

Part One

The UNDERWORLD

01 – **MARIE** *A Shadowy Figure Afoot Flashes “The Look”* 17

Asked to tell you the story of her life, Marie related her woes as a crack addict and a sex worker, and then she thanked you for caring. You ask, “What makes you think I care?” Marie answers.

02 – **LINDA** *Mr Crack Introduces Ms Jane to Mr John* 23

Linda could have been crowned Miss Connecticut. But instead she clinched the title Miss Cocaine. Quote: “Streetwalking was easy to do because it wasn’t like having sex. It was more like cleaning toilets.”



Maggie, Inmate Number 265762, at age 26
(sitting in for *Marie*)

01 - MARIE

A Shadowy Figure Afoot Flashes "The Look"

*Being the addict, being the prostitute,
I will not stop being who I am as an individual.*

Why would anyone want to pick up a streetwalker just to talk to her? If you are female, you must be burning the midnight oil in pursuit of your PhD in urban sociology. If male, you might be feeling lonely, especially during the desolate, dark hours past midnight. Or, regardless whether gal or guy, maybe after hearing about the misery of a streetwalker's life you want to feel less disconsolate about your own. Like when you visited your 95-year-old grandma who was wheezing through a ventilator and

was bedbound in hospice care, and you walked away thankful just to be alive and breathing.

Grandmother, streetwalker, tightrope walker. All totter along a precipice, one step short of the abyss. If living on the edge thrills you, you must enjoy looking for trouble. And looking at troubles. Her troubles and her sorrows. So go looking for a streetwalker.

Nocturnal Wildlife

A good place to start to look is where the drugs are. If you happen not to know where to find your local crack house or shooting gallery, check the police log of the local newspaper and note the street addresses of the accused. Thugs commit most petty crimes in their own backyards. Where there is crime, there are drugs. And where there are drugs, there are addicts. And where there are drug addicts, there are sex workers.

A good time to go looking is right after day fades into night, when pedestrians can begin to creep under the cloak of darkness. Another good time is at half past midnight, when bartenders pour their last drinks, when bartended empty their last glasses, when last-call johns hit the road in search of on-call janes, and when the only lone women on the streets are janes on the stroll. Dark outside. And darkness inside. Much like tonight.

The summer days are long and nights are short. The summer night is warm and windless. Distant dogs bark. Feral cats skulk. Odors of curbside trash and foraging skunks hang in the urban air. Possums, which some city folks mistake for giant mutant rats, saunter in the gutter. Rats share the gutter, too, but they creep unnoticed. Barely lit by the crooked sliver of a crescent moon, the sky is shrouded in ubiquitous blackness. Tonight the prospect of sunrise is dimmed if not forgotten.

On the pavement, the sharp beams from headlights merge with the thin halos from streetlights. On the sidewalks, the streetlamps cast more shadow than light. Possums and skunks and rats are not the only nocturnal wildlife prowling the streets along murky paths. You spot amid the lamplit gloom the silhouette of a shadowy human figure afoot. But is this pedestrian male or female?

Males are always on the prowl, females always on their guard. Males walk with long strides, females with short. Males stomp on the edges of their heels, females lift from the tips of their toes. Males lumber

with legs and feet set wide apart, females step with limber thighs held tightly together. Males swing at their broad shoulders, females pivot at their broad hips. Males bop and bounce, ready to pounce. Females glide with grace, as though to dance. Males walk like they wanna come, females like they gotta go. So coming or going?

Judging by her gait, you deduce she is female. A lone female. Very alone and very female. Even with no one near to compare for scale, clearly this female is tall, slender, and statuesque. So you slow down. As your car edges closer, you notice her lit cig held in one hand while the other relaxed hand swings freely. From her shoulder hangs a tiny purse just large enough to contain, perhaps, some random condoms. No cellphone is glued to her ear nor are her eyes glued to its screen. Undistracted by touchscreen or earbuds, she keeps her chin up and her eyes on the road. Her elbow-length frizzy hair is bunched and tucked in front of her right shoulder, exposing to passing motorists the femininity of her facial features as she walks in the direction of the traffic on her side of the street. All of these are good signs that she is open to suggestions.

You take note that her skin tone is black, which the night makes darker. Edging closer still, you notice her forehead looks odd, slightly askew, but not unsightly. Some of her facial features do not quite fit. Nor does she quite fit in on the street. The street is perilous and packed with roving wolves, all male. She is an antlerless doe whose sole defense is retreat. Yet she does not flee.

At nearly 1:00 a.m., a solitary woman should be heading home, her footsteps filled with purpose. Instead this one walks lazily, almost aimlessly. Or is she just wandering while waiting for a cab? Or while anticipating your ride?

The whites of her eyes framed by her ebony skin command your attention. She looks at you not cautiously, but seductively. Straight into your windshield, she flashes you *The Look*. You can sometimes recognize a streetwalker by her looks. You can always recognize her by her look. *The Look*. By how she looks at lone male motorists. Your sleepy eyes and her sad ones lock. If she were an unrented billboard, her signage would announce, “available.” Available for what? For temporary occupancy on your empty front passenger seat. So to signal that you wish to interview her to fill that vacancy, you pull over, stop, but keep the engine running.

Impromptu Interview

You brace your shaky foot on the brake pedal and lower the passenger-side window. She approaches, peers through the window frame, looks you over. You ask, "Would you like a ride?" She does not answer. Rather, she tosses her cigarette, grabs the door handle, opens the door wide, peers into the rear seat to check for danger. No one there. So she stoops and enters, sits, and gently shuts the door. Except for the click of the latch as the car door closes, she does all this soundlessly. You quickly lift the lever to roll the window back up. In this neighborhood, no telling what might come flying through an open window. Or come walking through an open door.

The tobacco-smoke fragrance of her clothes comingles with the stale summer air. You both eye each other like birds of prey. Ensnared on the passenger seat, she leans back against the door and rests her head against the window. Presses against it, actually. Scrutinizing you, she maintains the scant distance afforded by the compact space of your car. Demure, she waits for you to break the icy silence, ice beneath which may simmer your repressed lust for her or may fester her suppressed fear of you. Johns before you have assaulted and robbed and raped her.

Your jittery foot shifts from brake to gas pedal. You drive off, gain speed, but cautiously avoid exceeding the speed limit. In a 25 mph zone, you slither and slink at 24. You fear the cops who yet may intercept you. You are nervous but not embarrassed. You have no intention of engaging in anything either sexual or illegal. She may live outside the law. You live only outside the box. You are interested not in her body but in her story. You exchange first names. Hers, probably only her street name, is Marie. You think, Mary, not like the Virgin Mary, more like Mary Magdalene. "Marie," you say, "please tell me the story of your life."

As though by signal, she relaxes. She lets down her guard and lets fall her wall. And she replies with no hesitation nor digression nor any fluffy figures of speech. No "like's," no "um's," no "you know's." (Like, um, you know what I'm saying?) She enunciates clearly, injects details, backtracks only for accuracy, speaks nonstop for 20 minutes, without intermission or indecision. She tells you the story of her life as though she were waiting all day long to tell it. Or waiting all her life long.

Unfortunately for her, hers is a story rife with a plague of predictors common to most other addicts' and outcasts' pasts. Her broken home,

her single mom, her childhood poverty. Her depraved stepfather who abused her. Her running away from home, her school truancy, her teenage pregnancy. Her husband, a sailor who often was absent at sea, who went AWOL on her. Her succumbing to alcohol and drugs, her “using crack to cover up the pain,” her drug counselor calling her a “hard case,” her addictions dooming her to ostracism and disgrace. And to support her habits, her resorting to internet escorting, “Prostituting, tricking, call it what you want,” her near rock bottom. And, “Even though I said to myself, I would never walk the streets,” her sinking to streetwalking, her final fall from grace. Of which, “I don’t like the life that I’m living.”

Marie concludes chronicling the trajectory of her tragedy with tonight’s events that led her to enter your car, and she thanks you for caring. You ask, “What makes you think I care?”

MARIE speaks:

Because you told me how you want to know who I am. That lets me know that you care. And I am so glad, I really, really, am so glad, that you picked me up tonight, and that you wanted to know my story. Just knowing that someone wants to know, that makes me feel good.

Most people don’t understand the power of the drug and don’t know how hard it is to break the habit. All they do is see you out on the street and judge. They’ll see you and say, “Oh, look at that crack addict.” They don’t say, “Are you doing okay?” or something to let the addict know, to let me know, that they care. Nobody really cares.

WE are human beings. WE are people. WE have feelings. WE have families. WE want to stop using drugs. And when we try to stop, it’s like a rope, and it’s pulling you, and you’re trying to fight it, and you can’t fight it by yourself. You need, I need, people that care. Even the people in the drug programs don’t care. They don’t take the time to pull the car over. “Marie, why don’t you come to a NA meeting with me?” When I walk down the street, I might be a crack addict, and I might be a prostitute, but I speak to people. I ask how they’re doing. And I’m the one who has the problem. People don’t care no more. That is the problem.

That’s why, being the addict, being the prostitute, I will not stop being who I am as an individual. I will always speak to people. I will always do whatever I can do to help them if I have it to give. If all I have is boots, and they need something for their feet, I know I have a pair of slippers at home, so I will give them my boots. Even though I’m an addict and a prostitute, I care.

The police ride by and look at me, and I speak to them, and they speak to me. The ones that don't speak don't care. They just want to bust me, and put me into jail. I come out and keep doing it again, and they bust me again.

Tonight I was walking. Two policemen were in street clothes, and they stopped, and one of them said, "So, what are you doing tonight?" I said, "Well, I'm going to try to behave myself." He said, "I doubt that." I said, "I'm going to try. If I try, I'm doing okay." And the other one said, "You're right."

I hate being the way that I am, but I have no control over it. When I go home and say I'm going to stay in for the night, I maybe do it for one night. But the next day, how can I get some money? How can I do this? How can I do that? I go out, and get a job, and I get my first paycheck and take the money to get more drugs and not go back to work anymore.

And that's not right. But I have no control over it. I want to stop so bad. I know it's solely up to me. Solely. I try.

And I'm glad I told you this, every word of it.

