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The man who hated women

Sexually abused by his own mother, Andreas Marquardt went on to become a notorious Berlin pimp. But then he found redemption



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In every bar in the world there's the girl who'd rather not be there. She's the one standing awkwardly in the corner, dressed in baggy, unflattering clothes. Dragged along by her friends, she is a reluctant participant in a mating game that she has no confidence in winning. And because she lacks confidence, men rarely approach her. But for men like Andreas Marquardt she once represented the ideal woman: shy and malleable, a sitting duck.

In the old days – that is, from the 1970s through to the early 1990s – Marquardt was one of Berlin's most notorious pimps. His prostitutes walked the streets while he kept a close eye from inside a red Ferrari. A former karate champion, he was paid by local mafiosi to enforce deals on which people had reneged. For a while he knocked heads together. But he saw his chance to get rich in the barely regulated world of prostitution. By his mid-twenties, Marquardt was conforming solidly to the stereotype: heavy gold chains glinted from inside his silk shirts. He wore only £20,000 Rolexes. "I lived in a pretend world," he says.

Twenty years later Marquardt, now 52, has published his autobiography (in German). And it is Ferrari-less – as a Swatch-watch-wearing, Renault-van-driving reformed man – that he greets me at the gym that he now runs with his long-term girlfriend, Marion. He is not charming, as one might possibly expect, but gruff, and prone to long, not altogether unboastful, rants about his past. Even now the man has charisma, but not the kind of presence that once enabled him to trigger the awe and often masochistic obeisance of a corral of prostitutes. "Ten years ago," he says, "there is no way I could have sat down with a woman to have a conversation. Women weren't human to me. They were just objects,

animals to be exploited and dismantled.” Marion agrees. “He was a very bad man,” she says rather quietly.

Marquardt describes in his book how he ironed his bank notes and paid for the red Ferrari in cash; how he set himself apart from other pimps by cutting his hair short, thereby resisting the trend for ponytails then fashionable among criminal elements of Central Europe. The revelation, three quarters of the way through, that the book is ghost-written by Marquardt’s psychotherapist made me think of the lukewarm comedy *Analyse This*, in which Robert De Niro plays an unconvincing mobster. But despite its inadvertently comic moments, Marquardt’s story is about violence, and particularly violence against women. His brutality had a motive. Besides making money, his goal in life was to “break women with my will, make her realise that, because she was a woman, she was worth nothing at all”. From his late teens, he says: “I waged an uninterrupted campaign of hate against women.”

His description of how he targeted ordinary women and reduced them to shells of their former selves undermines common preconceptions about the kind of people who end up working in the sex industry. At any given time during his 20 years as a pimp, he controlled an average of 17 prostitutes, and a total of, he thinks, 50. Most had embarked on their adult lives not as homeless drug addicts but as ordinary students or secretaries – and, in one case, a doctor. What they shared in common was a profound lack of self-confidence: “I learned very early in life that women who are shy or inhibited were also weak and vulnerable, and that I could turn that to my own advantage,” he says.

His tactics were meticulous and always the same: bombard her with compliments, persuade her that he loves her, shower her with gifts, get her used to the money, then make her dependent as a prostitute. Often he would persuade a “new love” that he had fallen on hard times, couldn’t she take out a loan on his behalf? Broke and in debt, she was then forced on to the street or cajoled: “You have such a beautiful body. Just think: we can get out of this financial mess in no time.”

To keep the prostitutes he controlled subdued, he would often beat and humiliate them. But more effective than threats or violence was the constant dangling of an illusory future together. There were drives through affluent areas of town, during which he would point out the five-bedroom house “we’re saving up for. Soon we’re going to settle down there and start a family.” Unbelievable as it seems, women would be strung along for years by their own blind longing for a happy ending. Many convinced themselves that theirs was a legitimate relationship, and that Marquardt, although often cruel or inexplicably absent, was faithful.

“They were needy, and that’s why they allowed themselves to be so easily manipulated. They wanted someone to protect them, a strong man that they could lean on. Some were looking for a father figure which, of course, was another trap,” he says. “It’s hard to say exactly how I damaged these women, but by the time I was through with them, only very few were capable of going back to whatever they’d been doing in their old life”.

The turnaround came in his forties. Marquardt had already served one jail sentence when a prostitute took him to court for causing grievous bodily harm. He was convicted for eight years and lost all his money. It was in prison that he finally came up against the past that had put him here: “I hated her [the prostitute who had taken him to court], but I wasn’t really seeing her. The person I saw standing there laughing at me was my mother.” His behaviour grew increasingly violent until he was eventually forced on to the psychiatrist’s couch.

Marquardt breaks something of a taboo when he describes in the book how his mother sexually abused him from the age of 6. She became intensely jealous of her adolescent

son's girlfriends and deliberately undermined his fledgeling relationships. It was only after prolonged therapy in prison that he was able to trace the roots of this jealousy back to the point at which his parents split up and his mother started sharing her son's bed.

The description of what follows next – seven years of sexual abuse – is particularly difficult to read, perhaps because it is perpetrated by a woman. But Marquardt is there with the statistics. In Britain an estimated 5 per cent of child abusers are women, and he hopes that his book, the proceeds of which are going to a children's charity, will make people more aware that "women are not angels. They can be like men. If you know a mother sharing a bed with a young boy, you have to ask yourself why."

When his mother died three years ago, Marquardt buried her, without remorse, in an anonymous grave. Three months before her death he confronted her, frail and wheelchair-bound, but received no explanation, only an apology which, he says, he will never be able to accept.

What does he feel more, guilt towards the women whose lives he wrecked or hatred towards his mother? "Hate. I was a child. How can you do that to a child?" he says a little helplessly. "Maybe something happened to her in her own past, maybe she was sick. But why did she have to take it out on me? As a ten-year-old I felt like I was 20." With vehemence he blurts out: "I still hate her today."

Victims of abuse often say that one of the most difficult things to come to terms with is guilt, the feeling of having acted as a willing participant in a complicitous relationship. A young child is unable to tell the difference between sex and affection, just as some adults may be unable to differentiate between being cared for and being controlled. "I have never come across a prostitute who hated being controlled," says Marquardt. "It was the opposite: the more often I checked up on her, the happier she was. They confused being controlled with being looked after."

As an adult he sought to make women "feel like dirt" but, of course, there were plenty who already felt that way with no help from him. Those standing in the corner in bars, for example. Women like Marion.

Marion, a kind and quite beautiful woman in her forties, now helps her husband to run his gym and karate studio. When he was in prison she transformed the venue into a viable business. Marion is the real hero of Marquardt's book because, in telling his story, her boyfriend exposes Marion's past, too. They met when she was still a shy and uncertain 17-year-old, training to be a secretary. Had their paths never crossed she thinks that she would have led a "totally normal existence", married, perhaps had a couple of children. Instead she became infatuated, and was soon handing over every penny she made working as a prostitute. Over the years she lost many of her friends when they became exasperated by her refusal to leave a man who treated her so appallingly. Why on earth did she stay?

"Emotionally, I just couldn't leave," she says. "I fell for him right from the beginning, always convinced that I could see the good in him. You'd have to make a relationship out of the crumbs he gave you and build it up into some sort of a fairytale. Your friends would be going on holiday with their boyfriends or moving in together and you'd make these excuses.

"When he was cruel I would say to myself 'well, perhaps he had a bad day, if I try harder it will get better'."

Marion says that she feels relatively undamaged by her past life, because she saw herself as "more of a social worker" who tried to understand her clients, their loneliness and their sexual quirks.

Astonishingly Marion bears no resentment towards him. “You can’t hang on to the past,” she says carefully. “In any relationship there’s a point at which you decide, ‘This is the person I want to be with and I’m going to stick with him through good and bad times’.” She considers herself fantastically lucky now that she has got her man. Surely it’s the other way round?

“She’s the best thing that’s happened to me,” Marquardt says abruptly. “For years I repressed everything, I was lonely and very alone. Like a robot.”

He’s happier now with his gym and steady girlfriend. How about the other 49 women in his past life? “Maybe they’ve found peace, a good man, started a family, or maybe they’ve gone off the rails,” he says. If he’s honest, he’d rather not know. “I did a lot of things that probably tipped them over the edge. I’m sorry about it and if I could turn back the clock and make it better, I would.”

If he feels guilt about these women, it isn’t palpable. “I don’t think most of them would want to speak to me again. But I wish them well. I hope they’re OK.”

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