





# **HATING WOMEN**

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**A Memoir of  
Male Rage  
and Recovery**

**SEAN  
HOTCHKISS**

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*For Jay and Debbie,  
two American kids*



But if the text of my life was “successful independent man,” the subtext was “engulfed by WOMAN.”

—**SAM KEEN, *FIRE IN THE BELLY***



## CONTENTS

|                     |                                     |     |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Introduction</b> | Obsessed                            | 1   |
| <b>1</b>            | Take It Easy                        | 17  |
| <b>2</b>            | Sugar High                          | 36  |
| <b>3</b>            | Into the Feelings                   | 49  |
| <b>4</b>            | Wild Thing                          | 72  |
| <b>5</b>            | The Void                            | 93  |
| <b>6</b>            | The Fire Within                     | 115 |
| <b>7</b>            | Healing Alongside Women             | 135 |
| <b>8</b>            | The Longing for Dad                 | 154 |
| <b>9</b>            | Resistance to Mom (and to Intimacy) | 173 |
| <b>10</b>           | A Lover and a Worker                | 192 |
|                     | <i>Acknowledgments</i>              | 205 |
|                     | <i>Notes</i>                        | 209 |



# **HATING WOMEN**



## Introduction

# Obsessed

I remember being curious, for the first time, if I had a problem with women in 2009 or 2010, a few years after my father's suicide, and in the middle of some of my darkest days on earth to date. Those were the days I kept a tally going in my head, a list of all the women I was sleeping with. A list that was growing by the month. I was twenty-six years old. No job. No direction in life. When I wasn't dating or hooking up with women, I was watching porn, and when I wasn't watching porn, I was walking the streets of New York City, falling in love—or lust—ten or twelve or fifteen times a day. My fascination with women owned all the corners of my mind, body, and psyche. I was obsessed. I was overcome.

Though I wouldn't have admitted it, women had held this incredible power over me for a long time. After my parents' divorce, I was, from ages four to seven, the child of a single mother, which made keeping tabs on her feel like a means of survival. And when my father remarried, my stepmother ruled the roost while he was away all day. Both these women were there. I could feel them. They watched me. They looked after me. Rendered discipline when necessary, provided structure, and offered guidance. As for

my father? He was mostly a happy mystery. A charming, exuberant man who bounded down the stairs each morning dressed like an oversized prep-school teen in a blue blazer with gold buttons and khaki pants. “It’s going to be a helluva day!” he’d announce before disappearing in his champagne-colored Range Rover and returning home at night with takeout dinner in his arms.

With Dad as this rare creature, by default, women became my compass. They were the way I clocked if I was doing okay in the world: If they liked me, desired me, wanted me around, and, later, wanted to have sex with me, all was well. But if I was alone, my life tended to go dark quickly. Breakups were particularly rough. I’d often spiral into dark bouts of depression that were alleviated only temporarily through that old male adage of “getting over one woman by getting under another.” In reality, though, I wasn’t getting over anyone. It wasn’t uncommon that even short relationships took me years to mourn. Years spent pining, fantasizing, and attempting to scheme my way back into my exes’ periphery through any means necessary. What I just couldn’t seem to reckon with or accept was how a person could walk away from me. Even if I was the one to end it. The thought of being forgotten felt too big, too horrifying. My chest would grow tight with fear, longing, and desperation. How would I make it on my own?

I watched my father go through this same intense brand of post-breakup depression after his second divorce. It all began when he called me on the afternoon of my twenty-first birthday with hard news: “I hate to tell you this under these circumstances, sport.” His normally jovial voice cracked on the line. “But Sandy asked me for a divorce. I have to move out.”

I gulped. Something inside me knew this divorce wasn’t going to go well for him. And it didn’t. In fact, the Dad that pulled his SUV into the parking lot of Edgar’s—a white-tablecloth joint

housed in an old castle on the shores of Seneca Lake, just outside Geneva, New York, where I was attending college—was almost unrecognizable to me. He'd come for a visit, and I'd been excited to see him, to catch up, to show him off, proudly, to my friends and my fraternity brothers. *This is my dad. Isn't he great?* But most of his trademark sunshine was gone on that visit. His shoulders sagged as I hugged him. His Brooks Brothers blazer hung on his underweight shoulders. His eyelids were puffy, like he hadn't slept in a while. Had he been crying? No way. Not possible.

"Dad, how are you doing?" I asked once we'd been seated at our table.

Silence.

"Dad."

"Oh, buddy, I don't know." He stared into the menu. "I guess it's been tough. Jesus. I guess I just don't understand."

"Understand what?" I asked.

"Why she left me," he said, his voice drooping. He pulled off his drugstore reading glasses and rubbed his eyes. He looked old. Eons older than his fifty years. A thought that suddenly scared me.

"I know I was a good partner," he moaned. "A good lover . . ."

I sat silent, awkward at the thought of my father referring to his own bedroom prowess, more awkward still at this puddle of a man being my father at all. Where was his "it's a helluva day" optimism? Where was his light? My chest hummed with adrenaline; my belly swirled with longing.

"That fucking therapist of hers," he added. "That's where this all started." For a moment he looked angry, like he could pound a fist on the table. *You think we could get a damn beverage around here. . . .* But I saw him swallow the rage. The redness left his face as quickly as it arrived.

“Now she says she doesn’t trust me,” he whispered.

“Because of the money thing?” I asked.

My dad gave me a glare. As in, *Let’s not talk about that.*

“What will you do?” I asked finally.

“I don’t have the slightest idea, sport,” he said, holding his face in his hands, the sunburned crown of his head showing through his fading salt-and-pepper hair. “Fourteen fucking years of marriage. I’m fifty. Fifty! How do you start all over at my age? I don’t think I have another run in me.”

That line, in particular, would haunt me in the coming months, watching my father’s steep decline: “I don’t think I have another run in me.” It would taunt me in the background as I watched him avoid his friends that summer, ashamed of his oncoming divorce and of the circumstances that had led to it. (He’d been siphoning money from Sandy, and she’d confronted him.) It would ring truer as I watched him fight hard against therapy—“I don’t like some shrink jamming around inside my head, asking me about my mother. The past is the past.”—and struggle with the fogginess brought on by his antidepressants. It rang truest of all when he moved his things out of the charming, waterfront clapboard home on the Southern Maine Coast that Sandy and he shared and into a lifeless, newly constructed condominium on the other side of town, the same condo where I—home on Christmas break from college—found him either drunk or comatose, still surrounded by half-empty moving boxes, each night when I’d return from getting stoned with my friends.

My intuition knew my father was going to kill himself long before he did. Which is probably the most brutal thing a son can endure: to watch, powerlessly, as the most important man in his life slips into the abyss. Which he did, finally, on an early fall morning the following September: He parked his truck, climbed

to the top of the Piscataqua River Bridge—the big green bridge that separates Maine and New Hampshire—and jumped 135 feet down into the churning water below.

My father's suicide sent me into the greatest pain of my short life. Suicide is a unique event in that it has a tendency to coat the people closest to the victim in shame. The act of self-destruction itself tends to be so incomprehensible, so stigmatized that most of us rarely feel comfortable talking openly about it. As such, we, the family, all somehow become counterparts in our loved ones' perceived weakness, their inability to go on. With my dad, the shame of his suicide was doubly compounded by disbelief: Practically everyone who had ever met him believed he was the happiest, most carefree man they'd ever known. As for me, only one fact regarding this tragedy really mattered: My beautiful father had chosen death over me. It was the ultimate breakup. A betrayal so harsh, I couldn't even think it, much less talk about it. So I closed down. Boarded up the windows. Battened down the hatches. No vacancy.

But that vow of silence didn't mean I'd be alone. No, I was damn sure, after watching my father fall apart that summer of 2005, that being without a woman was probably the single worst thing that could happen to a man. I would never be alone again. So, although I was pretty sure I didn't have any real intentions to marry my college girlfriend, Nora—the young woman I'd just begun dating when my father jumped—I latched onto her like the last lifeboat on the tipping decks of the *Titanic*. I was twenty-two years old.

It was during my relationship with Nora that I would find out, for the first time, that I was angry, with the biggest recipient of my anger being myself. No one was harder on me than me. Since I was a teenager, I seemed thoroughly determined to annihilate my

body, mind, and spirit with almost sadistic glee: mainlining beer and vodka and later cocaine at a ferocious clip, driving drunk, having unprotected sex with practically any woman who would fuck me, spending the inheritance money I received after my father's suicide recklessly in guilt-filled shopping sprees at New York's most expensive department stores.

But after me, the most potent rage was always reserved for women. Nora bore the brunt of this streak of self-destruction, as our relationship came on the heels of my father's suicide. It was not unlikely that I would get drastically fucked-up, destroying myself per usual, and then she would fire back. Voices would rise. Doors would slam. Ultimatums would get tossed. One night, while she was driving an inebriated me home from Manhattan after a party, I screamed at her to pull over, then walked a defiant tenth of a mile toward home in the driving snow. On another, I threw a tantrum and dumped the entire contents of her Michael Kors purse down the stairs of our building.

The shame of these cycles was unbearable. Every morning reproach, every promise never to repeat the actions of the night before seemed to drive me further into the ground, into more hatred and loathing. Why was I mad? Well, easy enough: I was wholly dependent on Nora. Powerless over her the same way I'd felt powerless over women for the entirety of my life. Powerless because my father was dead, I didn't know who I actually was as a man, and I didn't want to begin trying to figure it out. It was easier to let Nora define who I was. Or her wealthy and well-connected family. It was easier to outsource my identity to her than do the hard work of figuring out who I truly was behind all the masks I wore.

Eventually, the dam broke. When Nora and I split, in 2009, I headed off to rehab to clean up and learn something about myself.

And in the years that followed, although I spent several of them sober, I couldn't right the ship. My inability to be alone coupled with my affinity for picking New York's seemingly most dysfunctional women to engage with was uncanny. They were the only ones I saw in the room: angry, depressed, looking to be saved, or all three—beautiful faces with tortured pasts. I believe I was attuned to a certain level of familiarity in these women—archetypes I recognized from childhood—from my mother's depression following my parents' divorce and from my stepmother's coldness. And I worked my way around the city, bedding them and then running away when things got serious or, God forbid, they fell in love with me. I did this for years, convinced I would eventually encounter the one perfect girl who offered no trouble, no drama, no pain.

Then Amy arrived. Amy was gorgeous, outgoing, and stylish, and perhaps most refreshingly, our relationship featured zero fighting. Even when Amy discovered my secretive texts with an ex-girlfriend, or when I was vomiting red wine all over our Airbnb in Paris in the middle of a "romantic getaway," she forgave me with almost no qualms. But beneath the surface of Amy's and my seemingly smooth relationship, I remained agitated all the time. Looking back, I can see I had no anchor. I was a stereotypical lost boy in those years I spent with Amy—thirty years old, listless, silently crippled by the fact that I'd worked my tail off to get my dream job as a writer for *GQ* only to discover that even one of the sexiest jobs in Manhattan did not bring me the relief I was looking for. What followed was more depression. A drastic low that I expected Amy to pull me out of. But even in all the fun and excitement and sex we had, she couldn't. And I resented her for it. I was angry that she—like all the women before her—was not the end-all, be-all answer to my problems. Like the perfect job,

perfect suit, or perfect apartment, Amy didn't save me from myself, or from that ancient, unquenchable pain I was holding inside. Because nothing did.

Amy pulled away from our relationship a year in, and then I spent a year scrambling to get her back. When we were together, I was restless, annoyed, and shut-down, but when she was gone, I felt desperate, needy, and, finally, suicidal. I knew—at least partially—that this relationship was showing me sides of myself that were highly problematic. Namely, that I felt powerless over a woman yet again, which only made me more angry and more uncomfortable. Keep in mind, men don't like being powerless over anything. It shows weakness. And yet, our behavior with women often suggests, on its best days, insanity.

Here's how it looks in action:

Man has a powder-keg connection with a beautiful woman, puts her on a pedestal, and rushes headlong into the relationship. But then, after the high of the romance has worn off, becomes resentful that she no longer has the same effect on him and his life is still unremarkable. He either falls into depression or starts looking for his next spark elsewhere.

Man meets a good woman, but her devotion and attention to him fries his internal circuit breakers—the ones that have been telling him he's a piece of shit since the dawn of time—and he runs away from her rather than face the discomfort that arises in intimacy.

Man settles down with a "safe" and stable woman who can hold him and his emotional weight, but feels unfulfilled in the relationship. To cope, he engages in outside flirting, energy exchange, or sourcing from work, porn, or other women. Resentment grows and intimacy dies.

Man seduces and discards one woman after the next, claiming

to his friends, his family, and himself that he's searching for love, but really he's just using the bodies and souls of women in an unconscious attempt to find relief from his own confusion.

Like I said, insanity. And yet, like most of the guys I know, I had no awareness that these patterns weren't doomed to repeat forever. That there was a way out of the hopeless cycle of romance roulette (and the drama and dissatisfaction that always seemed to occur despite having the best of intentions.)

Well, at least until I took a fateful trip to my mother's. But more on that shortly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thirty-five years ago, in his bestseller *Iron John*, one of the first popular books that proposed a new, hopeful vision of masculinity in modern times, Robert Bly wrote that the combination of a lack of fatherly guidance for young boys—especially since the Industrial Revolution—and an absence of male rites of passage in Western culture led to generations of confused, lost, angry, and often “soft” men who, in a sort of perpetual state of childhood or adolescence, remained dependent on or propped up by women. And I believe, in the decades since, this dynamic of man dependent on woman has become the single most under-addressed factor of the so-called “crisis of masculinity” that appears to be increasing by the day. Simply put, generations of men are left unsupported by other men (emotionally, physically, spiritually) during their formative years, and therefore never learn how to find safety within themselves, and instead look to women for that safety.

Men who are disconnected from themselves need women. We need them because, on the whole, our emotional capacity is so underdeveloped, and our pain is so great, that we require them

to smooth the rough edges of our lives, to reconnect us to our own tenderness, to care for us in ways that we have never learned to care for ourselves. Yet, a disconnected man also fears the very things he finds so attractive in women. They remind him of a vulnerability he has discarded, emotions he has classed as useless. They connect him to his heart, which he has long cast away in favor of his mind.

On the surface, it all feels like a reverseless sort of predicament. One acted out by millions of men across the world (and the often exasperated women who partner with them). Men I began to discover as I dove deeper into the world of men in my twenties: first, as a correspondent for men's magazines like *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *Men's Health* in New York City, and later, as a life coach in Los Angeles. It was in coaching that I began to meet and work with so many men like myself: sensitive, well-intentioned men who had seemingly successful lives. They lived in major metropolitan areas. They wore Rolexes and drove BMWs. They were handsome and charismatic. These were the men women wanted to be with! Yet, these men were often so plagued by self-doubt, so desperate for validation, so lacking of a solid, masculine structure within, that their relationship lives tended to be a mess. Like me, many of them admitted to feeling powerless over women. Terrified of being alone. Many were existing inside long-dead marriages, or scrolling hours a day on dating apps, stuck on the fantasy of finding that "perfect" partner. Others ran from women who did show interest. While still others were cheating, lying, or avoiding hard conversations with the women they were partnered with. And, of course, all of this behavior was bound up in shame—because they were supposed to be the good guys!

In time, I began to see this pattern of a sort of flimsy manhood emerging everywhere I looked: on social media, in celebrity