

The
Seduction
of Natalie



Francesco Rizzuto

THE SEDUCTION OF NATALIE

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ISBN 9781988905006

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A Small Matter of Bail



Ding Dong, Ding Dong, Ding Dong ...

Derrick kicked off the bedcovers then staggered in his sweat-soaked wife-beater and soiled jockey shorts towards the front door, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He was vaguely hoping it might be Natalie, his missing-person wife, but dismissed the thought as being irrelevant to 7 am on a hot, muggy morning in central Florida.

“What can I do for you, mister? If you’re selling something, then we don’t need any.”

“Not selling anything, young man,” replied the caller, reeling from the impact of morning breath.

“We don’t want anything for free, either.”

“Nothing comes free in this world.”

“Okay, then. Want a cold Budweiser? I was just getting up. It’s free.”

Derrick turned his back on the visitor, whom he hadn’t clearly examined yet through the crack in the door and the haze in his own puffy, bloodshot eyes, then grabbed a dart from a nearby bowl and launched it in a shallow arc toward a toilet seat hanging from the living room wall. There’s one in every room in case he gets the urge, even in the bathroom where a plasticized, waterproof portrait of Derrick’s boss rests inside the toilet bowl. He extracted two chilled cans of beer from the fridge, turned toward the visitor, then suddenly jumped backward in fright.

“Fuck! It’s you. The genie!”

“What genie? I’m your wife’s lawyer. She’s in big trouble.”

“Yeah, I bet. I told her not to drive around in a powder blue BMW Nasty M12. It’s gonna get her in trouble. She’s not used to being rich, you know. No previous training. *Noblesse Oblige* and all that.”

“Nazca, not *Nasty*.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

“Well, now. Shall we get down to business? First, there’s the small matter of your wife’s bail, set at ten million dollars. She’s been charged with the murder of a highway patrolman, a rather serious offense in this state. A delicate case, really. Could drag on for years. I’ve advised her to enter a plea of insanity, the better to buy time. Then, of course, there’s the subject of my fee for services.”

“Natalie doesn’t have any money. She’ll need to get a public defender.”

“I *am* the public defender.”

“Then why does she have to pay you?”

“Like I said. There’s no free lunch in this world, especially here in central Florida. Do you have a gun?”

“Well, yeah. I *had* a shotgun. But Natalie took off yesterday with it in the trunk of our car. Where is she now?”

“In jail awaiting arraignment. By the way, the murder weapon had your fingerprints on it, not hers. So, there’s some hope that she may be released for lack of evidence and they’ll arrest you instead.”

“Huh?”

“I’m sorry, but shit happens.”

“Hey. If you’re the guy in the turban, can’t you just, you know, like bust her out? Make the evidence disappear? And I’ll bet you’re naked under that silly trench coat.”

Mister Enrod drew a long slug from the beer can, swiped his foamy lips with his trench coat sleeve, then let go with a satisfying belch. After a short reverie, he turned to Derrick with genuine concern in his jaundiced eyes.

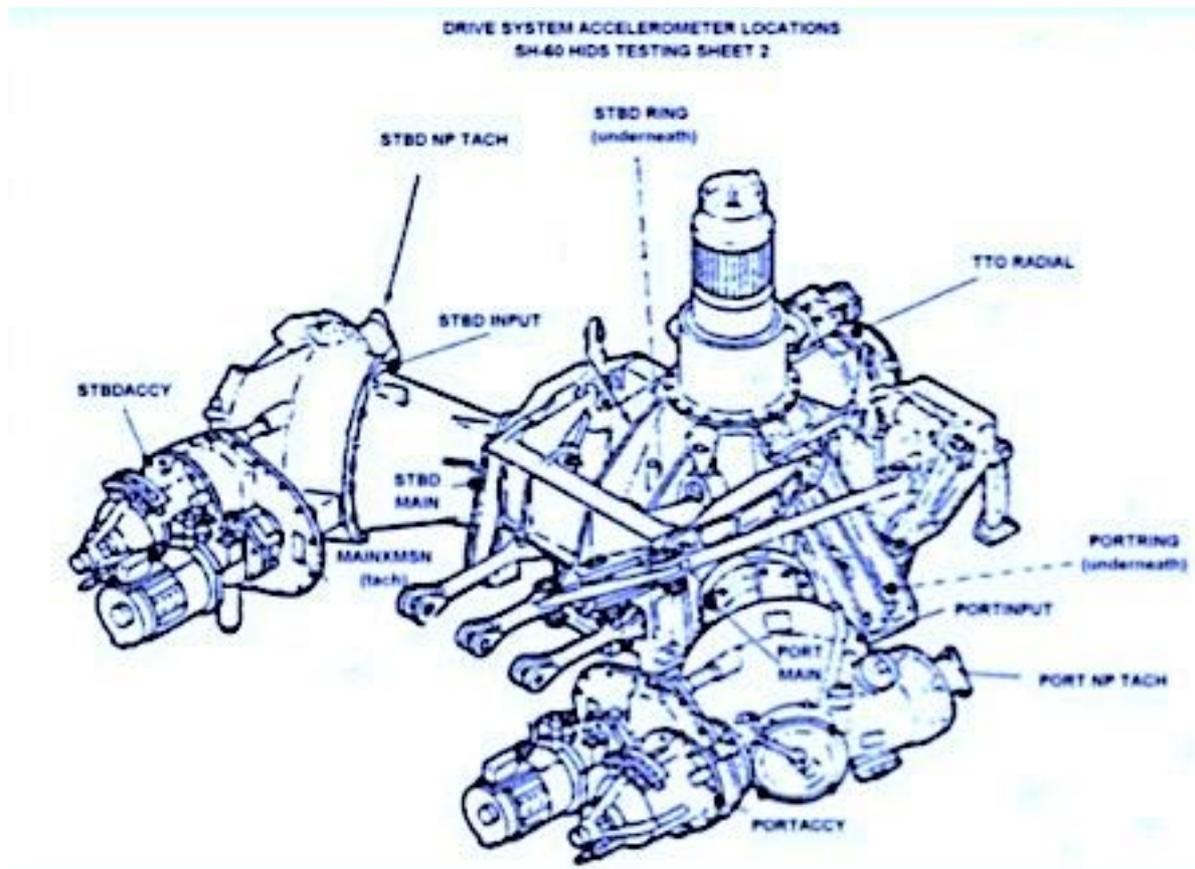
“It’s not so easy to bust prisoners out of jails these days. The state pays the private sector operators of these institutions for each inmate housed there and the bureaucrats get a kickback per head, never mind free flights aboard the Lolita Express to paid vacations in the Virgin Islands. It’s a one-way door, I’m afraid. The more people in custody, the more everyone benefits. It’s called the American Democracy; or institutionalized capitalism if you prefer.”

“Okay. Enough with the lecture. So how do I get my wife back?”

“Sign over your patent to the Calorifistibusticator and I’ll tell you.”

“Listen. I have something even more revolutionary in the works. Calorifistibustication is old technology. Why, there’s practically one in every home already. Come on down to the basement and I’ll show you the future.”

The Start-up



Click on the image to view product infomercial

“This, Bro, is called the Turbo Encabulator.”

Derrick pointed to a large tattered blueprint taped to the basement wall, next to another toilet seat. He selected a menacing dart from a cut-glass bowl and half-heartedly tossed it at a man’s picture pasted inside the opening in the seat, like absentmindedly grabbing a handful of peanuts though somewhat more lethal; unless you’re allergic to peanuts, of course.

“A lot of high-tech labs are working on the project but I’m head and shoulders above the rest. Stole the prints from Beta Systems Incorporated. That’s my workplace, by the way. Isn’t that clever?”

“Sure. But Turbo Encabulator videos are all over YouTube these days. It’s practically a household word by now. Anyway, what does it *do*? And who’s gonna buy it?”

“For a genie, you’re pretty stupid. Here, have another cold one.” Derrick reached into a tiny bar fridge for another two cans of Bud. “I’d better get down to the depot and pick up another couple dozen. This heat wave could continue indefinitely.”

“Thanks. It’s hot inside this trench coat.”

“I’ll bet.”

Derrick worked the elastic waistband of his jockey shorts like a forge bellows, attempting to ventilate its inner workings but in the process he wetted himself with spilled suds from the can.

“Okay, well here’s the thing. The answer is really quite simple. It doesn’t *do* anything. Not yet, anyway. Because they haven’t developed the one key component that makes it all work properly. But I have! It’s a micro-circuit I call the sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor.”

“How did you discover the secret?”

“Simple. See, all day I sit wasting away in a cube farm behind grey plastic partitions with fake wood trim, staring at a flickering monitor with the letters ‘LG’ on the front, to remind me that Life is Good, while designing sonoidal switches for digital news feeds. As if that’s not interesting enough, one day it dawns on me that the problem with the Turbo Encabulator concept lies in how to handle the reduced modal input due to the miniaturization, then wham-bam thank you ma’am! I had it!”

“Say what? Speak English, will you. I can’t understand Arabic.”

“I thought you were a genie from the ancient sacred crypts of Egypt.”

“Sure. But five centuries stuffed inside a pottery urn fucks with your language skills. The first words that entered my ears after a golf ball crashed through the window and released me were English. Or rather American. With a Florida accent. Now I’m stuck with it, although truth is that I prefer Quebecois.”

“What’s that?”

“French-Canadian.”

“No parlez-vous-ers around here, I’m afraid. Lots of Hispanics, though.”

“Look. Are you going to sign over the patent or not? Calorifistibusticator or Turbo Encabulator, I don’t care which one. Otherwise, I may need to drop your wife’s case.”

“Okay, yeah. Sure. But let me finish explaining first.”

“Ten seconds then I’m outta here. I’m a busy genie. I have cases waiting.”

“The Turbo Encabulator has already reached a very high level of development and is being deployed in the operation of nofer trunnions, but with limited results, unfortunately. Nonetheless, performance has improved greatly, and the cronal optronic metrics emulation rates are quite high. Problem is that these antiquated inter-temporal switches consistently fail, causing a performance loss to about 1.8GHz. Artronic data just can’t be shunted through the fifth integer dimensional omni-buffers at a decent rate. Hey! I think that’s what happened with my golf ball!

“Anyway, my sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor solves that problem by eliminating the inter-temporal switches entirely. It’s pure genius! The Turbo Encabulator is going to revolutionize transportation and just about everything else. It could very well become a catalyst for bringing peace to the world. I’m gonna make millions. All I need is a start-up.”

“Derrick, my man, you got it. And with all the money we’re gonna make together, you’ll get your wife back in no time. Trust me.”

“Is that a guarantee? Are you sure you can get her back?”

“Tell me, Derrick. How old are you?”

“Thirty-two.”

“And for how long have you believed in genies?”

Crow(d) Funding?



Natalie’s lawyer convinced her husband Derrick to set up the Save Natalie Campaign Headquarters right in their own living room. And to make sure the phones are manned 24/7, he’d sleep on the sofa from now on. That is, Derrick would sleep on the sofa. Mister Enron (oops, we meant Enrod), who needs his rest if he’s going to work on Natalie’s case at all, would occupy the couple’s bedroom.

“But where’s all this money gonna come from?” Derrick asked, somewhat dejected. The lawyer threw him a sympathetic wink that quickly changed to a castigatory grimace, as if confronted with a small child that has suddenly shit its nappies.

“I sense that you don’t relish the eventuality of your wife’s return. Is there something not *de rigueur* in the marriage? Erectile dysfunction perhaps?”

Mister Enrod knew Natalie. He knew her in the biblical sense of the word. Regardless of what her husband may have thought that day when his GPS-misguided golf ball crashed through a picture window, shattering the ancient pottery urn and releasing the genie from five hundred years of incarceration – and in this sense at least, he totally sympathized with the detained woman’s predicament – she hadn’t followed him upstairs to the bedroom just to admire his collection of etchings.

Derrick remains silent at the mention of their sex life; his versus Natalie’s, that is.

“Maybe your inter-temporal switch is on the fritz. Genies can fix these things. But it’s going to cost you. Here, you just sign over both patents, the Calorifistibusticator and the sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor, or whatever the friggin’ thing is called, and we’ll make everything right in your life. Your wife gets released from prison and, well, you know. You get hard-ons the size of the Washington Monument. What do you say, Derrick? Ready to become a superman?”

“Well, I don’t know. I have an appointment with my therapist this afternoon. I’ll run the idea past him and get back to you.”

“As you wish. But don’t take too long. I’ve heard that the current Administration in Washington is calling for fast-track executions to make room for more inmates in the prisons-for-profit system. It’s all about turnover. And Florida is one of those swing states, if you know what I mean.”

“What about crowdfunding? I hear a lot of start-ups get financed that way.”

“Derrick, I’m afraid I’ve underestimated you. Why, that’s brilliant. We’ll crowd-fund your wife’s bail and everyone who invests a dollar gets a free copy of the prototype.”

“Her bail? I meant crowd-fund the Calorifistibusticator. And the sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor, so we get control of the Turbo Encabulator market.

Mister Enrod adjusted his felt hat, the one with the protruding crown that looks as if it were concealing a turban.

“Get out that computer thingamabobbie of yours and let’s find out how to do a start-up. And what this crowdfunding stuff is all about. And how to do a start-up. Did I say that already?”

Derrick booted up his laptop, trying not to spill any more beer than necessary onto the keyboard. It wasn’t easy. Several keys were already sticking badly, like the ‘Delete’ button, most important of all the keys (ctrl/alt/delete, the unholy trinity of keyboard strokes).

“If you weren’t stark naked under that trench coat, I’d allow you to sit over here next to me, so we can both see,” he tells the lawyer.

But lawyers are a repulsive enough breed even with their clothes on. The screen flickers into life then shouts back:

Most start-ups fail. Debates about why are nearly as old as Silicon Valley itself. Some argue it was the team and its inability to execute, while others point to the lack of a market for an idea.

Both are critical in achieving ‘product market fit’. ‘No market need’ is the #1 reason for start-up failure.

Entrepreneurs put their heart and soul into these ideas, not to mention their capital, and in many cases the pain of a failed start-up could have been avoided with some customer research up front.

Derrick cringed at the word ‘execute.’ As lukewarm as he was about his wife’s quick release from the prison-for-profit, still he didn’t want to see her come to an ignominious end. After all, everyone makes a bad decision or two now and again. Like bad decision #1: relying on a GPS-guided golf ball to sabotage the Beta Systems Incorporated golf tournament. Then there was bad decision #2: accusing his bank manager of pilfering a hundred million dollars of his money, when all deposits greater than five thousand dollars need to be scrutinized by the IRS and DEA before the money is released. That takes time. Bad decision #3: letting a genie in a trench coat and felt hat get past the door. What if the ATM suddenly registered the hundred million? He’d probably want some of it.

“Have you conducted any market surveys on how many homes already have a Calorifistibusticator and, if so, where they purchased it?”

“Well, no. Not really.”

“And the Turbo-Encabulator?”

“Negative.”

A scratch-scratch-scratching is heard at the front door.

“What about the crowdfunding? Let’s check that out.”

Derrick hit a few sticky keys and up it came.

*Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project or venture by raising monetary contributions from a large number of people. Crowdfunding is a form of **crowdsourcing** and of **alternative finance**. In 2015, it was estimated that worldwide over US\$34 billion was raised this way.*

“Thirty-four billion, huh? We only need ten million to spring Natalie. It’s a drop in the bucket.”

“Let’s go for it.”

High-fives. Another two cans of Bud. To celebrate. And another two. And so on and so forth.

“What’s that scratching sound?”

“Probably somebody’s at the door. Somebody who can’t reach the bell.”

A Scratching at the Door



“Why, hello Gents, and how are we doing today?”

“We don’t need any alligators.”

“That’s fine because Milton here isn’t for sale. He isn’t even up for adoption.”

“Okay. One question. What does he want? What do *you* want?”

“Those are two separate questions. Milton doesn’t want anything. He wants to give you something, a message from his mommy.”

“And who might that be?” Derrick was getting bored with this conversation, although the attractive woman clutching a live alligator in one hand and an alligator skin purse in the other seemed pleasant enough. At least she isn’t a lawyer, Derrick thought, although he wasn’t absolutely certain about Milton. Oddly enough, the woman bore a rather strong resemblance to his missing wife.

“His mommy is sitting on top of our old Toyota that’s still parked in the police impoundment. She wants to know if you could send over a few chilled cans of Bud. A gin tonic, or two, would be even more welcome.”

“Okay. Come on in then. Beer’s in the fridge. Go help yourself.”

The mystery woman grabbed a can and tugged at the pop top, sending a geyser of foam all over Derrick’s laptop.

“Now what did you go and do that for?”

“Force of habit, I guess.”

Derrick mopped up the spilt suds from his keyboard with the hem of his wife-beater while trying to read the rest of the Wikipedia article on crowdfunding.

“What’s your name, anyway?”

“I’m Natalie.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be in jail? I heard you were indicted for murder.”

“I was. But they released me for lack of evidence. Somebody else’s finger prints were on the murder weapon – yours.”

“So, what’s with the baby alligator?”

“Milton isn’t an alligator. Whatever gave you that idea? He’s a BMW Nazca M12, the most expensive BMW in the world.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I was just being sarcastic about his mommy wanting cold beers and a gin tonic. You get a little daffy sitting in a concrete cell all day long with nothing to do, especially when your companions are Doris and Louise, the corset and panty twins. When I went to pick up the Toyota, the alligator that was attached to the roof had shrunk. Nobody thought to feed the poor little guy, and just look at him now, will you? Isn’t he pitiful? So emaciated!”

“Well, yeah. But what are you doing here, Natalie? This isn’t in the script. You’re supposed to be languishing in jail. (*Author’s note: this story is all ad lib. There’s isn’t any supposed-to-be.*) You should be putting your affairs in order and making peace with your Maker before they, well, you know, like the lawyer said. Otherwise, our crowdfunding campaign to Free Natalie will be meaningless. And there goes my huge salary and executive jet and stock options and all the free perks that come with the position. Didn’t you know that most of the money raised by charities these days goes to supporting high priced executives?”

“Can’t I be poster girl for your new start-up?”

“How did you know about the start-up?”

“I have woman’s institution. I mean intuition. And my intuition tells me that I’m going to divorce you. I had time to think about these things while languishing in jail. Sonoidal switch failure is grounds for divorce. I looked it up in the prison’s legal library.”

“But I got that fixed. I discovered the secret is in the sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor.”

“Oh, great. Well, for now I’m going to change into something more casual.” She opens the bedroom door then lets out a shrill scream.

“What are YOU doing here?”

Mister Enrod is sitting lotus-fashion on the matrimonial bed, stark naked except for a crimson turban on his head.

“Peace. I am Mister Enrod, the genie. And in celebration of your miraculous release from prison, I shall grant three wishes. One for you. One for your husband. And the remaining wish for myself.”

“Oh, good grief. Here we go again.”

“Well, why not celebrate? Now that Derrick has signed over his rights to the Calorifistibusticator and the Turbo Encabulator malfunction has been resolved by the sintra-soinoidal lettux of the tri-alpha-dereletor, and your impending divorce has been announced. That makes you and me business partners.”

Stay in touch for another installment of *The Seduction of Natalie* coming each week to this web page.

If you enjoyed this story and can't wait to see what's going to happen next (and who will win the U.S. election in 2020), then why not purchase the entire novella at [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07N2WRXN5 ?](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07N2WRXN5?)



“Bye ‘til next week...” from Natalie, Doris and Louise