Chapter 4: Are You Toxic?

In Rio, I was trying to build a business around the barracas on the beach. For those who don't know, barraca is Portuguese for tent, or any constructed stall with a tarp to keep the sun from beaming down on you. I guess. Please don't take my explanation as fact. Remember, noa fala portuguse.

To drive traffic to the barracas, I "formed" a community of gringos called Carioca Coastal Club and organized beach meetups. If you've been to Argentina or Rio, it's similar to MundoLingo, a language exchange, except the venue is a barraca, not a bar. I brought the entertainment: a beer pong table and a JBL speaker that famously got its own CPF. Foreigners don't bring a stereo cooler on vacation. I infamously did, on a trip to Cancún.

I hosted several of these, but one stands out. It was a very blah beach day: no theme, no table, just an American football (a novelty in Rio) and my speaker. As always, my friends came, and we slowly accumulated what I fondly refer to as randos.

As host, and out of my own need, I try to bring women into the group. A lot of the gringos who show up want to know where the hot women are, and I smirk every time one of them asks. The women who come tend to be more reserved. Just like a man, I'll offer my opinion on this: if I were almost naked on a beach, I'd be picky about where I set up shop too.

I also have deeper, better conversations with women. Whenever more than two guys hang out, it slowly turns into a jockeying contest to be the alpha, and I find that very uncomfortable. Most of my closest friends are men, and they're different in the same way I am. Still, I'll often do yoga or find any excuse to leave and talk to the closest group of women.

On this particular day, we were throwing the football. I noticed a girl in a brown bikini, in a group sitting close to us. I'll call her B. I found her attractive, so I made sure to look that way, make eye contact, and smile: Hello, I'm mostly harmless. Come throw the football with us. B was pretty lukewarm. But her friend gave me the signals.

I remember I was trying to get B to throw the ball. She tried halfheartedly, gave up, and went to talk to her friend while I tried to give my Patrick Mahomes impression. I saw them talking. Then I realized the friend, who I now found more attractive, was giving me vibes that she was interested. She eventually came up to me and asked to learn to throw the ball. It was very cute, and I gladly attempted to teach her.

After that, she and her friends joined our group. That's always the hardest part. It reminds me of beach days with my ex-wife. That's right, I ended up divorcing my wife from Chapter 1. I'd bring

her along, and I enjoyed the beach more because a woman was already in the group. I didn't need to outsource it.

At some point, I exchanged contact information with B's friend, the one I "really" taught to throw a ball. I knew all the single men would take their shot at her. I sent her a message: "Nice to meet you. Make sure you choose the right one." Maybe an hour went by. I was sitting facing away from her, talking to someone. Then suddenly someone interrupted my conversation. She was standing over me, looking down, and said, "Are you toxic?" For a moment I thought, where did that come from? Then I noticed the phone in her hand. She had read my message.

I was able to connect all the dots in almost real time, despite the fact that she had legit interrupted what was sure to be an intriguing conversation. I said, "Yeah, a little bit." She smirked and started to kiss me. What really made this moment stick in my mind: almost instantly after our kiss, she went back to what she was doing. My friend R rushed over with a huge smile on his face. I don't remember the exact words, but it was something like, "Dudeeee, right after she kissed you, I started kissing the girl in the brown." (That was B, the girl I originally fancied.) I smiled, laughed, and did my little shrug.

What made it even better: I enjoyed the day a little too much. I don't normally drink much. It's Rio; it's dangerous enough without being the sloppy drunk trying to get home. I also normally take everything I own to the beach. I guess being drugged and robbed taught me that I can lose it all and still be okay.

I woke up the next day and typed in the group chat I use to organize all the beach meetups, over two hundred people, thanking everyone for the nice time and saying that I was so drunk I didn't even remember getting home. Less than a minute later, my best friend C responded: "All I remember is you making out with the hottest Argentine girl." We joked afterward that we're in so many groups together that he responded as if it were a conversation between the two of us. It was slightly more than the two of us.