

"Important? Well, I guess it would be important to start from the beginning. You see, I'm not a bad guy. I work hard, I'm never late. I take care of my family as best as I can. I love my family so much."

Tears once again formed in his eyes but he fought them off and continued.

"I thought I might really be of use – be a good teacher, help someone to become good at something. But I was wrong. It all went so terribly wrong. I thought she was nice. A nice young girl from the Midwest: helpful, curious. But after our first week together, I soon got acquainted¹ with the real Becky James. It all started about four months ago."

He paused to take a small bite from the sandwich but apparently could not swallow it and sipped the coffee instead.

"We had been on the road throughout the week and everything went fine until we stopped at a diner for a quick bite to eat before heading home. I wanted her to take some notes on what we had done throughout the day and on whom we had visited when she stopped writing. She kept looking over to some guys who were flirting with her. I asked her to continue and told her she'd have enough time for fun after work. Then she suddenly dropped the pen onto the table and gave me a look of pure disgust saying, 'I'll tell you what we'll do. You write this useless report, and I'll go over there to those cute guys and then, when I'm done, you can damned well call us a cab.' Just like that, she switched from quiet and attentive² to cruel and rude. She said that she was sick of me and my sweaty, chubby³ appearance. She complained that we were using public transport instead of a car. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Before she stood up to go over to the men, she said 'What do you think will happen in a few months

1 to get acquainted with sb. – sich mit jdm. bekannt machen
2 attentive – aufmerksam
3 chubby – pummelig

anyway? You think I'll still be some stupid sales assistant? You think I honestly want to become someone like you? No thanks. I'll be out of this company in no time. So just do us all a favor and stop acting like a mentor. Because you're not. You're a sad reminder of what women like me have to endure¹ on the way to the top.' It seemed like a bad joke," Carlson said.

He then said that they had continued their trips with one another but more or less in silence. The roles had completely changed, and he had ended up fetching her water and food and doing all the work. After another month or so, she had got him to make copies of the transcripts of the day, so that no one would notice that she had often not turned up at work. Carlson stopped talking. It seemed as if the next part was leading up to the present day, just hours before his arrival at the police station.

"You must know that these past months were like torture² – the psychological abuse³, bullying⁴ me whenever and wherever she pleased. I couldn't tell anyone either. She was such a nice girl to everyone in the company – no one would've believed me."

"And you were in love with her," Stevens added.

"Yes. I was in love with her," he shyly admitted.

Carlson's expression was begging⁵ for Stevens to believe him. "You're not the first man I have encountered, who's been psychologically or even physically abused by a woman. It's not as rare as you might think. I believe you, Jeffrey. Please, go on."

Carlson nodded and proceeded carefully.

"So we were on our way back from one of our rounds in Greenwich Village. I'd signed up four new clients and a promising fifth. A good day, you might think. But Becky was out for trouble,

1 to endure sth. – etw. ertragen
2 torture – Qual
3 abuse – Misshandlung
4 to bully sb. – jdn. schikanieren
5 to beg for sth. – um etw. flehen

wanting to go to a bar. She managed to steal my wallet from my back pocket and was counting the small amount of money I had left. She said she needed a drink and that I had to go with her. She said she'd give me back my wallet when we reached the bar, which she didn't do. She got herself pretty drunk, and I didn't want to leave her in such a state. It was getting dark. Even after all she had put me through, I still tried to look out for her. So we walked to the subway station. I told her that she was heading to the wrong platform, but she just kept walking. She became aggressive and I endured more verbal attacks when she started looking at the photos in my wallet, which made her behavior worse. She was wobbling¹ and got too close to the edge of the subway platform. I had to pull her away. She started to scream and said I was attacking her and that I had raped² her and that she'd see to it that I'd get fired. I tried to calm her down. I let go of her arms, and then she stumbled³ backwards and fell off the platform. It all happened so quickly. I went down to try and help her, but she was unconscious.⁴ Then the train came rushing in and I had to leave her... I never wanted anything to happen to her, honestly. It was an accident. Please, you have to believe me."

Stevens had been listening carefully. It all made perfect sense. He had been the victim, not the other way around. An accident, a terrible accident without any wrongdoing by Carlson. It seemed too plausible to be true, his speech too perfected. Stevens was still going through the story in his mind when the door opened a second time. A man in a suit and tie entered the room and sat himself next to Carlson.

"Hello. I'm your appointed⁵ lawyer, Samuel Johnson. You have been granted⁶ bail."

- 1 to wobble - schwanken
- 2 to rape - vergewaltigen
- 3 to stumble - stolpern
- 4 unconscious - ohnmächtig
- 5 appointed - zugeteilt
- 6 to grant sth. - etw. gewähren

"What?" Stevens asked, furious about the interruption. "Who put forward the money?"

"My client's wife, Mrs. Carlson," the lawyer briefly stated before telling Carlson that he was free to leave for the time being.

About a million thoughts were racing through Stevens's mind. How was his wife able to pay for his bail? Where had she got the money from? What had been Becky James's exact remarks about his wife and children when she had looked at the photos? Had he and Becky ever had a sexual relationship? But it was too late. Johnson had already signaled to Carlson to get up and head to the door. Stevens rushed to him before he left the room. He reached out his hand to say goodbye. Carlson took his hand, and they both looked at each other for a moment. Stevens noticed a similar change in Carlson's expression - just like before. But now all the shyness and innocence seemed to have vanished and all that remained was a cunning¹ grin which would remain in Stevens's memory for a long time. This grin seemed to state the obvious: he had indeed pushed Becky James off the platform. He was guilty but had come up with this elaborate² explanation and was now fairly certain that he would not be charged with murder.

Stevens and Carlson let go of each other's hands, and Stevens watched the two men exit the room and then the building. There was nothing more he could do. Now it was in the hands of the jury and the justice system. If Carlson's lawyer did a good job, he would go free, and Stevens had a bad feeling that this was exactly what was going to happen.

Stevens was still in deep thought when Detective Gonzales rushed up to him and asked what had happened.

"Nothing," Stevens said with a shrug. "I got him to talk, though. Just as you asked me to."

- 1 cunning - gerissen
- 2 elaborate - durchdacht

He felt defensive and he felt his own failure. He had seen too many guilty men go free throughout his career.

"He didn't confess? Why's he leaving? I swore he was guilty," she said sternly¹.

Stevens looked at her and remembered how it felt to kiss her lips – to be close to her and to make her laugh. Then, the same guilt and pain that had accompanied his attraction for her fell upon him once again. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was nearly one in the morning. He imagined Aimee lying on her side of the bed, fast asleep. All he wanted to do now was go home.

"He's a great salesman, that's for sure," he began, facing Gonzales again. "For a minute I believed him. But then I should've known better."

Detective Gonzales met his gaze with a questioning look. And before Stevens left, he leaned in to her, gave her a peck² on the cheek and whispered in her ear, "No one is ever truly innocent."

1 sternly – streng
2 peck – flüchtiger Kuss



→ Greenwich Village gehört zur Insel Manhattan. Das beliebte Künstler- und Szeneviertel wird von vielen New Yorkern auch nur „The Village“ genannt. Im Greenwich Village fanden in den 1960er Jahren die Stonewall-Unruhen statt, die als Wendepunkt der Homosexuellenbewegung gelten. Bis in die 1960er Jahre war Homosexualität in den U.S.A. sehr verpönt. Regelmäßig wurden Polizeirazzias in den Bars und Clubs durchgeführt, die den Homosexuellen in New York als Treffpunkt dienten, um die Stadt zu „säubern“. Hinzu kam, dass viele der Clubgäste und Barbesucher nicht nur homosexuell, sondern auch von unterschiedlicher ethnischer Herkunft waren. Als eine Polizeitruppe am 28. Juni 1969 in der Stonewall Inn, einer Bar in der Christopher Street, einfiel, wehrten sich die Gäste gegen die Festnahmen und Misshandlungen. Der Aufstand in den Straßen hielt dem Einsatz der Polizei mehrere Tage erfolgreich stand. Nach diesem bahnbrechenden Aufstand ist der heutige CSD (Christopher Street Day) benannt.