

I walk back to my car, pay the stupid ticket fee and screech out of the parking lot. I can’t stand Jason up, who’s my next client, because he’s my favourite, which is why he gets Saturday nights.

“Argh!” I yell. The sound fills the interior of my Evolution VIII. “I am such a dickhead, aren’t I?” I question myself out loud. I don’t answer though, it was rhetoric. And I am not insane.

I’ve got ages to kill until I meet Jason. I could go home, but I doubt I’d have the will power to force myself to come back. I make a right turn and at the same time turn up the stereo that’s blasting *Major Lazer*’s new track. It’s awesome. At the next red light I text Jason.

Hey, mate, want to meet up earlier, say in 30mins? Had a shitty day and could use a drinking buddy.

I know the city well and navigate the traffic and one way streets until I reach the car park closest to the club. Another ticket fee to pay. Yay. I check my phone as soon as I cut the engine.

Yeah no worries, Ross. I’ll get ready now and meet you there at nine.

Oh thank god. I jump out and make my way to the club. It’s just a regular one on the Harbour, nothing too exclusive. Jason is rich but you’d never know it, he plays everything down. Ten minutes later I’m at the bar ordering an Old Fashioned. I skol it quickly and order another. A girl sits down beside me. I glance at her then return to my drink. Then I look back. She is gorgeous. Blonde hair, bright blue eyes, tall but petite, innocent smile. I sigh and return my gaze to my Old Fashioned. I want to talk to her. I want to be a *normal* guy who could potentially have a wonderful conversation followed by me asking for her number and then taking her to dinner during the week. But I can’t. I can get that to happen for Jason. But not for me...

“Hey,” someone nearby says to me. It’s a girl. I’m used to it. I bet you the \$500 I’m going to get from Jason that her next words will be something close to, ‘You look familiar,

do I know you?’ So I just continue to swirl my drink and stare at the stained wood of the bar counter.

“Okay, fine, ignore me then,” she says.

Now *that* gets my attention.

“Huh?” I turn to look at the girl. Oh my God. It’s the beautiful one.

“Don’t worry about it,” she says, her eyebrows scrunched together in annoyance.

“No, I’m sorry, I was just thinking and didn’t hear you at first,” I lie.

“Hmm.” She eyes me in an appraising manner. I feel scrutinised. I wait for her to continue. Surely she’s going to ask me more questions, latch onto me and want to be BFF’s. “Are you here on your own?”

“Uh, not for long, my friend’s coming soon.”

“Cool.” She sips her drink.

“What about you?” I ask, prompting her to continue. I’m sitting on edge here, waiting for the inevitable to happen.

“Same, friends are running late.” She doesn’t even look at me when she speaks. I need to look into her eyes to see if her pupils are dilating or not. That is a tell-tale sign that a girl is under my wingman influence.

“What’s your name?” I ask, swivelling around in my chair to face her. She still has her eyes locked on the entrance, so I brush my fingers over her shoulder to get her attention.

“Taylor,” she says, turning to me. Her pupils are normal. “Yours?”

“Ross,” I reply, breathless, shocked.

“Oh, my friends just got here,” Taylor says, looking over towards the entrance again. “See you.”

I watch as she walks away. Actually, for real, walking away from me. That hasn’t ever happened before. I am dumbfounded. And at that exact moment, Jason turns up.

“Hey, mate, what’s going on?” he asks, sitting on a stool beside me.

“Just a shitty client before you,” I say, watching Taylor approach her friends.

He orders a beer and another Old Fashioned for me. “Cheers,” he says as we clink glasses. I swivel back around and take a sip. “What’d he do?”

“I’m definitely in the wrong business,” I begin. “I hate what I do. And I hate ninety percent of the guys I help out—obviously you’re in the ten percent that I like. But it’s just snowballed into this massive business and I don’t know what else to do with my life. That last guy treats women like crap. He’s an arrogant bastard and the only thing he’s got going for him is his cash flow. He was trying to get me to pick up a girl for him who has a boyfriend and he called me a pussy when I refused. It’s not the insult that got to me, it’s just his attitude. So I basically dumped him as a client and walked out.”

“Wow, that’s crazy,” Jason replies. “I mean, of course you’re going to get dickheads in this business, you’ve got to expect that, but I thought you’d have enough people wanting to book you that you could pick and choose who you work for?”

“I do. But every one of them tells me their sap story about being terrified of girls just to book me. They all know my deal.”

“Well at least you’re rid of that one,” Jason says.

Yeah,” I agree, draining my third drink. I’m only half invested in this conversation. I’m still wondering about that girl, Taylor.

“Hey, Ross,” Jason begins.

“Yeah?”

“You aren’t the bad guy, you know that right?”

“I do not know that.”

“How come I never see you going home with anyone, then?” he asks.

I’ve never told any of my clients that *I* can’t pull girls. I mean, what type of image was I trying to sell when I started?

“Uh, well, that’s an interesting question,” I say, looking into my empty glass.

“You don’t have to tell me, it’s fine, man.”

That's what I like about Jason, he's respectful. "No, it's alright. My powers only work on other people."

"What? So you can't get girls to fall for you?"

"Nope. Not at all. In fact, my powers backfire on me. All any girl ever wants to be is friends."

"Shit, that's ironic."

"Tell me about it."

"Have you ever *been* with anyone?" He sounds hesitant.

I don't say anything. I order another drink. I drain it all. "Nope."

"Woah, so you are the ultimate wingman, but you're a virgin?"

"Please don't say the 'V' word out loud."

"Sorry, Ross. That's, ah, really unfortunate." Jason finishes his beer and orders another one. "Can I wingman for you tonight?"

"Thanks, but it won't work. My mates have all tried it. The girls just end up wanting to befriend me and then I give in and let my influence spread through them so that they become attracted to my friends."

"Is it better for you to work alone?"

"Tried that too. Same deal, just make lots of friends."

"I think you need an early one tonight," Jason says.

"Nah it's cool, let's get you sorted."

"Okay but nice and quick, I don't want you to hang around when you don't want to be here."

"Thanks, mate. Have a look then."

Jason swivels around in the stool, scoping the crowd for a girl who's his type. Now, I know I described Jason as respectful before, and I'm pretty sure that would have warranted a

few eyebrow raises, so let me explain. Jason will talk to the girl I introduce him to all night, get to know her and then drop her home. He won't go in, even though the girls never fail to invite him. The next night he calls, and they talk on the phone for ages. Then, on the third night, he takes them out for dinner. If he likes them, he'll take them home.

See? Even though he's still using my powers, he doesn't take advantage of the girls as much as most. He also tells me that each girl wants to continue seeing him after the week is up—my influence would have dissipated by then—so the girls really end up liking him. He's not ready for anything serious, so doesn't lead any of them on. He's an average looking guy but his personality is awesome. The girls he chooses are always elegant and classy, ones that would probably consider themselves in a different league from him. But, after a few days together, they're hooked onto his personality, and that has nothing to do with me. I just blind them for a little while so it gives him a chance to show them how much of a catch he is.

"She is so beautiful, that girl over there with the blonde hair, sitting in the group of four," Jason says, pointing over to the beer garden.

My heart drops. I know who he's picked without even having to turn around. Taylor.

"Sure thing," I mumble, standing and trudging over to the girls.

They're sitting on chairs pulled into a circle. Taylor is facing away from me. When I get close, I grab a free chair and push it into the circle, sitting down in one fluid motion. I'm facing her, and I can see Jason at the bar. He smiles and then turns around, back to the bartender. The girls are all staring at me. I've just invaded their Female Only Circle.

"Sorry to intrude," I say, smiling in a reassuring way at them all. "My friend and I were trying to build up the courage to come and speak to you." Crap and a half line but my mind is pretty muddled, sitting in front of Taylor.

"Right," she says, crossing her legs.

"So what's the most interesting thing you've done this week?" I ask her. The other three girls have already warmed to me. Their pupils are dilating. It's crazy how fast it works on everyone. But it's not working on Taylor.

"I went skydiving," she says, like it's something she does every day of the week.

“Skydiving?” I repeat, my voice rising to an uncharacteristic pitch. “That’s amazing, what was it like?”

She actually looks at me now. After a moment her eyes soften. “It was incredible,” she says, smiling. But it’s not the usual dreamy smile I’m used to. It’s a genuine one. This is taking me off-guard.

“Did you want to come over to the bar and meet my friend?” I ask, my stomach twisting as I force the words out. “That sounds like something we’d both love to hear.”

“No, I’m fine here with my friends,” Taylor replies.

What The Actual Fuck.

“I’ll come over,” one of the other girls pipes up.

“Me too!” Another one says.

“Yeah, we’ll come,” the third and last of the group reiterates for me.

Taylor looks at each of her friends, her expression puzzled.

She isn’t affected by my powers.

“Uh, um,” I say, confused and embarrassed, interacting with a ‘sober’ girl. The girl sitting next to Taylor is blonde as well. I get an idea. “Yeah, sure thing, he’d love to meet you,” I say to the other blonde.

“Awesome,” she says, standing right away. I follow suit. “I’m Nat, what was your name again? You look like a really nice guy, kind of familiar, are you from around here?”

Okay, so I’m not losing my touch, ‘cause Nat’s under my influence hard, so what’s the deal with Taylor?

“I’m Ross,” I say, taking her hand and leading her over to the bar. She babbles a bit more but I don’t answer her. I just want to get back to Taylor.

I clap Jason on the shoulder. “Nat, this is my friend, Jason.” They lock eyes and the connection is formed. Jason looks at me for a moment, slightly confused, but then shrugs and invites Nat to sit with him. He was expecting Taylor, but Nat is still very pretty, and she’s blonde, so he can’t really pull me up.

I've had enough drinks so turn and walk straight back to the group of girls.

"Hey," I say, announcing my return. "They seemed to hit it off straight away, mind if I join you again?" I direct my question at Taylor, but it's the other two who answer.

"No, of course, come sit!" they say, much too full of enthusiasm.

"Thanks," I say sitting down. "So, can you tell me what the best thing about skydiving was?"

Taylor laughs before answering. "Definitely the free fall. Have you been?"

"No, I'm not great with heights," I reply.

"It's a surreal experience, it doesn't really seem like you're that high above the ground, so I think you'd be fine."

"I'm not sure," I say, running my fingers through my hair. Damn, I spent ages styling it and I've probably just ruined it! My nerves are getting the better of me. The other two girls look like they want to ask me something, so I start speaking again. "What other extreme sports have you done?"

She smiles. It's so innocent. I'm used to the 'I want sex now' smile girls give my friends or the 'dreamy out of it' smile girls under my influence give me. Taylor is a breath of fresh air. She makes me feel every bit of my Virginity.

"I've been bungy jumping in New Zealand but that's the extent of my adrenalin highs," she replies, looking at me the whole time.

"You must be pretty brave," I say, trying to compliment her. "What was bungy jumping like?"

Her eyes light up and she leans forward in her seat, closer to me. I must be doing something right. "It was terrifying!" she begins. "Scariest than skydiving, because you have to jump off the landing yourself, whereas I went tandem skydiving so the instructor pushes you out of the plane. And it's more painful, the pull back hurts."

"What was New Zealand like?" I ask, not wanting her to stop talking.

She's mesmerising. She tucks some loose hair behind her ear before telling me about New Zealand. I have an urge to run my fingers through her hair. It's short, cut just above her shoulders and she has a fringe, which adds to the innocence, and suits her. I keep asking her questions, never wanting her to stop. This is my first ever real conversation with a girl.

Later on I notice that her friends have both left. I don't remember when that happened. I don't even know what the time is. And I don't care. This girl is immune to my super power. I cannot blow this. This enormity of my situation dawns on me and I feel the blood rush out of my face.

"Are you okay?" Taylor asks, leaning forward and resting her hand on my knee.

Oh god. Oh dear god. This is amazing. But I have no clarity for words. Multi-tasking. Difficult. When. Near. Taylor.

"You just make me nervous," I say. Oh, SO smooth, Ross. Jesus.

She smiles, less innocent, more... sexy? Is that a sexy smile directed toward the king of being friend zoned?

"Is that why you were rude before?" she asks.

"When you first spoke to me?" I question.

"Yeah."

"No. Well, yes. You did make me nervous, but I really was staring into space thinking of things. I've had a crap day." I grimace.

"How come?" she asks.

Hmmm how do I answer this question without bringing my 'job' into the conversation? "Just a guy I know being a massive arsehole, I'm pretty sure our friendship is over."

"I'm sorry," Taylor says. "Hopefully your night's going better?"

"You have made my week, Taylor," I say, eliciting a huge grin from her, which I mirror. I cannot hold on any longer. I've got to make sure I don't lose this amazing person. "May I please have your number?"

“Sure,” she says, holding out her hand. I give her my phone, trying to act cool. The shaking hands and goof-ball smile probably give me away though. She puts her number in and hands it back to me.

“Thank you,” I say, hoping that it was her real number. I’m not tacky enough to call her now under the pretence that ‘she can have my number too.’ Such a rookie error. “Did you want to get out of here?” I ask. Maybe we could get some ice-cream or something.

“Yep, I’d like that,” she says. I stand and take her hand, helping her up. “I’ll just go to the bathroom and let my friends know where I’m going, meet you by the door?” she asks.

I nod and head over to the entrance. I unlock my phone. She put her name in under ‘Taylor Xx.’ Argh, I melt. I can see her coming back. She reaches out to me and I take her hand, then she leads me out of the club.

“Where did you want to go?” I ask.

“You said you only live ten minutes away, I’m a bit further,” she replies.

“Huh?” I am clueless.

“Wait, what did you mean by ‘get out of here’?”

“Like, dessert or something?” I say, knowing I sound like a complete idiot.

“Oh,” she says, looking at her feet. “Oh, I feel stupid.”

“What, no, don’t feel stupid, I’m sorry!” I apologise.

“You seemed so keen back in there.” She nods back toward the club.

“Taylor,” I say, making her look at me. “I am Very Keen. But I want to take you out for dinner and go to a movie and talk with you and get to know who you are first. You are so captivating.”

She blushes. “That’s really nice, most guys just want to take me home for the night. It’s depressing actually.”

“I’m not going to lie, I would love to do just that because you are so beautiful and I’ve been able to hold an awesome conversation with you all night.” She grins, so I know I’ve

made up for my unintentional sex invite. “But, like I said, you seem special, and I’d really like to take you out for dinner first.”

“That sounds perfect,” she says. “So what did you want to do now then?”

“How do you feel about ice-cream?”

“I feel very fond of it. Cold Rock?”

“Done.”

So it’s two weeks later and I’ve just taken Taylor out to our fourth dinner. We’ve hung out a few other times as well and I still can’t believe that I’m not hallucinating. You know, I actually told her I had my own marketing business when she asked what I did for a living. Yeah, I suck. But how can I tell her about my super power? And I still don’t know how she’s not affected by it. I also didn’t mention that I’m A Virgin. And out of *all of that*, I was the most terrified of admitting my complete inexperience with women. She did ask me if I wanted to come inside one night after dinner, but I totally freaked out and deflected the question. I’m fairly sure she noticed my non-answer and—

“Ross?” Taylor says from the passenger seat of my car.

“Oh, sorry, I was just thinking,” I reply. Crap. I need to stop zoning out so much.

She laughs, “Yes, I know. I said we’re almost at my place and my housemate’s not home tonight.”

“Oh,” I reply. I feel a bit anxious. I pull up in front of her driveway.

“You should park,” she instructs.

“Okay.” I roll forward to an empty space and turn the engine off, still feeling that strange anxiety.

“Do you want to come inside?” Here it is again. The second invite. Her tone of voice suggests that ‘inside’ may have a double entendre.

Of course I jinxed myself with my previous thoughts. “Uh, look, Taylor, I should probably tell you something.”

“Is everything alright?” she asks, her tone reverting to worried.

I turn towards her but am unable to look her in the eye. “Yes, everything is fine, don’t be worried. I just have to tell you something *really* embarrassing.” Here it is. Here is the dreaded Virgin Conversation.

“Okay,” she says.

My breathing speeds up. I’m so freaking nervous. “Alright, so, I’m, um, a virgin.”

Silence.

“Ohhh”—it sounds like dawning comprehension—“that explains a lot.”

“Far out,” I say, frowning. “Am I that obvious?”

“The way you dodged my question the other day, about coming inside. The whole ‘do you want to get out of here?’ misunderstanding, and why you’re taking things nice and slow—don’t get me wrong, it’s so much better than what I’ve been exposed to before.”

“Really?” I say, incredulity evident in my tone.

“Ross, I’m not that experienced either, so don’t worry. I really like you, and I think you really like me too, so that means it’s going to be awesome.” I can feel my heart pounding behind my ribs. “Can I ask why you’re still a virgin?”

I remain silent for a moment, weighing up my options. I decide to be honest. I do really like her. “Please don’t freak out, because this is going to sound weird.” She smiles in a reassuring way. I exhale and continue. “I do own a marketing business, but I market myself. I have a, well it’s a... super power”—I pause, waiting for her to laugh at me, but her expression remains unfazed—“and I call it my wingman influence. I can somehow make any girl interested in anyone I like.”

“Oh, that’s what happened at the club with my friends when we first met!” she exclaims.

“Yeah, exactly,” I say, feeling a bit shocked at her acceptance. “But it means that every girl I meet immediately wants to be best friends with me—nothing more. Ever. I can make them interested in any guy just by introducing them, but no girl has ever been interested in *me* that way. Except you,” I finish.

“So you’re not human either?” she says.

I process that sentence for about a minute. “Okay, two things,” I say. “One. Not human? And two. Either?”

She laughs at me. “Okay, now it looks like I’ve got to explain some stuff to you.” I try to keep my face blank, impress her with my nonchalance, but I can feel my eyes bulging and my eyebrows straining to remain in a neutral position. “So this ‘super power’ of yours gives you a certain influence over humans, but not over your own people—the supernatural—like me,” Taylor explains.

“My own people?”

“Leviathans.”

“Leviawhatnows?” My mind has frozen.

“There are hardly any of us left, pure-breds at least,” Taylor says. She tucks a stray lock of hair behind her ear, like she’s talking about something completely mundane, not the fact that we are Not Human. “My parents are both human, but are carriers of the supernatural Leviathan gene. It’s recessive, so I had to get one from each of my parents to be born as a supernatural being, rather than normal. It would have been the same for you.”

“And how do you know this?” I ask.

“There’s a group of Leviathans that track down people like us, people who would never know what they really are, and they explain everything to you. Obviously they haven’t found you yet,” she adds.

“Yeah. Obviously.”

“I know how much it is to take in,” she says, leaning forward and taking my hands. “But you’ve known for ages that you’re different, who else do you know that has a super-power?” I grumble something incoherent in response before she replies. “We have so much time for me to explain. Let’s go and get a drink and I’ll fill you in on everything and show you my super-power.”

“A drink inside your place?” I ask, finally meeting her eyes. “What’s your power?”

“Yes, a drink inside my place. I’ll explain everything to you, including my power,” she says. “And then, we’ll fix that virgin status. I will blow your mind.”

She kisses me then unclips my seatbelt. She climbs out of the car, walking inside without even looking back.

I smile and shake my head in disbelief. Not human. Supernatural. Leviathans. De-virginate. Then, I realise that I’m still in the car. Not inside with the most amazing girl ever.

I remedy that quickly.