

THESE

BROKEN

Scammed and Vindicated  
One Woman's Story

An exclusive excerpt

ROADS

DONNA MARIE HAYES

*Six*

# THE EYES OF HANDSOME MEN

2016

I CHECK MY REFLECTION IN MY POWDER COMPACT. I am pleased with the golden-brown glitter eye shadow, cat-eye inspired liner, topped off with a delicate, pink-colored lip gloss. People hurry along the Upper West Side of Manhattan in the biting January cold as I wait for Javier De Leon from the Mount Hope section of the Bronx to arrive for our date.

We have been talking, texting and exchanging pictures for the past two weeks after meeting on Our Time, an internet dating website for folks over fifty. My stomach is in knots. I distract myself with the stunning array of colors that seem to jump off the walls of the Thai and Vietnamese restaurant. The waiter places two ice-filled, amber-colored glasses of water and menus in front of me. I draw lines along the condensation on one of the glasses and smile at a canoodling couple in a booth by the entrance. I nervously check my compact

again and look down at my outfit: black slacks, black turtle-neck and my go-to olive-green leather jacket. Olive green is my favorite color.

I check my Fitbit. It is 6:21 p.m. He is six minutes late.

My cell phone pings:

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

6:22 p.m.

Javier De Leon

*Almost there. Few minutes.*

I am processing a feeling of annoyance for his tardiness when the door chimes announce his arrival. His eyes scan the restaurant and I wave, recognizing him from his pictures. He waves back, smiles and walks toward me. I smile and do a quick scan. He is nicely dressed in a cream-colored sweater with a single black-and-brown button at the collar, blue jeans and a black leather jacket. He is shorter than I like, but he has a handsome face and there is something about his kind brown eyes.

“Nice to finally meet you, Donna. I am so sorry for being late,” he apologizes and reaches out his hand.

“Nice to meet you as well, Javier.” I shake his hand and he sits across from me. I take in his brown eyes and caramel skin.

Okay. This isn’t so bad.

The waitress hurries over and places a complimentary bowl of fried onions between us.

“May I get you something to drink?” she asks, looking down at us with a wide grin.

Javier orders a ginger ale and I, my go-to drink, seltzer with cranberry juice. I push aside the fried onions and the glass of water to pore over the menu. I feel his gaze.

“You are very pretty.”

I look up from my menu with an awkward smile. “Thank you. You’re not so bad yourself!”

We giggle.

By the time his grilled pork chops over white rice and my sautéed eggplant with jasmine rice arrive, it is clear that we have quite a bit in common. He is also twice divorced, but with two sons, one about the same age as my daughter. He is only a year younger than me. We both love “Chandelier” by Sia, “All of Me” by John Legend, and “Loving You” by Minnie Riperton. He has an adorable obsession with Anita Baker and attempts to sing “Sweet Love.” A vocal disaster ensues, and we cackle.

I feel him studying me as I unwrap my knife and fork and lay the white paper napkin across my lap.

“On your Our Time profile, you wrote that you are a managing director for an international investment bank. What exactly do you do?” He unwraps his straw and dunks it in his glass of ginger ale.

“I am a senior human resources generalist.”

He frowns with confusion.

“Hiring and firing. That sort of thing,” I explain dismissively.

“Firing people must be tough,” he says, wrinkling his face.

“It’s no fun, but it goes with the territory,” I reply, and take a delicate bite of the sautéed eggplant, even though I want to shovel it in. I am starving.

“So, what do you do?” I search his face.

“Well, I don’t have a big fancy job like you,” he grins. “But I am a private chauffeur and I have had Hoda Kotb, Tracy Morgan and Geraldo Rivera in my car. I was giddy when I met Hoda.”

He chuckles and removes his phone from his pocket. He leans in across the table to show off the pictures of his celebrity passengers. He smells good. His hair is jet black and thinning in the front and his lashes are thick and long. I study his hands as he swipes from picture to picture. Clean and neatly trimmed nails. My eyes move back to his face.

I like him.

As we eat, he somehow manages to guide the conversation back to my job and the stock market. The topic sends him into a verbal and animated tizzy, as he rambles on about ETFs, CNBC, interest rates, IPOs, foreign exchanges and how skilled he is at picking winning stocks.

"I work in financial services and I don't share half your excitement about the markets," I observe. "So, tell me something." He looks up mid-bite. "Why aren't you working in the financial services industry if you have such a strong passion for the markets?"

"I guess I could if I really put in the effort," he replies. "I tried when I was younger, but I didn't want to make all the cold calls. That was stupid. It's too late now, because I am an old man, too old to start from the bottom." He dabs the corner of his mouth with his napkin and smiles crookedly. We finish our meal and he pays the bill with cash and asks if I would go with him to a lounge in the village. I feel fairly confident that he is not a serial killer, plus we are out in a public space.

"Well, since you asked nicely," I grin at him.

We get off the C train at West Fourth Street and walk along West Third until we are standing in front of the Fat Black Pussycat.

"What kind of place is this?" I ask, looking curiously at the large blue-and-white neon sign.

"Oh, Donna, it's just a lounge!" he chuckles as he takes my hand and leads me into the large, shadowy space with muted colors. Paintings and photographs line the walls and a large vintage chandelier hangs from the ceiling. Candlelight flickers on each table as couples nuzzle and whisper. Soft jazz plays in the background. I follow him down a small set of stairs to the lower level toward a back room hidden behind a dark red curtain. It opens up to a smaller space that boasts oriental

rugs, lanterns and chairs with red velvet cushions that mimic royal thrones. We settle into a plush, orange-colored sofa and a waitress takes our order. We both order seltzer and cranberry juice with lime.

Neither of us drinks alcohol, which makes me think that we are going to get along very well. We talk. We laugh. He teaches me salsa, the bachata and dirty Spanish words. Four hours later we climb into the back seat of an Uber and head uptown. The driver pulls over at the corner of 86th and Lexington.

We hug, and he hops out and blows me a kiss. I settle into the soft leather of the SUV and watch him descend the subway stairs until he is out of sight. A smile creeps across my face as the Uber pulls away from the curb and I replay the date in my mind. His strong arms around my waist as we danced, the air thick with tenderness. The butterflies that fluttered around in my belly each time his soft brown eyes settled in mine. His voice. His face. I am beyond excited for our second date.

The doorman holds the door open for me with a smile. “Goodnight, Miss, Hayes. Have a good night.”

“Thanks, Joe. You do the same.” I check my Fitbit. It’s 12:45 a.m.



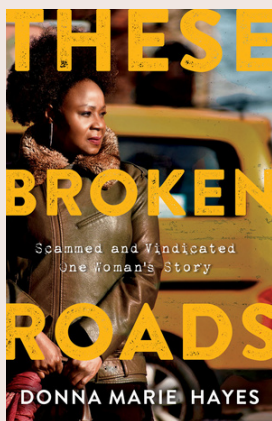


## **These Broken Roads: Scammed and Vindicated, One Woman's Story** By Donna Marie Hayes

Donna Marie Hayes had a fortitude and smarts. She already survived so much. In this gripping memoir, Hayes recounts the story of her impoverished Jamaican childhood and eventual immigration to the United States at 14. She weathers hardships, including a strict church upbringing, family abandonment, and marriages fused with domestic violence. Then she breaks free as a single mother. Decades later, Donna is educated and at the top of her game in New York City. Her career is soaring on Wall Street and she is starring in her own one-woman show off Broadway. Yet at the peak of her triumph, she is scammed and robbed of her life's savings by the "love of her life" who she meets on an online dating site. The mastermind was not the usual faceless online fraudster, hiding behind a computer screen in a faraway land; rather, he slept beside her for a year and a half, pretending to be the love of her life. This is the story of how that woman rose yet again to find her power, making the scam and her choice of such a man the last run along the broken roads of her past.

### **MEMOIR**

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