

Beyond The Pale

By Matthew Turner

Ferdinand's Bedroom, San Francisco

"Ferdinand Foy, you are a vile human being!"

These are the first words I hear as I'm stirred from my sleep by a deluge of cold water. My breath shortens as the cold stings my skin.

What the hell is going on? Am I dreaming? Why does my head hurt so much?

"What the fuck?" I say, pushing myself into an upright position and wiping my face free of water. Blurry eyed, I squint and see a familiar figure before me. She's furious, fists clenched. "Becky? What the hell is wrong with you?"

"What's wrong with me? What's *wrong* with me?!" she shouts, stepping closer, pushing the empty glass into my chest. "What's wrong with you, you creep?"

My head thuds, it feels like chaos inside. I squeeze my eyes shut and rub my hands over my face, it tender to touch. "What are you talking about?" I groan.

"Who is she?"

"Who's who?"

"This whore!" she says, throwing her phone at my arm.

"Watch it," I say, picking it up, my focus adjusting. "You're acting insane."

She mumbles something under her breath and strides away, pushing some clothes in a bag and muttering. I look around the room. Bright light streams through the floor-to-ceiling windows, a blue sky with hazy white streaks on the other side. My head continues to rumble as the picture on her phone becomes clearer.

"Oh, her," I say, searching my wayward memory for who 'her' may be. "I'm not sure what her name is."

She throws a shoe in my direction. "You said you were at some work event you couldn't get out of. You cancelled dinner for it."

"I was at a work event."

She laughs, a manic laugh, her eyes locked on mine and her teeth gritted. “Do all your important work events take place at strip clubs?”

“It wasn’t a strip club.”

“No?”

“No. Just a club.”

“You’re a joke, Ferdinand. You don’t give a shit about anyone else but yourself. I keep thinking it’s going to change, that once you got the round of investment out of the way, you’d have more time for me. For us. For this.” She spits those final words out, a near hiss. “But you’ll never have time for me, or anyone else. You’re just a selfish, immature little boy.”

“Becky, calm down...”

“Calm down. Calm down!” She steps toward me again, her finger close to my face. “You came back here in the middle of the night. You woke me up, fed me some line like you always do, and had sex with me.” Tears swell in the corner of her eyes. A couple escape and roll down her cheek. “Is that how little you think of me?”

“Becky, look,” I sigh, my mind still trying to crank into gear.

“Did you sleep with her?”

“Who, the girl in the picture?”

“Yeah, the girl in the picture.”

“I don’t know. No. I was drunk. My head’s pounding right now, I can’t...”

She screeches and turns away from the bed, back to her half-packed bag. “You can’t even remember if you slept with her or not. And you came home and slept with me, and put your vile, disgusting little...” She doesn’t finish, just pushes her hands through her hair and shakes her head.

“Becky, come over here so we can talk this through like adults.”

“Adults?” she shouts, her face red with emotion. “You’re no adult, Ferdinand. You’re

a child, and you always will be. A selfish little child who only cares about himself and his precious business. Well, I'm done with you. I've been done with you for months, but I kept trying to make it work, because... because..."

"Because of the money," I interrupt, although I regret it before the words leave my mouth.

"You asshole!" Tears stream down her face now. "No, because I love you. At least, I tried to."

She picks up her bag and almost runs to the door, opening it and sliding through with no further words; no stopping to look back.

"Yeah, leave. Go on!" I shout, though my voice cracks. I hear more doors sliding as she works her way out the house.

"She's crazy," I mutter under my breath. "Call Christian," I say louder, to my ever-listening, voice activated room. I stand but regret that decision, too, as my head spins and almost sends me to the floor.

"Morning, Ferdinand."

"Who the hell took pictures of me last night and put them on Instagram?" I practically yell.

"You okay?"

"Who took the picture, Christian?"

"Er, that would be you," he says, the hustle and bustle of San Francisco in the background.

"Me?"

"Yes. You posted a bunch of pictures of some random girl at 2am."

"No, I didn't. I don't remember doing that."

"They were selfies. And they came from your phone. So..."

“Fuck.” I rub my temples and walk round the bedroom in circles.

“I take it Becky saw them.”

“You could say that.”

“And she...?”

“Called me a vile human being, threw water at me and acted like a crazy person.”

“I see.” A blared horn sounds. “How do you feel about that?”

“Whatever. Fuck her. It’s been, what, six months?”

“Almost a year, but...”

“Well, long overdue if you ask me,” I say, brushing thoughts of her aside. “What have I got on today?”

“You sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. What’s the plan for today?”

“I messaged you your itinerary already, so it’s waiting for...”

“I don’t even know if I slept with that girl. Who does Becky think she is, going off at me like that?”

“You can’t remember if you slept with her?”

“No, I might not have done. So, she was totally out of order, don’t you think?”

“Okay. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Hell no. I don’t want to talk about her. I want to talk about business.”

“You sure?”

“Yes. Where do I need to be first? Do I have a busy day ahead?”

“Yeah, it’s stacked.”

“Good. Where first?”

“Well, like I say, check your messages for your itinerary. Your first call is soon, but you don’t have to be anywhere until noon.”

“Okay. Great. And where’s that?”

“A recording studio on Union Street.”

“Why?”

“A podcast interview with a guy called Jordan Harbinger. Dorie set it up.”

“Oh, okay. And you’ve sent me my to-do list?”

“I have.”

“Good. I’ll call you when I’m ready and I’ve got my head around the day.”

“Okay,” he says, amongst voices chattering away in the background. “You sure you’re okay?”

“Absolutely. I should have moved on from Becky months ago.” I hang up and push the phone into my pocket.

I take a few deep breaths and look out of my window, toward the rolling hillsides and beyond to the Pacific Ocean. I close my eyes and try to slow my mind down, opening the door and stepping out onto the balcony. A blast of air rolls in with its fresh, salty taste. “Come on,” I whisper to myself, exhaling.

I pull out my phone and open Christian’s message.

One Union Studios, San Francisco

I stare at the vacant screen. I can't make out the colour of my eyes in my reflection, but I sense the blue isn't as piercing as usual. They sting, the skin around them tight.

My head thuds no more and my throat is no longer dry, but my eyes remain a work in progress; tired, strained.

I spent the morning on calls, vaguely listening to problems, issues, ideas and updates. I attempted to listen and care about what each person said, but my mind kept wandering to last night in its attempt to piece together the puzzle. Snippets kept returning, but they provided nothing of any substance.

I'm almost certain I didn't sleep with her, but I can't be sure...

Either way, Becky and I weren't working. It was only a matter of time before we called it a day, which may as well be now. She expects too much of me. I'm busy. I have a business to run, and each day so many people rely on me to make decisions. I don't have time for someone like her, who demands so much.

She's better off, and I'm better off. It's no big deal.

I sigh and lean back in the leather chair. "Come on," I mutter under my breath. "Where is this guy?"

The studio door opens and a man heads toward me. I assume it's Jordan.

'Hey, Ferdinand,' he says. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"It's fine." I lean forward to shake his hand. "What's the theme of this interview? Anything I need to know?"

"I do have some questions in mind, but I like to see where the conversation goes," he says. He sits in the chair next to me and picks up a pair of clunky headphones. "Your assistant already sent me some details, so I'll record the intro and outro separately. Right now, we'll dive into main interview, if that's okay with you."

"Sure."

The studio door flies open again and a guy with glasses rushes through.

Jordan introduces us. “This is my producer, Jason.”

“Hey, man, nice to meet you,” says Jason. He sits next to the audio mixer and pulls an even larger pair of headphones over his head.

“Alright,” continues Jordan, “I like to keep things formal and relaxed. But I also like to go deep and push for value. So, I’ll likely have follow-up questions as we go along. It’s all conversational, though.”

I nod. “Sure, no problem.”

“Cool. Jason has a few tests to run, we’ll be ready in a minute. I know we’re already a little behind, so we’ll kick straight in. That okay with you?”

“Sure. I’m ready.”

“Cool. So, how is everything with you, anyway?” he asks. “Must be an exciting time after the recent round of investment.”

“Yeah, it’s good. The whole business has changed a lot over the last few years. Lots of growth. Lots of new projects and some massive clients. The recent investment capped it all off.”

“I bet,” he says, looking toward Jason. “Okay, we’re just about ready. I think our listeners would love to hear the process you took to get that investment. You’ve gone through it a few times, so it will be good to hear what you’ve learned along the way.” He slides his headphones into place, over his combed-tight-to-the-right hair. Exchanging a quick look with Jason, he leans back in his chair and pulls the overhead microphone between us. “Ferdinand, welcome to the show.”

“Thanks. Happy to be here.”

“You recently completed a pretty serious round of investment for Contollo. It must be an exciting time around the office.”

“Yeah, it’s been an awesome few months,” I say, leaning back again and surveying the room. “We have a great team who keeps pushing us to the next level. A lot of my focus recently has been on investment, so we can keep growing and scaling.”

“That must be intense for you, being as young as you are. You’re, what, twenty-five years old?”

“Just turned twenty-six.”

“Right. You must have been working with some big-time investors this time around.”

“Yeah,” I say, smiling. I look at the screen over Jason’s shoulder and watch the audio levels pop up and down. “It’s cool. I have some great people on the board who have some serious connections, and I made some myself while at college.”

“And this most recent round of investment was for...”

“\$85 million,” I interrupt. I break into another smile as I think back to the celebrations of a few weeks ago, when we got the all clear after months of late nights and hustling.

“Right. I bet you have some big plans for it. But I guess what I’m really interested in is ... what does it feel like as a twenty-six-year-old closing that sort of deal? What was your role in it?”

“Well, I am the face of the company. I’m always part of those talks,” I say. “I’ve been doing this for a long time now. I closed a \$10 million round on my own at the end of my freshman year at Stanford. At that stage, it was just me and a few buddies who helped me with the coding and tech. It was a lot of fun, and I was lucky enough to meet some A-players at Stanford. One person would buy into the product, love it, tell someone else they knew about it, and it grew from there.

“By the time I finished my second year there I’d passed all the coding, backend and tech work to other people. That way, I could focus more on sales and investment. It’s crazy, but I remember thinking at the time how \$10 million was a huge deal. I couldn’t imagine going through the whole investment process again. But we did, so I dropped out of Stanford to focus all my energy on the business, and it led to another round of investment, this time for \$30 million. And it was huge, you know?”

Jordan nods.

“It was around that stage I started to make a name for myself, appearing on TV and in magazines and winning awards. It was crazy, and it all seemed to happen overnight. But it was tough, a real hustle and grind kind of story. Though I won’t lie, I

loved it. I've always liked to work hard and challenge myself to see how far I can take something.

"It's been fun ever since. Massive growth, huge progress compared to the early days: 200+ employees, an experienced board of directors who have worked with some of the best companies in Silicon Valley, over a million users, and a \$850 million valuation, which, if I'm honest, doesn't tell the whole story, not with this new round of investment.

"We have big plans, and between you and me, I think we'll be the next hundred-billion-dollar company that goes public," I add with a wink.

My hangover completely dissolves, the adrenaline igniting my insides with a fresh buzz, as each word flows from my mouth.

But Jordan just stares at me. "Okay. Cool." He arches a brow. "Thanks for the overview. But what about *your* role in this investment. Our listeners have businesses of their own, and some of them are growing fast and are desperately in need of investment. You've gone through the process three times: \$10 million, \$30 million, and now \$85 million. What's the process you took?"

"Sure, sure," I reply, clearing my throat. "Well, it's all about having the right meetings with the right people, and showing them your growth and plans. Like, what have you achieved over the last few years? What does success look like today? What will success look like tomorrow?"

"All investors really want to hear about is their return. If they invest now, what will it be worth to them in a few years? Why is your company going to be the next hundred-billion-dollar unicorn? What makes you unique? For us, we've always had a great product that works. From day one, we've created a platform that the modern-day business needs, bringing together their project management and team communication. Whether you have a team of 50 or 50,000, our platform helps everyone work at 100% efficiency.

"Our product works. Our marketing is sexy. And, without sounding too into myself, it helps that someone like me is the CEO. I'm young and I had huge success while still at Stanford. When I'm in a meeting with an investor, I remind them of Zuckerberg or Dorsey. Combine that with a growing company and a successful product ... we had a lot of people who wanted to invest in us."

I smile, expecting the conversation to move on as it always does during interviews like this.

Yet Jordan continues to stare, eventually rubbing his chin. “Yeah, but, dude,” he finally says, “like, what did you actually do? So far, you’re saying you get investment if you have the right connections, you have an already successful business, and you’re young. But what do you have to do to get the meeting in the first place? Don’t you have to put together some sort of pitch? And how long does all this take... is it one meeting and bang: \$85 million wired to your account?”

I force a laugh and grit my teeth. *Who is this guy? Why has Christian hooked me up with someone like him? What’s he thinking?*

“No, it’s not that simple,” I say. “It takes time. This last round of investment was three or four months in the making. And I must have had a dozen or more meetings, meals and drinks, and lots of late nights. It’s a dance... you know how it is.”

“Well, no,” says Jordan. “I can’t say I do. I’ve had meetings with investors before, but not for \$85 million.”

“Right, well, look, whether it’s for \$1 million or \$100 million, the dance is the dance. You’ve got to be good at talking, and you’ve got to tell them what they want to hear. If you do that, you’re in good hands.”

“So, what did you do during this whole investment round? Was your job just to have meetings and drinks?”

“There was a little more to it than that.”

“Like what?”

“Come on, man,” I say, looking around the room. “What is this? I didn’t know I was coming on here to get grilled. People are usually grateful to have me on their show.”

Jordan smiles. “Dude, no offence. I’m a fan of yours, and I personally use Contollo. I’m stoked to talk to you right now, but you being here isn’t doing me a favour. All I care about is giving my audience the best value possible. So far, all you’ve given me is a bunch of elevator pitches.”

I shake my head and think of all the other things I could be doing.

“Look,” he continues. “I value my time and I value yours. Most of all I value my audience. We don’t do fluff on this show. I want to make this interview work. But we need more than, ‘*know the right people and take them out for drinks*’. So, let’s rewind this a little. Other than being part of the meetings, what was your actual role during this investment?”

I take a deep breath. “Okay. Well, I reached out to my network, and signed off the proposals, and...”

“Anything specific you can offer our listeners in terms of real advice they can apply?” he asks.

I stifle a laugh. “If you’re in a position to raise investment like this, a lot of that stuff is probably already taken care of.”

“By who?”

“Someone on your team.”

“But when you raised the first \$10 million, you did it all yourself, right?”

“Sure. But it still came down to the relationships. That’s the main thing.”

“How did you get those?”

I pause. “I was at Stanford, bro. You get to know who you need to know.”

Jordan sighs and shakes his head. “So, your advice is to get into Stanford?”

“Come on, that’s not what I’m...”

“Ferdinand...” he begins before turning to Jason. “I think we’ll cut it there.” He looks back at me. “Dude, I don’t want to waste your time on an interview I won’t publish. But I’ll be honest with you, we won’t publish this.”

“Are you kidding me? This is a podcast, not *60 Minutes*.”

He smiles again. It rounds his cheeks and highlights his dimples. “Maybe not, but this podcast is my work. Everything we publish reflects on me, and that matters. I’m

sure you can appreciate that.”

I sigh. “Sure, but...”

“At the end of the day,” he continues, “all I care about is giving my audience the best value I can. That’s what sets us apart. It’s why I don’t see this as ‘just another podcast’. So far, you’ve offered no value. I mean no offence. But you’ve basically said you need to know the right people to get investment, and that you need to go to a school like Stanford to meet those people. Imagine listening to that, sat at home building your business from nothing... do you really think that will help anyone?”

I look at the floor.

“Jason, give us a minute, will you?” Jordan rolls his chair closer. He waits for his colleague to leave before leaning in. “Look, I say it how it is. I have a high standard for this show, and this interview hasn’t met it. I’m sorry I’ve wasted your time, and honestly, it’s on me. We usually stop this from happening during the application process. I guess we dropped the ball with you. I’m sorry about that. It’s my fault. But I have to do what’s right for the show.”

“Okay, fine,” I say, curtly. “Whatever.”

“We can arrange to do another interview later in the year, if you like.”

“Sure. Fine.”

“Okay. So, we cool?”

I place my hands on my thighs and push myself up. “Yeah. It’s just not what I was expecting this morning, that’s all. I have a hangover from hell, and I’ve done a thousand interviews like this before. I wasn’t expecting... you, I guess.”

Jordan smiles as he rises. “What can I say, I say what I need to.” He flicks through some loose sheets of paper on a nearby desk. “And look, if you do want to do this again in the future, we can. Next time we’ll prepare you properly and make sure you bring your A-game.”

I laugh. “You really do say it as it is, don’t you?”

“It’s the only way. I don’t see the point otherwise.”

I say nothing, my frustration brewing.

Kama Sushi, San Francisco

I look at my gyoza, five deep fried dumplings filled with vegetables. I didn't order them, Jordan did. I haven't had sushi for years. Steam rises from them, creating a haze between the two of us. Jordan picks at his own platter of raw fish, seaweed and whatever else.

I flick my chopsticks between fingers and take in the surroundings. Wooden cladding fills the room, reaching up each wall and across the ceiling. If it wasn't for the dark floor, this place would look more like a sauna than a restaurant.

Still, it's supposed to be the best sushi place in San Francisco. Jordan said as much as we climbed into our Uber, shortly after leaving his studio. I spent much of the short trip on the phone, asking Christian to cancel my next few meetings.

I'm not sure why I'm here. I'm even more unsure why I invited Jordan to lunch. Going by the look on his face when I asked him, he was surprised, too.

I'm curious. I'm used to people showing caution around me; they're often nervous when we first meet. But this guy... from the moment we shook hands he exuded confidence; at times, arrogance.

I haven't experienced it for years, not since Contollo took off.

Even now, he focusses more on his food than on me; appears oblivious to the silence between us. I sense that, of the two of us, I'm the more uncomfortable.

What's his deal? What the hell is happening today?

"So," I begin, "your podcast. How long have you been doing it for?"

He wipes his mouth and clears his throat. "Almost ten years. Although this current version is new. I used to host another show but left to start my own. The format is pretty much the same, though."

"That's a long time for a podcast. I take it you've interviewed a lot of people in that time."

He nods. "So, let's get to it, man. Why are we here?"

I laugh, slightly. “I’m wondering that myself. I guess I’m curious. I don’t meet many people who say it ‘as it is’, like you do.”

Jordan smirks. “I’m impatient and I have a low tolerance to bullshit. I don’t see the point in hiding from what I have to say.”

“How does that work out for you?” I ask.

“Honestly... fine. It upsets some, but most of the people I care about appreciate it; at least, respect it. I hate wasting time.”

“Yeah, I can respect that. There’s never enough of it to waste.”

He places his chopsticks on the table and leans toward me. “Look, I apologise for having to cancel the interview. It’s on me and my producer. We should have got it on-point long before you came on. You had a wasted journey, and for that I’m sorry. But I won’t apologise for making the decision I did. As I said at the studio, I value my audience above all else. So, if that’s why we’re here...”

“It’s not. I’m not entirely sure why we are here, but we’re cool.”

He nods, biting into a fresh piece of sushi. “Okay, good.” He takes a deep breath and looks through the glass door at the busy streets of San Francisco. “I was just expecting more from you, that’s all. I like to go deep. What you were offering... it’s just surface level bullshit that helps nobody.”

“You’re not one to build up someone’s confidence, are you?”

“You need it?” he asks, smiling. “From the sound of it, you have plenty of people around you that say yes.”

“What does that mean?” I say. “I don’t surround myself with ‘yes men’.”

“No?”

“No, I have people who challenge me. I’m the youngest on the board by a long shot. And we have a great team, they never tell me what I want to hear. I’ve seen as much rejection as anyone.”

“Yeah?” he says, an incredulous look across his face.

I lean forward a little. “You think I built an \$850 million company on hand-outs? I’ve had to hustle and grind the entire way.”

“So you said.” He picks up his chopsticks and grabs another piece of sushi. “Look, I don’t want to offend you, so, if you want to have a meal and chat about whatever, that’s cool with me. But if you want to get real... well, I have a few questions I’d love to ask you.”

“Like what?”

“Are you sure you want to hear them?”

I nod, although I’m unsure if I am sure.

....

Because I’m a writer, I love leaving you on the edge and
wanting more...

So, if you want to read the rest of this chapter [Click Here](#)

Don’t worry, there’s no optin or anything like that (just a direct link)
(and around 10 more minutes of reading time)