

## The Long Haul

### I.

Toward the end of his six years of spotty employment, Guy Britski spent much of his downtime working out which led him to finally getting a job that seemed, at first, to offer some stability. Britski—college dropout, all but unemployable for the first couple of post-dropout years thanks to his own colossal laziness and his patient and forgiving parents, not to mention his once non-supportive and now absent friends—had finally scored a string of some not so promising jobs—furniture tester, dice inspector, adult store clerk—which dissolved once the economy went south and then landed a gig delivering bottled water. I know what you are thinking: delivering bottled water isn't exactly the most glamorous job, but it was a big step for Guy who bookended those less than promising experiences with long bouts of unemployment and with bouts of a depression so cavernous he was unable to even register that he was indeed depressed. Suddenly, driving around Las Vegas, even during the worst of the summer, to deliver bottled water to some offices and private homes seemed like world travel.

He quickly developed a preference for delivering to private homes, finding many of the offices too sterile and serious for his taste. In fact, many of these businesses made him appreciate the relative freedom that came with his job. He wasn't tied to a place. He didn't have a boss looming over him. Quite the contrary. As long as Guy left the distribution center with full bottles and returned with empties and no customers complained, he was left completely unsupervised. Josh Quinn was just about the same age as Guy if not a couple years younger and was not invested in his position in the slightest. He wanted things to run smoothly for purely selfish reasons. Quinn could have pushed his employees harder for the good of the company but that

would have meant that his job would have become stressful. Business was slow and many of the drivers took to hanging out at the distribution center waiting for their next rounds, which compelled Quinn to look busy. The less Quinn saw of any of his drivers, the happier he was and Britski was of such disposition to acquiesce to this unspoken plea. At first, Guy took the occasional fifteen minute nap in his truck. When nothing bad nor administrative happened to him, he tried taking leisurely and then increasingly boozy lunches. But even after returning to the distribution center clearly smelling of beer, he faced no penalty. After all, he did have his empties

But the nature of these liberties changed dramatically one day when he delivered to the home of Isabelle Fontaine, who lived in one of the ritzier developments. Britski grew adept at opening the five gallon jug, bending at the knees to grab it, and with one sweet and perfect motion, hoist the bottle into position without spilling a drop. Isabelle Fontaine, all 51 years of experience of her, came up behind him and at the end of his sweet and perfect motion, put her hands on his waist, and commented that he may not have gotten the floor wet, but—boy howdy—he sure did get something wet.

Guy was never bad-looking, but he had sort of—how shall I say?—let himself go during the early years of his hit or miss employment. Tall with naturally blond curls and blue eyes, Britski had been quite the man about campus. The distractions associated with such an honor slowly dragged down his grades and ambitions and drove him from his well-worn college dorm to his parents' basement. The attentive girls, non-stop parties, and epic drinking mixed with the occasional soft drug use made completing an undergraduate degree impossible. Although, I do give Guy some credit for hanging on until his final semester. Lesser students would have flamed out much sooner. Despite plentiful evidence, he didn't fully realize the extent of his problem

until he moved back home and began a mostly unintentional detox program in his parents' musty basement, his bedroom having been appropriated sometime during his freshman year for his father's pathologically obsessive *Space 1999* memorabilia. The aforementioned detox happened not because of any self-motivated pulling himself up by his bootstraps nor because of any willful intervention of the parents, but because Guy would have to walk through the living room to obtain any booze or drugs and he was too embarrassed by his failings to walk past his parents and then so isolated himself quite impressively, loathe to expose himself to judgment or sunshine. The shock of this change was almost too much for Guy to bear, and his body, whose psychology demanded that it feed the enormous and growing void within, began to slump and thicken as he did not have to walk by anyone to get to the fridge. His natural good looks slipped into a basement induced pallor. His confident stride turned into a definitive slouch (one that was exacerbated by the fact that the ceiling of the basement, although high enough to allow Guy to walk upright, was still low enough to fool Guy into thinking that it wasn't, so he felt compelled to stoop regardless). He was not in a good place—literally nor figuratively—and although he was not particularly fond of exercising, he came to realize he had to do something about his condition. Watching cable and playing videogames stopped being sufficient reason for getting out of bed so he rearranged his meager allotment of furniture to allow easy engagement in these activities without getting out of bed which invigorated a depression that had briefly seemed to have leveled off. The depression made him lazy and the laziness made him depressed so the only thing that kept him from sinking his head into the bathtub for the long haul was his resolution to force himself to use the exercise equipment he was sharing space with. His parents had purchased the equipment with the best of intentions but seldom used it and Guy's presence in their basement gave them all the more reason to avoid it. Finding the energy was not easy at first,

but exercising eventually gave him a purpose and lifted his spirits enough for him to leave the house to find a series of jobs before losing them all and returning to the basement to cycle through another wave of bed-ridden depression before coming to the same conclusion (much more quickly this time) regarding the aforementioned bathtub scenario, and Guy, once again, began forcing himself out of bed to exercise. After a couple of months, he developed the wherewithal to again leave the basement, this time to take up running. Got addicted to it, in fact, and began running every morning, which led him to a fateful run on a chilly January morning that led him past a Tectonic Water truck and a delivery man lugging his hand-truck of bottled water, which led Guy to circle back around to watch—running in place—and be hit by the epiphany that even he could master such a task, which led him to the office of Josh Quinn whose desire to selfishly hire non-ambitious drivers worked heavily in Guy’s favor, which led him to the kitchen of Isabelle Fontaine who whispered into his ear the words that changed his summer and, as we shall see, his life.

## II.

“You may not have gotten the floor wet, but you sure did get something wet,” Isabelle Fontaine, lounge singer at one of the least glamorous casinos in town, said to Guy Britski just as he was sliding the nozzle of the bottle into the cooler. She had her hands on his hips and slowly moved them along the waistline of his corporate-supplied summer shorts until she was clasping her hands right above his zipper. Guy, unable to defend himself—had he wanted to—due to handling the open water bottle, felt an erection start at his toes and work its way up through his legs until it filled his penis, restrained in a beautifully painful way in his Tectonic Water shorts. It wasn’t long before Guy relieved said erection into the back of Isabelle’s throat with the

unwelcome words “she’s old enough to be your mother” dancing within his head. But such a thought did not stop him from returning the favor by lifting Isabelle onto the kitchen counter and deftly working his way under her dress.

But Isabelle was just the beginning. Although Isabelle always held a special place in his heart for being first, there were other women in the same development he enjoyed more. Justine Hanson, for one. A young-looking thirty-five—unarguably older but clearly NOT older enough to be his mother—she had sent her own two children off to summer camp to avoid the Vegas heat. Her husband, a hard working son-of-a-bitch who put in endless hours at the office. Justine was friends, in fact, with Isabelle and it wouldn’t have surprised Guy if Isabelle told Justine about how they had been spending their afternoons. About two weeks after his first encounter, Justine—a Gwyneth Paltrow to Isabelle’s Ava Gardner, not that Guy would know who Ava Gardner was—made a similar come on. At first, he felt he could really fall for someone like Justine, despite her being seven years older, with kids, etc.

After one of the early times with Justine, Guy wondered, as they rested quietly in bed, about how people got to live in such luxury and comfort. The Hanson home featured five bedrooms, three baths, a fully stocked entertainment room, and a three car garage. Air conditioning the house probably cost more per month than Guy made. Outside, there was a large cactus garden and a pool which required a pool guy. Clearly, this house was never intended for the hoi polloi and to make sure that remained the case, there was a locked and coded gate for the development.

“It is an exceptional lifestyle in an exceptional location,” Justine said after Guy unintentionally uttered his curiosity. “It has all the amenities a successful young couple with

children could want. And with 33 acres of parks and trails, this development is a great place to live in the Southwest. Not to mention, it is a stellar community in which to raise children.”

“That’s not exactly what I am getting at.” Guy felt a sudden, unwanted and uninvited pang of dislike for Justine, who got up out of bed and walked to one of the floor to ceiling windows in the master bedroom, her naked body forming a sexy silhouette that pushed Guy’s dislike for her quickly aside.

“And best of all, you can barely see the strip from here. You could live here all your life and never be affected by what goes on there.”

“I wouldn’t say that’s entirely true.” He had seen things she never had. The half empty developments. The out of business businesses. The packs of dogs bonded together by the shared experience of being abandoned by their owners as they fled town. He could hear them, from time to time, howling off in the distance in unexpected places. They called out, he liked to think, to recruit others that had been left behind.

His own list of deliveries waxed and waned. As places went out of business and families packed up and moved, there were fewer places for him to deliver to, that is, until Quinn let some people go and then Guy’s route would spike again. Guy felt lucky that Quinn took a liking to him and was spared losing yet another job. He wanted to tell Justine all this but wasn’t sure how to articulate what he was thinking. He felt it would sound so alien to someone like Justine. But no matter. She ended the conversation by coming back to bed and straddling his face.

Unlike Isabelle who more or less lived a life of leisure, Justine taught at an elementary school and was off for the summer enjoying her three months of leisure. However, there had been a lot of talk in the news—at least as far as Guy could tell in his cursory attention to such—about major state budget cuts. We’re talking major. Tourism was down big time and Vegas was

disproportionately reliant on this one industry. The politicians were dead set against raising taxes, so the money was drying up. Things had to go and education was high on the list. Justine seemed unconcerned the one time he dared bring it up. Of course, Guy didn't know enough about her husband and his income to have any appreciation of the impact her losing her job would have. Despite his continued liberty taking, Guy was stressed at the potential of losing his job if business continued its decline. His lifestyle certainly was more sustainable than the Hanson's. But even if he made good with this job—or any—he couldn't imagine getting from where he was to owning a five bedroom house with a gigantic kitchen, an entertainment room with all the latest high-tech gadgets, a master bedroom with a master bath that included a Jacuzzi (much to his and Justine's pleasure) and a yard with a hot tub (ditto). All this and they still had the money to send the kids off to summer camp. Even with a second income—if any woman would have him—he could not envision how he could ever live like this. He wasn't sure he actually would want to, but he was curious about the process. Maybe Guy was just a small thinker. His parents were born and raised in Vegas, making Guy one of the seemingly few second generation natives. Despite all the change and growth in the city in their 50+ years in the area, they both kept the same civil service jobs their entire adult lives. Maybe what Guy lacked was proper role models for escaping this lower middle class life.

### III.

After a month of being with both Isabelle and Justine, Maribel Acevedo signed up for home water delivery and attacked Guy on his very first visit. After they made love in the kitchen, Guy asked why a 49-year-old woman would want a man over 20 years her junior.

Maribel smiled at the innocent ridiculousness of his question. “I love my husband. Of this, there is no doubt. He is wonderful to me and still a handsome man despite being even older than I. And I would imagine that, if he has not had affairs, he knows he could. He is very good at his job. Very confident. And he knows his way around the bedroom in ways you cannot yet imagine. He knows how to make love, but you, my new friend, know how to fuck unadulterated by wisdom.” A comment which Guy took as the compliment it was meant to be, not being fond of the other options.

One day at Isabelle’s, Guy asked her if she had told any of the other women in the development about their affair. You see, he had been honest with her about the other women because she had been first and, because of that, held a special place in his heart. He had not been so honest with Justine nor Maribel.

“Affair is such an ugly word for what we have,” Isabelle said.

“Sorry. Have you told any of the other women in the area about whatever this is we are doing?”

“Does it matter?” Isabelle took him by the hand and led him to bed.

#### IV.

Could things have gotten any better for Guy? Would you believe me if I told you that Maribel Acevedo had a daughter who just finished her junior year in college? Who went to Spain for the first few weeks of the summer and returned with a Barcelona tan and a new confidence? Who looked like Maribel must have when she was young? Who took one look at her mother’s face when Guy arrived for his delivery and instantly figured out what had been going on? Her



poor mother. A few weeks of a renewed and very active sex life and she can no longer indulge because Mariposa came home.

But that look of longing on her mother's face, that look of admiration and disappointment was so intense, so heart-breaking, that Mariposa's first instinct was to make herself scarce on delivery day. She would do this for her mother. However, the next delivery day was scheduled for a Friday when her parents were going out of town for a long weekend. Yes, Mariposa was home alone the next time Guy showed up. She needed to know what it was that could put such a look on her mother's face. She needed to know what could be so wonderful that the absence of the experience could bring such pain. Guy hoisted the water bottle into place and turned around to pick up the empty, but Mariposa had moved threateningly close to him and pushed her finger into his chest. "What have you been doing to my mother?"

"Nothing. I mean, what are you talking about?" Beads of nervous sweat formed on his forehead and on certain tightly bound areas under his uniform.

"You are making her happy." Mariposa removed her finger and slid her body still closer.

"Three," he said and held up three fingers.

"Three what?"

"I promised myself I would stop at three." He surprised himself by telling Mariposa about Isabelle and Justine. She already had figured out what was going on with her mother, so he saw no harm in being honest about the others. Of course, he spoke with great fondness for and admiration about Isabelle because she had been first and, because of this, held a special place in his heart.

"You've had a rather productive summer." Mariposa sounded somewhat impressed but was not shocked by his neighborly ways. She was on the worldly side, especially in comparison

with Guy, having traveled often with her parents, even taking off the year between high school and college to travel with one parent and/or the other. However, this recent trip to Spain was the first time she was able to travel unsupervised. It could very well have been the sophisticated look in her eyes that compelled Guy to trust her and be honest with her in a way he felt he couldn't be with her mother or Justine. He suspected that they knew about each other, but unlike Isabelle with whom he had been so honest about so many things, Justine and Maribel seemed to enjoy the illusion of dedicated affection.

“And because this has all gone so well, I have resolved to stop at three.”

“Three women or three houses?” This simple question was argument enough for Guy to allow himself to be led to the younger Acevedo's bedroom.

After they made love, he reclined next to her and looked up at the ceiling, her head on his chest. “What is it like to have money?”

“I'm not sure I can answer that because I have never not had it. I have no way to compare. Do you not have it?”

“Mostly, no. I've been able to sock some away recently. But it's nothing like this.”

“This? This what?”

“This place. This lifestyle. This spending summers in Europe. I deliver bottled water for a living, which, if you think about it, is pretty crazy.”

“You're a 21<sup>st</sup> Century milkman, is what you are. Delivering bottles and making love with various women along the way. You are part of an honored tradition memorialized by the sitcoms of yesteryear.”

“Well, I would venture to say there is something fundamentally different between delivering water and delivering milk.”

“I think you are missing my point.”

“I mean, milk doesn’t come from the tap. This stuff I deliver is just Michigan tap water or something.”

“This is the desert. We need all the water we can get. You wouldn’t want me to get all dry, would you?”

“And that’s another thing. I’ve lived here all my life so I never really thought of it before but it has recently dawned on me that it’s crazy this place even exists.”

“It’s a miracle, is what it is.”

“Simply crazy.”

“Maybe you should move to Michigan to be near your precious tap water. Some of us like it here.”

“I don’t have the money to do that.”

“You say you have some socked away.”

“Probably couldn’t get very far with what I have saved.”

“It’s more about bravery than money.” She moved to sit cross-legged next to him. “Your time will come. You won’t be delivering bottle water forever.”

“It took me years to figure out I can deliver bottled water. I’m not sure I have the wherewithal to plan a next big move.”

“Planning is over-rated. Don’t you see what you are doing? You’re creating a divorce in your head between what you have and what you want. There are other girls my age whose family has money who don’t spend their summers in Spain. It’s a matter of wanting it. It’s easy to do if you allow it to happen.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You have the money to do things.”

Mariposa slapped him. “Enough with the money. Right now you are here with me. What could be better? Stop fretting about the future.”

“That’s just the summer talking.”

Mariposa moved from his side to straddle him. “It is always summer here.”

“It gets cold.”

“Summer is a state of mind. The desert is a state of mind. Vegas is a state of mind.” She reached back to adjust the angle of his penis. “Someday, you will be in a whole new situation and will be very happy but you will think back on this day, on this time of your life and regret not savoring all these good times.” She lowered herself to allow him to enter her.

After they made love for a second time, Mariposa curled up next to him. “I don’t want to ever talk about money again. People try to make me feel guilty because my family has money, but why should I feel anything other than happiness that my father is successful. It is no less my fault that I was born into a wealthy family than it is that someone is born into poverty. Should I feel guilty about my pleasure on principle?”

“Jesus, you’re depressing.”

“Maybe if you were kinder to Jesus, he would be kinder to you. Save you from this miserable life you think you are leading.”

“Are you serious?”

Mariposa closed her eyes and raised her arms in the air. “I am seeing the future and you, Guy,” she opened one eye to look at him. “What is your last name?”

“Britski.”

“I am seeing the future and you, Guy Britski, will be very, very wealthy. You will travel the world bedroom to bedroom.”

Of course Guy knew she had no such power to see the future, but he wanted, just for a minute, to believe she did. He wanted to believe that his future was promising, that this beautiful woman saw something in him that could deliver him from his situation. It is fair to say that Guy found himself falling for the younger Acevedo.

He gave her one more kiss before putting on his Tectonic Water shirt and his tight blue shorts. Summer was coming to an end and he would soon be changing uniform.

He left her house and got into his blue Tectonic Water truck and started the engine. Across the street, a man about Guy's age mowed the lawn. The sky was atypically dark and looked poised to drop one of those nasty storms that occasionally hit the valley. But then again, it could be one of those threatening storms that never comes to fruition, its rain evaporating before it can reach the ground.

Once he drove out of the development, Guy decided he was going to bring his truck back and that would be it. He didn't care where he went; he just knew he needed to get away. He had never thought about leaving the country before but it was all he thought about as he drove to the distribution center, the howling of the stray dogs growing more intense under the darkening sky.