In November of 1999, after a 72-day stay, I was discharged from a psychiatric hospital. It was a pivotal time for me, having just turned 19 during my hospitalization. Before my admission, my life was quite different. I worked at a restaurant located in a bustling strip mall, a place teeming with life and social interactions. There, I was well-liked by many of my female coworkers and other girls from the surrounding shops. This popularity, however, seemed to be a thorn in the side of my male colleagues. They had their sights set on garnering the attention of these girls, and my presence was inadvertently foiling their plans.

Several months after my return from the hospital, roughly between eight months to a year later, the restaurant where I worked welcomed a new addition to our team—Megan. She was around 19 years old, the same age as me at the time, and notably attractive. Beyond her looks, Megan possessed a distinctively feminine and exceptionally charming personality, making her stand out and captivate those around her. Her arrival introduced a new dynamic to our workplace.

However, amidst the evolving dynamics at the restaurant, one of my colleagues, Kevin, set his sights on Megan. Determined, he concocted a plan with the help of another coworker, Danny. Their scheme was manipulative at its core, with the end goal for Kevin to win Megan's affections—ultimately, to persuade her into a sexual relationship.

Danny's role in this plot was pivotal. He positioned himself as Megan's confidant, a trusted friend she could confide in. Yet, this trust was a facade. Every piece of information Megan shared with Danny, thinking it was in confidence, was relayed to Kevin. This betrayal was strategic, feeding Kevin the insights he believed he needed to succeed in his pursuit. The entire operation was underhanded, exploiting Megan's trust to further their scheme.

In their pursuit, Kevin and Danny employed a particularly deceitful tactic—they began to spread false and damaging information about me, specifically focusing on my mental health and the reasons behind my hospitalization. They painted a picture of me that was not just unflattering but grotesquely exaggerated, likening me to the likes of Hannibal Lecter. This comparison was not only malicious but played into the prevailing stigmas associated with mental illness and the hospital I had been admitted to. At that time, misconceptions and biases about mental health were rampant, making their lies all the more harmful and isolating for me.

By spreading these unfounded rumors and exploiting the stigma around mental illness, Kevin and Danny strategically isolated me from Megan, effectively turning her against me before I could even interact with her. Their actions weren't just about pursuing Megan; they were preemptively ensuring that I wouldn't interfere with their plans, as I had inadvertently done in the past with others. This manipulation served their interests by eliminating any possibility of competition or disruption from my end, leveraging misinformation to cement their advantage.

At the restaurant, I found myself often openly discussing my mental health, including periods where I self-diagnosed, at one point even labeling myself a psychopath. This stemmed from a sort of mental health hypochondria, where I was constantly suspecting myself of having various conditions. Despite these claims, my colleagues would invariably counter my self-diagnoses with reassurance, insisting I was far from what I feared. They highlighted my kindness and concern for others, arguing that the traits I considered abnormal were, in fact, quite human and universal. Their efforts to correct my misconceptions were relentless.

However, I noticed a stark shift in their behavior whenever women were present, particularly during our less busy moments. Often, we'd retreat to the game room for pool games during downtimes. It was in these scenarios, especially when attractive female customers appeared, that my colleagues' attitudes would subtly change. They began to encourage me, both subtly and overtly, to share my thoughts on my mental health and self-diagnoses.

Part of me realized what they were attempting to do; they likely believed that these discussions would make me less appealing to the women around us. Despite recognizing their motives, I found myself either unwilling or unable to stop. This could have been due to a lack of understanding of the full implications of their actions or perhaps a deeper indifference stemming from my own struggles.