



## WE'RE ALL DONORS HERE

"You are essential to our success," they told us in the training course. "We're a non-profit, sure, but we need to break even. We provide a service that is half animal science, half romance. The romance is the clincher for everyone concerned. We need these guys to keep coming back—and much as they think it's for the cash, and tell anyone who asks the same, they're bound to experience some push back, some remorse. It's your job to make them seem attractive, genuine, a little noble."

*Noble for jerking off twice a week to a porn video or a porn magazine in an empty room?* I think.

"For jerking off all by their lonesome for a full year. Don't think it doesn't get to them. They feel virile at first. After awhile they can feel perverted, exploited. Your job is to write them up so they, and our clients, see them as loveable, *dateable*."

"Three-quarters of our clients are lesbians," a woman in army fatigues and a buzz cut, whose first name is Lacey but who prefers to be known as Wilson, protested.

"They're pretty adept by now at making gender translations," Delores said. She's our trainer. Delores is gorgeous. Long curly black hair down to mid-back, brown skin, tight jeans and a tight sequined T-shirt. She's a performance poet in her real life—but her poems are all stories, she emphasizes. She has an MFA from San Francisco State. She's here because her boyfriend has a three-year post-doc at Emory. He's in neuroscience and is going to be their financial bulwark and ballast, she says.

"And they're susceptible. You'd be surprised. We were. Our sales went up dramatically when we began including the interviews. The donors' own narratives weren't half as effective. The guys came out, well, like you

might expect. Like guys. Self-absorbed and a little boastful, or terse and flat. But when *we* described their physical appearance (muscular or tall, thin or broad shouldered, dimples, long lashes, a little tattoo showing under a neat blue shirt, a swagger or contagious laugh) or their attitude (withdrawn but slowly warming up, especially when talking about a beloved mother, grandmother, or younger sister; or brash but also self-aware with a keen sense of humor) something changed all around. The orders came rushing in. The guys completed their contracts and brought in referrals.

"And we, my dears, all of us starving writers, became indispensable," Delores said with a broad inclusive gesture to the four of us, which set her sixteen glittering bangles ringing. "But this is the course they don't give you in college or grad school, the one that puts a transforming gloss on real life. I need to tell you before we begin, it's contagious. It begins to infiltrate your whole life and, I'm sorry to say, your writing. Bid adieu to MFA angst and arid superiority—as if the meaninglessness of the universe is your own private secret. Think *juicy*. Two adjectives where once you used none. Think cute, adorable, charming, magnetic. Think women's romance fiction. Think prepubescent girls gushing over Justin Bieber."

We began to look at our hands, the door.

Delores, who knew her audience, looked at us with a gentle smile. "It's not *that* bad."

It was primarily a writing class. We were paired off in twos and asked to write a description of each other, from wide forehead and widow's peak to heart-shaped mouth and sensuous lips, arched or straight brows, strong or pointed chins. Hair texture, not just color. Touchable was a texture. Clothes, hipster or Green Peace, Occupy Wall Street or Goizueta Business School wasn't enough. Black pants, tight, with a beige metrosexual cardigan or green zippered hiker's pants and a plaid shirt.

We also had an interviewing class. We were taught how to create a comfortable interview environment, even in a fairly sterile office. A plant on a window sill—lucky bamboo or a flower without much scent, like carnations or daisies. Kleenex. A water heater, tea, real cups. Cookies on a plate. A warm but neutral expression.

We were told to tell them right off that our job was to get to know them so we could write a warm and positive description of them that would help interested clients know why *we* thought they would be a good choice for progenitor of that client's son or daughter.