



Face Value

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For Néo Areyon and for Love

Face Value

***Scam.** (Slang) Noun.*

Confidence trick, Swindle

*A **Scam**, [...] is a form of deceit, whereby the actor extracts money or valuable goods from someone. It is simultaneously denounced as a crime, and seen as an art form. To many, it is a great risk, but the ingenuity which so-called scam artists use in their plans is apparently a source of admiration to many as well. (Wikipedia.org).*

Welcome

Greetings, dear reader. Isn't it a wondrous thing how by reading these words you are inadvertently wandering into my world? Welcome.

And thank you.

I hereby would like to invite you to join me on a journey. This would be the journey I made over this last year; one of mixed feelings, a journey to the summit and beyond. I hope that you'll allow me to take you with me.

I do have to warn you. At times, it will be coarse, and blunt. At other times it will rather be deeply emotional; philosophical even - in other words, I will sound slightly inebriated or high. Whatever the case: I am all of these people, and hereby would like to apologize for all of them in advance. When I use violent words I merely hope that through this paper and ink – or through this screen - you will be able to feel what I feel, taste the blood that I taste. When I go deep, I hope you will understand just *why* I feel what I feel. Why we feel it. It might even become – if only ever so slightly – more clear to you what is real and what is not, in this world.

Welcome to the world of Face Value.





I – What kind of person am I turning into?

The only things I could discern right before were some cursing in a stark, generically British sounding accent, and a firm tap on the shoulder.

"You sneaky wankstain..."

Rush of alcohol, loud music. Eardrums are feeling stretched to numbness. A booming bass line is where everything starts and ends, and it's vibrating through my chest as the last DJ is starting to tune the night down. Pulsating strobe lights make the evening seem like an oddly edited movie.

The decor is something out of an early 2000's European summer road trip flick. Ibiza, a lavish villa on the outskirts of town, transformed for the night into a big and quite decadent dance hall. Mostly white in color, large mat white pillars surrounding the round main dance floor. Big, flashy banners between the two pillars behind the elevated DJ-booth. The pristine white of the interior is only visible in the flashes of the seemingly incessantly flickering strobe lights, which are blurring vision, mind and judgement. Scantily clad dancers in some black, shiny fabric and all with white-blond wigs and black lipstick. The girls, dancing on top of cut-off columns, curl around purple laser beams, and add to the steamy atmosphere already present around the twenty-, thirty- and forty-something teenagers scattered across this villa-turned-club. Some deep-house remix of a 2006 smash hit is playing. She's singing to me, personally: *I can show you a thing or two, yeah-uh yeah-uh.*

I bet you could. My mental faculties are severely clouded at best, at this point.

I forget to remember who this girl is to me, and who she's not.

The muscles in her back are slightly tense, her back is curved a little. Her hair is soft and so is her smell. The skin feels lighter than velvet to the touch, and lightly damp.

The fact that me and my subject of interest were near the bar on the main dance floor, means pretty much everybody at this party must have been able to see what happened. Especially the people up on the first and second stories, leaning over the bannisters that looked like floating rings above the round dance floor.

The only thing I could discern right before were some cursing in a stark,

generically British sounding accent. That, and a firm tap on the shoulder.

It was the moment in which you had already taken in the excitement of the evening to the fullest extent – through the drinking, the sultry atmosphere, the dancing, the music; the present female beauty and any possible other drugs. The moment where you might be looking for a climax – one in which the discharge you have been feeling pouring out of your body's every inch, like some kind of continuous orgasm, finally finds its absolute peak and end.

For instance a fight, to some. To me personally it would more likely be passionately making love or - and this may sound fairly soft, but works for me - intensely embracing a beloved friend. Or, as in this particular case: Rush of alcohol, loud music - and an "error of judgment". And after that an unnecessarily hard blow to the head.

'Fuck me, I'm so fucking sorry!! But why'd ya have to go and fucking...'

Well now, instant remorse? It would appear so, yes. And from both of us, no less.

And, yes; I have just now been punched in the face by a by all means beautiful leprechaun of a woman, who swears like a dock-worker. And this after I had just - in my own little charming way - made her a nice compliment about her girlfriend. I should think.

This, not a scene from the - according to my opinion fairly brilliant - TV-series about a washed up American writer.

Funny how one of the greatest influences in my life came from a fictional character, come to think of it. Whatever the case, this is my life, now.

'Oh I'm so fucking, so, so sorry!! Are you alright, though? Are you... Are you alright?' She grabs my shoulder while I'm trying to push away the pain, bent-over, inspecting the integrity of my nasal ridge. I have to shift my feet a couple of times to retain my already fragile balance. While I'm down here I'm also having a private conversation with my good friend Jack Daniels who has met an unfortunate early demise on the marble floor. The "Last Drink" of any night already has a certain bittersweet sadness to it, let alone if it ends like this.

Chick. Relax. I'm not made of glass, no offense. It was a pretty sweet hook, though, I'll give you that much. Perfect momentum.

What I'm standing here thinking, as I taste the salty and metallic taste of blood from the inside of my lip (*wench popped my lip...*) is that I've never been punched in the face before, at least not for real. And what I catch myself wondering next, is whether or not I should be happy with the fact that my flower has now been picked by a five foot, some-odd girl, 110 pounds, tops. What's the move, by the way, when almost punched flat on your back by a girl?

I take a deep breath and stand up straight. Now. She is looking at me quite bad-ass/slash/worried, beer bottle still in her left hand. So this must mean she's got most of her anger out, and that she's the "butch" out of the two? As far as that goes, really; honestly they're both fairly stunning young sapphics. Both Danish, both with very beautiful eyes; one blonde and one strawish blonde or brunette, and for some reason one about a full foot taller than the other. The Nordic princesses are wearing old, flat sneakers under a sexy, short and skin-tight black dress; my partner in crime even sporting an army-green cap - kind of a rebellious statement in this crowd. A very cute couple, regardless. So why the hell was I making out with her girlfriend? Was it purely because she'd confided in me minutes ago how she doesn't necessarily label herself a lesbian (and that she hates labels to begin with)? Was it the fact that she had been flirting, commenting on the merits of "open relationships"? Was it that I just saw an opening and went for it - like a dog, or a caveman; a monkey, would? Darker than I'm used to. What kind of person am I turning into?

-It's OK, it's OK. You had every right to punch me; I probably would have done it myself if you hadn't... well... beaten me to the punch. I'm such a terrible drunk...' I say, adding my most charming apologetic smile.

The three of us move a little to the side of the DJ-booth, away from the business end of the stacked speakers.

'No, I'm sorry; it's my wonderful lover I should be punching in the mouth, if anyone.'

She looks at her girlfriend and squints, forming a burning, piercing gaze. Regardless the daze of ample alcohol it dawns on me that this might cause some trouble for them as well as for little old me.

What if the little thrasher really decided to go after the person who's hurt her most, out of the two of us?

I realize that the least I can do is try to do damage control, as best I can.

Somehow she seems to want to make amends first. 'Honestly, I'm really sorry. I don't know how I should apologize or make it up to you... it's not...'

-Oh, that won't be necessary.' I interrupt her, in the middle of a pause. 'If anyone, you might want to apologize to my good friend Jack Daniels here who, as an innocent bystander in all this has now seen himself splattered all over this floor. Quite an untimely demise: he still had so much to give to this world. Remind me to get a new drink in a minute by the way, as that was supposed to be my Last One for the night.'

She doesn't seem to be very much charmed or swayed from her anger. I'm not sure why I keep on talking.

-Plus a damn shame to punch that mouth, such a pretty one - sorry.' I place my hand in front of my mouth, apologetically. I take a small step back to see what kind of effect the words I'm trying not to scream into her ear

seem to be having. I can't really tell. Time to move back into her swinging range.

'If you'd have paid close attention though, you would've seen it was I who sort of forced my knuckle- dragging self on her. Seriously, it wasn't her. Machismo is a very hard trait to eradicate in our kind, it seems.'

'Well there are reasons why we fancy birds over blokes, you know, and it's not the two reasons you would obviously think of.'

'Ooh, sarcasm combined with sexism. On top of a swollen lip, gee, thanks' I add, trying to balm her wounds by exaggerating my own. The British sounding champ is starting to smile again now.

'You know what; I'm gonna get you a new beer as a thank you *and* an apology. And finally, one Last drink for me.'

Miniature female Rocky laughs. Her still rather gorgeous girlfriend smiles at her, as she pulls her little slugger in for a reconciling hug. I feel my lip one more time, as inconspicuously as I can, while I look at the crowd around me. Yes, this really did just happen. And everybody saw it.

As I walk away, I notice how I suddenly care what unknown people say about me while they bump their friends' shoulders looking in my direction, laughing. Was there anybody holding a smartphone up at exactly the wrong moment? Would there be embarrassing pictures or, worse, videos? Were any of my friends looking? If 'May had seen anything, he'd be sure to tear me a new one. I look back at the two Viking princesses one more time, to convince myself they're really OK. The slightly sexier and taller one out of the two mouths a silent 'sorry' to me, but I'm actually pretty happy it ended like this. They do seem happy together; I didn't even manage to wreck that for them for just this one night. I hope. But more so, at this point I'm hoping the same can be said about me and my significant other.

And so I'm searching, between the flashes of light, and dancing and kissing and drunk people, some in the most bizarre of outfits. Drunk, X-ed up or coked-up, or any combination of any of the above. I know I wanted my friends to share in the High Life with me, at least for once, but right now I'm starting to have second thoughts about all of that.

The DJ has started to throw in more mellow tunes, something with a kind of muffled bass is gently kicking straight through my torso and still slightly pounding head now. I try to arrange my thoughts.

I know my New Best Friend 'May is in here somewhere, and that Frank and the guys are all in here too, somewhere. But where are they? And most importantly: where's Lily?

The thick cocktail of smells in the room and the stickiness of my steps remind me that the floor is covered in a mixture of beer and sweat and other bodily fluids and liquor – all of them mixed together as they are in the bodies of the hysterical party crowd. To the point of nauseating bliss. In the

flashes of luminescence (the light in the room? Or in my mind?) the camera inside my cranium is making snapshots of twenty-, thirty- and fortysomethings in the most oddly contorted postures; not as often alone as strung together and intertwined at the tongue. Then there are those who say they go to this kind of Island for the culture or to this kind of party for business, and that the nights out are purely for relaxation or networking. That they certainly have nothing to do with drugs, let alone sex. The ones who work the hardest to convince their mates of this before they leave, I find, are the funniest. Beautiful liars, all.

I get tapped on the back once more, while the party around me stubbornly continues to rage. I stop, and suddenly realize that this has actually already happened a couple of times during my tour from the other room to the place where I had last seen Lily. When I turn around and look at Liliana's face, the dime drops on its side, at first. I slowly do the math, which adds up to the insight that she must have seen quite a lot of what has happened over the last ten minutes. I am now seriously wondering what her reaction might be.

I stare at her face. A split-second, but time seems frozen. Conveniently.

Allow me, before I continue with my report of this turning point in our journey, to give you a little background, and to tell you a little something about the history of my relationship with the wonderful, sweet Liliana Archangela Gomez.

Liliana and I had first met each other at a most fortunate moment. She was a friend of a friend; I had just become single again and was enjoying my post-break-up mojo. The air was the watery, diluted kind of icy blue you have in my hometown, Rotterdam, at that time of year. We hit it off, right off the bat - partly due to the fact that both her and my mother were east-coast American immigrants in Dutchie- land.

After a strangely warm winter's evening of more than superficial flirting, we didn't happen to see each other again for a few months. Somehow I had forgotten to ask for her number, as if I believed in the kind of serendipity portrayed in the 90's movie by the same name.

As if by an ironic cosmic joke then, or simply coincidentally - who knows - we bumped into each other once more around early June the following year. And we had not forgotten one and other.

Ah, spring; pheromone-wise and hormone-wise the best time of the year to start a new romance. And thus occurred. Aren't we humans such an evolved species?

Liliana and I shared some cups of coffee, walks in the park, and slightly druggy and fairly drunk parties of - apparently - mutual friends. Rotterdam - officially only the second city of The Netherlands - is a very small town, especially when you're somehow involved in its cultural life, "know people"

and go to the right parties.

Liliana had spent one year at art school, to later divert her attention to the more practical and safe option of studying economics. What appeared to draw her to me, aside from the undeniable chemistry, was the guts I had had to push through and finish my education as a commercial graphic designer. Although to me this was a fairly weak version of going for what I really wanted to become; an independent graphic artist. She likes to say it wasn't my relatively tall, athletic build or my pretty perfectly fitting cultural background, but I tend to disagree with her culturally chauvinistic self.

What drew me to her was, to say it in one slang noun, her *cool*.

And not so much the "Pulp Fiction" kind of cool - of which by the way she also had plenty - but more so her ever calm demeanor. Her polished, relaxed and humble air which reflected her inside perfectly - as far as I was discovering - but which could turn into a street-wise no-nonsense attitude when provoked, or otherwise necessary. In those cases her Venezuelan and Brazilian temperament and Bronx-latino accent would come up a little stronger, which I mostly found hot and a little bit funny, yet - also slightly intimidating. In a fun, sexy way.

But in the end, after I got to know her a little better, it was actually her demure intelligence that I found most brilliant - pun not intended. More specifically; her amazing intelligence and wisdom combined with her total lack of intellectual arrogance. And of course, there was her body. My god, that body. And of course, there was the chemistry.

The process of getting to know each other ever better and liking each other ever better, was in our case accompanied by an until then unknown desire of the flesh, along with an equally other-worldly mental connection.

Her lips smelled like sweetest ripe fruit, succulent flesh; sex, beauty, and perfection.

I didn't know if this was what the effects of pheromones would be like, but it got to me. However, things only really started to get heated between us when our words and our minds met in text messaging and other types of written conversation, where it seemed we matched so well that more than anything we helped each other understand ourselves better.

The only thing we seemed not to understand in each other - but perhaps even more so in ourselves, then - was where this blissful, juicily uncomfortable feeling originated, which we felt whenever we found ourselves within a five foot radius of one and other. We weren't teenagers, after all and had both had our share of amorous adventures already. Everything was so beautiful back then. Where and when exactly had it all changed so much? In retrospect it's really not that hard a question.

I can still remember the first time we talked about our almost childishly intense infatuation with, and juvenile physical attraction to each other and

laughed nervously. I remember catching myself staring at her lips more and more during conversation. Her perfect, sculpted, soft, full lips with that beautiful contrast between the almost coarse juiciness and the delicate framing that seemed so elegantly designed. Forgetting myself.

'I'm sorry, what were you saying?'

Back in the moment, back at the villa party.

I'm staring at her face, and in the meanwhile trying to make sense out of the battle within me between alcohol and reason, and between repent and rage.

A pounding beat is fading away somewhere in the background of my consciousness. Her face is seemingly without expression – at least none that I can make out – but I know she's screaming mad at me on the inside.

And me? How can I ever explain how it's all *her* fault? That I *know*.

And, how can I blame her for something I set her up for myself? How can I hold her accountable, in the end, for something that eventually can't in any sensible way be explained as being either criminal or sinful?

After two seconds of deadly stillness, she lowers her eyes and turns away, still without saying even a word. Her hand waves dismissively at the same time. She's done, she wants to go home. I have no idea what to make of it or what exact kind of shit I've gotten myself into.

Face Value





II - Alcohol

I scan the crowd around us to find our friends. Our code dictates that no one leaves without at least saying goodbye. I follow her restrained angry walk, her posterior that doesn't lose an inch of its charm even with this played 'I don't care' attitude. How ironic that she has to work so hard to restrain her anger, while her divinely curvaceous behind is simply invitingly waving at me. What an exquisite woman. What a Goddess. What am I doing.

I finally spot good, trusted Frank and signal to him that 'we're leaving, don't ask; I'll explain later'. He sees in Lily's facial expression and in the stern, brisk way that she's moving that something's wrong, and that I very well might be it. He decides to follow my instructions without question.

As we're passing through the gate - or, as Lily passes through the gate and I scurry to follow her, my New Best Friend Kwame - 'May for short - comes up to me, his posse as always a couple of feet behind him.

He looks at me very seriously for a second, then opens up a wide smile.

'Yoww, I didn't get the memo sayin' you was gon' be the entertainment for the evening! I have only one complaint, my good man: you forgot about the popcorn, or better, some fried chicken wings. Other than that it was just perfect, dog!'

- 'Yeah... thanks, I guess' I reply, not sure how layered his uplifted expression is, exactly.

'You stepped out, almost got knocked-out by a three foot lesbian thrasher - took it like a man, by the way - and now you're being dragged home by your main chick cuz' she done watched the whole show! Man, you fucked.'

- 'Yeah man, look - much as I'd really enjoy listening to how much pleasure my recent missteps are allowing you, I really gotta go' I reply, as I see Lily impatiently pacing in front of the gate, no doubt wondering whether or not to just leave me there and walk back by herself.

Kwame straightens his face into an almost perfectly sincere concerned look. His eyes are still glistening with mischief, though.

'Ey yo Faceman, seriously, you want some Happy Herbs to ease the pain while "Mrs Face" reduces your balls to shreds? Maybe she'll want a hit, too.'