The Failed Escape

*An excerpt from ‘Fool Me Twice’*

*A Memoir by Jules Hannaford*

As Truman snored lightly next to me in the bed, I ran through the litany of events that had caused me alarm over the past few days. The emotional and physical stress of the time I had spent with Truman had taken its toll on me. I was more nervous and anxious than I had ever been, I felt intimidated and scared, and it was difficult to think rationally. The drinking, the jet lag, and being gaslighted at every opportunity by this narcissistic man had messed with my mind and heart. I was conscious that I had a responsibility to myself and my daughter to rise above it and get out of this situation, and I needed to take action before it was too late.

Truman was truly a master manipulator: even now, I second-guessed myself and wondered if I was overreacting or being overly sensitive. All the kind and loving things that he had said to me swirled around in my head, and I searched for a glimmer of hope that my fears could be wrong and that maybe he was a great man after all, a man who could share my future. These contradictory thoughts and feelings are a real testament to the quality of the manipulation and coercion that Truman used on me. He was very good at this scamming business, and I was drowning in his artful exploitation.

Trapped in the hotel room, struggling with my confusion and fear, I made a hard and fast decision to get out. The bottom line was that I did not feel safe, and I was hopeful that I could still get away with most of my money, which I really could not afford to be losing to this conniving egomaniac. My heart was pounding out of my chest and I could feel it in my ears; I was afraid that he might actually hear it, too. I glanced at him sleeping next to me, and reassured that he was out cold, I carefully slid out of bed and started to quietly pack my bag. I tiptoed nervously into the bathroom and grabbed my toiletry bag, keeping one eye on Truman in case he stirred. I tucked it in the suitcase and slowly zipped it up, trying to not make a sound. Every movement had to be precise and slow. I did not want to knock anything over or make any noise to disturb his sleep. I formulated excuses in my mind at every point; if he happened to wake up, I would be ready for his inquiries as to what I was up to.

I crawled stealthily around to his side of the bed on my hands and knees. I was trying to breathe as quietly as I could. I felt the remainder of the money in the pocket of his jeans, which were on the floor. I carefully eased the money out of his jeans and slid it into my handbag. I carefully picked up the car keys from the bedside table next to Truman without making them jingle. My mind was a bit fuzzy from the alcohol, but I tried my best to keep a clear head. To me, my breathing sounded like a jet engine and my heart like a jackhammer on concrete. Would he hear me? Would I get caught? Can I do this? I was worried that Truman would sense my fears and wake up.

I was all packed. I had the money and the keys, and I sat on the bed shaking with terror as I tried to work up the courage to go. I was increasingly worried that if I didn’t get out quietly without waking him that I would be in grave danger because I had seen how volatile he could get over the smallest things. The thought crossed my mind that I could be murdered in Manchester and no one would even know where I was. I had visions of him chasing me down the hall, catching me at the lift and pummelling me to death. Or if I went down the back stairs, I was afraid he might catch me and kill me with his bare hands and no-one would hear me scream. I was running different escape plan scenarios through my mind and I did not know if I could go through with it, but I had to try.

Just before I took my chance, it occurred to me that Truman might hear me open the door, so I went over to try it first to see how noisy it would be. I tiptoed over and slowly manoeuvred the door handle downwards as gently as I could, in the hope that it would not make a sound. Suddenly, there was loud click as the door opened, and he stirred. I froze, panic rising in my throat. In a drunken stupor, he asked what was going on. My mind raced and the answer came to me on the spot: I said I was just putting the ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign out and I grabbed it, hooked it on the outside door knob, and shut the door. He responded that it was a good idea and he rolled over went back to sleep.

My heart filled my throat and my head buzzed with panic and despair. My plan to escape with the money had been foiled. I sat on the end of the bed and felt like I wanted to cry. All my bravado and courage seeped into the floor as I considered my next move while he snored away. I was not sure I could get out quietly enough with my luggage. Should I leave it behind and run? I also was not sure where the car was parked, as he had just been driving it. I would have to pay my hotel bill before I left as well, and this would give him time to catch me if he awoke and realised I was gone. Where would I go, as it was the middle of the night in a city where I did not know a soul? I just didn’t have the courage to go through with it with so many unknown factors that could hinder my escape.

I gave up on the plan and quietly put the money and keys back, opened my suitcase, and returned my toiletry bag. Defeated, I slid silently back into bed. I felt like I had failed, and that failure made me feel inadequate and pathetic. I could not slow my racing heart down; it took hours to regulate my breathing and heart rate. Even to this day, years later when I recount this part of the story to others, my heart pounds and fear rises in my belly, just like it did on that night. It’s a visceral reaction that goes right to the core of my being. I feel dizzy and start sweating; my heart pounds in my throat. It’s one of the scariest moments in my life, and it runs like a horror movie in my mind.

***Jules was caught in an internet dating scam.***

***Find out what happens to Jules and learn some online dating safety tips by purchasing her book***

***‘Fool Me Twice’ from Amazon.***

‘Fool Me Twice’ Synopsis

**From her carefree early life on a farm in rural South Australia to a marriage that was broken even before it began, then living as a struggling single mother and navigating a string of bad romances – this is the story of a woman whose lessons in life – and love – have been learned the hard way.**

Jules Hannaford grew up living an idyllic childhood, full of fun and adventures. She went to boarding school and had the time of her life excelling at sport, making new friends and getting in trouble due to her risk taking and mischievous nature.

When single motherhood called for her to step up and take charge, she found her passion in her career as a teacher, yet she struggled to find someone to share her life with. One day, the opportunity came for her to move across the world, she packed her bags, pulled her daughter out of school, and took the risk of leaving her sleepy home city for Asia’s mega city of Hong Kong.

From then on, life was different. Suddenly, she was in a job she loved, and she no longer had to struggle to make ends meet, but there was still one thing missing. Love.

Optimistic, Jules began internet dating, and unwittingly invited in a new kind of trouble into her life. Was it her trusting nature? Her naïveté? Or was it simply her desperate desire to share her life with someone that made her take the risks that almost cost her life?

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