

# An uncontrollable fall

## Sample Chapter

### I Treadmills

Nabokov starts off *Lolita* with the words “Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins.” A lovely sentiment, an ode to mans lust for forbidden fruit. The desire for the thing that escapes, the thing Humbert Humbert cannot have. There’s always something that we want and cannot get to, some thing or some space that eludes the grasp of our feeble, mortal hands. That next sip from a just emptied whiskey glass, the smidgen cooler or darker or quieter than the room must be for you to concentrate on your Great Work. Life is a succession of these sirens leading us along, carrot and stick to our eventual, unavoidable, boring deaths.

Some people play at getting off the treadmill, they murder, thief, fornicate, drug, pray, or meditate themselves into delirium—no better off than anyone else on the road but contentedly deluded that they’re making some real progress, that their lives will mean something after all of that effort. I have the same malady. There is no real justification, no grand cosmic reason for what I engaged in, committed, perpetrated, and exercised. These things were done solely out of a pathological need to jump off of one treadmill and, unwittingly, jump onto another.

I was sixteen years old when I mounted my first treadmill. Not a lot was going on that day, my best friend Plato Edwards and me were sipping coffee and eating fantastical piles of cheese fries served from the darkest, meanest short-order kitchen in all of Anchorage, Alaska. It was the afternoon but the sun had already gone down. I know that the sun shines in Anchorage, I know the summers are so full of sunlight that it’s impossible to sleep for more than a couple of hours each night. But for some reason all of the memorable scenes from my young adulthood happened while it was dark.

We ate and ate; and drank pot after freely-refilled pot of weak and bitter coffee. The waitresses would treat us like nervous strays—except for the cute ones—the ones we tipped with our meager excess of disposable cash. They’d walk by, noticing the flipped lid of the coffee pot and quietly drop off one more refill, keeping us in booth-rent for another hour or so. Lucky Strikes were being smoked by the carton-full and we’d fill ashtrays as quickly as we’d empty coffee pots. The snow outside was five feet deep—it stood as high as the top of Jenny Fick’s head.

Jenny was a cherry-bomb that wouldn’t stop exploding in my pituitary gland, pumping fresh testosterone into my sixteen year old balls at an incredi-

ble rate. I had a twenty-four hour hard-on and it was all the fault of Jenny Fick. I would lament this to Plato on all occasions, three out of every ten pots of coffee would bear witness to a comment about my cock and Jenny's deserving but still unpenetrated mouth, vagina, asshole.

"She's not worth the effort." Plato was drawing on a hand-rolled Bugler cigarette. He could afford Drum, or even the tailor made Luckies that I liked to splurge on but he chose Bugler, probably for the street cred. The same reason we chose to drink Lucky Lager rather than Budweiser or MGD.

"Not worth the effort?" I nearly jumped out of my bench. "Dude, the effort would be the straightforward exertion of my hips, over and over again against her bent over ass."

"It would be—if you could get her into the sack to begin with. Forget it dude, we have other shit to worry about . . . besides, I've heard she's a bit sloppy."

He was right and I hated him for it.

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Three and a half short years later I was laying in a pile of sweat and blood and dirt and tears whispering to the guy above me that I wanted no part of the trouble he was involving me with. Plato was there but he wasn't chewing cheese fries with me, the lights behind his eyes were dimmed by the same monomania that had possessed me for the last 42 months. And I still hadn't fucked Jenny Fick.

There was a knock at the door.

"Get up, wipe your face off, pull down your sleeves, and answer the fucking door." Chip moved the barrel of his gun away from my temple, stood up, and slid it into the kitchen drawer.

It was the cops, the neighbors had heard my body being thrown around the apartment, and by dint of pure luck they were civic minded enough to call the police.

"Is everything all right?" The short, bright one asked.

Chip slid into place, putting his arm around my shoulder. "Yes sir, we were just arguing over a girl. We're cousins and," he glanced at me and smiled "—we can sometimes get a bit out of hand." I took a brief moment to marvel at how quickly Chip could make the transformation to Good Citizen.

The cop looked at me like he'd look at a battered wife—here's your chance, kid, just say the word and you don't have to take this anymore. But I didn't say anything; I agreed with Chip, like a battered housewife, and thanked them for their time.

The cops left and Chip sat down on the couch, snatching distance from my gun. Plato hadn't moved at all during the whole affair, he stood there like the animated corpse of a guy I grew up with. Nobody said a word, the apartment was filled with the sound of Chip's breath, he was a fat man and throwing me around had winded him.

“Let’s go.” Chip and Plato walked toward the door, Chip gave me a pat on the shoulder on the way out. “Don’t take it personally, I’ve been in your spot before,” he lifted his shirt, “that’s from my cousin, he stuck a knife in me for doing what you did—you need to be more careful about what you say.”

“Take care, brother.” Plato said as he followed Chip out the door, it was the last thing that he said to me for nearly five years.

I went to the freezer and grabbed a cold, fresh pack of Lucky Strikes. I had a half a pack sitting on the table already but there’s nothing like a smoke right from the freezer—sometimes you have to pamper yourself. The steadiness of my hand surprised me as I watched the cigarette burn down, each lung-full temporarily filling the hollow of my chest. My face felt dry and empty of fluid, my elbows were dripping blood and I had some glass in my head, toward the back.

After clean up, the first order of business was to arrange a way out of town before the forces of providence changed their fickle minds. Before Chip (or fucking Plato) came back to bludgeon, batter, or shoot me until my body stopped moving. I thought briefly about all this as the butt of my smoke burnt down, singeing my fingers.

Time to get the fuck out of town, the divine hand of providence couldn’t protect me like a few thousand air miles could.