

**12 CUPS
OF
COFFEE**

A NOVEL BY DAVID GOOSSEN

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Chapter 2

I sit on the plane, feeling millions of frequent flier points accrue in my pocket as we jet west, following the sunset. The remains of my electro-plastic food-like dinner have been cleared, leaving me in peace with a couple Rye & Gingers and an empty seat beside me.

As I flick thru the Skymall catalogue, my brain is doing a quick post-mortem of my successful sale. It's good for me to do this after each presentation, to figure out what went wrong – nothing, and what went right – everything. Everything works so much better when everyone sticks to their roles, conscious or unconscious, I think to myself, like at the company in Des Moines. I do my best work with people when they stay in role. Hard-As-Nails Boss; Crusty-But-Benign President; Sexy-Yet-Cold Head of Finance. I can deal with them and ensure I end up on top. I can work them as they think they're working me. I take a sip of my drink and ponder this a bit more. This reflective state is something new for me, so I'll enjoy it for a while. If it starts to turn into something more threatening, I can order another drink and kill it dead.

Another thought slips into my head, sneaking past the Rye & Ginger. My troubles start when people resist playing a role. Unfortunately those people tend to be girlfriends. Those are the same people who resist me playing my roles too. They want me to be 'Real' and 'Open' and 'Honest' - like I am going to be Open

and Honest with a girlfriend. Don't they understand men? Being open and honest would be the death of the relationship. They would see us guys as the shallow, sex and technology obsessed fools we are.

The plane does a shudder in some turbulence like the universe is shaking the plane in agreement with me. At least that is how I read the situation and not as a sign of an imminent fiery death. But something changes when in me when women do that shift from friend to girlfriend. It is like all my understanding of women falls out of my head, leaving only nineties rock trivia and a great recipe for Blueberry Pancakes I learned in Fifth Grade.

Why is that? Why do not I understand women, especially girlfriends? You would think I would be regularly working on getting this feminine mystery understood. I mean, I live with one, dated a few, grew up with a couple - mom and sister - and short of a catastrophic societal shakeup will probably be in contact with women off and on for the rest of my life.

I pondered this while finishing my drink and staring down at Wyoming half a mile below.

I think I can distill my confused attitude towards women as stemming from two incidents in my early teen years. Before then, I did not categorize them any differently than men or boys. Women were either adults or they were friends.

When I was eleven, I had a friend, Maggie. We did not do anything really, phoned each other after school every day, sat together at lunch, played board games in her parents' rec room. One day I had been over at her house after school watching TV and playing 'Operation'. I had gone upstairs to use the bathroom and walked in on her older, well-developed sister just after she has gotten out of the shower. I froze; my jaw dropped to the floor like a cartoon character. I was face to face with naked, wet seventeen-year old flesh. I was fascinated, in a purely analytic way. She was drying her long flowing hair, towel over her face. The bathroom was hot and steamy and I felt my pulse racing but I didn't know why. I stared, soaked in the sight of her body, and memorized every curve, every beaded drop of water that slid down her belly. After a moment, I slipped back out of the bathroom before she noticed I was even there.

I trooped back down to the basement rec room and sat down beside Maggie on their old plaid couch.

“What took you so long?”

Not thinking anything of it, I told her the truth.

“I saw your sister naked.”

She started screaming and ran upstairs. Utterly confused and kind worried that she had just been bitten by a wasp, I followed. She was freaking out to her mom in their Harvest Gold kitchen, then her sister came in, the story got repeated, and now there were three women freaking out at me. I tried to explain but the screaming was too loud. I started to get scared, I not understanding what the big deal was. Then her mom was on the phone to my mom. Make that four women freaking out at me. I panicked and ran out of Maggie’s house before they lynched me.

I stumbled home, barely noticing where I was walking, struggling to wrap my young and very undeveloped brain around what has happened. The best I could figure is that I got in trouble for telling the truth to them. I did not deny what I saw and I did not make up a story.

Maggie spread the shocking story around school the next day, my parents grounded me for two weeks and I had to talk to a counselor twice a week for the rest of the term. All the girls in my class shunned me, yet I still could not figure out exactly what I did wrong.

Luckily, my dad got a different job at the end of term and we got to move, again. That was the one and only time I looked forward to leaving one town and setting up home in another. I had learned my lesson. Telling the truth just gets you in trouble!

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The second event was a couple years later. We had settled in Western Washington and I was a much wiser teenager now. I was thirteen and I knew everything about everything. Except about thirteen year old girls. They were unfathomable, like the blanked out parts of old maps with notations stating, “Here be monsters”. Despite my lack of knowledge, and being the outsider in a small town, I was able to get a girlfriend, Emily. She was a perky, hyper girl who was into all things gymnastic. Rhythmic gymnastics, artistic gymnastics, or just

dancing around with a ball or long ribbon, she loved it all. I liked her a lot, and it was with her that my tongue actually touched another tongue. For that alone she will always have a place in my heart.

Emily's downfall, as far as I was concerned, was that she was crazy. Years later, I would see that she was struggling with a semi trailer filled with enough self esteem and insecurity issues to clog a major highway, but in Eighth Grade, I just thought she was a crazy girl. Like all Eighth Grade girls. And, through trial and error, I figured out to ask her what she wanted to hear from me, especially when she was in one of her moods.

"Why can't I just be like some of the Russian gymnasts, huh? It's so not fair."

A younger, dumber me would have told her she could not be like a Soviet gymnast because she was not born in the Eastern Bloc and she had hips and boobs that were too big. That was the truth. She was built for birthing babies, not flinging herself around a padded mat at the Olympics. And I could see what the outcome of telling the truth to her would be. Carnage. And we would have to move again.

I simply asked her what she wanted me to say, what she wanted to hear, and then repeated it back to her so we could go back to tongue kissing. I would not be fooled into telling the truth and set myself up to be attacked. I had figured out women, as far as I was concerned, and I successfully put those theories into practice from that point forward.

Tell the truth - like I did with Maggie - get yelled at and have everything blown out of proportion. Find out what they want to hear and tell them - like Emily - tongue kissing. Questions?

Besides, telling the truth certainly was not good for sales. Gregor explained it to me this way once.

"Tell them what they want to hear, before they say it, before they ask for it. That way, you are one step ahead of them."

And with that, I graduated from asking women what they want me to say, to guessing what they want me to say and saying it to them before they ask. I have lived that philosophy since Eighth Grade and I have done really well by it. I think. I have certainly had my fair share of tongue kissing.

