

# The Liar's Guide

Roberta Lee

## Chapter 1

A visionary lies to himself, a liar only to others.

Frederick Nietzsche

Being awakened from an erotic dream at four A.M. by a ringing telephone no longer surprised Laura Greggor, which is not at all the same as saying that it made her happy.

Curled up contentedly in pale pink satin and lace pajamas, her long auburn hair a silken drift across a soft nest of plump pillows, she sighed, reluctantly pried open her eyes and groaned. The space around her bed--all soothing tones of muted peach and elegant art deco curves--was lit only with a delicate wash of moonlight. Reaching for the jangling phone, the cool night air that had poured in the wide-open windows overnight chilled her bare arm.

"Jack? Damn it, it's--"

"You need to send me cash," he said, "maybe five hundred, six actually, or seven--seven would be better, that's about

right--and cancel all my credit cards right away, immediately. You have to do that now. That can't wait. I mean right now."

Jack Marin was pacing as he spoke rapid-fire into the phone, back and forth and back and forth again, weaving a compulsively repetitive path in the cluttered hotel room. His words beat out a staccato as relentless as a nail gun:

"Not all my cards, only the ones I carry. Then get me on a later flight. Three o'clock would be awesome. Nothing earlier than noon. Four might be better. Unless that's really expensive. Email me some airfares. As soon as you get in the office, call Hal and tell him I need to get in that buyer's face in Columbus. He's the broker on the account, he's supposed to get me an appointment, damn it! Tell him to get off his ass and do his fucking job. Hey, and while you're at it, tell him to read his damned email! And call my guy, my appointment. In Dallas. That guy . . . you know, John . . . something. The Dallas guy. Ask if I can take him to dinner, not lunch, because--"

"Jack! It's, like, three o'clock here. As in, three o'clock in the morning."

"Actually, it's four your time," he said, sounding delighted by that fact.

"Do you really think that extra hour makes a huge difference? Because I'm not thinking so."

"Well, you're always talking about how you just love the morning and love getting up early. You're this perky little early-riser freak. So what's the big deal, dude? It's morning. Get up." His voice remained astonishingly cheerful.

"Four o'clock isn't the morning," Laura said, and her voice was distinctly *not* cheerful. "Four o'clock is the middle of the freakin' night. *Dude*. Where are you calling from, anyway?"

"You booked the trip, you airhead, I'm in Phoenix. Phoenix is *amazing!* Phoenix is totally awesome."

Her comments hadn't dimmed his buoyancy, not one bit. There was a sound in the background that Laura could barely decipher. She sensed that he was opening a bottle of beer.

"Fine. Phoenix. Where in Phoenix are you, exactly, and where is your wallet, which clearly is no longer in your possession?"

This was greeted by a thoughtful pause. At least, what passed for thoughtful when it came to Jack. Laura suspected that he was actually choosing a story, and trying to decide how much of the truth and how many lies he wanted to tell her this time. She heard the unmistakable sound of swallowing; he was definitely drinking something.

"I'm in my hotel." His voice sounded wary.

"Fuck it, Jack! It's fucking four A.M., you need cash and to have your cards cancelled and all you're willing to tell me

is, 'I'm in my hotel'? I don't think so, pal! What's going on? Why not, just this once, surprise me, tell me the truth--"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." He cut her off, then laughed. "For one thing, the truth is highly overrated. And I forgot, you hate anybody waking you up. You were dreaming, right? That's why you're so pissed off, I interrupted some hot sex dream. Were you dreaming about getting laid? Were you dreaming about me? You were dreaming about sex with me, right?"

Laura shook her head, not fully believing she had heard him correctly, and put the phone out at arm's length, looking at it pleadingly, as if begging it for some sort of sensible response. It was a patently silly gesture, but she found herself doing it often when she spoke to Jack on the phone.

He was right, of course, but that was a fact she had no intention of admitting; she had been dreaming, and it had been a sex dream and--the part she especially didn't want to admit--it had been about him.

"It's not always about you, Jack," she said. "Life. Life is not always about you."

"No, but sex, sex is often about me. Women all want me. You know that." She could almost hear him shrug, and she could certainly hear him laugh. "You do, too."

"Yeah, yeah, in your dreams, pal," she said, and--finally--she found herself laughing, as well. "In your dreams you are

desired by all females, including me. By the way, which female desired you so much that she stole your wallet?"

"Well, if you've already figured out that much, then you also know I really need you to help me out," he said. "Because--if you don't--I'm totally dead."

"What did you just say?"

"You want me to start from the top?" he asked. He suddenly sounded exhausted.

"No, forget it. I understand what I need to do. It's just . . . that part about my having to help you, or else you'll die. Someone said exactly the same thing to me in the dream you interrupted just now."

"Dreams!" he said. "Who knows what they mean?"

A continent away, she sighed, wishing she knew exactly that: what her dreams meant.