

CHALK OUTLINE CONFESSIONS

BY

DAVID L.

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INTRO

DAVID L.

So tell me again, Mrs. Styles, what kind of man would describe your husband? More importantly, why are you here? You don't have an appointment scheduled for today.

Please, Doctor Taylor, after all this time as my psychiatrist...call me Francine, or better yet, Fran. Everyone I know calls me Fran. I tell you that every session, and still you continue to be so formal.

Very well, Fran. I'll try not to be so formal in the future. Sometimes I can't help myself. I'm gonna need you to remind me about being such a stick in the mud. So tell me all about Maxwell. And start from the beginning.

My husband and I were married on Valentine's Day – 1995. Sometimes I think he strayed into the arms of others because he knew I couldn't birth any kids for him. I don't know. We talked about it and he said it was no big deal – but...

At the beginning, everything was great. We did everything together. I didn't work, and the few times I did, it wasn't for long. You know – with my illness and everything. We enjoyed doing things together. We didn't go on any extravagant out-of-the country vacations or anything, but we spent a lot of time doing a variety of things, such as walking through the park, cultural sight-seeing like the Statue of Liberty, and every now and then, visiting the museum or taking a trip to the zoo or something. But that didn't last too long. Before you know it, Maxwell was hanging out all hours of the night with his buddies, who were a bunch of no-good losers that had no life and nothing better to do than go out every night drinking and riding around town searching for desperate women. Sometimes, he was getting home just as I was getting up to start my morning chores.

Did you suspect Maxwell of infidelity? You've been hinting during our last few sessions that you never were quite sure if you could trust anyone in your life...and that you wish he didn't have to go out as much as he did.

Maxwell? Cheating on me? No. Not at all! I never suspected it for a moment. I mean, he was a big partygoer and all, but he was always like that, even before we were married. I remember when we were first courting – it was so funny.

How so?

Maxwell couldn't even get up the nerve to ask me for a dance when he and I first met. Our eyes made contact for the first time at this low-key nightclub called Club Ecstasy located in downtown Baltimore. He had to get one of his friends to come over to my table and tell me his name. I don't know. I thought it was cute of him...being all shy and what not.

'Excuse me, little lady...you see that man over there? He would love for you to go over and talk to him. If you don't, he is going to depress us all the way home. And if he does, you're going to be to blame!'

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That was Maxwell's best friend since the seventh grade. His name was Kent.

Was?

He died of cancer about a year and a half ago. Very sad. He was too young to die like that. He was also one of the few friends Maxwell had that I actually liked. He was the best man at our wedding.

Speaking of weddings, do you think I look fat, doc? I've put on quite a bit of weight since my younger years.

Do I look like an idiot to you, Fran? I'm a married man, remember? Any way I answer that question, it's the wrong answer! If I tell you that you look perfect, you're going to say that is a typical response for a man. If I tell you that you have put on some weight, you'll throw that chair that you're sitting on at me. So, I think that I will plead the fifth on this one.

I'm five feet, seven inches, and have all of my real hair. Maxwell used to tell me that I had the sexiest cheekbones he'd ever saw. At the gym, I occasionally get compliments on my trim figure and caramel-brown complexion. So why am I questioning how I look?

Don't be so down on yourself. You're grieving, and you have a right to grieve. I would think you were in denial if you didn't question yourself. Continue...

So anyway, I did finally go over and introduce myself to Maxwell. Truth be told, I was initially feeling his friend Kent. He was very smooth and knew how to talk to a woman. When I walked over, Maxwell was playing the shy role, and barely looked me in my eyes. He was turning me off from the very beginning. Five minutes into the conversation, though, he began to get up the nerve to display his winning personality. He became more outgoing with his delivery and seemed very sure of himself. It got me starting to think the whole shy role was a well-prepared plan to get me over there and feel sorry for him. I remember what he said to me that made me fall for him.

'Even though we've only been talking back and forth for the last few minutes, I'm confident you and I will be married within the next year. Two years – TOPS!'

And he was so right! We got married exactly twelve months to that day. We thought it would be romantic to have that day etched in our lives forever. It was a relatively small wedding, with about one hundred and fifty people – mostly his family and some friends from around the way that were actually more like casual acquaintances. We just celebrated another anniversary last month. I thought for sure we would share many, many more together. I would never have guessed it. I still feel like this is all just one bad dream...a dream I still can't awaken from.

So, from what you've told me, the phone call you got telling you that he was murdered by his male lover was totally out of character for him?

DAVID L.

I couldn't believe it when I heard it for the first time. I mean, I still can't believe it's true. Sure, Maxwell and I had our differences, and yes, we were having marital problems before he died, but damn...

Take it easy, Mrs., uh, I mean Fran. Would you like some tissue?

Yes, please, I would. It seems like this is all I do now.

Cry?

Yes. Sometimes, I wake up in the middle of the night and my pillows are damp from me crying. Sometimes, I just start crying in the middle of the day for no reason at all.

I want you to begin very slowly and try not to leave anything out. If you feel like you need to take a moment and regain your thoughts – well, that's fine, too.

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“Mrs. Styles, we need you to have a seat. We have some bad news of you.”

The bearers of bad news came in the form of two uniformed cops...Detective Davis and Detective O'Malley, two detectives the precinct sent over to give me the dreadful news about Maxwell's death.

Detective O'Malley was a Caucasian man and had a lot of gray hair, which led me to believe he had his partner by at least a few years. He was taller, as well, and had a mole on the side of his face. Detective Davis was an African-American gentleman with a keen sense of attire and a dimple in his chin. He was well built and looked as if he spent a lot of time in the gym. Another thing I noticed right away about Detective Davis was that he did not have on a wedding band.

They were both very understanding and thoughtful throughout the entire ordeal. Matter of fact, they did everything that could be possibly done to calm me down, because I was very hysterical that night. I was more than hysterical. I was delirious. I think I wrecked half of my place the next morning, and I had just redecorated the entire house! As far as Detective O'Malley was concerned, I was just another grieving Black widow unable to control herself. He did eventually warm up to me, and made me feel as if I wasn't just some uncontrollable bitch with an attitude problem. Detective Davis, on the other hand, was a walking, living, breathing GOD of sexiness! Although I wasn't thinking about how fine he looked at the time, that next morning, he was still on my mind.

“Excuse me, detectives, but what was Maxwell doing in a seedy motel like the Malibu Inn? Maxwell was a man of class. I just find it very hard to believe that he would lay himself down in a place like that.”

Both detectives looked at each other momentarily, and then at me. There was unwelcome silence for at least thirty seconds. The silence made me become even more hysterical.

“TELL ME SOMETHING! DON'T JUST STAND THERE LOOKING STUPID! EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT MOTEL ROOM?”

Mustering up the courage to speak first, Detective Davis grudgingly told me what I needed to hear.

“Investigations into your husband's murder are still underway, but we believe that the perpetrator knew your husband very well, and that in the beginning, the sex was consensual.”

“So he was messing around behind my back? I knew it! I couldn't muster the courage to admit it to myself, but I knew it all along. Is there any indication as to why she murdered my husband? Did he owe her money? Was Maxwell involved in anything illegal that I didn't know about?”

“She? The perpetrator is not a she; it is a he.”

“Impossible! Are you saying that my husband was gay?”

DAVID L.

“Not exactly gay, because after all, he was your husband. We do, however, strongly believe he enjoyed both males and females. He definitely did not discriminate.”

Sitting down to gather my thoughts, I tried to reason with myself what would make Maxwell cross over and begin messing around with men. Then I started thinking about my own well-being. Was Maxwell practicing safe sex with these alleged men? Could I be infected with the HIV virus now?

“Maxwell wasn’t the most masculine person in the world, detectives...but I find it hard to believe my husband had sex with other men! He watched Sunday night football and frequented the strip clubs with his buddies every now and then. He even went hunting once or twice...everything you men do on a daily basis.”

“I hate to burst your bubble, Mrs. Styles, but a man can be bi-sexual and still enjoy football, strip clubs, AND hunting.”

“Detective O’Malley, if I offended you, I apologize sincerely. I’m just saying that my husband never exhibited any signs to lead me to think he was straying – with a man or a woman. Would either of you care for a cup of tea?”

Both detectives nodded their head in approval. Just as the kettle began to boil, I envisioned my deceased husband laying under the sheets with another man at his side...a vision that prompted me to begin crying yet again. For one split second, I contemplated taking the scathing water from out of the kettle and pouring it onto my unsuspecting scalp. I felt so much pain internally that maybe, just maybe, the agony from the boiling hot water would extinguish the pain from within.

“Is everything alright in there?” Detective Davis questioned.

I was amazed how the worried tone of an attractive detective could bring me back to my senses. I watched Detective Davis’ every move from the reflection on my kitchen table – and what a sight he was! Although I just received word of my husband’s demise, I still had wants and desires.

Detectives O’Malley and Davis must have skipped lunch, because they finished off another cup of tea, a couple of slices of chocolate cake, and some home-baked cookies that I had made the night before. I offered damn near the shoes off my feet! Anything to keep them from finalizing their investigative report and leaving me to cry myself to sleep.

“We’re going to leave you now to get some rest, Mrs. Styles,” Detective Davis announced. “I think we got everything we need for now.”

“When will I hear from you again?”

“Give us a few days to see what we can come up with. If you don’t hear from us by the end of the week, give us a call at this number.”

Just as Detective Davis handed me a card with his name and number on it, I came to the realization that I had become a full-fledged widow. A widow who up until that day, never imagined thinking about taking out a life insurance policy for her husband.

CHALK OUTLINE CONFESSIONS

You know I possess two degrees, right?

One of them is in psychology, right? I remember you telling me once or twice.

One in psychology and one in sociology...degrees I haven't used in over five years because Maxwell wanted me to be a stay-at-home wife and tend to the needs of the house. A job I've always hated, and partly because it was a waste of my talents! I think the real reason I hated being home so often was because it was a constant reminder of sitting on my porch and watching the neighborhood kids leave for school and come home from school. An experience I've never had a chance to enact with any of my own kids.

As I took a seat in my usual spot on the porch, in the corner where I kept my favorite plants, I watched in despair as both detectives drove off and ran the stop sign at the end of the block. I had cried so much that last half hour my eyes were red and puffy, and I could no longer muster the energy to shed another tear. On top of that, my nosy neighbor from across the street witnessed the detectives driving off, and she started bombarding me with thinly veiled attempts to pry into my personal life.

When she asked if everything was alright, I replied by saying, 'No, no, it's not! I just received word that my husband was murdered last night.'

I once again went through the painful news that was just told to me minutes earlier, and just when I thought I could no longer produce tears, my eyes were once again immersed in water as I sat myself back down in my recliner to avoid passing out from grief.

From what I see sitting over here, Fran, you are a strong woman. You are not a quitter, and are very intelligent. Do you agree?

Thanks for the kind words, Doc. It's just that I have always depended on Maxwell to provide. I guess that was my fault. I stupidly believed we would be together forever...that nothing like this would ever happen to either one of us...in a million years.

How about we fast forward a little bit? Your neighbor from across the street is gone, and you've had time to take in the fact that your husband is not coming home ever again. Then what?

I spent the next three days in my house crying myself to sleep every night and feverishly looking for things to do around the house. Anything to combat the boredom of being by myself. I'm from a very small family, so being alone was something I was used to doing. But this was something new. It's not something I think I could get used to. Even though I spent many a day alone in my house, this was different.

How so?

Well, for starters, I knew eventually Maxwell would be home. True, it may not be until the next morning or even days later – but I knew he was coming home eventually. I still can't believe he is gone from my life!

I can only imagine how much pain it must be to lose a loved one.

DAVID L.

Every time I start to break down in tears, you're always there to give me some tissue, Doc. You're not too bad looking yourself now that I think about it. Let me take a good look at you. Six feet two inches, hazel eyes, bronze skin, average build, not too thick, not too thin, and what a surprise - meticulously dressed in a navy blue blazer and black trousers. And you got a wedding ring on...not that it means anything these days!

Focus, Fran. I am very happily married.

I thought maybe if I play my cards right, you would embrace my pity and ask me out for a drink after today's session. Yeah right! Who in their right mind wants a weeping widow bringing them down? Let alone an established psychiatrist with degrees lined up on his wall? Did you graduate at the top of your class, Doc?

Yes, I did. Fran – can we get back to what happens next?

Is that your wife in the picture? And next to it...are those three kids playing with the family dog? That damn picture is just another grim reminder of my shattered family...a family void of kids, and now – my husband.

The detectives you mentioned, Fran...that wasn't the last time you came face to face with them, was it?

Oh no! Not by a long shot! You see, Doctor Taylor, my husband was the man around town and he knew everybody. I wouldn't be surprised if Detectives O'Malley and Davis were using my husband's death for their own benefit. Think about it. They solve Maxwell's murder, and their stock at the precinct would skyrocket! It would be the defining moment of their lives!

I want you to stay focused on the facts, Mrs. Styles...uh, I mean Fran. Tell me everything that transpired from the time your neighbor walked back across the street...and please stop dusting off my end table with that tissue I just gave you.

After she left, I think I just went into a deep depression or something. For a while there, life was no longer as important. I even cut off communication with my best friend Jaime. He and I go back to grade school. He was the only kid in class that could outdo me in double-dutch!

So, anyway, I think I finally answered the phone after about the third day of going without any food or sleep. I knew it was Jaime by his high-pitched voice cursing me out on the other end of the receiver for not returning any of his phone messages. After my teary-eyed tirade, Jaime was knocking on my door within thirty minutes.

* * * * *

“OHMYGOSH! You look a mess! I'm here now, baby. We'll get through this together,” he said, wrapping me up in a bear hug.

Jaime can be very flamboyant at times, almost to a fault. Everything to him has always been stretched out of context – overbearing almost.

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“I’ll be alright. I’m no weak, sobbing housewife that you have to protect.”

“I know that, Fran. I just worry about you so much. Maxwell did everything around here...”

“So what are you sayin’? That I can’t do anything for myself? Who do you think held down this house when Maxwell was running the streets with them knucklehead friends of his?”

“I didn’t mean nothing by that, girl! I’m just sayin’...you don’t have to play no role with me. I’m here for you. I got your back is what I’m trying to say – that’s all!”

“I know you do, Jaime...I know.”

I don’t know what was worse at times – the realization that my husband would never return to me, or Jaime smothering me with all his sympathy. But, oh, what a sweetheart! He was impeccably dressed in a green and black plaid shirt, black denim jeans, black suede boots of some sort, and had finely-manicured fingernails. One thing about Jaime was that he always had to look his best. One thing I remembered vividly that day was the white mark on his pants. It was placed right smack on his inside thigh.

“What do you have on your pants? Lemme get something to get that stain out for you. It is driving me crazy!”

“What stain? Oh, it’s not what you think. I was using wite-out earlier. I probably just got some on my pants.”

“Well, I need to get rid of it. Don’t move.”

Jaime finally convinced me to get out of the house and live a little. We went over to a local bar for a few drinks, and after downing a couple shots of vodka, I felt much more relaxed – that’s for sure! I must have been feeling a little insecure because I could swear everyone was looking at me.

Although I had only been living in Maryland for a little over five years, I encountered some of the people that probably lived in any one of the nearby towns. The majority of the inhabitants in that part of town were Spanish-speaking, but within the last couple of years, more Blacks had been slowly migrating.

There was a rather diminutive Hispanic-looking fellow eyeing me from across the bar. Like he could ever get with me! I would put his little five-foot ass to sleep fast! On the other hand, there was a dark-skinned Dominican-looking fellow seated about six stools from me. He was holding a bottle of Corona in one hand, and before he had a chance to light up a cigarette, the bartender motioned to the NO SMOKING sign above the cash register.

“He is kinda cute, isn’t he?” Jaime whispered, handing me a strawberry daiquiri.

“Who? Over there? I’m not paying him no mind. Besides, I like my men just a little bit taller than five and a half feet. I’m a lot of woman to deal with.”

“Well, if you don’t want him, bring him over this way,” Jaime responded.

DAVID L.

I could tell he was serious, too. Jaime might be a little “sweet” and all, but when he sees something he wants, he usually gets it. Not that the guy checking me out was gonna give Jaime any play anyway. He was obviously infatuated by me and could not keep his eyes from off of me.

By the time Jaime walked off to the men’s room to “freshen up,” my pursuer walked gallantly over towards my direction. He was smirking pretty hard, as if he had a chance with me, and offered to pay for my next drink. I couldn’t help but notice he was wearing a wedding ring, but so what? What’s a little harmless flirting going to do?

Sometimes, Fran, flirting begins as being harmless, but if you’re not careful – it could lead to problems.

I just lost my husband for GOD’S sake! I needed something to do to get my mind off of Maxwell. Besides, by my third drink, he was starting to look kinda cute.

Jaime was giving me the “look” and I could tell by the way his brows were arched downward that he was mad because he was not getting any attention.

“Oh – it’s like that!” Jaime stated matter-of-factly.

“Lemme make it up to you and buy you a drink,” I responded.

My potential “tease” walked back over to his stool and sat down. I guess he figured that since I was there with Jaime, he must’ve been my man. I had never known Jaime to get jealous of another man checking me out, but I know he was fuming that day.

“Are you feeling that drink yet, girl?” Jaime questioned.

I nodded my head up and down in response to Jaime’s inquiry and ordered the next round. Refusing my money, the bartender told me that it was already paid for, and then pointed over to a gentleman seated directly across from me. He must’ve just walked in because I didn’t notice him at all. My radar must’ve been in overdrive because he was wearing a wedding band, also.

“I’m ready to go,” I announced.

“Why are you in such a rush? We just got here. Live a little.”

“This place is filthy. My shoes are practically stuck to the ground, and these glasses look as if they haven’t been washed properly.”

Jaime rolled his eyes in apparent disgust. As usual, I got my way, and we proceeded to leave the bar. I turned around in surprise in response to someone lightly tapping me on my shoulder.

“Maybe you will have time to have a drink with me next time.”

It was the same gentleman that paid for our last round of drinks at the bar.

“Maybe.”

“Can I call you?”

Silence.

“How ‘bout I possibly call you instead?”

“Possibly?”

CHALK OUTLINE CONFESSIONS

“I don’t usually take strangers’ phone numbers, and I recently lost someone very close to me. You should be glad that you are at least getting a possibly.”

We went our separate ways, but something told me that I was going to see him again one day soon.

You’ve been coming here for therapy how many years now, Fran?

Approximately two years next month. What does that have to do with anything, Doc?

I thought after almost two years of a client-doctor relationship, you wouldn’t lie to me in such an obvious manner.

Whatever do you mean? How did I lie?

You called him, didn’t you? I can read it all over your face!

Damn, Doc – you are good! Yeah, I called him. There, I said it. His name was Elric.

Was?

Yeah – our relationship was VERY short lived...but I’ll get back to him in a little while.

* * * * *

There must be more gay men in this fitness club than in the city of San Francisco, I mumbled under my breath as I headed to the women’s locker room. Two queers were holding hands and walking towards their car. I am greeted at the water fountain by an obvious “flamer” adorned with four earrings in each earlobe, extra tight fluorescent spandex pants, and a tank-top so tight I could see his heart beating.

I see the way you’re looking at me and taking notes in that damn notepad of yours. I’m no gay basher, and like I’ve always said in life – to each his own. But damn! Are ALL the good, straight men in the state of Maryland a thing of the past?

Uh, Francine...

I know, Doc – I know. Stay focused.

“Will you be signing up for the new water aerobics class, Francine?” The voice belonged to the fitness club trainer, Raul. He spoke with a heavy Russian accent, and practically had a smile painted on his face every time I encountered him.

“No, not today. I think I’m gonna stick to the exercise bike and some light free weights today. Maybe this weekend.”

For added measure, I include some much-needed stomach crunches in my exercise routine after my cardio workout. Ever since Maxwell’s passing, I was hitting the gym much more frequently. Anything to avoid being trapped in my house like a damn fugitive.

“Are you done with the machine?”

“It’s all yours.”

DAVID L.

Just as I responded, a handsome man placed himself onto the ab machine and began his routine. I couldn't help but notice his six-pack fighting to be seen from under his Nike tee-shirt. His nails were perfectly manicured and his teeth – impeccably white. He knew I was in awe because he was looking at me from the corner of his eyes looking at him. And just as I decided to call it quits for the day, I was approached shortly afterwards by the fine hunk.

“All the years I've been comin' to this gym, I've never seen you before. Why is that? By the way, my name is Logan.”

“I used to come out in the early morning. For the past couple of weeks, I've been coming later in the day.”

“Lucky for me.”

A smile instantly materialized on my face. You see, Doctor Taylor, I've never been a vain individual, and all of a sudden, I was being wooed by two men...in less than two days! Don't give me that look either, Doc! I'm slowly getting to the good part!

* * * * *

“Look at your nosy neighbor over there peeking through her windows. Why is she so nosy?”

“She is old and very over-protective sometimes, Jaime. Besides, her kids never visit, and sometimes I think all she has is me in her life.”

“Well, she gives me the creeps!”

“Ms. Swedelson? Don't worry about her. She is harmless. What couldn't wait that you had to come over here in person to tell me?”

“It's in today's paper.”

Before Maxwell's death, I used to read the newspaper daily like it was the Holy Bible itself. I mean, being home all day, I had plenty of time to catch up on all the news. With my eyes open wide, I flipped through and stopped at page three. The article read: **Man Found Dead In Motel Room Last Week Was HIV Positive! May Have Infected Others!**

“OH MY GOD!”

I immediately began to tear up at the second paragraph in which it speculated that my Maxwell allegedly passed the HIV virus to his male lover. Further into the article, it even went as far as to say that he may have known for several weeks of his condition.

“I gotta run, honey, but I'll check up on you after work. Okay?”

I didn't respond to Jaime. Mainly because I was so distraught that my lips could not form the necessary shape for the words to exit my mouth. Just as Jaime left, old Mrs. Swedelson walked over towards me with a paper under one arm and holding her hyperactive Shih Tzu in the other.

Francine? You okay?

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Huh? What? Yeah, I'm alright. It's just that it's been almost an entire month since Maxwell left me, and I'm still not over it. Let me continue, Doc...

Mrs. Swedelson knocked on the door, and I was so disoriented that I could not will my body from off the couch to unlock the door. That old lady knew I was home, and repeatedly knocked for what seemed like an eternity.

To tell you the truth...I didn't get any sleep that night. I sat on that damn couch for over eight hours thinking the worst. Was I infected with the AIDS virus? Did he know he was infecting others? Was his murder a result of revenge for intentionally infecting someone?

Eyeing a pair of scissors that I uncharacteristically left out on the counter days ago, I momentarily considered cutting myself to ease the pain.

But I didn't do it, Doc! You should be proud of me. I remembered something you told me a long time ago during one of our very first sessions together.

You cannot replace mental pain with physical pain, Fran. No matter how hard you try.

That's exactly what you said! But I took the scissors and cut out the article and hung it up on my refrigerator door...so I could glance at it and let it be a constant reminder of my ever-growing hatred for all lying, two-faced devils like my dead bastard-ass husband!

ALSO AVAILABLE BY DAVID L.:

DAVID L.

OVER YOUR DEAD BODY
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