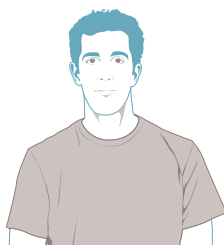


Nick and Choose { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

MAN TRAP

The truth shall set you free.



YEARS AGO, A GIRLFRIEND gave me a journal. Behind the cover, I taped the only *New Yorker* cartoon I've ever cut out. A couple sits in a restaurant.

The man says, "There's something you need to know about me, Donna. I don't like people knowing things about me." We break up on page seven. I stop writing on 19.

I find it hard to open up. Evidently, I don't even want future Nick to know his current state of mind. Personal questions just make me feel like an animal in a trap. I'd love the freedom of release. But that'd require chewing my foot off, so I just stall and bleed.

I need to be forced into candor, an opportunity that came courtesy of Laura Warrell, a local writer who runs the Man Panel, an alcohol-fueled interrogation of willing guys by dozens of single ladies. Warrell assured, "These are fantastic, attractive women in their 30s and 40s who just haven't had luck in relationships." My immature side pictured cat ladies brandishing glinting sewing needles. My empathetic, nearly-30 side RSVP'd.

Sipping on my third IPA, I considered the difference between candor and vulnerability. Before me sat about 40 women, two reporters and a cameraman. I was prepared to be honest, but this was naked, defenseless, "I-was-in-the-pool!" honesty. Luckily, I had five other men in the foxhole. When the first question was lobbed, we all paused, wondering who would jump on the grenade, "What makes you approach a woman?"

Our eyes glazed, and I could almost hear our collective consciences scream, "Don't say looks!" But to our credit, that truth was acknowledged. The man to my left—who no doubt owned a dog-eared copy of *The Game*—cited evolutionary biology, which would be his theme for the night. "Who here is sitting hunched with their arms crossed?" he asked. More than a few women raised their hands. "Exactly." I scooted to my right and watched dozens of shining eyes slowly narrow. I'm no body language expert, but those looks could've come with a parental advisory sticker.

As the panel progressed, the discussion—ostensibly for the benefit of the females—became an impetus for self-discovery. I found that my safety net is metaphor. Throughout the night, I turned to lions, amoebas and



traffic lights to make my points. "Well, at a bar or something, I consider everyone as a red light. If we lock eyes for a moment, you've changed to a yellow, and if we really lock eyes again, I have permission to advance." I blushed so hard my skin prickled. I don't know if it was because of my answer or the way I phrased it, but at least I was learning.

But were the women? We men provided simple truths. Why do guys hang out in bars? "Because I don't have draft beer at my house," posited a marketing exec. And for the most part, we presented the companionable version of our sex. Whenever our Y-chromosomes threatened to split us apart, the courteous, divorced father of two or the social worker with the godly voice steered us in the right direction.

But what did I offer? Trouble arrived with "What do you think women are looking for?" The suggestion of a sense of humor was met with approval, and my lonely heart soared at the response to my one marketable asset. But when the din died, I realized all I had left to offer was my confusion. A depressing thought when by yourself but oddly comforting in a room full of anxious women.

Collectively our answers were mixed, but with enough beer you could weave them into a lifeline. At the far end of the panel sat my antithesis—a muscled Southern firefighter/boxer/bartender in a mesh hat and tight "wing man" T-shirt. I'm certain that he has stories of eroticism that would make my inner Emily Post choke on her cucumber sandwich. Yet toward the end of the night, he said, "Don't fool yourselves. We're all scared as shit." The women nodded. We nodded. And for a moment, both sexes hovered around the one thing we all recognized as truth. ***

Picks for Nick? Send suggestions to nick@improper.com.

Impersonals

WE CAN WORK IT OUT

DEAR HOT GYM GUY: I hate going to the gym, especially in the mornings before work. I'm not a morning person. However, when I saw you behind the desk on my first day of early morning exercise, I must admit my cranky pants fell right off. I now consider myself a converted early riser who loves arriving at the gym when it's still dark outside. This is, of course, because I enjoy exercising my flirting muscles more than my abdominal ones. So, Hot Gym Guy with the beautiful blue eyes, thank you for giving me the extra push I need to work off that muffin top. Oh yeah, and I wouldn't be opposed to seeing you outside the confines of the gym walls one of these days.

Jennifer

To the beautiful, dehydrated blonde jogger in Allston/Brighton on Friday, Sept. 19:

It was extremely erotic watching you as you stood in front of my desk panting from the five-mile run. I offered you some water, and I wanted to ask for your number but thought it may have been inappropriate as you were just there to pick up your car. Was there a moment of attraction as I walked you out? Are you single? I would love to share the view of the Charles with you, and a picnic, as I don't think I could keep up jogging. If that interests you, send me an e-mail with the make, model and color of your car as the title.

fjh3910@yahoo.com

It was Sunday night, Sept. 26, and it was pouring rain:

I was exhausted and had just driven for the past five hours. I double-parked near my place on 6th and L Street in Southie to unload my car. I was trying to carry too many things as I was getting out of the front seat, dropping an orange folder of papers on the ground. You were driving toward me in a red car. I bent down to start picking the papers up, and you got out of your car and ran toward me to help me in the pouring rain. When I realized you were there, I looked into your eyes and just said, "Thank you." It was one of those perfect movie moments, but I didn't react fast enough, and maybe I was a little embarrassed. So I just ran to my front door, and you drove off. I would love to get your name, and even buy you a drink. There aren't that many truly nice guys out there anymore, but you're definitely one of them! Send me an e-mail, and I would love to find out more about you!

captimgigs@aol.com

Unrequited crush? Bad hair? Need to vent? Send your e-mails of love and spleen to impersonals@improper.com, or fax 617-859-1446.