

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT ... AN EXCERPT FROM

## SEARCHING FOR STEELY DAN

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Eddie Zittner is a 29-year-old New Yorker who is obsessed with Steely Dan. And his life is going nowhere. He's an aspiring writer who has stopped writing. He's bouncing from one dead-end job to another. His marriage is on the rocks.

February 29, 2000: When Eddie goes to purchase a copy of The Dan's new CD, *Two Against Nature*, he finds that the clerk at the music store has failed to hold a copy for him. He goes home and vents a little anger at his wife, who vents right back and throws him out of their apartment.

Eddie takes to the sidewalks of Manhattan, looking for solutions, looking for inspiration, looking for The Dan, and ultimately finding ... well ... read the book!



## PROLOGUE

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 1993

**S**PRING *has sprung, and those breasts are about to spring right out of that dress.*

Eddie Zittner eyed his wife-to-be from across the room and contemplated his good fortune. Alison was beautiful, and she loved him, and all was right with his world. He leaned against the wall, arms folded across his chest, and savored the aroma of beef and onions cooking downstairs. His younger brother, Mark, would get an eyeful of Alison's cleavage with his pot roast and mashed potatoes.

"That outfit sure looks good on you." He was getting aroused.

Alison turned and smiled. "That's three times you've said that today."

Sunlight picked up the blond highlights in her hair, and Eddie was reminded of the "Madonna Look" that Alison was trying to cultivate. He watched as she continued to wander. This was the first time she'd been upstairs in the Zittner home.

"The room is so bare, Eddie. Where is everything?"

"At my apartment, Alison."

"No stereo, no CDs, no nothing."

"They're all at the apartment. You've seen them. You've been there a hundred times."

During his years at Rutgers, first in a dorm and later in an apartment, he had moved most of his “essential stuff” out of this room, this bedroom—the room where he’d spent his teenage years. But he had left some memorabilia, mainly posters on the walls celebrating past glories of the Mets and Knicks.

He watched Alison as she moved to the dresser and nodded at two scruffy-looking men captured smiling in a picture frame. “Who are these guys?”

“Fagen and Becker. You know, Steely Dan?”

“That’s it? Just these two guys? You never told me it was just two guys.”

He moved across the room and grabbed her from behind, wrapping his arms around her belly as he pushed himself gently against her. He peered over her shoulder at the picture. “It was just those two guys, and whoever they hired to record with them.” He felt himself getting harder.

Alison took his hands in hers, turned around, and began to grind her hips against his. “I’m beginning to feel your Steely Dan.” She rubbed her husband-to-be through his khakis. A minute later, his pants and underwear were around his ankles, and she was down on her knees, kissing him.

“Let’s do it,” he said, predictably enough.

She looked up. “Here? In your bedroom?”

He leaned against the dresser, breathing hard. “Yeah. We have time.”

“Your family is downstairs!”

“So what? Dinner won’t be for another hour.” He glanced at his watch. “Thirty minutes, anyway.” He pulled her up by her shoulders and maneuvered himself onto the bed, pulling her down on top of him.

“Eddie,” she whispered, “they’ll hear us.”

“No, they won’t. Anyway, they know we’re sleeping

together. Christ, Alison, we're getting married in June." He watched as she leaned back and contemplated his penis, which was pointing due north. She leaned over and kissed it, then tweaked it with her tongue. He groaned as it twitched uncontrollably.

"Get on top of me."

"Wait a minute, Eddie. I've got to pee. Where's the bathroom?"

"Down the hall."

She kissed him one more time, prompting another series of twitches. "I'll be right back."

"Just hurry, please, Alison?" He watched as she eased off the bed, tiptoed to the door, opened it, slipped into the hallway, and closed the door behind her.

He lay there, penis throbbing, staring at the ceiling. He looked forward to being married to "the love of his life," marital bliss, and the regular sex that went with it. In fact, he wished they hadn't waited; they could have been married months ago. But her parents—both sets of parents, actually—had insisted they wait until after graduation. *So be it.*

He and Alison had been seeing each other for more than a year. They would graduate from Rutgers in June, both with bachelor's degrees, his in journalism and hers in marketing. A week later they'd be married—*finally!*—right here in Saddle River, at the synagogue where he'd had his bar mitzvah almost ten years ago. They would start out in near poverty, not that it mattered that much to him. They had already signed the lease on a starter apartment in Somerset, a town just down the road from Rutgers. The Kendall Commons was a huge complex of brown buildings, concrete driveways, and telephone poles. *Not very exciting, but cheap enough.*

He looked down at his penis. A few drops of liquid had

formed on its tip. He felt like he was about to explode. *Where was she?*

Then he heard the bedroom door open, and he watched, stunned, as his mother stuck her head in and sang out, “Dinner is ready.”

“Mom!” He quickly flipped onto his stomach, flinging droplets of semen against the second-story window.

Elaine Zittner blushed, eyes round as saucers, but she recovered quickly, and smiled knowingly. “It looks like someone is ready for dessert.”

# CHAPTER 1

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2000

*The man is a giant, with the brain of a reptile . . .*

Eddie's thoughts trailed off, then rebounded with renewed frustration. *I can't believe this is happening. I should find the manager and make a big stink about this.*

But he wasn't the type to find the manager and make a big stink. And he knew it. His wife and mother had both told him to be more assertive, more times than he'd care to remember, and he was getting better at it. But outright confrontation was something he avoided.

"I'm sorry," the man repeated, leaning toward him from behind the counter.

At just under six feet tall and maybe 175 pounds on a good day, Eddie knew he wasn't a physically imposing person. He thought of himself as average. And the man across the counter, Reuben, had him by at least three inches and fifty pounds. Eddie knew he was no he-man, but he was no weakling, either. He stood as tall as he could. He would not be intimidated. Not this time.

"Reuben. You know me, Reuben. How could you do this to me?" He held his voice steady as he spoke. He remembered Reuben's name from that day two weeks ago when he'd reserved a copy of the CD. Not that anyone could miss

the nametag pinned to Reuben's shirt, with letters that were, what, maybe two inches high?

Reuben looked puzzled. "How do I know you?"

"You took my reservation for the CD. Right here at this counter. See?" He held up the yellow copy of the reservation slip. "Your name is right here."

Reuben straightened and took a half step back, as if to avoid the truth. "Hey, I write up a lot of reservations. This is a busy store. Look around you."

He glanced at the line of people, just a few feet away, waiting to check out. Wearing bulky winter jackets, they looked like a herd of animals—buffalo, perhaps—swaying back and forth, threatening to encroach on his space. He would be trapped and crushed under their hooves, or squashed against the wall. *The key word is survival . . .*

The store was an oversized shoebox, he thought, a grey concrete turd of a building plopped down in the middle of a shopping center parking lot. No, you couldn't even call it a shopping center; it was just an overgrown strip mall. Everyone was funneled up to the front of the store and jammed into the one checkout line that was open. *This had to be the crummiest building ever constructed.*

"If you're so busy, why don't you have more registers open?"

"Well, partly because I'm standing here talking to you."

"Reuben, we're talking about *Two Against Nature*. Now what am I gonna do all week? Talk to my wife?"

"Why are you so hot on this particular CD?"

"It's Steely Dan, Reuben, Steely Dan. It's their first CD in twenty years."

"Who is Steely Dan, anyway?"

"You don't know who Steely Dan is?"

"I'm sorry. Never heard of them." Reuben forced a smile,



dimly recalling his training in customer service. “When were they popular?”

“In the seventies and eighties; the early eighties, anyway. And now, of course; they made a huge comeback in the early nineties. How old are you, anyway?”

“I’m twenty-four,” Reuben replied, staring at his tormentor with a mixture of disdain and amusement.

“Twenty-four. I would think that at your age, you might take an interest in the stuff you’re selling. If you don’t know anything about music, then why work in a music store?”

“Uh, I work here because of the big money they pay me. Can’t you tell?” Reuben was more than a little perturbed. “And how old are you?”

“Twenty-nine.”

“Hey, if you’re twenty-nine, you must’ve been born in, what, 1970 or 1971? So how come you like this old Steely Dan stuff?”

*How do you explain to someone why you like one rock group and not another?*

He had discovered “The Dan” as a teenager. He remembered the exact moment, sitting in his room doing homework, when he heard “Deacon Blues” on the radio. It had mesmerized him. He bought the album, *Aja*, the next day, and began playing “Deacon Blues” over and over. His parents, driven half crazy, bought him a set of earphones to preserve what remained of their sanity. It must have been the spring of 1984, he thought, just before his father had gone into the hospital, and his mother had gone a little crazy. And just before he had started to play keyboard. He had immersed himself in Steely Dan’s music.

Patience pretty much gone, Reuben continued, looking for a way to end the conversation: “Look. Like I told you before, we got ten copies of the CD in this morning’s delivery.

We were sold out in an hour, before we had a chance to check the reservations.” He held the white copy of the reservation slip in his hand.

“I guess those CDs just jumped off the shelves.”

“I said I was sorry. Look, we’ll get another shipment on Thursday. I’ll do the best I can for you, Mister . . .” Reuben glanced at the piece of paper. “Mister Zittner. Come back Thursday.”

Eddie dropped his head and sighed, a gesture intended to gain a little more sympathy that only succeeded in making him look pathetic. But, in any case, it was too late. Reuben had already turned, and was stuffing the reservation slip into his shirt pocket as he moved behind the counter, heading toward one of the idle registers. He watched as Reuben stopped, squared his shoulders, took a deep breath, and switched on the overhead light. A half dozen people broke free of the first checkout line and formed a new one in front of him.

Eddie pushed through both lines and walked out the door, scanning the parking lot for his car. It was a rotten day, typical of late winter in northern New Jersey, and he frowned as he walked through the freezing rain. *Fuck work, I’m going home.*

## CHAPTER 2

For Alison Zittner, it had been “one of those days” at the office. The boss—the president of Jacobs Advertising Agency—had called one of his rare communication meetings. All hands were to be in the conference room by eight-thirty sharp. Helga, his Hitler-like executive assistant, had sent out an email imploring everyone to be on-time so the boss could make his eleven o’clock flight. No doubt heading for his cabin in Vail, Alison thought, or, maybe, this time, a quiet getaway on some tropical island. *The man had it rough.*

The meeting had started with a few interesting slides about the Tri-State media market. That had been followed by an avalanche of useless drivel: introduction of new employees, birth and birthday announcements—thank God there were no death announcements—and the inevitable warning about pilferage of office supplies. The meeting had mercifully ended just before ten.

She’d spent the next two hours polishing the latest revision of her Account Penetration Plan. Then, over lunch—your choice of ham, turkey, or roast beef sandwiches—the actual presentations. As the newest account executive, she’d been asked to present first. Her presentation, which over a period of weeks she’d worked and reworked and reworked until she was sick of it, had gone well. At least she thought it had gone well. But her boss had punched a hole in her ego with his well-worn phrase, silently mouthed by her colleagues as he verbalized it: “You’re forecast isn’t aggressive enough.” She

got the usual action item: revise your plan and have it ready for next week's torture session.

She'd snuck out at four, navigated through the early stages of rush hour traffic, and dragged herself into the apartment at a quarter to five. Once home, she dropped her handbag, briefcase and overcoat, made her way into the master bathroom, stripped off her clothes, and stepped into a spray of steaming hot water.

Ten minutes later, a revitalized Alison Zittner stepped out of the shower, grabbed a towel, and quickly dried herself off. *What to do with my hair?* Let it hang, she decided; she'd blow dry it later.

She turned to look at herself in the full-length mirror. Twenty-nine years old—just months from The Big Three-Oh—and still attractive, she thought. She struck a few poses, and poked at her hair with her fingertips. *I need a touch-up . . . the blond highlights are fading fast.* She ran her hands over her breasts—*still firm*—and belly—*still firm*—and finally around her hips and butt—*which, admittedly, needed work.* She made a mental note to get out and run this weekend. She glanced at the clock: five-fifteen. Eddie would be home in a couple of hours.

They'd been at each other's throats for weeks. What was it? Was she losing patience with him? Or was he just wallowing in self-pity? Was he depressed, or was it lack of ambition? He'd been a knight in shining armor, that first day they'd met at Rutgers. Tall, thin—well, not really thin, he was pretty well-built; “wiry” would be a more accurate description—with deep brown eyes, and long black hair that curled around his ears. He reminded her of Russell Crowe in *L.A. Confidential*: handsome in a rugged kind of way. Not too polished. Rough around the edges. But, in seven years

of marriage, she'd come to realize that her husband was no Russell Crowe.

Eddie Zittner guided his car through the maze of buildings and parking lots at the Georgetown Woods, the large complex he and Alison had moved to three years ago. Parking near their apartment, he noted for the umpteenth time that there were no woods anywhere in sight, just a few threadbare trees scattered around. *What ever happened to truth in advertising?* Georgetown Woods was nicer than Kendall Commons, he thought, but not by much. He unlocked the front door and stomped into the tiny entryway, scattering mud over the throw rug.

He heard his wife shout: "Eddie, is that you?"

"Yeah," he said as he walked into the kitchen. Alison, in sweater, jeans, and sneakers, was sipping wine while stirring a pot of last night's marinara sauce. He spotted a box of linguini on the counter, next to a half-empty bottle of merlot. "Why, expecting someone else?"

She picked up on the attitude, but decided to let it go for the moment. "What are you doing home so early?" Eddie's shift at the drugstore ended at seven. He normally arrived home at about seven-fifteen.

"I went over to pick up that new Steely Dan CD and they didn't have it. They didn't hold a copy for me."

*The end of the world is at hand.* She knew that he had reserved a copy, and had talked about how great it was going to be having a new Steely Dan CD to listen to, which would have made this one boring week for her. She didn't know whether to be relieved or sympathetic or what. She put down the glass of wine and stared at her husband, arms crossed over her chest.

"What does that have to do with work?" she asked.

“I had a run-in with the guy at the music store, so I just said ‘the hell with it’ and came home.”

“Oh, fine. I’m sure your boss will understand.” She turned back to the marinara sauce.

“Do you know what’s wrong with this country?”

*I’m sure you’re about to tell me.* “No, what?”

“It’s the incompetence of the working people.”

“Do tell.”

“Yeah . . . incompetence.”

She could see that he was working up a head of steam. “Could you be more specific?”

“Yeah. It’s the clerical help. They’ve got their heads up their asses.”

She decided not to mention the fact that Eddie himself was clerical help, albeit a lead sales associate. “Go on,” she said.

“Specifically, clerical help in music stores, and more specifically, a fat piece of shit by the name of Reuben who didn’t hold a copy of that CD for me.”

*Correct that: a boring week with an unhappy husband.*

“Are you going to sue the bastards?” She raised her eyebrows, and thought about tapping the ashes off an imaginary cigar a la Groucho.

He scrunched his face. “Funny,” he replied.

“Eddie, why didn’t you just go to another store?”

“What makes you think other stores will have it?”

“Oh, yeah, excuse me, all the Steely Dan fans have already rushed right out and snapped up every copy in town. What was I thinking?” She watched as he sat down at the table. “Are you going to call your boss?”

“What for?”

“Uh, maybe to keep your job? Which is where you’re supposed to be, right now?”

Eddie muttered a few words to himself. To her, it sounded like “fuck it,” which she’d heard way too many times in the last few weeks. She put the spoon down, turned off the gas burner, walked over to the kitchen table and leaned over the chair opposite him.

She spoke softly. “Eddie, this is bullshit. You’ve got to stop with this obsession about Steely Dan. All the time, Steely Dan, Steely Dan, Steely Dan. I can’t stand listening to that music anymore. I want you to call your boss, right now, and tell him you got sick and had to go home.”

He just sat there, head down, tapping the silverware with his fingers, staring at a pattern of yellow flowers on the placemat.

His wife raised her voice. “Eddie. Do it.”

“Alison . . . I don’t think I’m going back.”

“Eddie. Another job you’re going to walk away from? How many is that now?” He continued to tap on the silverware. His wife sat down opposite him.

She spoke softly again. “Eddie, you know I love you.”

He looked up and smiled, trying not to look like a whipped dog. “I love you, too,” he replied.

“But Eddie,” she continued, “love is not getting us anywhere. What’s happened to you? You used to be interested in writing. I haven’t seen you sit down and write for months now. All you do is listen to that music, or fool around on your keyboard.”

His head dropped, and he went back to staring at the flowers.

“Eddie. Why don’t you try to get a job at a newspaper? Or a magazine? You have a degree in journalism, for Christ sake.”

They had had this discussion—argument, really—many times. Why wasn’t he using his degree? Or, why had he

gotten a degree in journalism anyway? And then the inevitable: why not take some evening classes and learn how to do something else?

She leaned toward him. “Or why don’t you go back to work at the bookstore?” He could tell she was trying hard to control her voice, but an edge had crept in. “Jerry’s the manager now, isn’t he? Call Jerry and get your old job back.”

Jerry was his best friend, and had been promoted to store manager a few months ago. Alison liked Jerry. They had even gone out a few times together, he and Alison with Jerry and whoever he was seeing at the time. Jerry was a fun guy—“the life of the party,” Alison liked to call him—and she thought he had a serious side to him, too. Career oriented, she thought. *He was manager of a fucking bookstore, for Christ sake.*

He snuck a peek at her. Her cheeks were bright pink, on their way to cherry red. She was about to come unglued.

“Eddie.” Her voice rose. “What about the bookstore? What about writing? Or are you just going to sit around here and vegetate all day?”

He looked up at her. “Vegetation sounds good. I could probably be good at that.”

She stood and moved away from the table. “Eddie, why don’t you get out?” Her eyes flashed with anger. “Why don’t you just *get the hell out?*”

“Maybe I will,” he said, and regretted it immediately. He heard her mumble something that sounded like “I don’t care anymore” as she turned and walked out of the kitchen. Uncharacteristically, she kept on walking. A few seconds later, he heard the front door slam, and then a car starting, backing up, and roaring away.

He had fucked up, and he knew it. A wave of fear shivered through him. It wasn’t like Alison to get so angry. For a fleeting moment, he wondered what his life would be like



without her. Then, pushing the negative thoughts from his mind, he got up, walked over to the stove, and turned the gas burner back on. At least he would have something to eat before he left.