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## THE SELF-HURT GUIDE

How to **FAIL** to not get mistaken for a bum. How to develop  
How to masturbate at work. How to **FAIL** to make  
parents proud of you. How to go insane and garner voices in y  
head. How to **FAIL** to do something productive all day. How to  
healthy environment. How to locate and find yours  
paying rent to a slumlord. How to **FAIL** in love. How to get us  
your girlfriend's ex. How to have a sordid past. How to **FAI**  
way to the bottom. How to live on a couch. How to avoid yo  
a sh... How to **FAIL** to extend your family tree. How to  
a couch. How to acquire the STD that's right for you. How  
commercial material. How to **FAIL** in bed. How to be  
unted by demons. How to be aimless and uninspired. How to  
people off, alienate yourself, and end up alone. How to have a  
negative net and self-worth. How to network. How to **FAIL** to

a novel by AARON GOLDFARB





HOW TO FAIL | **THE SELF-HURT GUIDE**  
A NOVEL BY AARON GOLDFARB

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Also by Aaron Goldfarb: THE CHEAT SHEET

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## FUCK **YOUS...**

Oh I've got plenty...

# PART ONE | **HELL'S KITCHEN**

<b>1</b>	<b>How to Fail to Write a Cohesive Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>How to Fail to Not Get Mistaken For a Bum.....</b>	<b>7</b>
	Footchapter Two   How to Go Insane and Garner Voices in Your Head	25
<b>3</b>	<b>How to Fail to Make Your Parents Proud of You.....</b>	<b>43</b>
	Footchapter Three   How to Fail to Write Commercial Material	67
<b>4</b>	<b>How to Fail to Do Something Productive All Day .....</b>	<b>73</b>
	Footchapter Four-A   How to Develop an Addiction	93
	Footchapter Four-B   How to Masturbate at Work	97
<b>5</b>	<b>How To Fail to Live in a Healthy Environment.....</b>	<b>103</b>
	Footchapter Five-A:   How to Locate and Find Yourself Paying Rent to a Slumlord	113
	Footchapter Five-B   How to Have Fucked Up Neighbors	119
<b>6</b>	<b>How to Fail in Love .....</b>	<b>123</b>
	Footchapter Six-A   How to Get Usurped By Your Girlfriend's Ex	153
	Footchapter Six-B   How to Have a Sordid Past	157
<b>7</b>	<b>How to Fail All the Way to Rock Bottom.....</b>	<b>173</b>

# PART TWO | UWS

<b>8</b>	<b>How to Live on a Couch</b> .....	<b>197</b>
	Footchapter Eight   How to Avoid Your Ex in a Small Town	211
<b>9</b>	<b>How to Fail to Extend Your Family Tree</b> .....	<b>217</b>
	Footchapter Nine   How to Fail in Bed	229
<b>10</b>	<b>How to Get Laid on a Couch</b> .....	<b>239</b>
	Footchapter Ten   How to Acquire the STD That's Right for You	257
<b>11</b>	<b>How to Be Haunted by Demons</b> .....	<b>261</b>
	Footchapter Eleven-A   How to Be Aimless and Uninspired	287
	Footchapter Eleven-B   How to Piss People Off, Alienate Yourself, and End Up Alone	295
<b>12</b>	<b>How to Have a Negative Net and Self-Worth</b> .....	<b>303</b>
	Footchapter Twelve   How to Network	319
<b>13</b>	<b>How to Fail to Be Normal</b> .....	<b>331</b>
	Footchapter Thirteen-A   How to Be a Hypochondriac Without Health Care	341
	Footchapter Thirteen-B   How to Grow Apart From Your Friends	345
<b>14</b>	<b>How to Fail to Fail</b> .....	<b>351</b>
	Epilogue .....	<b>361</b>
	<b>How to Write a Successful Book and Become Rich</b>	





*"Failure is not a single, cataclysmic event. You don't fail overnight. Instead, failure is a few errors in judgment, repeated every single day."*

– Jim Rohn



## PART ONE | **HELL'S KITCHEN**



# 1 | HOW TO FAIL

## TO WRITE A COHESIVE INTRODUCTION

They say some men see things that are and say, “Why?” Robert Kennedy dreamed things that never were and said, “Why not?” Well, I see my life unfolding and I just say, “Why me?”

I shit where I eat. I dip my pen in the company inkwell. I bite the hand that feeds me and I never take my vitamins. Often, I’ll drink beer before liquor and I always take the easy way out. I frequently take “No” for an answer, but I rarely say “No” to offers of greasy food, cheap drinks, and sleazy sex. I hemorrhage the little money I have on frivolous items that are only tangible ‘til they are poured down my gullet and filtered through my liver. I rarely capitalize on promising offers. And I’m lazy. My God, am I lazy. Oh, yes, I am fucked up.

I am thirty years old and a failure. But lest you worry, dear reader, dear successful reader, I wasn’t always that way. I once was a success: a high I.Q., honors classes, a high school class presidency, athletic skills and accomplishments, science fair awards, writing prizes, a happy disposition, a winning smile, 99th percentile SAT score, “Most Likely to Succeed” senior year, the love of family, the adoration of

friends and the opposite sex, and scholarship acceptance to a top fifty American university.

My success continued in college where I graduated *magna cum laude* (Latin for “only drinks five nights a week,” *summa cum laude* meaning “only drinks three nights a week”), won more plaudits for my writing, co-edited the school’s “alternative” newspaper *The Cock of the Walk*, made countless friends and acquired sexual partners, and, if I wasn’t the BMOC, then I was at least the “Kinda Large Guy on Campus.”

My life used to be so promising and I so idealistic. Positive of my future success. And, in fact, I kinda still am. I still have wild delusions of grandeur, wealth, fame, writing relevancy, and Scarlett Johansson on my arm at some cool club I’m currently not successful enough to know about. It is this megalomania, though, that led toward a life of failure.

Ruining your life is easy when you’re the kind of arrogant fuck that always thinks he’s a day away from pulling himself out of the doldrums and becoming a legend. Nothing else matters. Oh yeah, and you’re frequently intoxicated. Living “in the moment” and not sweating the small stuff is a really bad thing, I must say.

I haven’t given up on life per se, but I certainly behave that way. There’s a subtle difference between the man that lives like each day could be his last and the man who lives like there’s no tomorrow.

If I committed suicide my note might read: “I was bored.” Though I couldn’t afford a gun and have no idea where to buy hangman’s rope (Bed, Bath, and Beyond?) I don’t even have a bathtub to electrocute myself in (Manhattan apartments are tiny!)

Current failure doesn't mean I will be a failure forever, but it's certainly possible. Probable.

In the decade since college I have failed at everything. Job-wise, earnings-wise, savings-wise. I've failed at snagging frequent sexual congress, at finding love, at keeping love. Failed at maintaining old (now "successful") friendships, at holding down jobs, at making a livable wage, and at even coming close to achieving my dreams.

I've squandered promising chances with good girls and risked sexually transmitted disease acquisition from bad girls. My body has morphed from a taut athletic figure into one of decadence and sloth. Cheap one dollar drafts "decadence" and ten cent wings from four-to-seven "sloth." I've gotten into trouble with all sorts of authority figures. Disappointed my loving parents too. If not yet, soon, very soon. Soon as I answer the phone next time they call.

But failure can be fun, you say. At least it ain't that hard. Succeeding's hard work, but ruining relationships by not answering the phone because you're on a three-day bender, man, that shit's simple.

In many ways, I am to be admired. You have your 62" HDTV and your lovely fiancée (save the first weekend in May '11!), your good job you never call in sick for, your purebred Cornish Rex hairless hypoallergenic cat Sadie, and a promising future of sober, lights off, missionary position, rhythm method, 500 thread-count, Saturday-nights-only "love-making." And, I'm sure that's all well and good, but wouldn't you like to be a little bit of a failure?

Wouldn't you like to take out cash advances with 25% APR interest charges just to get wasted? Wouldn't you like to know the fear inside after a condomless screw session



with a girl you met at three in the morning in your local urban environment's dive bar section? Wouldn't you like to not remember saying the wrong thing to the wrong person and wake up in the morning with inexplicable bruising? Wouldn't you like to have a mug shot? Wouldn't you like to spend all day Saturday alone watching an *Intervention* marathon on A&E instead of going to Bed, Bath, & Beyond with your fiancée ("You can speak at the wedding, Stu, so long as you promise to not drink beforehand, and absolutely swear you'll not say anything offensive. My eighty-nine-year-old grandma's gonna be there, dude.") Wouldn't you like to just skip shaving every weekday morning?!

Wouldn't you like to have the love/hate relationship with yourself that I have with myself?

Even if one day I become a success, I will always live the life of a failure. I was predestined to be one. I will always be brash, stupid, and impetuous. It's in my chemical makeup. I will frequently be chemically-impaired in environments where that is shunned. It's in my DNA. I will often screw up shit that's going good. My RNA, too! Even if I become a success one day, all that means is my fall from grace will be even further. Funnier too, no doubt, to the passive outside observer or the hack who writes my biography.

"Shoot for the stars because even if you miss you'll still end up in the sky."

Fuck that. I'd rather be a failure. I don't really like air travel much either.

And, that's the best part about it. As a failure, things can't get much worse. I'm not a ticking time bomb. There will be no climactic point at which said bomb explodes and I kill myself accidentally or get busted for shrooms at Newark

International. I'm not Len Bias or Darryl Strawberry or Courtney Love or Keith Moon. I'm just your garden variety fuck up. I'm haunted by demons but they aren't very potent demons. They're lazy, failure demons just like their possessor. They stand on my left shoulder and goad me into drinking massive amounts of booze, stupidly spending my little money, falling ass backwards into unpleasant intercourse with fatties and uglies, screwing up job interviews, and calling the wrong kinds of people "douchebag."

Thus I write this—the first ever—Self-Hurt book, the utter opposite of a Self-Help book, to teach you how to ruin your life as much as I have ruined mine.

There are hundreds of thousands of self-help books released per year. I'm almost surprised there's not a Self-Help Annex at Barnes & Noble. Millions of tomes on subjects such as gaining self-confidence to conquering your inner demons to mastering women to not being afraid of your cat. Where has it gotten us? Nowhere. Everyone's as fucked up as ever. Unconfident, haunted by demons, bad with chicks, and scared of Sadie. So, what do you have to lose by not following my advice?

William Randolph Hearst said (I'm too lazy to look it up verbatim): "I am a man that could have been great, but wasn't." (Actually, maybe Joseph Pulitzer said that. Or was it Charles Foster Kane? Wait, he's not real, is he?)

Well, I am a man that could have been somewhat decent, but who chose to go to happy hour instead. Who chose to not meet his girlfriend's parents. Who chose to call in sick for work on the day of an important meeting. Who chose to fail.



## 2 | **HOW TO FAIL**

TO NOT GET MISTAKEN FOR A BUM

Where am I? Don't open your eyes. It's hot. Shit, what's that smell? Laying in something wet. I pray it's wetness created by some gorgeous woman next to me's intervaginal secretions. The heat from her Soho condo's skylight. The smell? Eh...can't justify that.

I open my eyes to find myself in a pile of garbage somewhere in what looks like the West Thirties. The sun breaking over the skyscrapered horizon to the northeast. What time it is? Luckily, my fly is unzipped and my morning erection explodes through, standing straight as if an ancient sundial. By the steepness of my dick's shadow I'd surmise it's seven AM.

My head hurts. My mouth tastes like an ashtray. I don't have a mirror but can tell my hair is disheveled, my shirt tattered, covered in red wine, vomit, and honey mustard. Discarded Wendy's wrappers act as a duvet around me. One of my shoes is missing, the other covered in mud. I've also pissed myself. Or, at least, someone has pissed me. I should be pissed off, I suppose, but, you know, been there, done that.

Last night was my thirtieth birthday party and my

friends came out in full force. By “my friends” I mean my successful friends. The ones with their shit together. The ones that don’t have a “full force.”

These less fun friends have great jobs and good wives and decent husbands and kids. They own nice property and live in places where you can actually have a patio grill. A big stainless steel propane one. A lawnmower, too. Though, these people are rich enough to hire someone else to do the mowing.

I can never remember who is who when it comes to minor characters in books and I’m sure you’re the same way. If you’re like me, you probably just gloss over these characters. In this case, that won’t really matter because these people, these “minor characters” of my life, have become interchangeable.

### **Danny & MEliSSa**

(sic [although I guess it isn’t a sic (–*adverb Latin. so; thus: usually written parenthetically to denote that a word, phrase, passage that may appear incorrect has been written intentionally*) if MEliSSa’s arrogant parents chose to give her an incorrectly written name what with that capitalized second letter.])

Danny’s an aspiring politician currently in banking. ME’s a lawyer at a downtown firm. They live in White Plains. They don’t have children because Danny has a mild case of hypogonadism. At least he doesn’t have to shave. They plan to adopt as soon as they can. They only buy American cars which leads me to believe they will only adopt an American child. Good thing they’re well-connected.

### Jack & Kirsten

Jack's a financial analyst. Kirsten would say she's a "homemaker" if she was on *Wheel of Fortune* and Sajak asked her, who takes care of their daughter Anna during the day. They live in Weehawken by the NY Waterway ferry terminal and the once site of the Alexander Hamilton/Aaron Burr duel. They are planning to move to a big house in Shorthills or Millburn before Anna reaches kindergarten.

### Keith & Erin

Keith's a trader in Midtown. Erin's an investment banker *in* Wall Street but not *on* Wall Street. They live in a highrise near Central Park. They make boatloads of money but are cheapskates. Keith would like kids but would not like cutting off Erin's earning potential any time soon. Erin would love to not work and get to stay at home all day but would hate to shit out a child and then have to tend to it. She doesn't even much like having to live in the same apartment as Keith's beloved cat James A. Garfield. They work long hours. They do not make love a lot.

I don't know much about my friends' occupations. In my world it's rub-a-dub-dub, everyone has a simple one-word job. Job. A butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker. A banker, a lawyer, a trader, a stripper. Let's be honest, your occupation is boring. It's great if you like it. It's great if you pretend to like it. It's really great if you work good hours and make good money. But I don't need to hear about it.

I hate when I'm making conversation and when it comes to the "What do you do?" portion of the new friend interview, said new friend unleashes a torrent of pedantic,

ambiguous words.

“I’m what they call a ‘luminous intensity rod manifester.’”

I get handed a business card with those words on it, their full name including the middle one (“Arnold?!”), a Vice-President (everyone’s a veep) title, a work number and extension, their cell and Blackberry and e-mail and fax and outdated company logo and, shit, there’s barely any space left to get girls’ numbers at the bar!

I’ll study their card. Not wanting to sound stupid. Trodding carefully among a more successful peer.

“‘Luminous intensity rod manifester?’ You’re saying you’re a candlestick maker, right?”

“Basically.”

That’s why I quit asking people about their jobs. That’s why I quit making friendly conversation. That’s why I barely know what my friends do. Career-wise, that is. I know far too much about their private lives.

For some reason the wives love to confide in me. “Pillow talk” sans the pillow. At first I thought these women wanted to sleep with me. Why else would they tell me about their husband’s hypogonadism? The fact that Jack was a virgin before they met? Or that Keith thinks only whores give head?

I thought these women were trying to flirt in some fucked-up way: “My husband has hypogonadism, do you?” Nope. My balls are a standard 7.5 inch spherical circumference and I do produce testosterone.

“My husband is sexually inexperienced, are you?”

Nope. I’m a wily veteran. The Gordie Howe of fuckin’. Nearing my third decade of play.

“My husband is repulsed by fellatio, are you?” God nope. Uh...do you call it “fellatio” around him? Maybe he’s just repulsed by your anatomicalisms.

But I wasn’t being flirted with. Just confided in. Probably cause these women don’t think I’m “of” their world. I can’t harm them with the knowledge they give me. It’s like asking an alien for advice.

Now, successful people care greatly about the arbitrary moments of one’s existence and the troika of couples forced me to celebrate my birthday. They, of course, didn’t ask where I wanted to celebrate but instead told me to meet them for dinner at a swank-but-certainly-not-hip French restaurant in the West Teens, La Enfants Magnifique!

At the table I looked at the drinks menu first, as per my *modus operandi*, and was dismayed to find the beer list severely lacking as per most upscale restaurants’ *modus operandi*. How can places that put such great care into assembling sommelier-approved wine lists, creating mixologist-tested cocktail menus, then have a beer list that looks like something from the cooler at a roadside Texaco?

We let the foodie of our group, Keith, take charge as he ordered some appetizers from *la cave a fromage* and two bottles of expensive vin. I was glad they were paying.

“Your husband is quite the connoisseur, huh?” chirped an admiring Kirsten. “Jack doesn’t know squat about wine.”

“Heh, she’s right,” Jack conceded. “On our first date, I didn’t want to look like a cheapskate so I ordered the second cheapest bottle on the wine list and hoped she wouldn’t notice.”

“Oh, I noticed!” smiled Kirsten, tweaking her



husband's cheek.

"Yes, we'll have the wagyu however the chef most prefers to prepare it."

"Not too pink," Erin interrupted as Keith gave her a stare down.

"We read an interesting article in *Crain's* last week," continued Danny.

ME flawlessly cut in. "It seems that since most people don't know about wine and, in today's economy, most people want to be thrifty but not look cheap..."

Danny again, "...and most restaurants know this, they are now throwing the cheapest wholesale bottle they have in the number two lowest slot..."

ME again, "...jacking the menu price up to just a dollar below the third cheapest bottle's price..."

"...and making an absolute killing! The second cheapest bottle usually outsells the entire rest of the menu combined!"

Everyone at the table laughed.

"Show's what I know!" Jack chortled.

"Show's what he knows!" Kirsten guffawed.

"In fact, nowadays, the best value on the menu for both taste and price, has again become the lowest priced bottle!" Danny cackled.

I examined my six cracking up friends, wondering what happened to us. We were the same just eight years ago, but now we were completely different. This made me realize how come whenever I went to a dinner party I hated every person I met. I also realized why I didn't hate my friends, too. I didn't hate them because in the back of my mind I remembered the people they used to be. I'm sure

if I'd met those dinner party strangers at age twenty-two I would like them and if I met my friends for the first time at age thirty I would hate them.

Then why were we still friends?

You might say because they took pity on me. Especially now. Everyone feels sorry for me since my girlfriend dumped me, since I lost my job, since I remain brutally poor, since I live in a hovel, since I have no success in life, and I'm sure the six around me would list a half dozen other "sinces" behind closed doors. So they coddle me the rare times they see me, buy me lots of liquor, meals, gifts. They ineptly try to help me out with bar sluts, not, however, that those bastards would ever set me up with their few sexy single friends.

They think I must be miserable, no way as happy as they are. Little do they realize, though I may be a failure, I'm much happier than they are. It hit me as I drank some Vin di Felibre 2004, that they aren't the ones "allowing" me to remain their friends, but it's rather, amazingly, the reverse. I don't need them, I have a fun life. They don't. They are "old" people who that one night a yearly quarter in which they need some late night fun, call me. Who when they vicariously want to live through a sordid tale, got me to tell one from my audiobook series. They got me to quiz about the tenor of hip New York culture. Me to make them feel young again! Yet they still probably snicker about me on the cab ride home. Say, "Oh him. Poor guy. Poor guy."

After our meal, after I blew the candles out on some decadent torte, it was barely nine o'clock and I didn't feel like turning in. Of course, Jack and Kirsten had to get back to Anna and her sitter. Danny and ME had to head

home to passionately...not have sex and go to bed. Erin had an early meeting and needed to hit the 600 thread count hay which left only Keith to have “just one” with me at the plastic paddy pub next door.

“You’re really having ‘just one?’ You used to stay out later than me!”

Keith had slugged his “just one” in about ten minutes.

“Next time. I gotta get up early for a dentist appointment.”

“Root canal or something?”

“Just a check-up.”

“A check-up?!” I couldn’t believe him. “Dentistry is so overrated. You ever thought about that, Keith? Brushing in the morning, evening, after every meal, mouthwashing, flossing, waterpicking, teeth whitening, and regular check-ups every six months. Who has time for that shit?”

“I have time for that crap. I’m quite attached to my teeth.”

“So am I. I just see no reason for all this brushing. I only brush when I wake up sober enough to drag my ass to work, weekend nights if I’m going out, or if predict I may be kissing a girl soon. That is, a girl I’ve never kissed before.”

“Charming.”

“Even worse is flossing! Do you own a book with sharp pages? Then you own floss, Keith. Do you receive mail? Or have *Crain’s* subscription cards scattered on the floor? Metrocards in your pocket?” I pulled a stack of business cards from my wallet. “Or, business cards from promising head hunters you never called? That’s floss!”

“That’s disgusting.”

“You only need it when the harshest meats or grainy breads become lodged in your molars. Usually my tongue is dexterous enough to floss everything else out. How satisfying that is! Felt as good as an orgasm when I finally dislodged a shard of baguette a few minutes ago.”

“You know tooth care is important to cardiovascular health? Your dental regimen sounds very harmful.”

“Indeed there are two *caveats dentanta*: paper cuts on the gums and the potential for pieces of subscription card floss getting stuck and unable to be dislodged by anything but the big gun: a loose thread from the elastic of your socks.”

Keith looked at me seriously.

“We’re young, I get it, but the way you live now is setting you up for down the road. Do you want to be the old fart in the nursing home gumming his tapioca?”

“Eh, it doesn’t matter. I’ll be rich and famous soon enough.”

“What does that have to do with dentistry?”

“Only everything. When I’m pulled out of the doldrums and become a great success, virtually overnight, what’s the first thing the Hollywood machine will do to me?”

“There’s a lot I could say...”

“They’ll cap my teeth. Fill my facehole with a bunch of big, fake chompers. Like Ben Affleck or Hilary Duff. Gorgeous and pricey mouth Chiclets that’ll make Gary Busey, Mr. Ed, and George Washington’s teeth look subtle by comparison.”

“OoooooooK, well I better get going.” Keith slapped me on the back sadly. “Happy Birthday, pal. Take care of

yourself.”

“I can’t believe you’ve so bought into the dental industrial complex!” I yelled after Keith but he was already out the door.

Come to think of it, my teeth were hurting. The incisors separating from the gum line, exposing painful nerve endings. Luckily, bourbon numbs that. It’s cyclical:



I ordered a few bourbons and several pints of How to Fail Ale and soon I was outside making out with a chubby girl I’d acquired discussing dental co-pays, gawking at her breasts that drooped as if painted by Salvador Dali.

Those Dali tits are the last thing I remember. Then, I must have boarded a time machine but unlike the Terminator who arrived in a new destination completely jacked and completely naked, I’d arrived in this garbage pile completely hungover and completely disgusting.

A business man walks by, a look of abject disgust only a hard-working success can generate. He squeezes his mug into a tight ball so that none of my visual, aural, or olfactory grossness can possibly enter his facial cavities. He mutters under his breath, “Fuckin’ bums.”

How does one fail his way to being confused for a homeless person, a bum, a hobo, a bindle, a derelict, a bag lady, a gutterpup, a drifter, a vagabond, a vagrant, a tramp, a transient, a filthy, filthy, filthy, bum?

First: give up on hygiene. Personal maintenance is

a boring, time-consuming, labor-inducing task. Failures don't have time for that in their lives, it just gets in the way of watching television.

Start small and quit shaving. Who decided: clean shaven = responsible member of society? Removing hairs from one's face is one of the silliest things man has ever made ritualistic (that doesn't involve God). Plus, razor blades and creams are expensive.

You can justify quitting shaving by reasoning that it will make you into a sexy bad boy. And, truthfully, it will. Briefly. In that three to seven days scruff range. Women will dig you then, so you best get mad pussy during those four days.

After seven days, assuming you're not in the top one percentile that can grow luxurious beards (Kenny Rogers, Ice Cube, Sean Connery, Rutherford B. Hayes, et al), the hair on your face will look repellent—uneven, thatchy, and prickly—bringing oils that will make your skin break out, becoming shiny and greasy. The fuzz on your mug will be like Velcro to foreign objects. Lint, pizza sauce, and shreds of paper will attach like filings to a magnet.

After ten days without shaving, people will begin noticing. Your friends will passive-aggressively dance around the subject. "Sooooooo, trying to grow a beard?" Nope. Just checking out on life.

Now you're ready to quit showering. Another labor-intensive practice. What other object needs to be scrubbed spic and span every ten to twenty-four hours? Shampoos, soaps, conditioners, and, God forbid, exfoliating facial scrubs and cleansers, these things are expensive. I mean, which liquid would you rather spend five bucks on: a

bottle of shampoo or a quality ale?

Of course, without showering there will no longer be any gravitas in using hair gel, cologne, deodorant, lotion, and/or toilet paper either. Anyhow, you don't partake in many things that work up a sweat. Sweat is caused by hard work, which is something only a success would do. Edison even said success was "90% perspiration." Running, exercising, "all-nighters," coitus, leaving the house...those are for perspiring successes. Being a failure is 90% no inspiration, 10% no perspiration.

You would think your lack of hard work and resultant sweat would produce less bad-smelling bacterium than that of a success. Not so. All the booze, caffeine, and greasy foods you consume will explode from your pores. You are not necessarily what you eat, but you will still stink of Wild Turkey, Whoppers Junior, and powdery strippers.

You will not wash your clothing either. We all have our one favorite shirt. So wear that shirt every single day. Jeans can go months without a cleaning. You're broke, despite the fact you no longer buy toiletries, and thus haven't been able to purchase a new pair of shoes in three years. They are faded, filthy, have an uneven sole, and smell like horrendous foot odor. Even Dr. Scholls would euthanize them. You should be able to smell your feet while standing, your nose about 5'2" away from the toe of your shoe. If you can't smell them, you ain't doing a good enough job.

Physically you should be close to resembling a bum. Greasy hair matted into a mold resembling your latest head placement while sleeping, scruff making you look like a hockey player during the playoffs, unbrushed teeth causing everyone around to gasp at their caffeine and nicotine-

stained horror, and ratty, filthy (though damn comfortable) clothing on your back.

Your stench will be an enfilade of bullets spraying out from you in all directions. The stench will permeate the world on a strict foot-to-day exponential ratio according to this formula:

$$S_{\text{days}} = \text{Stench range [Where } S = \text{the stench constant]}$$

That is: for every one (1) day you go without showering, shaving, tooth-brushing, and clothes-changing, you will be smelled from exponentially one point two-five (1.25) times more feet away. Hence, if you go fifteen (15) days without doing any of the above hygienic tasks, you will produce a stench that can be smelled from (1.25 stench constant to the 15[days]th power =) 28.42 feet (28 feet and 5 inches) away from you in any direction. Two notes:

1. This caps at approx. fifty feet depending on normal wind conditions and humidity.
2. Add an additional five feet of stink permeation for every time you shit your pants.

Now it's time to tackle the mental aspects of being a bum, for without the mental aspects, an astute urban dweller will just assume you to be a Brooklyn hipster or a traveling Phish fan. This is tougher though because failing all the way to mental instability and the nut house is a task that takes a few good years to accomplish (please see **Footchapter Two: How to Go Insane and Garner Voices in Your Head**). So for now you'll just have to do what I do to show the world a verisimilitude of bum-like craziness. I drink. A lot.



Who hasn't trekked to their shitty job every morning only to see a group of bums, lounging supine on garbage, starting the day by turning over their engines with a little booze? A little booze you know they get to drink all day long 'til they pass out, only to awake and begin drinking again. What slaving-for-the-man individual hasn't encountered that scene and thought:

"LUCKY!!!"

Well, guess what? Now you get to spend all day drinking too! Decide what kind of libationist you want to be: a wino or a rummy, a ginhead or a whiskeyhound, a malt-liquor-guzzler or a beerchugger or maybe even a plastic-bottle-vodka tippler. I suggest sticking to only one potable as nothing is more fun than having someone shout:

"Officer, could you please remove this rummy—he's blocking the entrance to my building!"

And, you standing to say: "Dear lady, I am no rummy. I am a wino! Have some respect."

Now you're constantly drunk, stumbling around town, no idea where you are, yelling incoherent, maniacal, and curse-filled rants. Getting taunted by teens, spurned by men, derided by women, and protected from children. You have officially tricked the masses into thinking you are a bum.

A final thought: the best thing about failing all the way to homeless-lookingness is that it is so easy to quickly succeed your way back to non-homeless-lookingness status. A shave, shower, clothes change, spritz of cologne, and breath mint and, in under an hour, you will look like a man with some dignity and a home.

I laughed to myself, for the first time truly glad I no

longer had an office to call in sick to, just as Danny and ME walked by, en route to their profitable jobs, discovering me splayed out like human vomit.

They rushed to my side and helped me to my feet. ME began to brush some wilted lettuce from my head but quickly decided it was too disgusting.

“What happened?!” Danny wondered.

“Oh my God, honey, were you robbed, mugged?”

“I was...pickpocketed. Knocked out. Left for dead.”

I slapped at my pocket. “I’m missing my wallet!”

“You’re all beat up!”

“I can’t believe this happened to you again! What bad luck.”

“You need to get home and cleaned up.”

“Take this twenty and get a cab home. Call the police to report the crime.”

“I’m so sorry, you look just awful.”

“You look like a bum, Stu.”

I rubbed my head, pretending I was still foggy from the crime perpetrated against me and not just painfully hungover from the alcohol perpetrated against my brain.

“I wish we could stay to help, Stu, but we’re already late as is.”

“We went a little too ‘full force’ at your party last night. We weren’t in bed til eleven!”

After Danny and ME had departed and I’d lost them in the horizon south on Eighth Avenue, I plopped back down into the garbage, because I have to finish telling you how to fail.

What? You got a problem with me telling my story while residing in garbage? That childish egomaniac Holden

Caulfield told his while in an insane asylum and that didn't stop some hundred million people from listening to him, including that swine Mark David Chapman. So, I'd certainly say storytelling time from amidst Glad bags is better than while banging one's head on a rubber wall. Just listen to me...

# FOOTCHAPTERS

Do you recall reading *Grapes of Wrath* in high school? You probably ignored it like I did. No one reads stuff assigned by teachers, that's something both successes and failures agree on. Luckily, I picked up a copy a few years ago at LGA en route to Keith and Erin's wedding in Cleveland. Great book. Steinbeck's most famous and his second best effort after *East of Eden*. Except for those intermediary chapters, remembers those? The chapters where, instead of focusing on Tom Joad and the Okies, Steinbeck wrote flowery shit about blossoms swelling and earths crusting, winds galing, and weeds springing. Yeah, I know, those boring chapters were necessary to set the scene, the time, the ethos and pathos of the book, but, goddamn, they still were boring as shit and I'm sure most of us skimmed through them.

Well, I too need intermediary chapters for similar purposes. I thought about using footnotes but that's become blasé. Plus, no one likes seeing a miniscule footnote and then losing their focus in the narrative to glance to the bottom of the page or flip to the back of the book and soon you're using two separate bookmarks and eventually you get tired of all the fucking flipping so you just say screw the notes I'll take my chances digesting the story without reading all the information provided. But no author wants that. So instead, I offer "Footchapters." Don't skim them, asshole.



FOOTCHAPTER 2 | **HOW TO** GO INSANE AND GARNER  
VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

The basic gist of *Catch 22*, the definition of *Catch 22* itself, is the paradox, *the Catch 22*, that if you think you are crazy then you can't possibly be crazy because crazy people are too crazy to think they are crazy. Yeah, right. Maybe before the first printing of *Catch 22* came out in 1961. But I've read *Catch 22*, I know what the *Catch 22* is, so it's totally feasible I may be crazy even though I wonder if I may be crazy because *Catch 22* has tipped me off to this paradox. So, do I truly wonder if I am crazy or do I only wonder because *Catch 22* reminded me to wonder? A real conundrum. Shall we call it the *Catch 23*? Will the Joseph Heller estate sue me for that?

These are dialogues the voices in my head had on a daily basis.

Around the same time Heller was punching out *Catch 22* on his Remington, another American success story was being written. Engineer Bill Fair and mathematician Earl Isaac were developing a unique algorithm in their studio apartment in San Rafael, California. When this algorithm was perfected in 1970 it was immediately put into place, becoming an integral part of our lives. Dubbed the Fair Isaac

Corporation score, the FICO score, would now determine for the entirety of one's life what the likelihood would be of a person paying back their debts.

I sat on a train headed for the Poconos. I was going there to clear my mind after having been dumped by my girlfriend one week previous. We were supposed to have gone together on a couples' retreat but now sans her I decided to go by myself sans dignity. My three X two friends were a little surprised I was still attending.

On the train surrounding me was a cacophony of noisy fools. Unable to live for a second in their meager minds, they needed to constantly be ejaculating thoughts into the ether. Behind me, a construction worker played a Nextel chirping symphony with some other mook on some other train.

\*CHIRP\*

"Eh Vinnie, youse see Grubman sleeping on 'is fat ass all day?"

\*CHIRP\*

"Ya', and I can't believe he prefers da' Daily Noos over da' Post. Fuckin' Einstein 'dere, huh?"

\*CHIRP\*

To my left, a women in a power suit told someone on her phone that her idea for "designer bibs" would revolutionize upscale dining.

"Diners will no longer be scared to wear lighter colored couture to restaurants of a messier ethnic cuisine! Although, BBQ, Mexican, Indian...who exactly eats at those places?"

In front of me, a dopey grunge fellow who, when asked by his scuzzy girlfriend what time our train arrives,

replied, "A quarter 'til. 1:35."

1:35?

"Yeah, twenty-five minutes 'til. A quarter 'til."

Up front some JAP bitches discussed whether one should dump her boyfriend since he was in a loser frat in college. These gals are pushing thirty-five.

"But he was a Sig Ep! A Sig Ep, Miriam! They had the lamest parties."

I always thought a good idea for an MTV reality show would be one called *JAP Fit*. The pitch:

*Our cameras will follow a half-dozen Jewish American Princesses (JAPs) as they negotiate such urban enclaves as Manhattan, Miami Beach, and Los Angeles, dating, dining, and flipping the fuck out over the most minor things in life in the most nasally shrill way possible.*

"Miriam! I can't keep dating him! What if we have kids? Boys?! Then they would be Sig Ep legacies. How gross. Ugh! Do you know any Beta Psis? Has Jerry Coen gotten hitched yet?"

"Forget that, Lexy, what about my situation?"

"The credit thing still?"

"Yah. Daniel refuses to propose until I have a 'respectable' credit score."

"What does that even mean?!"

"Daniel apparently has an 'unblemished' one and he doesn't want to have to marry mine! UGH! Why are men so annoying?"

"At least he was a Sigma Nu."

"Yah. Lucky."

Miriam and Lexy, a FICO score is a number between 300 to 850 with one over 650 considered above average.



This is not to be confused with FICA, the Federal Insurance Contributions Act, which is a sleazy tax the government takes from everyone's paycheck, giving people less money than they deserve which causes them to buy things on credit which causes their FICO scores to suck.

(For the record, my FICO sits somewhere in the 500s and I was never in a frat.)

The FICO score scale has a left-skewed median of 723. Yet another example of America's obsession with the Lake Wobegon effect whereas more than 50% of the public is above average at something. Even under these lax parameters, I was still below average, still needing my parents to sign as guarantors to rent a crummy apartment. I couldn't even get a \$250 limit Gap card. I should have never signed up for all those first-year no-interest credit cards in college. Did I really need that many free t-shirts?!

My train dropped me off at the Middletown station where Keith and Erin sat waiting in their Zipcar convertible, the top still up.

I hopped in and Keith began to lower the soft roof but Erin immediately complained, causing a *convertiblus interruptus* midway before Keith sent the roof back to its up position.

"We're so glad you decided to still join us, Stu."

"Oh...thanks. No problem."

"Sorry we had to leave early and couldn't give you a ride."

Couples always talk like this. "Us." "We." No longer having a unique personality once they tie the knot.

"What have you two been up to?" Small talk.

"We went to that new restaurant Veni Vidi Vici on

Wednesday.”

“How was it?”

“We did not like it.”

“We thought the food was too smug.”

“We felt mocked by it.”

“We came, we ate, we stopped at Subway on the way home.”

“Seen any good movies lately?”

“We loved this little foreign film we just saw. From out of Canada.”

“We love foreign films so long as they are from foreign places that speak English.”

“How about this weekend? What should I expect, guys?”

“We’re so looking forward to it. We hope you’ll have a good time with us.”

Cult-like! A cult of just two. Why were they no longer allowed to have differing opinions? “Well, I loved the restaurant but Erin found the food too seasoned. I hated *O No, Canada*, but Erin found it inspired. I’m leery about finding activities for the weekend but Erin thinks the R & R will be H & D. Hunky and dory.”

Perhaps I didn’t have voices in my head because I was crazy, but rather because I found other people’s conversations so insipid. Why were old people so boring? So OLD!!

I couldn’t help it, I still separated people into “adults” and “kids.” I may have been born in the 1970s, but I was still a kid. My friends were adults. Adults were successes. Kids were failures. Kids liked to have fun, go on adventures, drink, fuck around, maybe get in trouble. Adults liked to forward

each other recipes for gazpacho, discuss the best furniture stores in town, clean their houses, pay their bills. Adults listed their hobby as “travel.”

Travel is not a hobby. If someone says their hobby is “traveling” then nine times out of ten they are boring. Interesting people don’t need to fill the voids of their life by simply placing their body in another state, country, continent. To look at the same old shit everyone knows these countries have. Oh look, a picture of Keith in front of the Eiffel Tower. Erin at our favorite restaurant in Roma. Traveling just gives boring adults more fodder for boring dinner conversation.

“We’re going to Italy next month.”

“Stupendous. We thought it was amazing there. Where are you starting?”

“The Amalfi Coast.”

“Wonderful. You’ll get some great pictures just like we did. You have to go to this little restaurant we loved.”

“We’d like that. What’s it called?”

“Honey? What was the name of that restaurant we loved? The one with the buffalo mozzarella we thought was mouthwatering?”

“Remember, honey? We learned it had no name. Locals just call it ‘Restaurant.’”

“Whatever the Italiano word for ‘Restaurant’ is she means.”

“We loved it.”

“I’m sure we will too.”

I wondered what Keith and Erin’s FICO score was. Did marriage really force couples to combine their scores? Hardly seemed fair. Though, if you’re going to annoy

all us kids with your we conversations then you might as well economically exist as one entity. “We have an 849,” I’m sure Keith and Erin would note. They certainly weren’t responsible for the current, say it with me, Global Economic Crisis.

“Crisis.” Ha. A crisis is a small town baseball team unable to pay market value to retain their top hurler in free agency. The power going out right as a new episode of *Mad Men* is about to air. Getting gonorrhea while having no health care and then instead of getting simple oral antibiotics being forced to have your dick swabbed at the free clinic. But this economic shit was no crisis.

“We were thinking we could all take a hike tomorrow morning.”

“Bright and early. Probably around the time you’re getting in on a typical Friday night!”

Keith stared at Erin, protective of me. He didn’t like his wife to offer even a jokingly deprecating remark. I didn’t care. They probably thought my girlfriend was wise to have broken up with me. I always suspected they liked her more than me. She was more like them.

“I’m not sure I brought the correct clothes for hiking. What exactly is hiking?”

Keith and Erin looked at each other and smiled. Nodding. Mmm huh.

“Essentially just walking. We love it, though. We walk around, we enjoy the nature, we look at the animals. We’re getting up early to see the sunrise, too. Beautiful. You may think you’ve seen the sunrise but in the city all those nasty buildings and gross smog block its true majesty.”

Like with any business, as we entered the 2000s, the

money lending business wanted to expand its demographics. If you're McDonald's, you do this by opening a location in Agra and releasing the Big Tikka Mac-sala. If you're CBS, you add a flamingly homosexual character to a sitcom. *Two and a Half Men* and *a Quarter Gay*. You're a sports bar, you offer nickel Cosmos on "Ladies' Night." And, if you were a credit lender, you did this by relaxing your standards on who you were willing to lend to. These were those subprime loans we now heard so much about.

Keith weaved the Zipcar through a gravel road amongst the tall Eastern White Pine trees and soon we were at the cabin, the other couples sitting on a wrap-around deck overlooking a ridge. Everyone sipping on some wine, a slightly chilled Malbec, incorrectly chilled in my opinion, out of very fine glassware. This "cabin" was nicer than most houses I'd been in, stocked with beautiful HDTVs, classy furniture, expensive throw rugs, paintings, legit animal heads, African vases. Who carted it all to the mountains, I have no clue, but adults can't even have a bad home aesthetic when "roughing it."

"We're so excited you decided to come after all, Stu!" said Danny.

"We were worried you wouldn't come after..." said ME as Danny stared at her.

"ME apologize to him. We discussed how we weren't going to bring her up all weekend."

"Guys, it's fine. I'm not some character in a movie, wandering around all bummed out, weepy, sobbing, trying to make sense of my life."

Well, the first few were true. I wasn't bummed out, in fact, it concerned me how un-upset I was. Was I a

psychopath? Wasn't that the sign? Emotionlessness when faced with things that should have made you emotional? I mean, I laughed at funny jokes, pumped my first in glory when the Knicks hit a big shot. Was I compelled to do these things or was I just trying to fit in? I never cried about supposedly sad things. I never got angry about supposedly maddening things. I was always just there. In a perpetual nihilistic malaise of ennui and lots of other SAT words.

Jack began talking about how he liked to cook steaks. We would be having steaks on the stainless steel propane grill that evening.

"We love *Boy Meets Grill*."

"We just adore Bobby Flay," added Kirsten.

"We saw him at the Chelsea Market once."

"You just like him because he's cute," joshed Jack, breaking the Rule of We.

"That's not true! We both like him because he has the best tips."

"We should do what he says. A slight coating of extra virgin olive oil on each side. Slap some kosher salt and fresh pepper on, then throw it on the grill. Bobby says the key is to not handle the meat too much."

I handled my meat far too much. Especially since my girlfriend had dumped me.

I thought how much more interesting I was than those around me. I didn't mean to rip Bobby Flay. I actually liked the guy and always DVR'd *Throwdown*. Even the couples' boring conversations were topics I knew. They just weren't topics I cared to discuss. I had no reason to know about the nitty-gritties of the recession. But I did. I had no reason to know about cooking. But I did. Or fine furniture.

But I did. Or how the Amalfi Coast is now a tourist trap full of American dads in pink pleated shorts and docksiders. But I, unfortunately, did.

I was so well-versed on so many topics. I read books and watched important films. If I didn't know about something, I read the Wikipedia entry on the subject. I hadn't known what subprime loans were. So I read the entry. Or, why Grover Cleveland was our 22nd and 24th president. So I read the entry. (He got screwed in the 1888 election.) I didn't know what a croque monsieur was. Read the entry. Or, where exactly the Amalfi Coast was. Or, how to spell it. So I read the entry.

Everyone else had such a narrow range of knowledge. Was that my problem? Jack of all trades, master of none? Did you need to not be a jack to be a success? Were all the failures in life jacks? Then that's why we were all more interesting than the successes.

They read the *Wall Street Journal* on their commute.

We think about which of our fellow commuters we'd like to see naked.

They go to bed at a "reasonable" hour.

We wonder if anyone knows of an "after hours" place.

They brunch.

We hit the greasy spoon and order a Mexican coffee.

They make love.

We fuck.

Let's be serious, I wasn't a jack of all trades. I was just a jack-off of none. A hubristic fool who lived in my mind, certain I was better than everyone. An irredeemable asshole

that for some reason people tolerated and occasionally even liked. Must have been my winning smile, still pretty good despite my aversion to dentistry.

“...and my accountant says by 2041, our 401K could be worth as much as three million dollars.”

“Hey, not bad. But do you need to stay with Franklin Pierce for that?”

“Not necessarily. It’s set up so we can roll it over to the next company I work for.”

“Yes, I believe that’s how ours works, too.”

“Any penalties for early withdrawal? We were a little light on cash flow when we were thinking about joining the country club and considered tapping into ours.”

“Don’t do that. A few million dollars in 2050 is so much more valuable to you than tens of thousand of dollars now. It’s simple math.”

I wish I had such mundane problems. Whether to be rich now or incredibly rich when I was old. Boringness was good in that regard. My friends were boring because they were rich, not because they were simple. It reminded me of the writer Dostoevsky. Every time he got some money from writing something, he became rich. And boring. And boring lives do not lead to creating masterpieces no one reads in high school. Which was of the utmost importance to him. So Dostoevsky intentionally cultivated a severe gambling problem. A severe losing at gambling problem so the second he got money and got boring, he lost the money at the tables and all of the sudden got interesting again. Able to write crackling masterpieces again.

The breeze blew in over the mountains.

“Such a great view.”



“We think it’s incredible.”

“Crystal clear. Nothing to block it.”

“We might wake up to watch the sunrise.”

“We’re in!”

“We’re in too!”

I came here for peace and I got three boring couples discussing a bland view. I didn’t think this was what Thoreau had in mind. Then again, he didn’t recommend going into the woods with three upper-class couples.

Even alone, Thoreau detested the noises he could hear: church bells ringing, carriages rattling and rumbling, cows lowing, whip-poor-wills singing, owls hooting, frogs croaking, and cockerels crowing.

Couples yapping, wind chimes chiming, Blackberries vibrating, corks uncorking, wine glasses swirling, couples yapping, couples yapping, couples yapping.

Then again, Thoreau was such a phony. Praising the simple life, panning the American dream, yet going into Concord most days to hang at the local tavern, though the pussy refused to drink. I bet he was sure the life of the watering hole. Unshowered and stinky, ranting about this and that, a man obsessed with teetotalism (he considered “intoxicants” such as alcohol, tobacco, and even tea and coffee to be “demonic”), vegetarianism (he thought vegetarians had evolved and were superior to meat-eaters), chastity (I’m guessing the smelly guy just couldn’t get laid and had some serious sour grapes), and not paying his taxes. I’m sure the other barflies loved him.

“Did ye see the score of yesterday’s rounders match?”

“Ay! Another victory for the Redstockings.”

\*DING DONG\*

“Ah, shite! It’s Hank Thoreau again.”

“Shite! Pretend we have to go home and then we’ll meet down the road at O’Donnell’s.”

“Splendid! We’ll play some pinball. Has that been invented yet?”

(Note to self: hit up Wikipedia to learn more about the argot of 19th century New England as well as the invention and rise to prominence of pinball and other bar games.)

It occurred to me that perhaps Thoreau was a failure all along. Just cause you wrote a book, even one taught in every high school in America, doesn’t mean you weren’t a failure.

I craved being alone. I was desiring being alone more and more these days to hear myself think. Was desiring aloneness symptomatic to craziness? Some real Unabomber shit? Was it trite to make Unabomber comparisons in the year 2010?! Does anyone even recall who he was?

For the record, he was, he is, Theodore “Ted” Kaczynski.

I wonder if Kaczynski ever left his Lincoln, Montana cabin to head into town to wet his whistle? Did he have a problem with strong drink? Doubt it. Beer and booze surely helped fuel his crazy ideas. How much of an annoying bore was he compared to Thoreau? Did he cockblock other gents at the bar? Ruin their chances of having one-night stands with some of The Treasure State’s finest? Would Thoreau have been bombing people if bombs had existed back in his time?

Kaczynski was definitely a success at one time.

An IQ of 167, enrolled in Harvard at age sixteen where he quickly rose to the head of the class, a regular Good Will Hunting though without Robin William's sappy bearded mentoring to shape him into a respectable young man, Berkeley's youngest professor ever hired at age twenty-five, then—pfft!—gone, resigned, off the grid.

Kaczynski was also a jack of all trades. Skilled at tracking, IDing edible plants, building shelters and primitive tools, monkeywrenching, wiring up pipebombs, writing manifestos, and not having to watch TV to be entertained.

Did the Unabomber have voices in his head like me? Was I going to go crazy like him one day? Was I already crazy? Did he consider himself a success or a failure as he sat in a jail cell on this fine day?

I lay in bed tossing and turning those thoughts through my mind. It was four in the morning. The couples had gone to bed, wasted on wine after drinking 'til midnight. I had been up the whole time since. Drinking, masturbating, talking in my head.

When the hell did the sun rise? Five o'clock? Six? I had no clue. I was only up at sunrise if I was still out drinking or if I had to fly somewhere early for a successful friend's wedding or bachelor party or baby shower. Always flying somewhere for them, never for me.

I did not want to still be here when the couples got up to admire a giant fiery orb doing the same thing it had done 365.25 days a year since the Big Bang. I got out of bed, threw my previous night's come rag in the trash, got dressed, swiped a How to Fail Ale from the cooler on the porch, and headed to the woods.

What would those two hermits think of the

current economic...conundrum? The Federal Reserve's expansionary money policy? The Community Reinvestment Act, another dopey thoughtful-but-harmful government program which ordered commercial banks to start "meeting the needs" of all segments of the community. As in the poor, the super poor, the dumb, the risky, the never-gonna-pay-you-backs. They gave loans to people with bad credit, no credit, loans structured "non-traditionally," with documentation that didn't meet Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac standards. Loans given to the kinds of people that no doubt lived in these little hovels out in the very mountains I was passing.

This had created a real estate bubble. A rapid increase in property values until they reached unsustainable levels based on risky mortgages and subprime loans.

I wondered if I could have gotten a mortgage a few years back? I wondered if I could have bought a house and now had it repossessed? That sure would have made me into an even more miserable failure. Where would I be living now? The street?

You see, the one thing the government and a lot of voters don't seem to understand is that you can't turn a failure into a success just by giving them a little "free" money. Creating programs for them. Failures can only become successes by hard work and shit.

I thought of my life just six months ago. Had I been happy then? No real money but the false illusion of money through a huge stack of credit cards. I had a girlfriend, a highly active sex life, the dreams of someone in their twenties, people that actually admired my life, a full docket of happenings to attend.

I had someone to call when I had something good happen to me. Someone to call when I needed comfort after something bad happened. Someone to spoon with while I slept. Someone to fuck—check that—make love to. Was that true happiness? It sure seemed like it then.

And, then God said, “Here comes the light, y’all.”

My surroundings went from pitch black to lighter lighter lighter lighter. Like someone turning the dimmer switch in a 1970s bachelor pad. With scorn, I imagined the couples now awake, enjoying a French pressed coffee under a six-man Slanket on the uncomfortable bamboo papasan faced easterly on the porch.

I walked through a clearing, finding myself at a lookout point proudly marked: “View.”

I stood at the View, Joy Behar and Barbara Walters nowhere in site. I might as well see what all the fuss was about. How long could this take anyways?

Did I wish my ex-girlfriend was beside me? So I could hold her hand, snuggle to keep her warm from the cool breeze, the dew floating around us? Were these seemingly “boring” moments actually exciting if you had someone to share them with? Was my current life a struggle because I went through it alone?

Did you know the exact moment of sunrise and sunset was actually calculated by a mathematical equation:

$$\cos(\omega_0) = -\tan(\phi) \times \tan(\delta)$$

whereas:

$\omega_0$  is the hour angle in degrees at either sunrise (when negative value is taken) or sunset (when positive value is taken) in degrees ( $^{\circ}$ );

$\phi$  is the latitude of the observer on the Earth in

degrees;

$\delta$  is the sun declination in degrees.

My God, the sun is beautiful!

A fury of brilliant reds and oranges. Scattered atmospheric dust particles really. An optical illusion. I knew it was an optical illusion but it still blew my mind.

I let it envelope me with a majesty. Its corona circling me like a halo. I didn't care if I went blind, if my eyeballs got a tan, if my face got scalded.

My mind was clear. The voices in my head were gone. I was living in the moment and enjoying it.

And then...

It was just a sun. Up in the sky. Risen. Just a sun.

I could get on with my life. The voices had returned.

I would never tell anyone how much that fucking sun had turned me on. How I had gotten a sun boner.

I truly was into boring shit just like the people I derided.



### 3 | **HOW TO FAIL** TO MAKE YOUR PARENTS PROUD OF YOU

I grew up with middle class parents but they provided my sister and I with an upper class lifestyle, even if it was to the detriment of their credit lines. There were tons of hugs and kisses. I was always supported, always told I was “the best.” My dreams were encouraged, even if they were unrealistic. I was helped with homework, given all the school supplies and sporting equipment I needed. My college was completely paid off and when I was underemployed my first year out of college as I pursued my writing dreams, parental loans were shoved into my hands so I would not starve. I was given every possible resource I could desire. And, that’s my point: maybe it would have been better if my parents were assholes.

If my dad was a philandering drunk that hit me and mocked my dreams. If my mom was mentally fucked up and distant. If they didn’t provide for me one cent, forcing me to get some crummy fast food job at age twelve just to survive. If they never gave me any hope of graduating high school, much less getting into college, forcing me to see the harshness of life from day one. Instilling in me anger, neuroses, and substance abuse addictions just so I could



cope and survive childhood. Maybe then I'd be a success. Maybe then I'd be famous. The parents of famous people are always assholes.

Dammit, dad, why couldn't you have kicked my ass every once in a while? Oh mom, why did you attend my sporting events and school plays? It's because of your generosity and love that I'm a nobody.

But I didn't say that to Ash. She'd have thought me ungrateful. We sat at the Marriott Marquis's bar waiting for my non-asshole parents. They were in town for a restaurant supplies convention my father was attending at the Jacob Javits Center. My mom tagged along hoping to get in some shows, most interested in Disney's new musical adaptation of *The Black Cauldron*.

"You're not going to believe these two. I can't believe they created me."

Ash was psyched to meet them as we'd been dating for eight months now.

"I bet you're kidding. They sound sweet and your dad looks just like you."

I took a large gulp of How to Fail Ale, I was going to have to be a few in the bag to handle tonight.

"There's the big guy!" It was my dad's booming voice. He did look like me but in miniature. He'd been born several weeks premature and as the runt of his peer group he'd felt the need to develop an overwhelmingly outgoing personality. Always "networking." Always schmoozing and working the room. Clad in a perfectly tailored Men's Wearhouse generic suit, he heartily shook my hand.

"And you must be his beee-you-tee-full girlfriend, Ashley!"

Ash smiled warmly and extended her hand.

“No, no handshakes. Us Fishes are huggers. Right, son?” My father opened his arms wide. “Ha, ‘Fishes.’ I know the plural of the animal fish is ‘fish’ too, but I never know whether the plural of our last name would be ‘Fish’ or ‘Fishes.’”

Ash smiled and shrugged. Girls my age were always beguiled by my father’s lounge act which I had unfortunately heard a million times. His schtick was as fresh as Henny Youngman’s, and Henny had been dead for years.

“Hey, ma.”

I kissed my mother on the cheek. A public school math teacher she always wore sweatshirts that alerted everyone in the room she was a public school math teacher. They looked homemade, perhaps bought at a local crafts fair, accented with sequins and plastic jewels and puff paint. They had arithmetically pithy sayings on them such as “3.1415 in the Sky” and “Without Geometry Life would be Pointless.” Tonight she’d gone with a slightly more risqué “What’s Your Sine?”

“Honey!” My mom gave me a kiss on the cheek and pulled me in for a hug. “I’ve missed you. Why don’t you call more?” She turned to Ash. “It’s great to finally meet you. You’re so pretty. Just look at your long blond hair.”

My father stood smiling, his head bobbing. My mother did likewise. As did Ash. A real happy lot. I knew this was just the calm before the storm but I decided, for once, I would try my best and expect the best. I would answer the questions my parents asked me, no matter how inane. I would listen to their advice, no matter how common-knowledge. I would make my parents proud.

“Sorry I’m late got off at Newark Penn Station and walked around the city for a good half hour before I realized I needed to get back on the train can you believe there’s two Penn Stations how does that make sense?”

We turned to see a fast-talking scrubs-clad beauty, breathing heavily and exhausted from what must have been a harrowing experience. It was my sister. Sissy, I called her. Sought-after veterinarian, six-figures in yearly income, male model-looking fiancé just honorably discharged from the Israeli air force, absolute scatterbrain, but nevertheless the success of the family and the pride of Allen and Suzanne Fish. The Fishes.

I hadn’t seen Sissy out of scrubs in about five years, no matter our surroundings: weddings, funerals, sporting events. Spending years in school and labs and operating rooms does not a cool person make. Since my sister was seemingly unable to do anything on her own, my parents coddled her, speaking to her every single day on the phone so they could help her run her life.

“Oh, sweetheart, you should have called. I could have helped you with your directions.”

“I would have, Mom, but my phone died.”

“I told you you need to be charging it more often. It’s not safe to have a dead cell phone.”

My sister nodded in agreement.

“Well, now that you’re safe, honey, why don’t you tell Stuart and Ashley about that funny thing that happened in the office today.” My mother gave Sissy a “go on” nod.

“Yeah, so at four today, this thuggish guy sprints into our office carrying a bloody Rottweiler under his arm. I rush to his side, ‘What happened? What happened?!’”

My sister began to act out the scene, unfortunate since she majored in zoology, not drama studies, at Cornell and because she didn't understand the social inappropriateness of her raucous and not exactly politically correct impersonations.

"And he's like, 'My mo'erfuckin' dawg been shot! My mo'erfuckin' dawg been shot! It was a drive-by, a mo'erfuckin' drive-by. And dey got 'im!'"

My girlfriend was giggling. I nodded to the bartender to get me another beer.

"And I'm like, 'Please calm down, sir, everything will be a-ight.'"

"You said 'a-ight?'" asked Ash, amusingly surprised.

Sissy laughed. "No. But that would be funny if I did. And the thug guy is like, 'Jus' fix my mo'erfuckin' dawg. Jus' fix my mo'erfuckin' dawg!' So, I take him to the back room to look him over, and this dog's got a bullet in his leg but he should be alright. A-ight. He's in shock and breathing poorly but this is a standard procedure. I'll have the pooch up and good as new in no time."

My parents and girlfriend smiled, touched, proud of Sissy.

"I walk back out to the waiting room and I tell the thug guy what the deal is. He's elated, of course. Then, I tell him how much it will cost to fix the dog.

"'Fi' hun'ed dolla! Fi' hun'ed dolla to fix that piece a shit mo'erfuckin' dawg?! Sheeet. No mo'erfucking way. I. Am. Out!'"

"He just walked out of our offices."

Everyone was stunned.

"He wouldn't pay \$500 to fix his dog? What did

you do?” Ash wondered.

“Don’t worry, this happens a lot with the neighborhood we’re in. We fix the dog up and then he stays in our kennel. Hopefully someone comes and adopts him. We’re not going to let a dog die just cause Nothing But a G-Thang’s a cheap ‘mo’erfucker.”

Everyone laughed as my sister brought her story full circle. She was a decent raconteur, I would give her credit for that. No Garrison Keillor or anything, but solid nonetheless.

“I’ve been trying to talk your brother into getting a Weimaraner,” my girlfriend confided.

“Gorgeous creatures. You should get one, bro. They’re very elegant.”

My dad looked at me angrily as the bartender handed me a fresh drink. He lipped “Drink up, ASAP” and I did as told, slugging the pint as soon as I possibly could.

I was already being picked on, compared to my more successful sister. So, I did the only thing I could, I immaturely tried to drop Sissy down a peg.

“We’re going to a nice restaurant, Sissy, didn’t you have time to put some appropriate clothes on?”

“She looks fine, I even helped her pick that pair out,” retorted my mother.

“Why don’t they make any cool looking scrubs? They’re all so bland. Like mental ward pajamas. What would be the problem with working in jeans? It’s good enough for auto mechanics.”

My dad cut in. “Don’t be stupid, Stu. They have to wear scrubs for movement and sterility purposes.” He was always defending her.

“Dad, where are we eating tonight?” Sissy asked.

“This New Jersey guy I network with gave me a tip for the best place in the city for vegetarians, honey. It’s *Zuh-gut* reviewed.”

“I’ve heard it pronounced Zah-gets and Zuh-GATS before but never that way, Pops.”

My father smiled conspiratorially toward my girlfriend and did an over the shoulder thumb point back toward me. “My son thinks he’s a Manhattan big shot, eh?”

We were soon sitting at a massive gymnasium of a Broadway restaurant, FonDos & Don’ts, Zagat reviewed to a towering score of 14 out of 30, my father plunging his bread-tipped skewer into a simmering pot of gruyere.

“You still sending those resumes out?”

I’d already changed my plans about making my parents proud for just one night. Two glasses of bourbon had turned me from a punching bag into Muhammad Ali. I was floating around my parent’s questions like a butterfly, responding to them stingingly like a bee.

“I don’t exactly believe in resumes.”

My mother saw where things were headed and tried to escape the conversation, chatting up my girlfriend in some cross talk.

“Stuart says you work at a museum. That sounds fun.”

As my girlfriend discussed her job with my mother, my father continued attacking.

“Oh, you don’t believe in resumes? What makes you special?”

“Resumes are worthless in today’s savvy work climate. You’re not allowed to list the truly important things

on them. How hilarious you are, how many beers you can drink in one sitting, how hot of girlfriend you've attracted..."

I winked at my shy girlfriend who looked down, embarrassed.

My mom piped in. "How many degrees you've squandered?"

"Exactly. Those are listed on a classic resume, but so what? I'd hire a young guy in a second that could match me pitcher for pitcher at happy hour. It's one reason I date her."

Ash was getting more embarrassed by the second.

"It doesn't appear you will ever reach a level where you are hiring others."

I dipped a baby pickle into the fondue, the cheese dripping everywhere.

"Fine with me. I got a job now that pays me enough to exist while I focus on my real passions."

"Your film career you mean?" My father mocked me. A pragmatist, he could never get over the fact I couldn't be content with living the life we're "supposed to" live. In his world, people were supposed to go to college, buy some cheap suits in bulk from Men's Wearhouse, get an office job, dream of becoming a middle manager, and retire from the company at age sixty-five to go golf all day. I could get on board with being retired and golfing every day, but the rest sounded bogus.

"I think you're going to make it in film, honey, I believe in you..."

"Thank you, mom."

"...but until then, we got to get you a better job."

"I don't want a 'better' job. 'Better' jobs will just

give me less time to surf the internet, watch TV, goof around with her.”

A moment of silence before Sissy butted in, never sure when the appropriate time was to say certain things. “We had a tabby brought in today that had fallen from a ninth floor balcony.” We stared at her.

“Oh my gosh! What happened?” My girlfriend put her hand to her B-cup chest.

“The little guy was chasing a bee on the balcony and slipped. A lot of people assume cats can survive falls. The whole ‘nine lives’ thing. And, actually, that is pretty true. But listen to this: cats have a better survival rate and a smaller injury rate the *higher* they fall, beginning at about the seventh story.”

“No way!”

“Cat have this amazing ability to quickly reach a maximum terminal velocity from a fall of about seven stories or so. Falling at around sixty miles per hour, they relax and spread their bodies out, orienting themselves like flying squirrels and gliding to the surface, avoiding any serious harm.”

“Even fat cats?”

“Even fat cats.”

My girlfriend and mother were, yet again, touched. My father, yet again, saw his chance to castigate me.

“What about networking, Stuart? Do you even carry business cards on your person?”

“My person?”

My dad pulled a card from his bulky billfold. “Look at that. Always on me. And check this out!”

He flipped over the card and handed it to me, a



message on the back:

“‘It takes ten times as many muscles to frown as it does to smile.’”

He handed me another one.

“‘Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this planet.’”

Yet another.

“‘Try everything once, even the things you don’t think you will like.’ What is this shit, Dad? It’s like fortune cookies without the most important part: the cookie.”

“People love ‘em! When I’m at a conference like I’ll be at tomorrow, I’m walking around the room with a big smile on my face. ‘Allen Fish, how you doing? Good to see you.’ Shaking hands, getting names, and handing out cards. I got 15,000 people in my Rolodex.”

“Why in the world do you still use a Rolodex? It’s 2009.”

“Figure of speech. I mean that’s how many ‘contacts’ I have in my life.”

“Big deal. I know a half-dozen dudes that could get me six different kinds of weed within the next thirty minutes.”

“It’s networking, son! You want to succeed in this world, you can’t do it on your own. You need help. You need a network.”

It was a good thing “network” wasn’t the word of the day at PeeWee’s Playhouse. Paul Reubens would have screamed his voice more hoarse than that first night he spent in the clink.

“How ‘bout that friend of yours, Wesley?” My mother cut in. “You still network with him?”

Wesley, the son my parents wished they'd had. Actually, they wished they'd had a lawyer or a doctor, or maybe just a generic businessman as a son. But, if they had to have a Hollywood dreamer of a son as their son, they'd wish for it be Wesley.

Wesley was my friendly rival at film school. We were the two superstars of the one-hundred-fifty student class. The ones that wrote the best scripts, made the student films that got the biggest applause at the semester-end screenings, scored the meager grants to put together projects.

Our first year out of college, I moved to New York while Wesley went to Los Angeles. I'd always hated driving and wanted to live in a city with public transit. While I was semi-professionally bartending, Wesley was PAing on film sets. While I was finding the best drink deals in town, Wesley was writing screenplays. I was occasionally writing screenplays too, whenever I had the gumption to sit down at my desk. Or the bar. Every time we'd finish a new one, we'd mail it across the country to each other (these were the days before e-mailing allowed such large attachments) for critique.

Wesley loved my screenplays: the creativity, the quirkiness, the vision. I hated Wesley's stuff. I thought them well-crafted, quick reads, and hacky. I thought I was soon to be the screenwriting wunderkind, not him (please see **Footchapter Three: How to Fail to Write Commercial Material**).

Wesley wrote romantic comedies that presented a world unlike the world we truly lived in. A world where guys did all the wrong things—bumbling during the “meet

cute,” stumbling during the first date, acting overeager, inept in bed, and generally uncool—but still got the girl in the final scene after a cringeworthy speech, usually at a wedding. Why the girl choose the mediocre looking, boring, and needy guy over the handsome, cool, and “with it” dude was simply because...well, the mediocre dude was the protagonist of the script.

Women loved these movies because they presented a world where men treated the objects of their affections not like objects, but like princesses, like “the one.” Nerdy men liked this world because it incorrectly convinced them that, yeah, they could beat out the handsome guys for a Kate Hudson, a Reese Witherspoon, a Jennifer Aniston, if they just continued acting like themselves. Cool guys never had opinions on these movies because they never watched them because they were off actually fucking women in the real world.

Wesley’s was the fantasy romantic comedy world everyone loved. The fantasy rom-com world usually created by nerdy writers that didn’t get chicks. Wesley did get chicks though, tons of them. He was handsome, cool, and also a savvy motherfucker who knew what the public wanted. I could only make myself feel better by telling myself he was a sell-out. A sell-out that now owned a \$3.5M house in Santa Monica.

“You’re almost thirty, Stu. What if the screenwriting career doesn’t work out? Don’t you want something to fall back on?”

“No, Mom, I want something to fall forward on. A sword’s blade.” I smirked about my clever turn of phrase. Could an untalented writer have come up with that?!

Being middle class is the worst for a failure. If you're an upper class failure, your parents' wealth, connections, and pure unadulterated nepotism can still allow you to end up on top (see: Bush, George W.) or, at least, enjoying the good life of promiscuous sex and substance abuse (see: any of the twenty-first century reality show retards whose fathers worked their asses off at legit professions [attorney, hotelier, gold medalist, etc] so that their children could go to Hollywood clubs every night to do coke and fuck each other [see: Kardashian, Kim; Hilton, Paris; Jenner, Brody; et al]).

Likewise, if you grew up lower class you have already grown up in a "failed" environment and know no better life than what is presented in the aforementioned reality television worlds. In this world it's great to be a failure as you can live a life of relative leisure, collecting food stamps, unemployment ("never-employment" would be a better term), and living in the projects.

Me, I'd love to live in the projects. You ever walk by them? Take the ones by me on 55<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. Their denizens seem to be having a blast! Up at seven in the morning—they actually want to get up early—to play hoops, dominoes, smoke weed, have unprotected sex, and, most importantly: NOT WORK. Now that's the American dream. In fact, I once thought of a reality show I called *The Projects Project* whereas I'd intentionally get fired, move into the Clinton Projects, and soon find myself BBQing, drinking forties, and most certainly not wearing a jacket and tie on weekday afternoons. What a life!

I was born in Forest Hills, Queens to fifth generation New Yorkers straight through Ellis Island. By age two, my struggling parents decided to take their chances in the

Midwest, opting for St. Louis over Kansas City, Tulsa, and Fort Worth for no other reason than flights there from LGA were a tad cheaper. A great reason to select a homestead, no question. We first lived in a split-level in the upper-lower class Mudville part of town. We had to be the only city residents that didn't own a car as we were poor and still used to New York City living which also made us some of the only city residents that took the MetroBus wherever we went. You probably don't even realize St. Louis has a bus line.

My father had lined up a job as an accountant for a restaurant supplies company and he relished the opportunity to put on a suit every morning, slam shut his cheap briefcase, and head to work. One of the reasons my family was so poor at the time was because my mother had quit her promising career as a CPA to raise my sister and I. Mom didn't believe children should be raised by babysitters, nannies, or au pairs. Especially those of a different nationality as she thought it would cause her kids to speak in weird accents.

My mom was there for every second of our childhoods, shuttling us to school, to our sports practices, rehearsals, and extracurriculars. We were so busy and my mother was happy to be the bus driver to my sister and I.

Soon, my father was making good money and eventually bought his own restaurant supplies company. It didn't make us rich, but it did catapult us firmly into the middle-middle class. As a kid, I thought we were "rich" as our next house was a four bedroom at the top of a cul-de-sac in the faux tony (fauxny?) Green Oaks section of town. The house had two tiny roaring lion statues framing the front door and a mailbox made of real stone!

Every winter we went on a ski vacation to a nearby

resort and every summer we took a trip to a top fifty American city where we'd check out their Major League ballpark, their water park, their amusement park, their zoo. I'd probably been to forty-five of the top fifty largest American cities by the time I was eighteen.

I was never a big fashion plate but I had a new wardrobe twice a year, spring and fall, short stuff and long stuff. My mother wanted her children to look nice. We had the best soccer cleats, ballet slippers, video game systems, school binders, whatever. We weren't greedy, we weren't selfish, we weren't spoiled, our parents just made sure we were well provided for.

It was only when I got to college I realized I hadn't grown up rich. I met kids from Scarsdale and Darien and Great Neck. These kids went to private and prep schools. I went to a public school with a gravel parking lot. They had grown up playing lacrosse and polo, both swimming and horseys. I'd played basketball in the park, baseball at the sandlot. They didn't even know sandlots still existed. Their fathers drove Mercedes and BMWs and Jaguars; mine, when he finally got a car in 1989, a Toyota Camry. These people "summered" and "wintered." They never "springed" or "falled," but my family didn't do any of the four seasons!

And, the houses they grew up in—my lord! Monstrosities! My parents' house was the size of my new college friends' parents' guest houses. This made me realize perspective. I had thought we were rich and I was happy. When I learned I actually hadn't grown up rich, it didn't make me any less happy though. I mean, if you or I was forced to live the exact same life that, say, President William Howard Taft lived back during his term, we would

probably kill ourselves. He was the most famous man in America, probably one of the richest, most successful, and most coddled of his time, yet we would find his life utterly repugnant. No indoor plumbing, no cable television, no fast food, no porn. We would rather be a bum in the 2000s than Taft. Than probably every single president up to, oh, I don't know, JFK? Carter?! The internet wasn't even high-speed as recent as Clinton's second term.

But my parents tried their best and surely worked as hard as my friends from Scarsdale, Darien, and Great Neck's parents. Didn't they?

Hey, now that I think about it, why was my mother a homemaker for so many years? Sure, I can understand her taking a break from the workforce for the first few years of my sister's and my life, when we were babbling, drooling, diaper-shitting fools with no activities to partake in, but why did she need to be a homemaker once we were enrolled in school? What exactly was she homemaking from eight in the morning until three in the afternoon every day while Sissy and I were in class? The house was never that tidy, we rarely ate home-cooked meals as my parents preferred the speed and variety of restaurants, and she certainly wasn't mowing the lawn or changing the car's oil. She did do our laundry but, I mean, how long could that take? She could have handled that after she got home from a real job. Like the math teacher job she took once I'd entered college.

Is it possible my mother was scamming us all? Was my mother just a layabout? Drop us off at school, go home to catch a few more ZZZZs, watch game shows, soaps, M\*A\*S\*H\* reruns, gab with her friends pulling off the same scams, taking long leisurely lunches and tea times?

Had I gotten my lack of drive due to her? Well, fuck, I couldn't become a homemaker. Especially in this day and age. Even my female friends who gave birth were back in the workforce by the time their kids could say "Mama, pwease don't weave me with the mean Jamaican nanny." It wasn't my fault I was a failure. It was my mother's! My father's! My dreadful parents!

"You criticize my lack of success, but it's all your guys' fault!"

"OUR fault?!"

"Yes, honey, how exactly is it our fault? Your father and I did nothing but love you since the day you came out of me."

"Exactly! Why couldn't you have ignored me, mocked me, deprived me, beat me?"

"What the heck are you talking about, Stuart?"

"Oprah was born to a thirteen-year-old mother and raped at nine. Billie Holiday never knew her father and was raped at ten. Judy Garland was forced to perform on the Vaudeville stage from age two on by her closeted gay father. Later she was pumped with amphetamines and barbiturates in order to keep her energy up and weight down so she could spend all day acting with that chipmunk-cheeked perv Mickey Rooney."

"Son, where is this coming from?"

"How about Marilyn Monroe? Born into poverty, she never knew her father and was shuffled between foster homes and orphanages as a ward of the state after her mother suffered a nervous breakdown which caused her brother to commit suicide!"

"Did you memorize these from Wikipedia or



something?”

“Elvis, born in a shitty shack in Tupelo to an alcoholic mother and malingerer father who was sent to jail for forging an eight dollar check. Babe Ruth, the only one of his seven siblings to survive infancy. Abe Lincoln, born to uneducated farmers in a log cabin. Eminem was abandoned by his father, forced to move from trailer park to trailer park with his moth—”

“—Hey! We saw *Eight Mile* too.”

“Why couldn’t you have been like those parents?! Or like The Jackson 5’s dad? He ordered his children to call him Joseph. Mentally and physically tortured them, going so far as to sneak up on them wearing fright masks, giving them a lifetime of psychological problems.”

“You’re saying you wish you were Michael Jackson?”

“Maybe not Jacko. Now, of course. But, Tito seems to be doing alright.”

“Let me get this straight. Instead of your mother and I loving you and giving you all we could, you wish we had ignored you, mistreated you, raped you, better yet, abandoned you, all so you would be a ‘successful’ adult by whatever crazy lens you define that term by?”

“I guess,” was the only reply I could muster.

“Maybe I should have treated you like Marvin Gaye’s father treated him!” My dad slung his napkin onto the table.

My girlfriend, red in the face, rose from the table and gave an “excuse me” half-grin before mumbling something about going to wash her hands.

“First you lambast me for not being a success, then you skewer me for wishing I’d been raised in a way which would have facilitated me being that success?!”

“Stuart...”

“Why aren’t you proud of me?”

“Who said we aren’t?”

“You do every time we get together, with your actions, your behavior, your mockery of me and trumpeting of Sissy.” I looked over at my sister. “Sorry, no offense.”

She nodded.

“But you should be proud of me. I’ve accomplished a lot.”

“Yeah?”

“Well...I know a lot about pop culture. TV, sports, the like.”

“That could help you win a Trivial Pursuit game or two.”

“I follow my dreams.”

“You’re a dreamer, that’s for sure.”

“I seize the day.”

“What’s Latin for the opposite of *carpe diem*? ‘Fuckaroundall diem?’”

“I don’t take life too seriously.”

“Why should you? It’s frivolous, ain’t it, Stuart? Fuck up this one and it’s not hard to get another.”

“I’m my own man, I refuse to be a stereotype.”

“No, you’re the biggest stereotype. The world’s full of slackers that think the mold was broken when they were born. It wasn’t. It’s still part of an assembly line pumping you guys out.”

“Then be proud I haven’t surrendered to ‘THE Man.’”

“Always the lament of the guy that refuses to earn a decent living, Stu. You know the great thing about ‘THE

Man?’ He has ‘THE money’ and ‘THE power’ and ‘THE ability’ to help make you into something.”

“I even have a bylaw in my college’s student handbook named after me.”

“\$200,000 down the drain. Shoulda sent you to community college.”

“And I’m great in bed. Hundreds of satisfied customers before the age of twenty-five.”

“Don’t make me cry, sweetie.” My mom grabbed for her napkin.

“Don’t worry, Mom, now I’m a monogamous man. With a ten-out-of-ten.”

My father shook his head in dismay.

“OK fine, dad, she’s an eight and a half. That’s still pretty good.”

Sissy’s phone vibrated and she looked at a text.

“Holy schnikeys! The mayor’s turtle just got stepped on by some klutzy secretary. He’s being rushed to our ER. I gotta split!”

Sissy stood, quickly kissed us on the foreheads and jetted. My mom called after her: “Take a cab. I don’t want you on the subway at this hour.” My mom looked back at me. “Look how well your sister is doing. Honey, you are twenty-nine, almost thirty—”

“Why does everyone always start sentences by reminding me of my age?”

“Goddammit, Stuart, your mother and I came all the way from St. Louis and wanted to buy you a nice dinner. A dinner that will cost more than your crummy, no benefits, biweekly paycheck. So, when your mother tells you you’re twenty-nine, you should fucking well listen.”

“Fair enough. I am twenty-nine, and...”

“Too old to be acting like this.”

I always get to this part of every conversation with my parents where I have to ask:

“WHY?!”

“Because that’s what people do. They lock down steady relationships and steady families and steady jobs...”

“...and have steady hands because they aren’t always drunk.”

“What’s so great about that, Mom and Dad?”

“You have two college degrees, use them!”

“Relish having a boring office job like you, Dad? I don’t like sitting on my ass all day unless a TV with football on it is in front of said ass. I don’t even know how to tie a tie.”

“A four-in-hand or half-windsor is quite simple.”

My dad unfastened his tie as my mom continued.

“You need to treat that girl nicely. Make her an honest woman or she’ll leave you, you watch. Get a ring and propose to Ashley. She’s a keeper.”

My dad wordlessly started showing how to tie a four-in-hand knot.

“What’s so great about being married? You two, married for what?”

A nice moment as the Mr. and the Mrs. looked lovingly at each other.

“Thirty-one years.” “Thirty-two years.”

My mother stared bullets at my father.

“I was counting from the day we met.”

“Let’s say thirty-one point five years. And you’ve never cheated on each other?”

"I refuse to dignify that question, Stuart," said my father.

"I'll assume that's true. Really, though? Not even a rub and tug once in awhile, Pops?"

My father angrily sipped his espresso, not quite grasping the dainty glass correctly.

"Thirty one years of monogamous marriage. Wow! Congrats. What kind of losers in modern Western society stay married that long? You know how lame that is? I mean really, who doesn't get a divorce by this time?"

My mother was hurt. "You're being unfair to us both."

"Maybe. But I'm wasted."

"Exactly. Let's go, Allen. Tell your girlfriend it was a pleasure to meet her before you chased us away."

My father peeled off a thick stack of traveler's cheques and laid them on the table.

"Seriously, son. Get your shit together."

My mother touched my cheek warmly.

"We do love you, Stuart, even if you won't let us."

As they walked out of the restaurant I called after them. I was calling after people a lot lately.

"I know how to tie a tie! I'm not a moron."

Alone, I gathered the unfinished drinks in front of me and poured them into one glass. A Staten Island Iced Tea.

Ash finally returned to the empty table.

"What happened?"

The waiter scurried over.

"Is everything OK, sir?"

"Excellent. There's your money. Sorry it's traveler's cheques but my dad doesn't believe in traveling with cash or

plastic for safety reasons.”

I nodded to the pot of fondue and looked back at the waiter.

“And...is there any way you can doggy bag the rest for me?”



***Don't adapt from something popular*** – Novels, plays, musicals, and even theme park rides are great source materials to use in crafting a commercial hit. Bad source materials? The fine print on the back of prophylactics boxes, dreams the annoying girl in the office told you she had the previous night, the “how we were established” stories on diner menus, and tracts from religious fringe groups. In fact, don't adapt your screenplay from anything. Just write it straight from your mind, loosely based on your meager life.

***Curse a lot*** – I'd bet the top ten highest grossing movies of all time have a sum total of twelve “shits,” two “fucks,” and zero “twat-lickers” in them. I mean, would *Gone With the Wind* be the box office adjusted highest grossing movie of all time if Rhett had said, “Frankly you cunt, I don't give a motherfuck”?

***Neglect to involve aliens or other creatures*** – Americans will go in droves to theaters if you include a non-human in your movie. In fact, it's harder to think of unpopular movies featuring creatures than high grossing



flicks without creatures. Even *Titanic* had Billy Zane in it.

***Make animating an impossibility*** – Another easy way to make a flick commercially viable is to cartoon it up. No one would have put up with the bullshit of *Pinocchio* if it were live-action. Geppeto and the long-nosed wooden son he built? How perverse! But turn it animated and everyone's on board. Daft kids like to look at cute anthropomorphized shit and miserable parents that no longer get to go to real films like to pretend these animated pictures are truly deep ("The humor was going right over little Anna's head!")

***Labyrinthine plot structure*** – Most people are dumb, barely able to follow the intricacies of a *Leave it to Beaver* rerun, much less a script that plays with time, flashforwards and flashbacks, dream sequences, countless characters, and tons of concurrent action. You want to be commercial? Write a three-act script using the Aristotelian drama pyramid and include a clear-cut protagonist and antagonist, a few supporting characters for comic relief (one of which is gay and bitchy or black and sassy), and plot points that hit you hard over your head, preferably with musical cues.

***Ambiguity*** – Is that guy good? Is that dude evil? Are they in love? Answer these questions immediately, in the first act, if not first few minutes, of your commercial script. Also, tie up all loose ends by the movie's end, even if you've written something you plan to turn into a franchise. Hollywood figured out how to make sequels to *Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid*, *Chinatown*, even *Gone With the Wind*. They can easily figure out how to make a sequel to your PG-rated

profanity-free alien movie starring Billy Zane.

**Intelligent characters** – Not saying you want dumb characters per se (unless they're pure comic relief or endearingly retarded) but you can't expect to have a commercially-viable script with overly intelligent characters in it. Unless they're huge nerds and/or scientists, of course. People want to see characters on screen as mediocre of mind as them.

A. You especially can't have intelligent males in your script. The male lead should be brash, cocksure, and sexy, but never wise. That's not allowed or how else would the female lead learn him sumpin'?

B. The female lead can be somewhat wiser, but she must also be way emotional. Crying, dreaming, and bouncing around like a train wreck of a pinball. Stable women have no place in commercial material.

**Unlikeable characters** – In commercial movies, even the bad guys are likable in that rakish, foreign "Ahh, he's had a rough life" kinda way. And the good guys are the most glad-handing, nicely coiffed, sexy but not sexual folks everyone would want to be friends with. Actually, I'd never want to be friends with those kinds of people. I'd rather be buddies with irredeemable assholes that always have a witty insult ready and have nothing but scorn for the confederacy of dunces around them.

**No morals, especially "Love conquers all"** – I have no clue if those noted fables were big box office draws back in Aesop's day, but I suspect sixth century BC Greeks

lined up early to hear public readings of *The Fox and the Grapes* (“Great date reading!” – Socrates). You know why? Because people like their entertainment to be summed up with a simple moral: “We despise what we can’t have.” “Slow and steady wins the race.” “Frequent liars are never believed even when they tell the truth.” “Mean aliens suck, dude.” “Friendly aliens are cool, bro.” And, of course, “Love conquers all.” But love doesn’t conquer all. It doesn’t conquer anything but boredom and horniness. Dictators with lots of brainwashed followers and state-of-the-art weaponry conquer all.

**Perverse sexuality** – Just like love conquers all in commercial product, beautiful displays of making love conquer the screen in this same product. Dim red-filtered lighting, romantic mood music, the use of luxurious California King size beds, and face-to-face not-sweaty-but-glistening missionary intercourse. Maybe, some still-bra’ed women-on-top with the naughty region covered by silk sheets if the scene is particularly steamy. Anything else is too perverse and will hurt the movie’s earning potential by about 0.5% per thrust. Doggy style is for fucking hookers. Reverse cowgirl for porn. Blowjob for low-budget indies. Cunnilingus can be hinted at but cut out of the scene by the time the man has kissed down the woman’s body to her naval. That’s the threshold between good box office and throwing the script on the slush pile. And, for the love of God, if you want to make a commercial product, no anal.

**Big budget yet high brow** – Big budget movies are great in theory. You know, the whole “gotta spend money to

make money” corollary? CGled battles between monster and alien and Billy Zane armies are gonna cost a ton but the public craves these mindless action scenes that eat up huge chunks of running time without advancing plot in any way. Audiences love explosions and slaughterings and telling their friends, “I read in *Entertainment Weekly* that final car chase cost twenty-five million dollars to shoot!” So it’s fine to write those scenes into a movie, but don’t you dare write a costly non-action, high-brow, highly-talkative scene into your script. You know, one where perhaps two cultured east coast liberal homosexuals debate and then demonstrate atom smashing techniques at the Fermilab.

If you somehow get a big meeting with some fancy Hollywood execs to discuss the potential of your non-commercial script, be sure to act aloof. When their assistant offers you a beverage, request the best Scotch in the building. Who cares if it’s eleven in the morning on a Tuesday? When they say stuff to you like: “It’s a great concept, but can we make it more...broad?”

Don’t say: “Why yes, of course, anything to help us get this picture made!”

Say things like: “Not a fucking chance you turn my masterpiece into some hacky mall movie bullshit.”

THEM: “We’re not saying you have to make the gay character straight but can we make him into one of those woo-wooing lispy *harmless* homosexuals?”

YOU: “Nope, he’s got to be more perverse than Boise, Idaho’s Gay Pride Parade and queerer than John

Waters on LSD.”

THEM: “Does that scene really need—let’s see, by our count—two-hundred-and-fifty F-bombs in it?”

YOU: “Have you been inside a synagogue lately?! That’s how they talk, man.”

THEM: “Does the male lead have to be so brazen when he notes, and I’ll read straight from your script: ‘I’d rather jerk off than fuck you with a balloon on the end of my stinky cock?’”

YOU: “What exactly is your problem with realism? You don’t get out of the house a lot, do you?”

THEM: “Finally, what about the title? We’re not sure people will pay \$12.50 to see *Fucking on the Rag*.”

YOU: “Actually, I would consider changing the title, giving it a lil’ more commercial appeal. What about *Menses Mayhem*?”

All that will guarantee your script never gets optioned and certainly never gets made and most definitely keeps you bartending well into your thirties.

## 4 | **HOW TO FAIL**

TO DO SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE ALL DAY

EH EH EH EH! My alarm clock buzzes strong at eight AM.

I'm not one of those people that hits snooze three times in a row, which I suppose makes me a success of the lowest regard, but it will be my only victory for the day so I have to brag a little.

I rise from bed like a zombie, hungover, perhaps still drunk, and enter my squalid bathroom. I should probably clean it this weekend during my hour or two of sobriety.

I flip two switches, the hot/cold knob on my shower, and the power button on the Bose wave radio I won at some charity raffle I should have never been at in the first place. The fates wish to musically mock me and the song that plays is *Top of the World* by The Carpenters.

I lean over the sink, staring at myself in the toothpaste-speckled mirror. Look at you, loser. My self-loathing turns to hatred for my job. I'm not the loser. I just have a shitty fucking job. Another fucking day at the shitty fucking job.

I reconsider the running water and turn the shower off. Cleanliness is not in the cards this morning. My first

failure of the day, quite minor or quite huge depending on who you ask. You've heard of an Irish shower—washing your pits and crotch with a washcloth? Or, maybe, the Puerto Rican shower—dousing your body in cologne? I'll take my own special Stuart Fish shower today. That's simply doing nothing. I won't shower, I won't wash, I won't splash on cologne or apply deodorant, I won't even comb my bedhead or put on clean undies. I don't care about the exterior I present to this world. I've been nothing but an empty vessel since Ash broke up with me.

Soon, I am on a packed subway, running late to work, disheveled in rumpled business casual attire. I have to wear anything-but-jeans to work, so I do, a single pair of shoddy fifteen dollar slacks with big pleats and bigger cuffs. At the end of each day I take these pants off, spritz them with Febreze, and drape them across my desk chair. I haven't had them dry-cleaned since I was dumped a few weeks ago. My dress shirts are three alternating button-ups I purchased my senior year of college for a variety of nicer functions I needed to attend. These shirts are old, worn out, perma-stained. My shoes are a stinky filthy pair of black Doc Martens I've been wearing for a decade.

I stare with admiration at the successes packed into the subway car around me. Them in their Hugo Boss suits, crisply pressed Thomas Pink oxfords, their Ferragamo lace-ups, a *Wall Street Journal* snapped and folded so they can read it, they soon to have their own woodcut visage on the front page no doubt, if newspapers even exist by then. The women in their sexy work attire, listening to music on their fancy iPhones which I can only dream of affording.

On my commute, I do nothing productive. I

don't read the paper, or a magazine, or a book. I don't do a crossword or play Sudoku. I don't even listen to an iPod or play BrickBreaker on my cell phone. I might ogle a businesswoman's pumped-up calves, thinking about them straddling my waist, being thrown over my shoulders. Thinking about her being my next girlfriend. But, usually, I just stare in a daze at the advertisements for chiropractors and ESL courses.

By 9:18 I've arrived to drop my shit at my desk, to check in and let my inferior superiors know I am in the building.

It doesn't matter what I do for a living because I don't really do anything for a living. I am essentially paid \$39,000 a year to show up at an office building approximately 230 times a year for about eight hours a day. I never arrive at nine, not even close, but like Fred Flintstone I sprint out of the office the second the bird's tail is pulled and he squawks five o'clock.

I am no hypocrite, just as I mentioned in Chapter Two how I don't give a shit what others do for a living, I am just the same when it comes to my own job. I frequently get the "So what do you do?" question, just like anybody does, but I rarely answer it by revealing what I "do."

People ask "So what do you do?" to get a grasp on who you are as a person.

You're an investment banker = you work long hours, make a butt-load of money, are nerdy.

You're a lawyer = you had no explicit dreams in life so you went to law school, now you push paper all day waiting to be made partner in a decade or two.

You're a doctor = you like exploiting people's



ailments for your own financial gain.

I tell people I'm a writer. Cause that's what I want to be. It's the only thing I could possibly enjoy. Screenwriter is the only job that's interested me since I realized at age fifteen I would never be a Major League third baseman.

"Wow, a screenwriter, that's awesome!" is what you probably think people would respond, opening me up to a series of uncomfortable follow-up questions proving I'm not really one. But, no. No one cares. People are just waiting for you to finish talking so they can start talking again. Follow-up questions only come if they think it will allow them to brag a little bit more about themselves.

After I've dropped my shit at my desk, I head off to get coffee, caffeination being of crucial importance for getting me through the wretched day. I need coffee like zombies need brains. I don't head to the standard break room, though. Instead, I walk down two floors and visit the janitorial lounge.

Not only does the lounge have superior coffee, but the janitors, repairmen, and handymen that congregate in this uncarpeted room are the best. All so funny, so interesting, so kind. All clad in jump suits or Dickeys, shirts with patches on them and their names sewn onto the breast, though these are people whose names I actually care to know. J.J. the electrician and Kenny the janitor, Oswaldo the plumber and Carl the superintendent. All with jobs that sounded a helluva lot better than mine. Getting to clean toilets, fix electrical cords, vacuum. Much better than being chained to a desk. You think I'm joking, but I'm not.

The only job I've ever enjoyed was a blue collar one. Back in the summer between sophomore and junior

year of college, Keith convinced me that instead of interning at some stuffy office, waitering, bagging groceries, we should get a house in South Carolina and golf every day.

Our first day in North Myrtle Beach, we saw a rich local loading some day-laborers into a pickup truck and asked him about work, needing some coin to facilitate our golfing lifestyle. Mr. Showalter was having his gigantic guest house painted and was thrilled to have two English-speaking boys up for the low-paying job. Low-paying for a true adult, sure, but for us, ten dollars an hour was phenomenal.

Every morning, Keith and I would wake before sunrise, throw on some filthy coveralls, slam a thirty-two ounce Mountain Dew to shake off the cobwebs, and walk over to Mr. Showalter's house where we'd take our place among a few kindly Mexicans. There wasn't much talking between us painters—language barrier and lack of interest in each other's favorite sports—so it was very peaceful. Just standing on a ladder, you and the brush. Brush into bucket, up, down, up, down, up, down, dip, repeat. Seven straight hours of this. I figured out so many things during those days. I tackled my problems, had great explosions of creativity, planned the next fifty years of my life. Most satisfying, at the end of every day, I'd get off the ladder, walk back from the house about twenty yards and go, "Look what I've accomplished today!" You just can't do that in an office environment.

After our day of painting, Keith and I would rip off our coveralls and head over to cheap public courses where we'd get the twilight rate and rush through eighteen holes, our hands and fingernails still caked in paint flecks. After a quick clubhouse shower, we'd hit the bars for cheap beers

and to try and hook up with tourists on the beach. By the end of the summer, I was breaking eight-five regularly and had upped my sexual number eleven-fold, but the painting ended up being what I remember most about that time.

The beginning of my day is actually the only part of my current work day I enjoy as I check the previous twelve hours of unread e-mails, though most are of the SPAM or "Please finish this report ASAP!" variety. The random personal e-mail excites me, however. I don't know why e-mail is still such an exciting form of communication. Did worker bees back in the 1970s sit at their desks staring at their rotary phone, hoping it would ring? That's how I treat e-mail. I always have it up in one of the windows on my computer and most of the time I just stare at the inbox with zero new messages in it, hoping a new one arrives. Story of my life, just sitting around waiting for others to take action. When the box refreshes and a new message comes in, I jump to, quickly opening it, elated when it's from an actual friend. A simple message, a funny link passed along, some sage wisdom forwarded.

Sometimes, on those days I'm not getting any messages, I'm forced to create them myself by initiating contact with someone in my address book, though never Keith or Danny or Jack because they tell me they're something called..."busy." Do you know that word? They also fear repercussions from their companies for using work e-mail for personal purposes. And don't get me started about cursing. When we do actually e-mail, they make me write stuff like "sh\*t" and "\*ss" and "f\*ck" and "c\*cks\*cker" so their systems won't be alerted to profanities usage. P\*ssies.

Even without them, if I can get e-mailing threads started with five or so people, that gives me enough fodder to blow through a whole workless day.

When I've exhausted all my e-mailing, I start hitting up websites, anything to waste time. Sports, entertainment, politics. Shit that doesn't even interest me, though that's one reason I'm so smart. I'd much rather read a long, boring Wikipedia entry about Noam Chomsky than actually do work.

Before I know it, I've done not a lick for the entire morning though I have learned a reasonable amount about generative grammar. It's remarkable how quickly noon comes. Noon, on the dot, is when I go to lunch, a fact that makes my coworkers laugh at me. Not that I talk to those losers. I don't even know most their names. There's the one guy I call Flanders in my head because he dresses like Flanders from *The Simpsons* and is the most phony nice person I've ever met. There's Creepy Pants who I always run into by the copier. He has a perpetual look of pedophilic leering on his face. There's Skank who is this jappy chick with the exact same job as me. She spends all day yakking on the phone to her friends. I call her Skank because every time she bends over to reach into her bottom drawer, her Filene's Basement blazer lifts up a little revealing a mermaid tattoo on the tramp stamp portion of her lower back. I have no idea if she is literally a skank, or a tramp, but that's what I call her because I don't know her real name.

Flanders, Creepy Pants, Skank, The Koala, Stinkbreath, Gayman, Fartface, Perv, and Ze Zit (an acne-scarred German fella), they work within a thirty foot radius of me, have for years, some of them, and I've never taken

the time to know their names. I guess that's just the kind of person I am.

I would never pick these people as my friends. Why should I befriend them just because we're forced into the same situation due to every human being's need to earn an income? Having work friends I see outside the office would just remind me of my shitty job. I'm not one of those people that likes to bitch about things he dislikes, one of the major reasons a lot of people have coworker friends.

While the diligent Flanders orders in some Chinese, Skank goes out to grab a salad to bring back to her desk, and Creepy Pants nukes a Lean Cuisine, I luxuriate for the full hour I'm entitled. I stretch my lunch to about ninety minutes as I walk around midtown Manhattan, as far north as 59<sup>th</sup> and Central Park, as far south as 42<sup>nd</sup> and Bryant Park, as far east as Madison Ave., and as far west as Eighth, chowing down on styrofoam trays of Halal street meat, gawking at tourists, window shopping, reading magazines at newsstands, working on my tan.

Back from lunch and it's more goofing off. By now, I'm on cup five of coffee. Its lackadaisical laxative quality begins to rear its ugly head and soon some fecal matter will be rearing its ugly head out my back end. This is a terrific development as I can kill a good half-hour in the bathroom. I don't do anything special, I just treat the work bathroom like I'd treat my at-home bathroom. Sitting on the can, reading internet printouts about string theory, The Prisoner's Dilemma, Mel Ott, Pliny the Elder, texting people on my phone, working crosswords, daydreaming. I may even stick around for a few extra minutes to peel one off (please see **Footchapter Four-B: How to Masturbate at**

**Work).**

By now it's three and you can't get any work done the last hour or two before it's time to leave. I've already begun packing it in for the day.

People say to me, "Surely at some point you've exhausted every single time-waster and literally have no choice but to work?!"

Amazingly not and I'm sorry if you lack the time-wasting skills I have. At the art of time-wasting I am, in fact, a wild success. I do have to work a little, just to assure I keep my plush job, but I've found that "little" can be fifteen to thirty minutes a day. To my credit, I'm actually pretty good at my worthless job when I do it, and a focused half-hour flurry can produce an output that rivals most of my dumb coworkers' whole afternoon.

On those days or weeks that my boss, Dough (pronounced Doug), feels particularly chippy, I'll focus a little harder, and produce so much work it'll make his life exponentially tougher as he has to process it all. I usually don't hear much for him after that and am again free and back to my own devices.

Remember, this is a time of recession. At least that's what we're told. No one really knows. Rich people know they are poorer. Poor people know that rich people won't shut the fuck up about it. No bonuses this year? Shit, I've never gotten a bonus in my life. A person like me loves this recession because it has made so many successes into failures. I know how to cope with failure. I've been dealing with it for years. But some dude who has been pulling six figs and taking black Towncars and bottle servicing it since the days of Clinton, that fuck has no idea how to cope.

In fact, it's possible, as we near a second Great Depression, I will soon be one of the leaders in this new world. As brokers and bankers and traders leap to their deaths from my building, I will slowly rise to the top of the heap of corpses. Why, I might just be the recession's white collar Mad Max.

If some cataclysmic event caused the world's modern technologies to go down, who would be the new leaders on this planet? It wouldn't be the well-heeled Ivy League educated poofs. It would be the high school dropouts that knew how to live on the land and deftly use a knife. As this cataclysmic economic event has brought the money world to its knees (and not for some fellatio), it's not the well-heeled Ivy Leaguer who knows how to cope. It's me. I thrive on failure. I watch CNN and read *The New York Times* to get a good laugh. The Dow Jones drops, and my place in the world rises. Those Depression-era movies never looked too bad to me. A lot of waiting on soup lines and drinking potato vodka while leaning against a building. I could handle that. Except for all of FDR's radio chats interrupting my favorite shows. Being an Okie and heading West? Well, at least we seem to have solved the major dust problems of the last century.

By 5:28 I am back home, sitting on my couch in a t-shirt and mesh shorts, watching *Pardon the Interruption* in a catatonic state, slowly coming out of that work-induced coma. Missing my ex-girlfriend. Trying to snap out of my malaise.

A box of pizza appears in front of me. I will eat it.

A six-pack of beer appears in front of me. I will drink it.

A reality show on MTV about tween semi-prostitutes appears in front of me. I will watch it.

By midnight, I go to sleep. Not because I'm tired but because I'm bored.

479 minutes later my alarm clock will read 7:59 AM as sunlight creeps through the window...

And then one more minute will turn over...

And then EH EH EH EH....

And I will shut it off...

And march to the shower...

And work another eight hours like a zombie.

But that didn't happen today.

Today I got laid off.

The first thing I did after getting laid off was go buy a coffeemaker. The second was go get wasted.

The day had begun like any other. Alarm, bathroom self-loathing, missing Ash, packed subway car, mindless web-surfing (did you know Proust was asthmatic?), counting down the minutes til lunch, and then, at 11:08, Dough (pronounced Doug) poked his head out of his office, and talked to me for the first time in thirteen days.

"Uh, hey, Stu? Could you come in so we could talk about something?"

An ambiguous desire to "talk" is always a death knell. When I entered his office and he closed the door, I knew my dream was about to come true. My malaise would soon be gone. I would be reborn.

Most men dream of promotions, plusher offices, and more responsibility, but I had always dreamt of getting laid off with a severance package. Paid to literally not work.

Dough (pronounced Doug) is one of this



civilization's last "company men." He went straight from graduating Seton Hall to the exact same position I currently have. As people above him moved on to other jobs, retired, died, he slowly but surely got promoted until he reached the position he has resided in for the last five years. The highest position he will ever obtain, the position he will have for the rest of his life. And, though it's impossible he would ever lose this job, every single day he exists on pins and needles, walking on eggshells, scared to death of offending the mere half-dozen people higher than him and losing his middle-manager job.

Dough (pronounced Doug) limply shook my hand, touched my shoulder with his left hand, and patted my back. All that was missing was a hair tousle and a happy ending.

Dough (pronounced Doug) opened his mouth to speak some rehearsed patter, but retracted a bit upon inhaling a whiff of my breath.

"Uh...have you been drinking today?"

"If by 'today' you mean midnight til five this morning, then, yes, technically I have been drinking today, but it's not like..."

"Never mind. That's not important at this moment in time." He exhaled. "You know we greatly admire the work you, uh, do here for us all and we've always considered you, uh, a great asset to the company..."

He was wasting both our time as he progressed to the most basic of revelations.

"...and we had always hoped you'd, uh, be with us until your own retirement..."

I just grinned and beared it. Naw, I smiled ear to ear and reveled in it.

“...you were probably, in fact, uh, the best we’ve ever had here in your particular position...”

Dough (pronounced Doug) was struggling, trying to give the appearance of struggling, no, he was certainly struggling, as he talked about all the great work I’d done for them over the past five years (hogwash!), how he and everyone else would miss me (hogwash!), how it would be a great blow to the “team” to not have me there any more (hogwash!), but it was all, yes, hogwash.

“...and it just, uh, tears me up inside that the current economic climate, uh, demands that we free up some space...”

I was irrelevant, I deserved to be laid off. Surprisingly, it wasn’t my shoddy work ethic, lack of skills, unkempt appearance, or even my alcoholism. No, it was simply because they could no longer afford to pay my marginal salary. (Of course they could afford that new \$15,000 Xerox machine that could print on seven different sizes of paper and even bind them together in three different ways.)

“...so since you have, by just a mere month, juniority to Meryl, it’s you that we have to let go...”

So that was the Skank’s name!

“Don’t fret, though, because if there is any sort of good news I can offer you on this tough day, you will be getting fifteen weeks of full severance, plus eighteen remaining vacation days paid in full.”

My penis became so engorged with blood I thought I was going to split the seam of my cheap slacks.

“I’m just so, so, so sorry.”

Dough (pronounced Doug) stood and offered his hand, again patted me on the back, and led me out of his

office and toward the elevators. En route we passed Skank, just that one measly month my senior, who glared at me as if I had won the lottery. I had and I didn't even need to scratch anything off with a dirty coin.

"Be seeing you...Meryl." She reached for the phone to call and bitch to one of her friends.

Out on the 55<sup>th</sup> Street, I had a hop in my step, a free man for the first time in years. What with my severance package and what I would later find out was an available thirty-three weeks of New York State unemployment per year at a supplement of ~\$250 per week, I could probably survive for six to eight months doing diddly squat.

I did immediately rue one thing about losing my job: all the free coffee. Now unemployed, I couldn't afford to buy four X \$2.50 Ventis a day to feed my biggest addiction (please see **Footchapter Four-A: How to Get an Addiction**). Thus, soon I was downstairs at the Columbus Circle Bed, Bath, & Beyond sorting through coffeemakers, trying to determine what I would need. Four cup, six cup, eight cup, twelve? Stainless steel, unbreakable insulated carafe, charcoal water filter? Programmable clock, LED control panel, internal thermostat, "coffee-on-demand," a fucking remote control?!

I grabbed the cheapest one, a twelve dollar four cup model with a reusable mesh filter made by a company I'd never heard of that sounded Nordic in origin. Vikings drank a lot of joe, I guess. And though the floor display showed my selection to be a mere four inches wide and about a foot tall, the box my new coffeemaker came in was about as big as a 32" tube television.

Walking out of Bed, Bath with the cumbersome

box under my arm, I glanced up at the CNN digital clock to see the time roll over to noon. I had no snooze button to even consider slapping, nowhere to be, nothing to do. I could do whatever I needed to do.

I needed a drink.

Naw, I didn't need a drink. People with jobs and bitch girlfriends and stress need drinks. I wanted a drink.

I headed to The Wee Pub in Hell's Kitchen, a gimmicky dive bar in which everything—barstools, the bar, tables, televisions, and even the bouncers—are all larger than normal in order to make patrons feel tiny, minuscule, wee. It's an ego blow I will admit. Probably why everyone there feels so miserable.

That wee feeling extended to their standard mug of beer being some thirty-two ounces and their standard cocktail tumbler sixteen, which lead to the Wee Pub usually being full of massive drunkards trying to cure their self-loathing which wouldn't be quite as bad as it was in the first place if the Wee didn't have such an intimidating gimmick.

I set the coffeemaker box on the enormous bar in front of me and said hello to the owner, Lynn, 6'7" himself, who was busily reading about the Mets in the *Post*. They were on a ten-game losing streak as seemingly every other day one of their players got injured. Lynn spoke to me in his mumbly, quick, sing-songy brogue.

"They rally need ta' fi-yar fookin' Omar cuz da' Metz ain't fer shite this year. Eh...since whun da' ya' come 'ere in da' muddle ofv the day?"

Several years ago, when I started coming to the Wee and had first met Lynn, I couldn't understand a goddamn thing the Irish bastard said. I was tired of constantly going

“Huh?” that I claimed to be hard of hearing. He started speaking slower and enunciating in an American accent until, after a while, I was able to understand him in all his glory. At that point, to save face, I’d claimed I’d gotten a cochlear implant and that was how I all of the sudden could understand him.

“I just got laid off, Lynn.”

“Surry to ‘ear that, brutha. Roof ek-ahnommic climutt nowadaze. Furst drink’s onda houz.”

Hell’s Kitchen is a splendid drinking part of Manhattan, probably the second best after the East Village, but it’s dead during the day. The unemployed and the alcoholic aren’t yet awake and the employed work too far east to drop in for a lunchtime chin chin.

For the next three hours I had the bar, Lynn, and the thirty-two ounce mugs to myself save the occasional tourist family that accidentally came in, the artists meeting to pontificate, the bums looking for bottles to redeem for a few shekels.

Feeling tipsy after three mugs, I called some friends to brag about being laid off, but no one would answer the phone. They were all something called...“busy.” I didn’t want them to know about my newfound lack of employment anyhow. It would just make them jealous. Would just make them feel even sorrier for me. Would just make them try to “help” by finding me some other crummy job. I didn’t need that.

At 3:30 sharp, a youthful gal entered the bar, her outfit betraying her age as she wore an old lady shawl over a navy sundress.

“Wow, I’m not the first one in here today, huh,

Lynn? That's a first. You look like you've had a few, fella."

"I'm on..." I did the math in my head. "...uh..." I chugged the remaining How to Fail Ale to make the calculations easier. "Just finished my hundred and sixtieth ounce."

"Not too shabby. So what do you do that gives you the awesome ability to get loaded before the rest of us? Before moi?"

"Nothing important."

"Me neither." She flirtatiously smiled.

"You know, I've never given a damn about anyone's job before, but I kinda want to know about yours."

She leaned in and whispered in my ear. "I'm a school teacher."

Katie Anderson made a pretty penny working for a private elementary school on the Upper West Side. When the final bell rang at three, she hoofed it down to the Wee where she'd get soused while grading papers. Swig her beer, check an answer wrong, slurp some vodka, A+++ smiley face, shot of Jameson. She had to be in the classroom by six AM and drinking heavily starting at previous-to-happy hour was the easiest way for her to be passed out before the evening news and up before the sun.

"That's so perverse!"

"I'm not going to lie, it's pretty easy to teach seven-year-olds."

"You don't say..."

"I do say. And you know what *they* say..."

"Who's they?"

"They that say, 'Those that can't do...?'"

"Right."

“Totally true. Most of my coworkers are retards. Even the ones that teach the literal retards. Some kinda reverse Stockholm Syndrome or something. Corky Syndrome maybe. I can barely have adult conversations with any of them. All they know about are reasonably-priced shoes, *The Bachelorette*, and giving pacifying blow jobs to their undersexed hubbies who often work in an administrative capacity in our very same school.”

Katie took a swig of her beer, she was already slurring a bit.

“That doesn’t mean I’m a moron, though. That doesn’t mean I ‘can’t do.’ Because besides those that can’t do, there are also those that don’t want to do. I’m of that breed. But I do want to have money, so I teach. Easiest way to make a dime without giving a shit that I can think of.”

“Maybe teaching could be my next avocation. If only I weren’t allergic to kids.”

Katie giggled.

“So, Stu, I’m going to have to address the enormous elephant in the room: what’s that coffee pot for?”

Four hours later we were in her Murphy bed having sex. I’d never had sex in a Murphy bed before. Another sexual task to check off my Fucket List. It had kinda been fun.

Five hours later we were sleeping. I’d never slept in a Murphy bed before. It had kinda been uncomfortable.

Thirteen hours later we were awake. I’d never awoke in a Murphy bed before. My back kinda hurt. It was five in the morning. Katie was toweling off from a shower.

“Good mornin’, sunshine.”

Yesterday was the best day I’d had in awhile. The

most productive, too. I'd lost a crappy job, made a few grand in severance, boosted my bank account to never-before-seen heights, purchased my first career coffeemaker, had sex, and met an awesome girl.

It was the earliest I'd been awake in awhile. I could make today even more productive. I wondered what was on television at this hour. I hoped I had paid the cable bill.





**Coffee** – Get little sleep, be constantly hungover, and have little enthusiasm for the world you live in and the day in front of you.

**Alcohol** – I can't say it better than Bukowski in *Women*: "If something bad happens you drink in an attempt to forget; if something good happens you drink in order to celebrate; and if nothing happens you drink to make something happen." As a failure you will rarely be celebrating, but you'll also rarely be drinking to forget. Failedom's not as sad as you think, just boring. Thus, alcohol will be the lubricant for making you get off your ass to do something. Even if that something is just going out to Eighth Avenue to laugh at tourists. Alcohol is decisiveness juice. It's also bad idea punch, intellect intoxicant, insolence nectar, fighting fluid, boastfulness booze, smartass sauce, injury water, aggressiveness aqua vitae, felony-committin' firewater, and, of course, maybe above all else...depression drink.

**Smoking** – Have no need for your hands. If you needed your hands to hold a briefcase, the woman you loved, or

your newborn son you also wouldn't have the need to inject an alkaloid stimulant into your system twenty some-odd times per day.

**Greasy foods** – Let's just say the bars you frequent don't exactly have organic arugula, grilled swordfish, and couscous on the menu. You'll have little choice but to eat bacon cheeseburgers, bowls of Texas chili, and chicken fingers. Fittingly, greasy foods are the failures of the culinary industry. You in food form! Instead of a flawlessly dry-aged, perfectly cut tenderloin pan-seared to an exact medium-rare in some fresh prime extra-virgin olive oil before being plated with a nice Shiraz sauce, the foods you eat are simply taken from a freeze-dried bag and dipped in delicious grease. You are what you eat, a failure that opts for quick and easy over slow, skilled, and accomplished.

**Television** – Latchkey kids with absentee parents often note they were "raised by television." But what happens when you're an adult? You don't need television to raise you any more, so instead it will act as your companion. Your best friend when sports are on, your drinking buddy when a funny movie is airing, your romantic partner when dramatic stuff is on the tube, and your sexual companion when you find yourself watching some late night softcore on the premium channels.

**Sex** – Having a sex addiction is blatant braggery. Ever notice it's only handsome celebrities that have sex addictions? You know why? Because even though your fat and swarthy fifty-two-year-old doorman would love to have a sex addiction,

he can't, because no one will fuck him. Addictions to caffeine, food, booze, cigarettes, even drugs, are easily acquirable, so long as you have a little loot and even less self respect. But a sex addiction, by its nature, means a second person has to go along with the plan and you probably aren't doing too well at getting a second person to aid in this most desirable addiction. So I guess I am, like most men, more addicted to the concept of having lots of sex.

Which is really just **masturbation**, now, ain't it? To have an addiction to masturbation you simply need to find yourself unwillingly celibate, by yourself a lot, often bored, lacking a girlfriend, eschewing hookers, owning a bottle of lotion and a resilient dick, and having very high speed internet.

**Lying** – If you are a failure, you will have to develop an addiction to lying. Going around with full transparency will make people, at best, pity you and, at worst, have nothing but contempt for you. People don't like to be around failures. They want friends, acquaintances, and companions that are successes, that can help facilitate their dreams, or at least inspire those dreams. Thus, you will find yourself walking around under the guise of success, lying about how well this went and that went, how good you are at this, fortunate at that, and how many beautiful women you fucked just last night. Shit, I wouldn't believe a damn thing I've said in this book so far.



Sure coffee breaks, internet surfing, and online Boggle are swell, but there is no better time-waster during the work day than masturbation.

You may ask, “What kind of deviant would disgustingly pleasure himself in a public office bathroom?” Exactly.

Masturbating at work is a delicate ballet of subterfuge, expediency, and breathing control. To start, I will assume you don’t have your own office since, like me, you are a failure. It’s kinda the Catch 22 that the sort of person who would be successful enough to have his own office would also never be the sort who would exploit that perk by locking the door to said office just to rub one out.

How shrouded is your cubicle’s computer screen from others’ eyelines? When you have some free time, walk a full 360 degrees around the cube at varying height levels to test for visibility. You see, you’re going to want to get a little titillated while at your desk to make your actual bathroom time minimal. Assuming no one can see your computer screen, you may be able to look at some pornography right from your desk chair. Now, don’t be a dope and Google

“drunken college amateurs blow job facials.” Those Indian nerds in the IT department might be spying on your internet usage. They probably won’t rat you out, especially if your surfing history offers them good free wank site suggestions, but you should never be too cavalier.

Instead of Googling for porn, or straight up visiting your favorite URLs, just keep a secret folder on your computer with a repository of pics and videos. Carefully compile this at home, transfer it to your office computer using a zip drive, and then give it an innocuous name, “Client info, 2005” for example. Something no snoop would have any interest in opening on days you’ve called in sick (read: hungover) to work.

Now you can watch videos and look at pictures from the privacy of your own cubicle in the wide open midst of your office floor. Don’t watch too many videos and don’t get yourself too worked up, just view enough to give your brain a little stuff to mull over, your libido a little juice, your penis a drop or two of blood.

Let us head to the bathroom. If you’re lucky, you work in an office with one-man bathrooms. Piece of cake if that’s the case and I’ll let you figure out the rest yourself. But if you work in an environment with multi-user separated-gender lavatories, pleasuring yourself will be no cakewalk.

Every office has some bathrooms that are less utilized than others. The bathroom on a little-populated floor, the hidden loo in the lobby, the water closet near the supply closet. Finding these are crucial as they will offer both a paucity of intra-bathroom traffic and stench. There’s nothing erotic about trying to get hot and heavy with the fifth floor receptionist—in your mind—as countless aged

coworkers in adjacent stalls hack up a lung and fart out a colon, your nostrils getting pelted with fecal pungentness. I've been known to pull my shirt over my head to block out all senses and take myself to that "special" place, but that is obviously a risky maneuver and will make you feel truly sorry for blind dudes who want to pull their pud.

Speaking of that hot receptionist on the fifth floor, don't be afraid to use her for material. As a failure, there's a good chance you don't have much recent sexual experience to draw from. No one's penis can snap to full attention when he is only able to remember that recent whiskey-dicked one night stand with a bar floozy with Dali tits or last weekend's sensual massage from a Koreatown washy-washy lady. Thus, you may want to have a little talk with the hottest girl in the office before you head to the restroom. Try to shape the conversation toward your own perverse needs.

YOU: Hey, Shelly, what did you do last night?

SHELLY: Oh, not much. Just stayed home and watched Netflix with my cat.

YOU: Did you pet, no, make that rub...wait, no stroke, that...cat by any chance...?

If you have the misfortune of working with no attractive coworkers, either try to be allowed in on the hiring discussions for next summer's batch of interns, or simply add some lascivious pictures to your cell phone. It's not the most comfortable thing to be standing in a stall with your dick in your right hand and your cell in your left, but with limited options, you may have no choice.

As for standing in the stall to do the deed, you may prefer to sit and I can fully understand that. I like freedom, though, and adopt a wide stance ala Dave Winfield or Jeff



Bagwell. Since I'm standing, anyone entering the bathroom and looking under the stalls may find it odd to see a pair of dull boots facing toward the bowl. Seeing shoes facing toward the bowl will raise pointed questions in a snoop's mind, leading them to think you may be doing something even worse than choking the chicken; we're talking illicit drug usage or bulimic stomach purging.

I alleviate those concerns by removing my shoes and putting them on backwards, right shoe heel-forward on my left foot, left shoe heel-forward on my right. It's not the most comfortable thing in the world, but it will do the trick and make snoops assume you're just taking a highly-prolonged crap. You may even want to bring a few sections of the newspaper into the stall to lay right in front of the flip-flopped shoes' toes to make it appear as if you may be catching up on current events or enjoying the day's newest *Blondie* (you enjoy that sandwich, Dagwood!)

We're finally ready for the coup de grace. Firstly, you're going to need lubricant to reduce friction from your meaty paws. I don't suggest carrying around your own tiny bottle of lotion or water soluble jelly. It's not only risky to have such products on your person at all times, but even a failure will feel a little weird having a tiny tube of KY next to his keys as he goes about his day.

Some people may like to improvise with some old-fashioned face  $H_2O$ , but I've always found problems with this. As an inveterate drunkard and coffee slugger, as well as a person who never drinks his doctor-assigned eight glasses of agua a day, I am perpetually dehydrated and unable to produce enough spittle for masturbatory purposes. Thus, I use the liquid soap.

Office bathrooms are stocked with that neon pink bought-in-bulk soap that is so low in quality it has a nice thin viscosity for great gliding action with one's palm. Discreetly take a pump or two from the dispenser into your "playing" hand and lock yourself in a stall. Yeah, you'll have to use your off-hand for all tasks post-pump, pre-entering the stall, but that shouldn't be a big deal. The great thing about masturbating with the liquid soap is that your unit will smell terrific afterward. Like a clunker that just visited the car wash. Liquid soap is also relatively silent, not creating that noisy thwack-thwack-thwack slappin' the salami sound that thicker lotions and greasier lubricants create.

While in the act, you will have to keep the sound to a minimum. Before I even begin, I set the scene by artificially creating a little white noise. I turn a sink on, barely, just so a steady drizzle hits the drain. This causes a louder noise than you would think and, assuming you have a multi-sink bathroom, will probably not be looked at askew by fellow bathroom patrons who will simply assume a leaky faucet to be avoided. I also vigorously flush the commercial-grade toilet several times in rapid fire succession before I begin the act. This causes the building's pipes to overwork with water flow noise, creating a great masking agent that will last anywhere from two to five minutes depending on your building's age.

Most importantly, though, is your own breathing. You're not going to be able to get all worked up making loud porno "Uuuuuuh" and "AAAAAHHH" grunts. Certainly don't speak dirty to yourself. "Oh, you like that shit, don't you? You're a slutty like penis, aren't you?" That will only raise eyebrows. I suggest breathing completely out of your

nose as it is less bassy than those guttural mouth exhales that many men inadvertently find themselves making during the act. Don't get me wrong, you'll be able to periodically offer a groan or a grunt because, if you recall, anyone outside the stall will just assume you're squeezing out a pumpernickel loaf which can be painful and necessitate noise. You just can't have a constant stream of breathy noise slowing building to a crescendo of ejaculatory yelling.

As for the sound of your semen hitting the toilet water, eh, I wouldn't worry too much about that. If another bathroom patron is able to that acutely identify certain sounds then may God have mercy on us all. That man will truly conquer the planet one day.

You've now killed a good twenty minutes of the day and your brain is flooded with endorphins. You should be content and spent enough to buckle down and work straight for the next half-hour. Exiting the bathroom, if anyone seems to notice you flustered with rosy palms, having spent an inordinate amount of time in the W.C., just make a joke about it, infer you had some Taco Bell or White Castle for lunch. That'll shut 'em up.

## 5 | **HOW TO FAIL**

### TO LIVE IN A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Moving into a Manhattan apartment is a hellacious experience. Rich, successful people can get a broker, hire moving men, and easily foot the tens of thousands in broker's, security, and moving fees by throwing cash at the problem. Failures, living paycheck to paycheck, cannot.

I should have moved in with Ash like she begged me to. We had been dating for a year at that point, which is a perfectly typical “living together” threshold, I am told by Jack. It would have been easy. I wouldn't have had to do any hunting, pay any fees, and our monthly rents would have been halved which would have given us more money to wine and dine, though we were less a wine and dine couple than a brew and screw pairing.

I loved her, sure, but I wasn't ready to live with her. I spent the night with her three out of five weekdays, and all forty-eight hours of the weekend, but I still wanted that 10% away time for myself. For peace and quiet, to watch the TV shows I liked that she didn't understand, to get my “work” done, to drink. Or, perhaps I just wasn't ready to grow up and live with a lady.

Why I had to move in the first place was another

story. I'd been living in a tiny studio on 47<sup>th</sup> that was a steal at \$1000/month, and my landlord knew it was a steal, but due to New York's tenant laws he couldn't raise my rent more than 7.5% per year. Which meant he had to force me out (please see **Footchapter Five-A: How to Locate and Find Yourself Paying Rent to a Slumlord**), which he ultimately did.

With little options, less money, and terrible credit, I was forced to turn to Craigslist's "Available Rooms" section where I found only one subletter willing to accept me. Which is how I ended up moving into the spare room in the Hell's Kitchen apartment of a man with the Christian name of Christian.

## TEN FUN FACTS ABOUT CHRISTIAN:

**10** **Believes he is reincarnated from an Indian yoga master** – Christian told me this the day I moved in. I was holding one side of my mattress while Jack held the other and, as we negotiated a corner, Christian popped up. "I'm reincarnated from Yogi Swatmarama, you know?" I could barely understand him. "Cool." Later, after I was moved in and stealing WiFi from our above neighbors (Awesometown69), I spent twenty minutes on Swatmarama's Wikipedia entry trying to figure out what Christian had said. Seems the yogi lived in fifteenth century India and introduced something called "Hatha" which focuses on purification of the body as a path that leads to purification of the mind through "vital energy." Oh boy.

**9 Is also a homosexual** – Which of itself is not strange nor interesting, but is a fact Christian mentions all the time. In fact, his Craigslist ad even noted: “I must warn you, I am gay.” When I first met him, again, “I must warn you, I am gay.” The third time, “I must warn you, I am gay,” and I was a little concerned. Was my new situation going to be akin to living in a modern version of ancient Greek houses of Erastes with Christian, the wise elder, “befriending” countless young eromenos in a plethora of loud intercrural positions, slamming against the bedroom wall we shared as ABBA thumped on his iPod dock?

**8 Is forty-five-years-old** – If Christian and I stood side-by-side, fully clothed or fully unclothed (and, God forbid, I hope the latter never occurs), nine out of ten people would guess he is younger than me. He is in fact fifteen years older. How embarrassing is that?! Besides my small beer gut and alcohol-soaked pores, I actually don’t look that bad, but Christian looks phenomenal. He owns his own yoga studio (Funkytown Yoga on W. 58<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue; three classes a day, four on Saturdays), works out all day, and is a vegetarian, I believe, based on the disgusting food in our refrigerator which I would never consider pilfering. His body is carved like a marble statue, his skin luminescent, and he looks youthful and healthy.

**7 Earned a quadruple major from an Ivy League university** – Before moving in with Christian, I, of course, Googled him and found his bio on FunkytownYoga’s website. (If only every human had to put an official bio online.) It was there I learned such uninteresting

facts like he was an Ashtanga teacher authorized by Pattabhi J Sriz and that he founded his own studio in 1997. I also learned of his impressive academic background. Heck, I'm a double-major myself. I've heard of a person that graduated with a triple major. But a quadruple?! From an Ivy League school, no less? Get the fuck out of here. I calmed my feelings of academic inferiority by noting that those four majors included bullshit like Sanskrit and that he went to, at best, the sixth best Ivy League school.

**6 Is a huge mess** – In the twelve years since I left my parents' home to attend college, I have had eleven different roommates. There was hippy Mikey who showered only once a week and used organic toothpaste. There was my lone female roommate Lori who had a constantly shedding lhaso apso she never cleaned up after. There was my freshman year roommate, Even (pronounced "Evan" but mockingly called "Even"), who was such a slob. He consistently had a huge pile of clothes on his side of our dorm room. One time, as a trick, some friends and I found a discarded pair of boxers on the side of the road which literally had skid marks on them and placed them in Even's pile, seeing if the absentminded fellow would notice the addition to his laundral inventory. Of course he didn't, and a few days later, when he stretched to change the TV in our communal lounge, we noticed him wearing the roadside undies. So where would you say a forty-five-year-old, homosexual, quadruple-major Ivy League graduate with a flourishing yoga practice ranks amongst those eleven roomies in cleanliness?

Christian is by far the filthiest.

This makes sense when you consider these next two facts:

**5 Has a dog** – Nothing about Christian says “gay” to the untrained stereotyping eye, except for his white Yorkie, Beatrice, possibly the most annoying animal on planet earth, and I’m including Mickey Mouse. Christian ignores the dog while spending all day meditating in his room, so it’s no surprise that Bea is constantly yapping for attention, chewing up anything her meager frame can reach, and dropping nuggets of shit on every inch of floor space making our apartment absolutely disgusting. I want to drop-kick that shit-crazy dog out the fifth story window.

**4 Is bipolar** – Despite our differences, Christian and I get along surprisingly well. Mainly because we’re on vastly different schedules. I’m coming home from a late night of boozing while he’s waking up to teach his first Ashtanga class of the day. We both stay in our shut-door bedrooms, never bothering each other, even having the courtesy to only head to the kitchen when we’re sure the other is safely tucked in his abode, thereby preventing any uncomfortable chitchat from occurring. We like it this way. However, in mid-March, Christian began to change. He insisted I call him by his Indian name of B Bengali Krishna Vaishnavishna Gita. Or simply “Swami” if that made me more comfortable and I didn’t have a spare fifteen seconds to address him. Soon, the Swami began listening to a nonstop stream of warbling sitar music and I ain’t talking about *Norwegian Wood*. Every day I came home from work, the apartment was noticeably messier, too. Didn’t matter if I left for five minutes to go to



the corner bodega for a soda, when I came back it would look like a hurricane had hit our living quarters. One day I got a mysterious voicemail message from Christian's mother, Elaine, warning me her son might be having one of his manic bipolar "episodes" as Christian's doctor had called to inform her that he hadn't picked up his recent meds. In the voicemail, Elaine implored me to call if anything strange happened and, "for the love of God," please remove anything from the apartment with the number nine on it. "When he's manic, nine becomes his enemy," she ambiguously ended the voicemail.

**3 May not defecate** – In late January, Ash and I went on a weeklong vacation to Miami using some free miles she had. When I departed the apartment, there were a mere four squares of TP on our sole roll. When I returned, the exact same amount was still there. Did the Swami not shit the entire time I was gone? Christian is in the house eighteen hours a day. He must need to shit sometime, though I've never seen him enter our bathroom. Never heard him shower, piss, shit, or even brush his teeth. Christian looks clean and smells great in an earthy way so he must take care of his business somewhere. I secretly suspect he removes waste from his body once a week by swallowing a wet rag and pulling it through his digestive tract.

**2 Doesn't own a TV** – This might not sound weird to you, but to me—a television addict—it's the weirdest thing in the world. I mean, in an era of HDTV and 2,000 channels, there's something for everybody. There's probably even a gay bipolar yoga channel. Wouldn't he enjoy that?!

**Sleeps on a wood slat** – Since we both live behind closed doors, I assume Christian has never seen the inside of my room, just like I have never seen the inside of his. I am very much a snoop, but since Christian is a prolific meditator, a silently peaceful man, and a non-TV-watcher, I can never be sure whether he's home or not and don't want to risk interrupting one of his ohm sessions. One Friday morning, though, returning home after a little drinking "incident," I found that Christian had forgotten to fully close his door upon leaving the house. The room was spartan to the nth degree. A closet with a few pairs of sweat pants and sleeveless t-shirts as well as a couple of ornately stitched robes, presumably for "dressier" occasions. A stack of spiritual tomes in one corner. In the center of the room, a raised wood slat, serving as his bed. I pushed down on the "bed." Stiff like a coffee table. I sat on it. Less comfortable than the bleachers at a Little League ballpark. I laid down. The only way to not be in intense pain was to lie completely flat on my back, without even the most subtle movement. And, I didn't want to move because I feared getting splinters.

"Hello, Stuart."

Christian stood in the doorframe. He held a street falafel. I hadn't heard him enter. His eyes were agog like a frog's and his nose ran.

"It is raining outside. They expect nine inches."  
Nine?!

"It is already at three inches. Six more to go."  
He looked frightened.

"The number nine foretells bad circumstance, Stuart."

I rose from Christian's slat, slowly crept past him, and locked myself in my bedroom. I considered calling his mother, filling her in on this latest episode, but I decided against it.

I followed the reports of the torrential downpour on The Weather Channel and just as it hit nine inches for the day, my apartment's ceiling began caving in. Just like my life was caving in. In movies that would be called too "on-the-nose" and cheesily symbolic. They'd make me cut this scene. But sometimes shit like this does truly happen.

By midnight, the apartment stunk of mold and mildew. By three AM, the walls had become green and furry, Chia-like. By six, the carpet seemed to be sprouting something as well. It's amazing how quickly an apartment can become a rainforest.

I tried to ignore it, sleep through it, but Christian was bouncing off the walls of his room. At seven in the morning, I heard him open his door and I opened mine.

"What did I tell you about the number nine?! What did I tell you!?!?"

He had a small duffel bag under one arm and a yoga mat under the other.

"I am heading back home to my parents' farm in Maine. I need some relaxation."

I found that funny since Christian's entire way of life was based on relaxation.

"Avoid the number nine!!!" Christian screeched as he departed my life.

Perhaps he was right.

I called U-Haul and booked a truck. I called Big Apple Mini-Storage and booked a unit. I called Keith

and asked for help, and though I had no game plan, four hours later, I had fully moved my worthless shit out of the crumbling apartment on 54<sup>th</sup> Street and into storage on Eleventh Avenue, just across the street from the Wee Pub.

With nothing more than a single rolling suitcase and about a week's worth of clothing, some books, and a laptop, I needed to find a place to live.



There was Boris and Ena, a Ukrainian couple that dressed in black and looked like they stayed up all night fucking using weird implements, devices, and machines. Which is feasible considering they were both inveterate drug addicts. Mostly coke to keep their senses honed for screwing people over and squabbling about petty building repairs, but on weekends they'd experiment with mushrooms and LSD and obscure hallucinogens even my drug addict then-roommate Calvin had never heard of. The two talked like stereotypical Soviet bad guys from 80s movies. "Eez furst of munt. Rrrrent iz dew!" topped off with the occasional Draculian cackle "Ah ah ah!" When they weren't badgering us about minuscule improprieties, Boris worked a lucrative day job on Wall Street while Ena handled the day-to-day operations of the fifteen units they owned. I have no idea how they possessed so much property as they were both just off the boat and clearly illegal. Very smart and savvy, it wouldn't surprise me if they had blackmailed easily-corruptible Hoboken city officials or were simply appointees of some Kiev-based cosa nostra. We were daft twenty-three-year-olds just out of college, living in our first

real world place. We didn't know any better. We thought this was how all landlords treated you and, quite frankly, the Ukrainians amused us. We liked mimicking their accents, creating elaborate scenarios about their late night pillow talk: "Borrrris, eez now time forjyu to leek my pooosy." Though, maybe it was actually Boris and Ena that were the dopes as they told us we weren't getting back our \$4,000 security deposit the day before we moved out. We spent our last night in the apartment swilling cheap Ruskie vodka, hurling the shattering bottles into the fireplace, and relieving ourselves in the center of the living room carpet.

Then, there was Gary Johnson aka Gary the Plumber aka Gary Plumber, a sixty-six-year-old man and one tough SOB, though a real moron. When he scaled down his plumbing practice—do plumbers have “practices” or do you need an advanced degree for that nomenclature?—he decided to convert his main office into a three-bedroom apartment. By “convert” I mean he moved all the plumbing equipment from the office, white-washed the walls, mopped the tile floor, and shoved some Glade Plug-Ins in every free socket. Jack, Keith, and I didn't know zoning laws, but this seemed quite illegal even to a troika of twenty-four-year-old fools. However, the former office was immense and the monthly rent was silly cheap so we quickly snapped it up. Our first night living there, we realized we'd made a tremendous mistake. Since it was an office building, it was insulated worse than a teepee or igloo. If it was cold outside, it was freezing in our apartment. Warm outside and our pad was a sweatbox. Windy and we had to use paperweights to keep magazines from blowing off the coffee table. It was

loud, too; the most minor street noise pelting our aural senses. Even worse, Gary's new and smaller plumbing office abutted our living room courtesy of a paper-thin wall and we could never enjoy TV as we were forced to spend all day and night listening to Gary and his secretary Rosetta loudly gab about customers' shit-filled commodes.

Then, there was...well, what if I asked you to guess the most comically stereotypical name for the most comically stereotypical Manhattan Jew bastard slumlord? (I can say "Jew bastard" because I'm a Semite myself.) What would you say a Nazi film propagandist would tritely give as a surname to a family of cartoonishly swarthy, weaselly, big-nosey, miserly Jews? The answer is obvious: Shalom. The Shalom family of Little Neck, New York, the slumlords par excellence of the tri-state area. Owners of dozens of buildings and hundreds upon hundreds of apartments throughout town. So much maligned that there are at least three internet hate sites created for the sole purpose of bashing the Shaloms and cataloging all the grievances against them. The Shaloms snapped up rent stabilized places on the cheap and then used strong-arm tactics to get new tenants to leave so they could keep raising rent 7.5% with each new tenant. In my case, the Shaloms erroneously claimed I owed them six months in back rent on my studio and when I refused to be extorted, they turned off my heat in the dead of winter. During that miserable three-month stretch I'd spend most nights sitting in my living room wearing a parka and drinking straight whiskey to stay warm. I'd usually end those evenings by drunk dialing their management offices and leaving curse-laden rants on their voicemail. I couldn't



help myself and regretted it each morning, yet there I'd be, back again that night leaving another. I was certain one day I would be summoned to court and have to listen to the collected recordings of those drunk dials for a whole afternoon. That has yet to happen.

Finally, there is Randy, the landlord of Christian and I, and the only one of these slumlords I have never met as he resides full time in Key West, letting his hunchbacked super Chester run his operations. Each time I speak to Randy on the phone, it's clear I've just interrupted something decadent and depraved and topped off with a tiny umbrella. Oh, he'll kill me with kindness but I can tell he's slurping daiquiris and *in media orgy* every time I phone. When the shit hit the fan in our building and the ceiling drooped to the carpet, Randy became impossible to reach.

Interested in your own slumlord? They can be acquired in just five steps:

**I Be poor** – When one is rich, he can be selective. But when you're poor, you have to take what you can get and even allow yourself to be exploited. Slumlords are like strip club owners and we're like uneducated drug-addled strippers in this regard.

**2 Live in an urban environment you can't really afford** – Sure, I could live in Brooklyn or Queens or even back home with Mom and Dad (well, maybe not, again see **Chapter 3: How to Fail to Make Your Parents Proud of You**) but what fun would that

be? I gotta live where the action is! The overly expensive Manhattan action I can't really afford! You may want to try to live in upscale Chicago, San Francisco, Miami Beach, or even London. It's all the same, and thus, you'll have to take the few cheap and shitty apartments left in those glorious towns.

**3 Take fixer uppers** – Thanks to anti-capitalistic rent control laws, a lot of major cities still have quote-unquote “affordable” housing. That kind of housing may be affordable but it's certainly not quote-unquote “livable.” Cracking staircases, walls with exposed insulation, finicky heating systems, unyielding smells, decrepit utilities, and despicable building residents who have been paying only fifty bucks a month since 1947 (please see **Footchapter Five-B: How to Have Fucked-Up Neighbors**). These are what you are looking for: six-story piles of dust held together by hundreds of years of lead-based paint.

**4 Rent well past the age most people do** – I must be the last person from the Green Oaks class of 1996 still paying rent. If I lived in a “normal,” boring city, I could easily afford the mortgage on a respectable home with what I have thrown away on rent the past several years. But that's no fun. So while most of your friends and out-of-town peers are already saving money to buy second homes, you're still tossing away thousands a month to live in a shoebox. Savvy.

**5 Treat your landlord like shit** – Are slumlords born or created? Hard to say, but paying your rent

late, abusing the guy's property, living noisily, and throwing your trash down the ventilation shaft are not exactly ways to ensure your landlord treats you kindly.

As Keith and I lugged my shit out of my apartment and down the five flights, I thought about my leaking building, the same kinda craphole walk-up that would be projects in any other city but which was a several-thousand-dollars-a-month apartment in Manhattan. I always live on the absolute top, hence cheapest, floor of a Manhattan walk-up which is by New York state law the fifth. I thought about the freak show populous of the building. About their lives compared to mine.

Next to me on the fifth was an alkie named Steve. He always sat on the stairs like a sad stray dog, waiting for me to exit my apartment so he could pounce and beg to borrow some change. I eschew dirty paper money and detest coinage, so I'd always clear out my pockets for him. Eventually, I got fed up and no longer wanted to run into him. Now I really had to plan my apartment exits. Did I need a Coke that badly? I couldn't chance walking outside of my safe womb and running into Steve. I was soon a prisoner. New Yorkers spend every second they are on the street trying to avoid beggars. Forced to ignore them, turn the other cheek, act like they are not humans, just to avoid

giving these hobos a nickel. Now, every time I exited my place I was confronted, bombarded, by a panhandler in my own building. I handed Steve a twenty as I saw him for surely the final time: "Spend it wisely. Buy some Grey Goose, at least."

Across the hall lived a man that must have been one-hundred-and-twenty-five years old. He looked like a Dominican Woodrow Wilson and wore a priest's collar at all times along with a tiny American flag on a stick jutting from his lapel hole as if he had just attended a parade. He always sat on the front stoop eating massive styrofoam containers of pork fried rice. A month before, I'd seen some EMTs gurney Maderow Wilson from the building. Two days later, there was an NYPD sticker sealing his front door shut and I hadn't seen him since. Hmmm. I wonder if he's on vacation?

4A is a Jamaican drug dealer, Sean. How did I know he was a Jamaican drug dealer? Because as I was moving into the building he said in a thick Jamaican accent, "Me name is Sean. Knock on me door if ya wanna buy any ganja." Every night around midnight I'd see various fat-assed white girls arrive lugging McDonald's take-out, ready to service him. I suspect Sean stole my weight set when I first moved in. I turned my back on it for a few minutes and, next thing I knew, it was filched. His biceps did begin looking bigger almost immediately, come to think of it. Not like I was using the weights.

4B is an enormous Puerto Rican family that crammed into a tiny two-bedroom. They had three smoking hot daughters that pranced around the building in décolletage-revealing tanks. I was afraid they were, like, twelve though so I'd avert my eyes whenever I had to do-si-

do to pass them on the tight stairwell.

4C seems to be Eastern European. The hulk wears shiny suits, shades indoors, and looks like he deals arms. I always held the door open for him when we passed, no need to get on his bad side. What if I needed to buy a Luger one day?

3B are two old Argentinian sisters. They wear nightgowns at all times, have wispy mustaches, are constantly returning from the store with pushcarts full of groceries, and always offered me lemonade and homemade empanadas when I'd see them. Somehow, I could decipher their accents, but unfortunately I never accepted their offers. Perhaps I should have as terrific cooking odors wafted from their pad as Keith and I passed. I do love fried meat patties. Nice breads.

2B is a fabulous homosexual couple whose lives revolve around walking their Italian greyhounds. They always stared at me with a disdainful "Bitch, you ain't all that" look when we'd pass each other. As I passed them one final time, I stared: "Bitches, *you* ain't all that!"

2C is the building's aforementioned super, Chester. An ogre of a man with a hunchback Quasimodo would be jealous of. He always looked like he was about to snap and hated me because I didn't separate my garbage and recycling, simply tossing it onto the pile. I think Chester would be a lot happier if someone took him out of his misery and put a bullet in his head. In my now former building, the odds of that spontaneously happening have to be pretty decent.

And, in the big apartment on the first floor lives Cecil, the "mayor" of the building, a guy who knows everyone as he spends all his time in the foyer. Every time I returned

or left my building, I'd pass this man who looked like he was from the order rodentia with his tiny features, gnawing incisors, and thin strands of hair tightly pulled into a greasy ponytail. Every time I returned or left, I'd pass this man with a body and clothing style befitting Keith Richards: thin but sinewy, heroin arms fully revealed by a sleeveless T with a coyote or wolverine on it. His lower body covered by black denims and dirty Avia sneakers. Every time I returned or left, I'd pass this man who constantly works on his upturned bicycle, meticulously cleaning its parts (though it was still always grimy), torquing things with a wrench, and oiling its movable areas. And, every time I returned or left, I'd pass this man who flagrantly smokes cheap cigarettes and poorly-rolled joints right out in the open, the smoke in one hand, an oil can of Foster's in the other.

Cecil must have suffered from some disorder as he talked nonstop to himself. Voices in his head. Oh, I'm familiar with those. When a person passed Cecil, his self-contained rants would branch out into a borderline conversation with the person near him, but his eyes remained vacant, as if he thought you may just be an image in his head, some acid flashback.

As I walked down the stairs for the final time I heard Cecil yet again mumbling to himself—"OK, now what I gotta do is just be sure that dog doesn't find me and then..."—but upon reaching him he turned and with a completely lucid look on his face said: "If not for people like us, you would never know the depths."

That sounded wise, kinda, but it also sounded like the ambiguities of a crazy man and, sure enough, once we passed, Cecil went back to ranting to himself.

## 6 | **HOW TO FAIL**

IN LOVE

The beginning of the end started with a “thank you.”

Eddie Haskell rushed around the table. Not playing musical chairs but rather pulling out the chair of every female about to sit, including the married women, including Ash. We were at a Ruby Tuesday’s in Old Bridge, New Jersey, and this was before they’d been awarded all those Michelin Stars, mind you.

The diners were me, Ash, her parents, Bill and Nan, her brother, Spitshine Tommy, her sister, Becky, a baby whose name I had never been told, and Becky’s husband Eddie Haskell.

We’d come from watching Ash run the East Brunswick Marathon, “the most exciting 6.5 hours in sport,” alongside tens of thousands of other non-athletes, people with something to “prove,” paraplegics that could afford those cool aerodynamic racing wheelchairs, Jog-a-thonners, and old crumbling farts who traversed a two-lap 13.1 mile swath through lovely downtown E.B. and the neighboring Monroe and South Brunswick Townships.

Before our post-race Ruby Tuesday’s feast had



begun, Eddie Haskell histrionically cleared his throat, banged the table twice like his fist was a gavel and proudly announced: “Get whatever you want—this one’s on me.”

A flood of appreciative “Thanks” and “No, you don’t have tos” and “If you insists” poured in from everyone at the table, save me, toward this brown noser par excellence. I rolled my eyes, pissed that because of this thirty-three-year-old goateed charlatan, I would no longer be able to order a thirty-two-ounce stein of macro lager from the picture book menu, the only thing photographed that actually looked palatable.

Friedman was right. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

## QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of person offers to pay for an entire meal when they are neither the oldest nor richest at the table, nor a parent nor grandparent of at least one of the other diners?
2. What kind of picker-upper of a tab announces his intentions before the “appe-teazers” have even been ordered?

## ANSWERS:

1. No one does. Because it’s a show-off, fishing-for-appreciation move. Simply not done by people of normal means like Eddie Haskell who was nothing more than the co-manager of a bike shop in Hopewell Junction (The

Banana Seat) and an enthusiast of those cloth hats with the tiny flip-up bills.

2. A strategic jackass, that's who. Casually picking up the tab after all the damage has been done, now that shows some clout. But announcing it before your fellow diners have even decided between starting with a spinach/artichoke dip or Southwestern spring rolls—"You know what, let's get both. Or better yet, The Sampler!"—just means two more things:

A. Now that everyone knows someone else is picking up the tab, they aren't going to order anything too expensive, even if it's what they truly want.

B. Eddie Haskell knows this fact. Diabolical!

So instead of me getting some Cajun shrimp and the biggest sirloin, washing it down with a few High Lifes, I got a Ruby's Classic Burger and a bottomless order of iced tea. I was not pleased.

This was only the second time in the first year and a half of dating in which I'd met Ash's parents. The first was also the first time I met her, at Jack's wedding where I was the best man. Ash's parents were family friends of Jack's parents from way back when both families lived in lovely Schenectady.

At that wedding, I gave a bravura performance during my best man speech, bringing down the house when I noted I had been Jack's roommate for exactly six years and eleven months before he had finally moved in with Kirsten, a most fortunate occurrence considering that a common-

law marriage in New York state was official at seven years of cohabitation according to Wikipedia.

That hilarious speech made me the star of the reception and it got me laid. Or, I could be less crass and say it got me a girlfriend. Ashley Forester. The one and only love of my life in my first twenty-seven years on this planet.

But, before I hooked up with my soon-to-be-girlfriend at three that night on the tile of the Courtyard by Marriott's indoor swimming pool—no lifeguard on duty, it was very much at our own risk—I met her dreadful parents. Mean teetotalers who you could tell ruled over their twenty-five-year-old daughter's life with an iron fist.

Why should I have cared, though? I assumed this was to just be a one time thing. However, the week after the wedding, we actually went on a date and had a great time. We kept having great times because we were two peas in a pod. Ostensible failures, we liked to spend our days dreaming and our nights drinking. We enjoyed watching hours of television, spoon-position sex and lots of it, and avoiding examining our meager bank accounts. We were soon in love.

Things were going perfectly, in my opinion, but Ash was one of those people that expects failure. I'm a failure that arrogantly expects success, which makes my failures even more grandiose. Like clockwork, every Thursday night, as we capitalized on J. Monroe's unlimited buffalo wings and five dollar pitcher deal—we always knew the best bar deal in town—Ash would tearfully pour her heart out to me, each week a new and pathetic reason why we had to break up.

There was time she said we had conflicting religions.

I noted I hadn't been in a synagogue since my Bar Mitzvah and that she only went to church for weddings and funerals. Neither of us exactly believed in God either.

There was the time she said we had clashing political ideals. I noted she knew so little about politics she couldn't even name the current Vice-President. She argued, "Yes, I can! It's that...balding...old...white guy."

There was the time she said that I was more of a cat person and she was more of a dog person. I noted neither of us was responsible enough to even take care of ourselves so why worry about animals just yet.

And there was the time she said our sex life had gotten stale. She was actually right about that. My whole life I had been interested in sexual novelty, but novelty as in many different partners, not as in many different ways of accomplishing the task. One need not learn many moves when you're only having sex with each girl a couple of times. It's like how great relief pitchers like Mariano Rivera only have one good pitch. Why learn more when you're facing so few batters?

The only ways I knew where the most basic, vanilla, high school kid ways: missionary, woman on top, doggy style, and spooning. I was incredibly accomplished in those positions, but those were the only tricks in my bag. Sure, I could unleash those moves in different venues—the living room, kitchen, shower, outdoors—but I didn't really have anything else to draw from.

It wasn't like Ash was ever taking the lead. But that was typical of her: complain about a problem we were having and expect me to fix it. I made some attempts, trying out positions used in the porn I watched, but I quickly learned

that normal women don't like sex in porny positions.

In pornography, reverse cowgirl is the most beloved position as it enables us home viewers to see the actress in all her glory—face, tits, and pussy—while seeing very little of the hirsute man giving it to her. In the real world though, nearly all women hate this position as they detest having their ass in a man's face without being able to monitor it. All women think they have a big rump and are constantly trying to hide it from even the men that have been seeing them naked for years.

The same goes for other popular porn positions such as the wheelbarrow, the piledriver, and the standing 69er. All positions designed more for how they look on camera than how they add zest to one's love life.

Ash and I started frequenting sex toy shops. In Hell's Kitchen, it's impossible to even go out for a Sunday morning bagel without passing Fantasies or Titillators or Ye Olde Orgasmosity Shoppe. I'd passed countless for years, but had never been in even one. I must admit I was curious. One day I got Ash to accompany me and soon we were giggling at the vibrators and dildos, teasers and ticklers, penile extenders and vaginal spreaders, balms, lotions, lubricants, oils, all in a variety of flavors, bondage and fetish implements, and that was just on the first floor.

Immature as they come, we giggled our way through the aisles, getting stares from mustachioed customers as we feigned using each silly product on each other. Soon, we were on the second floor which housed the larger, more expensive devices. Swings and slings and fucking machines and cages and shit that looked like it belonged in the prison section of a Renaissance fair. How exactly would a stockade

enhance one's sex life?!

We never got up the gumption to purchase even a dildo and bailed on our giggle-trips after a run-in with Boris and Ena at the surely copyright-infringing Sex Toys 'R' Us.

"Vell look vat ve haff here, Boris."

"Ah, ze funny boy who peed in our apartment zo many years ago."

"Are you into vatersports?"

I had only one option left to salvage our sex life and with hat in hand I went to Christian, hoping this wise, gay swami could help out.

"Naturally, I am going to recommend to you, Stuart, the Kama Sutra."

"People actually use that? I thought it was just some gimmicky shit."

"Oh, no. It is the finest compendium of sexual and romantic knowledge ever compiled. Most people, perverts usually, think it's just about the positions."

"It's not?"

"The positions may sell a lot of dormitory room posters, but the work is actually 1,250 verses, distributed into thirty-six chapters, which are further organized into seven parts on such topics as what one's priorities in life should be, how to have a good marriage, and rules for virtuous living."

I nodded.

"It is only one of the seven chapters, probably the least important chapter, that is about sexual union. Caressing and kissing, embraces and positions, and, of course, copulation."

He handed me a well-worn copy laying on the floor.

“You can read Sanskrit, right?”

“Uh, no.”

The Swami smiled arrogantly. “Well then, I guess you’ll have to read the translation. You won’t get as much out of it, but what choice do we have?”

“Thanks. Uh...what chapter is the sex chapter, by the way?”

Ash and I stripped and lay in bed with the book that night. We quickly learned that the actual Kama Sutra, even the English translation by Sir Richard Francis Burton, was hard to read and even harder to understand. Who knew reading about sex could be so boring? Apparently the sex chapter, Chapter Two, encompassed sixty-four different positions, but Ash and I never found them and the index only listed things like anustubh poetry (pp. 5-17); courtesans (45, 47-72, 74); and dharma (201) as opposed to stuff like anal sex (102-115, 117, 119); blow jobs (2, 7-75, 79); and threesomes (220-275). We eventually got fed up and went over to Barnes & Noble where, on the clearance rack, we found a Kama Sutra deck of cards put out by *Cosmopolitan* magazine. I have no idea if the sixty-four cards in that deck actually matched up with the legit Kama Sutra, but it did the trick for us.

Over the next two months, every night and more times on weekends, we’d shuffle the deck, pick a card, and get to work. Soon we found ourselves in the coital “Ballerina,” “The Bridge,” “The Bullfrog,” and “The Butterfly,” and those were just the Bs in the deck.

After each act was over, or we were too worn out or stuck in a pretzeline shape to continue, we’d break out a composition book to log our findings, rating each position

I-10 in the following categories:

ENTRY

EASE

PLEASURE FOR MAN

PLEASURE FOR WOMAN

CHANCE OF INJURY

“CUM-ABILITY”

Our highest-rated positions ended up being a three-way tie between “The Cradle,” “The Pancake,” and “The Jockey,” all of which scored 54 out of a possible 60. Our lowest rated were “Reverse Doggy Style” (never even got in on that one) and “The Lotus” (Ash momentarily thought she dislocated her left knee.)

Amazingly, this sixty-four card magical intercourse tour did the trick. We were more in love than ever, having more fun than ever, and going to unlimited wings and five dollar pitchers nights without any crying ensuing. That was the acme of our relationship. Then came that marathon and that Ruby Tuesday’s lunch.

The lunch went as could be expected. I quietly munched on my over-cooked preformed-patty burger while the other related people at the table discussed things that only pertained to them. Anecdotes I couldn’t add to, “remember whens” I obviously couldn’t remember, complaints I couldn’t be a part of.

“...and that was the last time Ash tried to make her own banana split!”

Later, I would realize Bill and Nan had intentionally steered the conversation away from anything I could possibly talk about to assure they could later tell their daughter they found me aloof, haughty, and unwilling to join in conversation



with everyone else.

The coup de grace of this character assassination being waged against me, though, happened without me even realizing it. Seems I never said “Thank you” to Eddie Haskell for picking up my meal. Seems Spitshine Tommy, the little snitch, privately pulled his parents aside and noted this fact. Seems Bill and Nan now had a tangible reason to despise me.

It didn’t matter whether I had truly said “Thank you.” It didn’t matter that it was a crummy eleven dollar chain restaurant meal I would have gladly picked up myself. All that mattered was that now everyone thought me the kind of guy that didn’t say “Thank you,” which couldn’t be further from the truth. I may be rude, transgressive, and an utter vulgarian, but I’ve always been very committed to social mores. I hold open doors for those behind me and say “Thanks” when they are held for me. I actually answer the question when a coffee shop cashier says, “Hi, how are you today?” and tell them to “Have a nice day” after they’ve given me my joe. I tell cabbies to “Take care” and shake the hands of bartenders upon entering and exiting their establishments. So, of course, I would say “Thank you” for a free meal and I’d be shocked if I didn’t say it in this particular instance. But, I mean, how profusely am I supposed to thank a man—who is intentionally only after the plaudits—for a cheap and unfulfilling chain meal?

“Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you, Eddie Haskell. I’ve never dined so finely in my life. I would call this a meal fit for a king, but kings don’t often get to use such luxurious cloth napkins and paper placemats with children games printed on the reverse side. And have you ever even heard

of a palace with a ten-yards-long salad bar, complete with tapioca pudding, just a brief walk across the room for any of us? Finally, even Peter the Great, Ramses the II, or Philip of Macedonia did not have such a wide variety of desserts to choose among, from Death by Chocolate to Death by Vanilla to even Death by Neapolitan. How decadent!”

There is no such thing as a free lunch.

That very evening, Bill, Nan, Eddie Haskell, and Spitshine Tommy conference-called Ash to tell her about my thank youlessness and wonder how she could continue dating such a heathen. And, though I insisted that I had said “Thank you” and that her family was conniving against me, it didn’t matter. Her loving demeanor instantly changed. We didn’t draw any Kama Sutra playing cards that night. I had been really looking forward to the “Flea-Flicker.”

Over the next month, Ash became disinterested in life, especially our life in Manhattan, and she increasingly headed back to Poughkeepsie on weekends to hang with her family and do God knows what. I was too daft to realize what was going on. I just assumed she was depressed. I should have asked her.

***How to Fail in Love Tip #1:*** *Don’t Communicate Well With Your Significant Other.* Assume you know everything going on inside her complicated lady brain. Assume you are prescient. Assume you are too awesome for her to fall out of love with and that, if she’s not happy, it’s something out of your control and she’s got to figure out how to fix that shit herself.

It’s kinda funny, the night before Ash’s twenty-seventh birthday party, after some twenty-three months of

dating, while grabbing a bite with Keith and Erin, they asked if I thought Ash and I would ever live together.

"I'm sure of it. Probably in the next month or two, even. I'm tired of Christian, tired of my dump of an apartment, and, more importantly...I'm finally ready."

Ash's party was to be held at her favorite bar, Harry's Conundrum, a place which attracted adult men that still wished they were in frats and the women that tolerated them. Ash's party was to feature all her friends I hated, none of my friends whom she hated, her immediate family who hated me, and some other surprise cameo hateable all-stars.

I walked into Harry's Conundrum one minute early.

"You're fifty-nine minutesth late, Stu," lisped Spitshine Tommy, raining spittle on my shoes, living up to the nickname I had given him in my head.

"The party's at ten."

"No. The party stharterd at nine. Didn't you double-check my Evite?!"

"Man, I'm sorry, Thomas. I must have misread it. I feel so...guilty."

"Yeah, well, you look guilty." Spitshine Tommy sidled up beside me. "I've been meaning to asthk you something for quite awhile and I just never found the appropriate time for it."

Here we go.

"What I wanted to asthk you, ah, Stu, is...what are your intentions with my sthister?"

I'll never understand brothers that protect their sisters' vaginas like they're the Hope Diamond. It's peculiar, incestuous, even! Your sister's a grown woman, she doesn't need your 155 pounds of protection in order to make

romantic and sexual decisions. She's not Joanie Cunningham and you ain't Richie, though, come to think of it, Tommy did sort of look like a *Happy Days*-era Ron Howard, though in a less masculine way.

"Intentions?"

"Yesth. What are your intentions?"

I could have said something nasty ("Fuck her while you watch since you seem to care so much, Tommy!") but instead I simply kowtowed to the mid-thirties apparent virgin and predicted a bright and innocent future with his kin.

"Hey, Tommy, can't wait to hear what you say at our wedding, heh heh."

So there was **Tip #2: Cultivate Poor Relations With Her Beloved Siblings.**

The awkwardness between us was palpable, though I had a feeling awkwardness followed Tommy wherever he went, much like Pig-Pen and his cloud of stink.

I'd been dealing with a lot of awkwardness recently. Just the previous day I'd accompanied My Lesbian Wingman—who I will introduce in Part II—to her gynecologist. A small girl, she's struggled in having her girlfriend penetrate her with a strap-on. Not that she told the possibly-homophobic/possibly-aroused-by-lesbos doc that, simply claiming she was struggling in having her "boyfriend" enter her. (I was playing the role of "boyfriend" for this exercise.) The gynecologist insisted her claims were physically impossible based on his vulvan findings. That her problems were purely mental. My Lesbian Wingman insisted they weren't to which the doctor finally replied, exasperated, "Tell you what ya' do then. Go down to Eighth Avenue, Fantasies or Titillators, buy a dildo,

and come back here and show me you can masturbate with it.”

“You want me to fuck myself, doc?”

“Essentially.”

“Why don’t you go fuck yourself, doc?!”

She still had to write a thirty-five dollar check for the co-pay. Health care nowadays.

Spitshine Tommy escorted me to a private back room where the party was in full swing. Ash was disposed with some people so we were only able to have a second of eye contact and a can’t-wait-to-shake-this-boring-conversation-so-I-can-kiss-you grin from her. It was the most loving look she’d given me in weeks. In the months to come, I’d wonder if I’d misread it. That smile haunts me to this very day. I analyze it as much as possible. I’ve even considered hiring a police sketch artist to recreate it from my memory so I can have others analyze it to try to determine what exactly she meant by that smile.

With no other choice, I went to schmooze up Ash’s friends, few of which I’d taken the time to get to know, while the ones I had, I had quickly learned to hate. **Tip #3: Don’t Care to Befriend Her Friends.**

Ash’s friends swarmed to me like hungry pigs in a sty were I the farmer entering with a slop bucket. Though they looked more like the kind of chicks that preferred a tray of mozzarella sticks. Nearly all of Ash’s chums were workmates. That sent a signal to me the first time she revealed that and it still does today. It’s fine to have coworker cohorts, I guess, but when a person only has work friends they usually don’t have real friends. It’s one thing to cultivate a friendship in the real world, it’s another to have

pals that you head straight from work to the bar with to get loaded and bitch about Paul, your asshole boss.

These friends were terrible, a real horror show. Each seemingly decent looking until you found that one defect that overshadowed anything positive. There was Tatiana with the highly visible gum line who loved to smile, Carly who must have had fifty-five teeth and loved to laugh, Lori with a prominent birth control mustache who never smiled nor laughed, and Patricia who wouldn't shut the fuck up about her "recent" engagement (four months ago).

I had only met Patricia a handful of times, despite her being Ash's roommate, because she spent most of her time at her fiancé's. Clearly with either some prompting from my girlfriend or more likely some nosiness of her own, she had recently friended me on Facebook. I thought that was sweet until my News Feed began to fill up with her every-five-minutes status updates about her upcoming nuptials: "Patricia is shopping for wedding gowns!," "Patricia is meeting the flower guy," "Patricia is deciding between a band and DJ," "Patricia is admiring the engagement ring her latently homosexual fiancé Kurt bought her."

Stu is...wishing I could delete you as a friend without you and my girlfriend finding out.

Patricia was one of those women preternaturally designed to be annoying. A wannabe Broadway actress, she currently plied her trade at a Times Square novelty restaurant, First Ladies, where the servers all dressed as the eponymous women from our nation's past. Ash had once forced us to dine at this ghastly establishment where I found myself oddly attracted to bartender Mamie Eisenhower after she shook me up a sublime Moscow Mule. Portraying both

Hannah Van Buren and Lucretia Garfield, Patricia hid her professional failures behind a ubiquitous ear-to-ear smile, a plastic surgery addiction she used to make herself still appear to be the just-out-Rutgers-drama-school kiddo she was some seven years earlier, and her recent engagement to Kurt.

Kurt was a dullard who had served as maitre d' at another Times Square novelty restaurant, Sing Sing, where all the restaurant's workers literally sing everything they say as if the dining establishment exists in some sort of faraway land always in the middle of a production number. Customers are encouraged to try their best to sing all their orders as well, though it certainly is not mandatory. Patricia had met Kurt on the island near the TKTS discount Broadway tickets booth where both dreamers often went during their five-minutes-an-hour smoking breaks to relax, soak in the touristy scene, and one day fantasize about having their visage on a billboard atop the Marriott Marquis.

About a year ago, Kurt had gotten cast as the co-lead in a new musical adaptation of Disney's little-seen 1985 animated flop *The Black Cauldron*, and soon enough his effete mug was, indeed, on such a billboard. Patricia was both jealous and in great admiration that Kurt had finally made it and was surprised when comp tickets to his opening night arrived at First Ladies one afternoon. Patricia took Ash as her guest and that was the night Patricia fell for Kurt, though she was certain he was gay and just trying to enlist her as his new hag, a fact she could deal with as she was getting little male attention at this time in her life.

Immediately after the opening night show, Ash took off to go drink with me at a plastic paddy pub around the

corner, McManumus's, and Patricia found herself backstage, engaging in reverse doggy style with Kurt in his tiny dressing room. She was now 75% certain he was straight. Their romance was torrid and, within eight months, Patricia was now positive Kurt was 99.9% heterosexual. On their one-year anniversary, he proposed marriage. 100%!

"Oh, Stu, you two are going to have such a great time at our wedding! We've found the most quaint Unitarian church in Lake George and the reception afterward is in this beautiful outdoor facility. It's like the Garden of Eden and Kurt and I are Adam and Eve!"

Kurt smugly nodded behind her. He'd gotten very smug since his fame had started to soar. Tonight, he wore a tight red vest and pants ensemble making him look like an organ grinder's monkey. He wasn't on a leash, however, as, without even an "excuse me," he left the conversation to go play foosball by himself. He appeared to be losing.

Patricia leaned her collagen-injected lips, rhinoplastied nose, mentoplastied chin, and Restalyned wrinkle-filled face toward me and smiled conspiratorially. "So when are you and my best friend gonna get engaged? You've been going out since before Kurt and I even met!"

***Tip #4: Frequently Rail on the Stupidity of Engagement Rings, Weddings, and Marriage in General.***

I never knew whether to be honest or lie when the subject of marriage came up. It's like, I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Ash. I loved her and I wanted no other woman in my life as either a romantic or sexual partner. I just wasn't sure about marriage.

Marriage was a melding of two of my least favorite



things in the world: religion and government. An atheist, there was no way I was going to stand under stained glass in an uncomfortable rental tux as some virgin told me about the “sanctity” of a union. Likewise, the government bungles enough things in our daily lives from package shipping to public transit to pothole filling, why should I care that they recognize my love for Ash?

As for weddings, they were fun when you were tangentially a part of them, a guest on the fringes allowed to mooch a meal and get wasted at the open bar, maybe find yourself a one-night stand for the evening. I should know as I’d attended twenty-eight of them since graduation. As for one’s own wedding, I couldn’t imagine a worst fate for a bridegroom. Yes, I did realize the irony of having met Ash at a wedding.

Don’t get me started on engagement rings. Such a waste of money and excitement. Even the brightest girls didn’t seem to realize how lame, uneducated, and trite they looked getting all misty-eyed over these things. Why, heck, it was almost as if they liked the ring more than their man. There was so many arguments for a diamond engagement ring’s futility:

“You know that diamonds are essentially worthless?! Just a shiny stone. They weren’t even a marriage tradition until Hollywood teamed with the struggling De Beers company to make them noteworthy. They’re only a commodity because...”

Or, maybe I was one of those apolitical jackasses who didn’t even vote, who thought all elected officials were swine, yet, who suddenly became a left-leaning activist on par with Cesar Chavez, Rachel Carson, or Albert Gore Jr.

when diamonds came up, talking about the plight of enslaved Africans forced to harvest this worthless rock and then, next thing you knew, I'd be quoting from *Blood Diamond* and doing an even worse South African accent that Leo.

If I thought hard, though, I was railing against a status quo institution that everyone from my parents to Bill Clinton to Dennis Rodman to Kurt Cobain had no problem with. Was I simply being difficult? Trying to sabotage the first overwhelmingly happy relationship of my life?

Finally, Ash was free and came over to me with a sloppy wine-soaked smooch on my cheek. I'd been dating her for nearly two years and never seen her so drunk. And we drank nearly every night. We were like Henry Chinaski and Wanda Wilcox in *Barfly*. Despite all her wine and beer swilling she was never wasted and always in control. Likewise, she had always been thin and taut despite the highly-caloric boozing as she had a splendid metabolism and exercise regimen, though in these last few depressed months she'd quit working out, quit training for the upcoming Utica "Elite" Marathon, and put on a few pounds, that excess baggage going straight to her chin, gut, and ass. As we hugged, I playfully clenched her love handles.

**Tip #5: Passive-Aggressively Criticize Her.**

I didn't have the courage to tell her she was getting fat. I was a hypocrite too as I had packed on a few lbs. myself. For me, I knew it was because I was in a comfortable relationship. "Happy fat" they call it. But I thought Ash's weight gain might be a sign of unhappiness for her. Of course, I didn't discuss things like this. We never discussed our feelings. I'd just fake grimace when I lifted her. Make comical jiggle-jiggle-jiggle sound effects after I flirtatiously slapped her ass.

Tell her she didn't need the empty calories when she fellated me.

**Tip #6: Don't Treat Your Girlfriend Like a Princess.** As she slapped them off her love handles, my girlfriend noticed my hands were empty. I hadn't brought a present.

"You didn't bring me a gift, Stu?!" I looked around.

"I didn't know it was one of *those* parties. What are we, eight years old? We're in a bar, Ash, not a rollerskating rink or bowling alley."

"But it's my birthday!"

"It's not your actual birthday for another few days." I'd already planned to have a present for her by then, an easel and nice set of oil paints as she had recently mentioned wanting to get back into her teenage love of painting.

"Always with the technicalities!"

The other three dozen invitees had brought a gift. Oh, well, I'd never felt like one should treat their girlfriend like a princess. It's rude to your own self-esteem. I never made my girlfriend treat me like a prince. Romantic partners should treat each other as equals, right? Isn't that what feminists fought for? Don't you just love me, acting like I'm an anti-diamond activist and a uber-feminist just to justify my vile behavior? I headed to the bar in desperate need of a respite and a drink.

"M'boy, how are you!" I turned toward Bill's stern non-question as the old-man-strong construction company owner patronizingly slapped me on the back so hard he must have thought I had something caught in my windpipe. Nan stood a lock-step behind her hubby, a pained half-grin on her puss.

**Tip #7: Justify Her Parents' Hatred of You.**

Not that I didn't justifiably hate them back. Nan for smothering her daughter, for never allowing Ash any freedom to live the life she desired, for crushing her dreams. From the minor ("You can't play high school basketball—it's unladylike!") to the major ("Trying to become an artist is an unrealistic career goal. Get a reasonable job at a reasonable company."). Dopey Bill for treating her like daddy's little girl, for telling her he was the only man that would ever treat her the way she deserved to be treated, all the while being emasculated by his own bitchy wife.

This would be the first time I had dealt with them one-on-one. But the game wasn't to be pick-up basketball, it was pick-on-me as they volleyed thinly-veiled insults back-and-forth with each other, rarely allowing me to answer.

"My daughter tells me you're still trying to be a writer."

"At what age do you think about trying another profession?"

"A profession. Gosh, I guess I just don't have the same perseverance as you because I would have given up by now."

"Me too, Nan. It's real inspiring to hear our daughter tell us about your writing. Comedies, huh?"

"Like what? Abbott and Costello? Laurel and Hardy? Probably something more New York Jewish like that Woody Allen, eh?"

"Wouldn't it benefit you more to be in Los Angeles?"

I'd definitely thought about it. It would benefit me career-wise for sure. It would not benefit me in numerous

other ways as I hate to drive and I like to get wasted. New York's the best city for finding your way home when you're too drunk to know you're not home already.

"We keep telling Ash, you two should move back to Poughkeepsie."

"Beautiful neck of the country. Ha, can you have a 'neck' of the country or does that only apply to the woods?"

"Country's have necks, Bill, no question."

"The Poughkeepsie housing market is splendid right now. And we know some good lenders if you don't have enough money."

"Don't worry, they aren't what you'd call...Shylocks."

"You know Rebecca and Edward live right across the street from us. What a life they've had!"

"High school sweethearts, head off to SUNY New Paltz together, engaged on graduation day, and, what luck, right after they get married, our neighbors die of carbon monoxide poisoning and they're able to pick up their mortgage."

"Isn't that beautiful? The American Dream."

Just like Gatsby dreamed it. Eddie Haskell would have probably lived in Bill and Nan's bedroom if they would have let him. Fucking brown noser.

"Nan, did you tell him how another neighbor of ours just had a stroke and now the house kiddy-corner to us is free?"

"I believe it's 'kitty-corner,' Bill."

"Oh, yeah, she had cats. Beautiful house. Not one of those cookie-cutter McMansions, this baby's a whopper of nice stone and biggie picture windows."

"You know we have five miniature golf courses in

town?”

“Dutchess County’s third best school system too!”

I didn’t ask the obvious. If this “neck” of the country was so awesome, why was their neighborhood losing more inhabitants than Love Canal?

***Tip #8: Fall For Someone with Dissimilar Dreams Than You.***

Sadly enough, it was actually Ash’s dream to move back home to Love Canal...er Birth Canal...uh, Out-of-Love Canal.

My girlfriend had meager but well-thought-out dreams. To live walking distance from her parents, to have a simple suburban house with her hubby, to be a wife, a mother, a homemaker, a Weimaraner owner. Jesus, how boring did that sound?!

Incredibly boring to me. Could I be a part of that? I didn’t think so. But I never told Ash that, assuming she was all talk, simply romanticizing things, that she would support me, follow me wherever my dreams took me. I’m not just a failure; I’m incredibly selfish.

I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to live in New York the rest of my life, or maybe move to California, or some place completely different, but I knew I always would need to live somewhere exciting. That wasn’t going to be in Poughkeepsie, despite its ninety holes of miniature golf.

Bill and Nan knew that, too. They knew if their daughter stayed with me then she would never live near them again. They were also secretly smarting that I had been dating Ash for nearly two years and had been fucking her for nearly two years plus a few days, yet I had never even considered marrying her. They were in a paradox, both

demanding I make an honest women of her but knowing that honest woman would live far away from them until their deaths.

Just then Bill and Nan's pupils dilated. I looked toward the entranceway, just as Trevor arrived, being greeted by Tommy with a brotherly hug and Bill and Nan as if he was their very own son returning from the war in Iraq.

Trevor was Ash's college boyfriend, her now ex-boyfriend, her "best" friend. Right. Let me tell you something, women, former boyfriends you dumped yet who still hang out with you like a pathetic puppy dog are not your friends. They are just losers with no other female options, self-esteem, or integrity, that continue to have the hopes that one day you'll fall back into bed with them. And they hate your current boyfriend. As in me.

Now, Trevor is the kind of guy who is so two-dimensional, such a living-and-breathing stereotype, that one need only know him for a minute to know everything about him. A neo-hippie from Brooklyn, Trevor spends every second he's in Manhattan telling you how much it sucks compared to Brooklyn. Though he will admit he himself is worried about Brooklyn becoming gentrified, too.

"I'm thinking about moving to Roosevelt Island, maybe Spanish Harlem, or especially Yonkers. Supposed to be the new hot place. Totally un-gentrified. Great live poetry scene. No chain establishments. Tons of victimless crime there right now and you can easily get away with smoking weed right on the cracked sidewalks!"

Trevor's the kind of guy who still wears an Obama pin even though the election has been over for nearly a year, still so proud that he voted for the man. Oh, sure,

he would never remain a fan of a band that became even marginally famous, but he thinks he's real unique for being one of seventy million to vote for Barack.

"Trevor, you wanna go grab a drink?" Anything to shut him up.

"Thanks, pal, but I'm not drinking now. I've kinda decided to be sober this month, detox a bit for my cosmic health."

"How do those buffalo wings laid out over there factor into that?"

"I don't eat 'processed' foods, and only free range chicken for that matter. I say, if the ingredients on the back of the box have a word I can't pronounce, the food is not for me."

I chose not to question him on his reading level.

Instead, I learn that Trevor doesn't like much of anything. Oh, but he'll tell you everything he dislikes: the nebulous idea of "corporations" (even though the dilettante of a musician is forced to work in the mailroom for a Wall Street one), the nebulous idea of competition, sports determined by scoring as opposed to judging, western health care, American studio movies, people with money, free market economics, Republicans, Fox News, Glenn Beck, war, and television.

"I haven't owned one since sophomore year!" he proudly proclaims, though he must be a Marshall McLuhan fan cause later he talks about watching *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* via Hulu on his Macbook Pro.

Trevor is the kind of guy that adds nothing to a conversation, unable to generate anything interesting of his own, only able to snarkily critique things created by other



people. He's like a blogger who is only able to reblog stuff from others with only a single boring caption added.

If he was a movie character, critics would deride Trevor as being too wooden, saying that real life humans have much more depth. Sadly, that is not the case. I find Trevor to be such a detestable loser—the kind of guy who thinks listing his sexuality status on Facebook as “Whatever I can get” (LOL!) as being the height of American comedy—that it makes me question if Ash is a loser for having once dated him and whether I am a loser, *quod erat demonstrandum*, for having been the other “great love of her life” (her words).

To make myself feel better, I note that college for my twenty-seven-year-old girlfriend was almost a decade ago and why judge her on her past actions or her past boyfriends. I certainly wouldn't want to be judged on my past actions and relationships (please see **Footchapter Six-B: How to Have a Sordid Past**).

I should have analyzed the situation more rigorously. As the party heated up and Ash began ignoring me in favor of her friends and Trevor (please see **Footchapter Six-A: How to Get Usurped By Your Girlfriend's Ex**), I did what I usually do when I'm bored at a party, wedding, or funeral. I headed to the bar.

I start gabbing with the bartender, Tony, and find him to be very cool. He's just bartending at night so he has enough free time to pursue an animation career. We talk about the fucked up situation I am currently in. I tell him that maybe I'm crazy, maybe a little buzzed, but I have this sneaking suspicion I'm about to be dumped.

Tony agrees that it seems plausible and, yeah, both my girlfriend and Trevor are dumb for feigning friendship.

“Just leave them to their own devices, you’re better than that, Stu. You can get a hotter chick anyways.”

I now realize that, whether it’s over, it’s over. Tony—a stranger—just insulted my girlfriend’s looks and I didn’t care.

“Stu, can we talk?”

That ambiguous desire to talk again. Ash with the four ugliest words in any relationship after “Does your dick itch?” I knew what was coming, as did Tony, who gave me a “Godspeed, John Glenn” look as Ash dragged me to an empty corner booth.

**Tip #9: *Never Plan A Future With Her (Outside of “So Where We Going Drinkin’ This Weekend?”).***

She immediately started crying. We were breaking up. Er, she was dumping my ass.

You should never ask a person who was the dumpee to explain why they were dumped. You simply can’t trust them as a dumpee is full of cognitive dissonance.

“Yeah, so she dumped me.”

“But WHY?”

Because...

“She’s crazy. But aren’t all women a little crazy, ha?”

Because...

“She’s a coward.”

Because...

“She’s scared of her parents’ wrath.”

Because...

“She fears intimacy.”

Because...

“She doesn’t choose happiness.”

Because...

“She’s scared of success”

See how ambiguous those reasons are? Proof you’re just kidding yourself? Maybe, but isn’t love itself somewhat ambiguous? It’s hard to elucidate why exactly you’ve fallen in love with someone other than: “She’s hot” or “I like her a lot.”

Then again, you can’t trust the dumpers either.

“Honey, WHY are you dumping me?”

Because...

“We don’t communicate well.”

Then what are we doing right now?

Because...

“You have poor relations with my siblings.”

They started it.

Because...

“You don’t befriend my friends.”

You don’t befriend mine!

Because...

“We have dissimilar dreams.”

My dream is to spend the rest of my life with you.

Because...

“You don’t want to get married.”

But I love you.

I didn’t want to be broken up with. I didn’t want my world turned upside down.

“But I love you, Ash.”

“Then why don’t you EVER say it?”

**Tip #10: Rarely, if Never, Say “I Love You.”**

She had me there. I never said “I Love You.” It was just so...sitcom-y.

I had a problem saying it not because I didn't love her, I had a problem saying it because it sounded so trite. It's been a hack sitcom device for ages. A plot of at least one installment of every relationships-based comedy series since at least 1980. The battle of the sexes between a couple as to who will be the first to "cave" and say those magic words. The man refusing to break for fear of desperation, the woman more desperate to hear the words than to actually have a man that loved her.

Then, one day, finally, in a moment of passion, or drunkenness, Ross or Chandler or Joey or even a non-*Friend* accidentally, as if unable to control his vocalizations, stutters out, "I I-, I I-I-I-, I llllo-, I looooooove you." And Rachel or Monica or Phoebe is smitten, while he is crestfallen over his weakness. But, ever so briefly before he realizes that, yes, he did fucking mean it. He does fucking love her.

Ash should have known I loved her by my actions. By how I spent so much time with her, how I kissed her deeply every time I saw her, held her hand when we walked through Central Park, slept with my left arm tightly around her. By how I massaged her back and rubbed her feet, bought her gifts just for the heck of it, and always insisted she follow her dreams. But she still needed to hear, as that magnificent blind bastard Stevie Wonder once said, "These three words."

She needed to hear them as all girls do. This is a fact I only came to learn after the fact. It would have been easy to throw out a couple of "I love yous" every day, yet Ash was lucky to get one a week. Oops.

Ash wondered if we could remain friends and I told her no way. What would be the point? We'd never been

friends. From several hours after we'd met until just this second we'd been sexual and/or romantic partners. I wasn't going to be a loser ex like Trevor, hanging around like a stray dog, hoping for another chance. Needy girls like Ash just collect those kind of guys.

Tony grabbed me as I headed out. "A consolation prize." He handed me a pint of How to Fail Ale in a plastic to-go cup.

I smiled and said, "Thank you," like I always do when people are kind to me. Which gave me an idea. As I exited the bar, passing Bill, Nan, Trevor, and Spitshine Tommy, I bowed to them with two clasped hands like a geisha girl:

"THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU  
THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK. YOU.  
FOR. EVERYTHING!!!"

FOOTCHAPTER 6A | **HOW TO GET** USURPED BY YOUR  
GIRLFRIEND'S EX

He's everything you are not. You're glad about that.  
He's a "nice guy." You just think that he likes to  
sublimate his true desires.

He's considerate. You think he's afraid to have  
anyone mad at him.

He's compassionate. You're pretty sure he just  
cultivates a deep sympathy for the suffering of others—  
always female "others"—as a pathetic flirtation technique.

You find your girlfriend's ex just so...inconsequential.  
He's not as handsome as you, in shape as you, smart, funny,  
creative, or talented as you; and, believe me, it's not like you  
think that highly of yourself. That's why it doesn't concern  
you that he takes her to crappy movies you'd never want to  
take her to. Meets her at wine bars on Sundays for a Malbec  
or two. Occasionally hits up a museum with her. Cultural  
shit you don't enjoy and would much rather be watching  
sports than attending.

They don't get together often, only once a month,  
and communicate a little more than that. An e-mail exchange,  
a brief note on each other's Facebook walls, nothing special.  
A non-relationship. Especially on your girlfriend's end who

seems to only be in contact with him because she doesn't want to hurt the puppy dog's feelings.

She tells you everything they do. Not because she needs your "permission," just to let you know. You think it's a sign of awesome confidence that you aren't bothered in the least.

When she says, "Trevor and I are going to see the new Kate Hudson movie, *Cheeseburgers in Paradise*," you nonchalantly say, "Oh, that's nice."

"Trevor and I are gonna grab a glass of wine after work."

"Terrific."

"Trevor and I are going to check out the found art exhibit over at the Museum of Boring Shit."

"Sounds fun," you say. "I'll just be here watching the Giants game."

Isn't that what women want? A guy so content he is not threatened by his girlfriend chillin' with the ex? To me, he was just another of her girlfriends, humiliating himself by trying to be in my Ash's life. Thinking if he stuck around long enough, he'd prove he truly was more handsome than me, more in shape than me, smart, funny, creative, and talented than me. Or that he could at least edge me out in a best-of-seven series with those things. I guarantee he was certain he was better than me in what he considered the most important thing: his love for Ash.

He may have been right. I couldn't control his love for something. Just like I couldn't control how much John Hinckley loved Jodie Foster compared to whomever she was dating at the time. In fact, I'll guarantee Hinckley loved her more. How'd that turn out?

I should have been jealous. Just a little. Women want us to be jealous. How fucked up is that? Showing a little jealousy—we're not talking about monitoring phone calls and throwing shit across the room—is greatly important. It shows our girlfriends we're still engaged in the relationship, we still desire them, covet them, don't want to lose them to someone else.

So "Trevor and I are gonna grab a glass of wine after work" becomes a pouty response of "Why do you got to hang out with him instead of meeeeeee?" Or, I could just throw shit against the wall and demand she never sees him again. I would've never guessed being a phony who hid his desires was the most important thing to Ash.

It came full circle when she and Trevor started dating again. Now, I can in no way respect the girl I used to date who now dates an idiot which I guess makes me an idiot for losing out to that idiot for Ash's love.

Yet, I still miss her.





“Those that don’t recall history are doomed to repeat it.”

That quote has been attributed to the likes of LBJ, Edmund Burke, Napoleon, Plato, and General Patton. But no one said that. Or, rather, the famous quote is actually:

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

That quote was said by George Santayana. Spanish essayist, philosopher, poet, novelist, man you’ve never heard of.

Now truly famous people can say all sorts of trite shit and you’re still like, “Wiiiiiiise.” But if some bloke you’ve never heard of says even a beautifully crafted aphorism you’re all “The fuck does that loser know?” The fuck does George Santayana know?

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Those who cannot remember the past were probably drunk when the present was happening. And will surely repeat it next weekend.

I wonder if Santayana drank a lot. If he did illegal drugs, gambled, disappointed his parents, defamed authority

figures. I wonder if he fucked a lot of women. How much play could a “man of letters” get in 1800s Madrid? I’ve seen pictures of George. Not that great looking. Kinda looks like Gorbachev sans birth mark avec Spanish mustachio.

I wonder if Santayana was ever asked, “What your number?” How many chicks ya’ banged, Georgie?

I lay in bed with my girl du jour. Girl du nuit. I met her at Boffo Bar as I sat shiva over my ex-girlfriend who was my girlfriend a few hours previous. Some people—women—think you should grieve over an ex for a bit. Other people—men—think you should throw yourself back into the game—the sack—as quickly as possible.

I had no clue what I had done to attract Shoshana aside from asking her if she had any interest in being on *JAP Fit*. She must have thought I was some reality TV producer as opposed to some drunk jerk mocking her. She was annoying me as her and her coterie loudly sang along to *Only the Good Die Young* off the jukebox. They just loved Billy Joel’s line about “ya’ Catholic girls start[ing] much too late.” Shoshana seemed dead set on proving the opposite.

We lay in bed pre-coitus.

“Do you do this a lot, Stu?”

Do what? Ignore annoying one-night stands while I think about my life?

It was coincidentally the twelve-year anniversary of having lost my virginity. Settle down. I’m not some freak who keeps track of that. Marks my calender every year, writes a diary entry, has a special celebration. No, I remember for another reason.

I had just had sex for the first time and was in my dorm’s community bathroom trying to urinate at the urinal.

That's what they're there for.

"You gonna stand there all night?"

I hadn't seen Dan, not my friend just yet, enter the large bathroom.

"I don't really need to pee."

"Then why are you in here?"

"Well, you see, I just had sex..."

"Way to go!" he mocked me.

"...and I read somewhere that after you have sex you should pee to clear the gunk out of your pipes to prevent future infection."

"OK."

"And, being that my penis is finally getting some use, I certainly do not want an infection."

Dan and I were friends immediately. He too cared deeply about urinary issues as he suffered from polyuria, a side-effect of his hypogonadism.

Everyone talks about how incompetent they were the first time they made love, but I was great. I was Hoyt Wilhelm hitting a home run in his first career plate appearance. Orson Welles making his directorial debut with *Citizen Kane*. No, I wasn't a natural or anything, I was just so...prepared.

Green Oaks High back in St. Louis was a fine enough public learning institution annually ranked on such prestigious lists as: the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch's* 50 Best Area Schools, the *Movin' to MO* 1000 Best Public Schools, and *Newsweek* magazine's 50,000 Best National High Schools. So you know I was getting a highly-coveted education. For free! For really just a lot of my parents' tax dollars that would have been better spent on publicly funding a new

stadium for the Rams or Blues.

My graduating class was large, 915 students entered as ninth graders and 914 of those graduated. Compared to a national average of 9.2%, we only had one dropout: Anthony Lee.

A nice enough fella raised well by loving parents, Anthony Lee never took to schooling. He wasn't rude in class or anything, he just didn't like being there. Which many thought a shame because many people thought him a genius. I'll be the first to say he wasn't. He was certainly above-average intellectually, but he was no genius.

People love to overrate those that fail in childhood. "Such a shame Anthony Lee dropped out. He could have made something of himself. You know he's a genius. Counselor May secretly told me he has the highest IQ in the entire school" was a refrain I heard all too often.

Just like the football quasi-star who breaks his femur, never able to play again, destined to be the next Jim Brown.

Just like the class president who dies in a car wreck who was certain to be the next Thomas Jefferson.

Just like the drama class queen who scars her vocal chords from too much smoking who would have been the next Beverly Sills.

Although, maybe Anthony Lee was a genius. Because, even though he was a dropout, by the time we had graduated college he had already put in six years of adult work and was now the regional manager of a local gym franchise. By twenty-six, when most of us were graduating from grad school/law school/medical school, up to our ears in debt, Anthony Lee opened his first gym, Beer Muscles, a

weight room you could actually buy a frosty brew at. Now at thirty, most of the kids from that initial 915 are ostensibly successes—spouse, kids, house, job—but Anthony Lee is the biggest. He's an exercise franchise magnate with his mug plastered on billboards around town, his impressive physique appearing in Beer Muscles (now with 78 locations!) commercials around the clock.

Likewise, of our 915 students, 485 of them female, only one girl ever got pregnant: Martha Woolery. You say, "Well, you grew up in a lily white, suburban, semi-wealthy area. Of course only one girl got pregnant (to term)." You argue it's amazing it was even that many. Well, I get what you're inferring, but I'll have you know I was high school friends with Rohit Patel, the son of our community's only abortionist, Dr. Anish Patel. And he never worked. He never had anything to abort, save corrupted programs on his IBM PC Jr. The Patels must have been the poorest doctor family in America. Poor Anish. He should have never worked on commission.

Born into poverty in Dharamsala, through odd jobs Anish saved enough to make it to America where he enrolled at Dutchess County Community College which led to him attending Cornell and then Columbia Medical School. With most Christians scared to become abortionists, Anish thought he could capitalize on the lack of supply and the very high demand during those more promiscuous, less responsible times. Then he fell in love with a flight attendant stationed in St. Louis and was soon lucky enough to have approximately one fetus to abort per year. Anish felt like an abject failure, so insignificant that crazy pro-lifers never once targeted him. Never once! He didn't want to die or

anything, but he would have liked an idle death threat or two.

Anish's lack of work, however, gave him plenty of time to golf and he was our community's best over-40 player. He supplemented his meager aborting income by playing drunken Nassaus with his doctoral clique: Dr. Harvey Markowitz, DDS; Dr. Jacob Stein, plastic surgeon; and Dr. Bobby, acupuncturist. Anish always won their bets because the rest of his group were so busy, they had little time to hit the practice range as, apparently, Green Oaks' residents valued straight teeth, liposuction, and "pseudo-medical back procedures" (Dr. Patel's words) a lot more than they valued "underage, unprotected, irresponsible fucking" (his words again, but try to imagine them in an Indian accent for full comic effect).

Except Martha Woolery, of course, and most of us were certain some demon had put a spawn in her, which was the plot of *Rosemary's Baby*, a movie none of us had heard of and a book we weren't taught in English classes which were still forcing upon us boring classics like *The Scarlet Letter* which, for some reason, no one ever questioned the greatness of even though they should have.

A demon had to have knocked Martha preggo because she was so vile. Olive Oyl thin with a pizza face full of acne (deep dish Chicago-style, no less) and a receding hairline.

A demon had to have impregnated her because I went to a highly Christian school where no one understood the concept of premarital sex. Of obtaining it, committing it, enjoying it. Me included.

Church and state were officially separated at

Green Oaks, but not really. How could they be when every kid wore a cross necklace—pewter for the gals, leather-strapped for the guys—kept a spare Bible in his or her locker, attended prayer group under the flag pole in the morning, Bible study in the cafetorium in the afternoon. These kids claimed they were “born again” even though they’d literally been born just a decade point five previous. They claimed they were “saved,” even though, when they once were “lost” that was only because they were too young to talk yet. My classmates even put Bible passages under their autographs when they signed your yearbook: “Have a terrific summer, Stu, but never forget Proverbs 10:5 ‘He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.’ Joel Cantrell.”

Looking through my yearbooks now, I’m struck by how ugly my classmates were. Not just Martha Woolery, but all of them. It’s not the unfortunate styles of the era either—big bangs, grungy flannels, dark makeup—oh no, my classmates were fucking ugly. Even more so now. Now that they’ve put on weight, men with goatees floating in the middle of their fat faces, women that look ten years older than me. It occurs to me that perhaps Biblical devotion and a strong aversion to premarital sex is simply a coping mechanism so that no one in an ugly community like Green Oaks ever has to see each other naked.

My classmates weren’t just casually anti-sex, they were virulently against penis into vagina. Adamantly opposed to the ol’ in out, in out. A real horror show they were with their anti-sex clothing (“Virginity Rocks!”), paraphernalia (purity pants with a zipperless front), Promise Rings, and rallies. Rallies to rah rah cheer for NOT doing something.



Now that is true perversity!

The only non-Christians in my class were Hindi Rohit, the latent homosexual humanist Kris Christopher, two Goth kids, Azzy and Andi, who feigned being devil worshipers even though their straight-laced parents made them attend Sunday School, and, of course, Semitic me. But just because we were not Christians didn't mean we were pro-sex. The five of us weren't partaking in bi-curious Satanic Hindi humanist sex orgies. I wish! We had been brainwashed by our classmates and community and we too were anti-sex. Little did I know, the feelings inside of me were being repressed. Ready to explode. And I ain't talking about my first career wet dream which happened on April 5, 1994 which was the same day Kurt Cobain died. I don't think the incidents are connected; although, for a while in the 90s "Teen spirit" was a slang term for masturbating.

I was always girl crazy. I loved these Christian girls. Not for their Christianness, no, for their vaginas. Their breasts and asses, too. I even liked the ugly Goths, Azzy and Andi. I'd sit in class ogling them, thinking what I'd do with them in another lifetime. Luckily, classes were so easy I didn't need to really pay attention. We read *The Great Gatsby* and learned about derivatives and the Doppler effect and "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," and I showed up unprepared and still aced the tests, spent an hour writing an essay about how Daisy Buchanan was a fickle twat and got an A plus. I was the laziest overachiever. I didn't hear a teacher speak for all of my eleventh and twelfth grade years. I was tuned out to them; tuned in and turned on by my female classmates.

Back then I knew I wasn't a Christian, but I was pretty sure I wasn't a Jew either. I mean, I was ethnically

a Jew of course and I was anti-anti-semitism. You can't convert from that. You couldn't say to Hitler, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Slow down. I am no longer a Jew as of...this second. I converted to being Aryan."

I knew it made no sense that someone called God ruled over us, but I never once thought I was an Atheist. I knew I didn't believe in a God that would get angry if you had sex before you had signed papers with the government and worn a rented tuxedo in front of family and friends, yet these Christians around me believed such was the case. Since there were hundreds of them and just one of me, I had no real choice but to believe them. Not believing them wouldn't have gotten my dick wet either. That was not what Pascal was wagering on. Thus, I threw myself into a private study of sex.

I'd find an old *Playboy* at a garage sale and study it. And by "study" it, I mean jerk off violently to it. Those were the days before the internet so it wasn't easy. As the end of the twentieth century neared, I can't imagine there was anyone—save maybe twelve-year-olds, airbrushing enthusiasts, and people without high-speed internet—who looked at the magazine for any reason but the articles, but back in the early- to mid-90s I had no choice.

I'd watch VHS porn I found at flea markets. Again for masturbatory purposes, but after I'd chafed my shaft and ailed my forearm muscles worse than a tennis player after five clay court sets at Roland Garros, I'd study the videos. I'd notice the way Rocco Siffredi ate out Misty Dawn. Seemed kinda messy. I'd take notes on the positions Lexington Steele placed Ginger Lynn in, how quickly each lasted, and how he'd segue from one move to another. It was more poetic than

Fred and Ginger. I'd put it in the memory bank where Peter North chose to shoot his sperm on Honey Wilder. Would I have such power?

I became an expert on vaginas, too, as I was seeing such a wide range. You couldn't help but notice the evolution of pubic hair. From the big unkempt mounds of the Me Decade to the topiary designs of the 80s to simple strips and tufts and Hitler puss-staches of the 90s to the bare bones styles of the modern era.

The lips could be purely interior as if the woman had a tiny mail slot at the end of her, or exterior but sturdy. Lips like an inflated inner tube or Carol Channing's kisser turned ninety degrees. Or they could be the famed "roast beef curtains," droopy and spirally, gut-like in how they spilled from the woman like unraveling yarn.

The hymen you, of course, never saw in porn, so I'd have to check out medical texts from the library to see that. It could be the big classic cherry or nothing more than a raisin. Just dying to be popped.

The clitorises just as varying, it sometimes appearing as if the women had a dwarf's penis jutting out from her. Other times, though, they were as small as the air valve on a bicycle tire.

And the positioning! Sometimes nearly touching the rectum with only a half inch of rectouterine pouch area, sometimes nearly up by her belly button.

Some people were birdwatchers—"Oh look, a scissor-tailed flycatcher!"—but I was a pussywatcher—"My gracious, a burning bush-waxing atop a puckering cherry blossom pink pussy, hymen still intact!"

I knew breasts, too. The small mosquito bites, the

tiny red bumps that looked like when a cartoon character hit his head on something, the “scoop” tits that shot out like a backwards phonograph ear or cornucopia basket. Filled with subcutaneous fat, mammaries, and eroticism instead of squash, baby pumpkins, and gourds. The saggy sausages, stretched out water balloons hanging down, looking ready to rip from the skin and burst on the sidewalk. The naturally firm ones, pasted to the chest like slow-pitch softballs, but just for a few years of post-adolescence. And, of course, the fakies, divided into good and bad. The difference in quality simply an analysis of placement, separation, exposed sternum, and how cockeyed the nipples.

Nipples and areolas, red, pink, brown, and mauve. Usually matching the vulva in the same ways belts should match your shoes. Silver-dollar-sized and perfectly outlined, ones that just smeared into the skin. Covered with tiny bumps or smooth as freshly-Zambonied ice. Nipples that were long, wide, pointy, pokey, like eraserheads, like David Lynch’s *Eraserhead*, inverted, concave, convex.

Asses were pretty much the same. Firm or saggy, big or small, the bottom of a nicely formed hourglass, or more like one of those plastic timers from a board game. They were what they were, two pillows of seat fat separated by a split. But I still liked them, still wanted them in my face. The girl on all fours as I entered her from behind like they did in the movies. Yeah, the logistics of doggy style didn’t exactly make sense to me. How my 6.1” dick could reach her vagina I did not know, but apparently other people had no problems, so I assumed I wouldn’t either. You got to understand, people have been fucking each other since day one. Or, I guess to not offend my former high school

classmates, I should say since day six, if I'm recalling the Bible correctly.

Adam wasn't nervous when he lost his virginity to Eve. When he popped history's first cherry, a far more interesting Biblical fruit than that apple. Adam didn't worry about doing it "right." He wasn't inhibited with fear that Eve would gossip about his dick size to her gal pals over Cosmos. I never heard a Bible verse discuss whether Adam felt inadequate ("He who worries about how well her last boyfriend fucked her will be smote by his own screwy emotions." —Ecclesiastes 25:82) Whether he worried about getting it up. Whether he thought about other things to prevent a humiliating premature ejaculation. Mainly because baseball and walking the dog and Richard Nixon naked were not even things Adam could turn his mind to just yet. I doubt little Adam was obsessed with Eve's orgasm. "How's that feel, Eve? Does that feel good? You gonna cum? You about to cum? I want you to cum. Let's cum together..."

From Adam until about 1960, human beings fucked each other with no ceremony, with no *Cosmo* to inform them that 15% of straight men like an index finger shoved up their rectum, no *Love Line* to call into, no romantic comedies written by Wesley to make us feel like shit for our inadequacies. These modern insights into sex hadn't help us. They had just fucked up our fucking by introducing us to problems we didn't even know we could possibly have.

I think of how different sex had become from just the turn of the twentieth century. Of the prim and proper character Constance from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* who had no clue what to expect when she fucked her gamekeeper Oliver for the first time. What did sex with someone even

look like? To her, the first time with Oliver seemed farcical: “The butting of his haunches seemed ridiculous.” She likewise thought Ollie looked a fool when he came, and that it was downright pathetic the wilting of his post-coital penis.

Sex could seem silly if you didn’t know what to expect. Such an odd act to insert one of your body parts into one of her body parts and then bounce up and down for awhile. This was “special?” It seemed silly, yes, but I knew what to expect before the first time I had sex. I had a plan, a strategy, even a favorite position (reverse cowgirl from a seated position).

When it came time to lose my virginity to Hillary Edmund from Poli Sci 101, even though I was encountering things for the very first time—who knew breasts would be so squishy, a vagina so wet, sticking my penis in not as smooth as the movies made it seem?—like a great improviser, I was ready. From kissing to underdressing her to her undressing me to kissing her body to her kissing mine to her...blowing me!...to me going down on her to “Let’s have sex, Stu” to “Fuck me, Stu!” to missionary to woman on top to doggy style (hey, I am able to reach!) back to missionary and I came.

I came out of the community bathroom and took a prideful walk back to my dorm room. I entered to find Hillary, still naked, and bawling her eyes out.

“I thought you said I was good?”

She looked at me like I was a moron. “Princess Diana just died.”

“What?” Hillary was watching the tiny TV in my room.

“Lady Di died.”

I glanced at the “Breaking News Report” trying to process things. “So?”

“So?!”

“Yeah. Who cares?”

“She was a great person!”

“She had sex with the guy that would be king. Big deal.”

“She was a humanitarian!”

“She had nothing else to do besides being charitable. She sucked at everything in life. She could barely pass her high school classes, couldn’t get into college, or get a real job. What else could she do besides become the biggest trophy wife in the world and then visit homeless people while cameras followed her?”

Hillary and I never had sex again. And Hoyt Wilhelm never hit another home run. Orson Welles never matched the success of *Citizen Kane* and in his final years shilled for frozen peas and voiced robots in children’s cartoons.

I didn’t have sex for months after that. I now knew how good sex was yet I didn’t get to partake in it. Once you’ve tasted the ecstasy, you can’t just be stripped of it. Now I needed to remember the past so I could be condemned to repeat it and have a lot more sex.

College girls liked cool guys that drank hard and acted like only the devil may care. During that first dry spell, I became determined to be one of those guys. To go into the history books as a legendary drunkard and fucker. Your Humphrey Bogarts, Babe Ruths, Jackie Gleasons, and your U.S. Grant who, legend claims, was once accused by President Lincoln’s advisers of being a drunkard, to which Honest Abe replied, “I wish you would tell me the brand of

whiskey that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel to my other generals.”

That whiskey was Old Crow which I began to drink in the same way Popeye enjoyed his spinach. Danny hated that U.S. Grant story I would trot out to justify my dipsomaniacal behavior.

“That would never happen nowadays. Nowadays politicians are too wise. They don’t want negative items following them around.”

Danny never did anything bad. He’d have a glass of red wine with an Italian meal. A cup of sake with his sashima. A frosty American beer at the ball game. He never lost control. He never tried drugs. He’d maybe take a puff off a legally-imported cigar to celebrate a momentous occasion. If he was at a party getting out of hand, he would tell everyone to tone it down. If a joint came out of someone’s pocket, he would leave. I’m not even sure he knew there were higher-level drugs as he was so overprotective of his image and concerned about his future.

I certainly wasn’t worried about doing something bad for my image. I had no image. I had an image of someone that did bad things. I never wanted to be a politician. I had no respect for them, considering them failures of the highest order. I would never tell Danny this, but career politicians were just human beings that weren’t good at shit. If you were truly good at something—baseball, writing, business, handsomeness—you would get rich and famous that way. Politics was the last and only bastion for those ugly, dumb, untalented fucks bursting with ambition. You didn’t have to be good at anything to be a politician. You only had to be good at getting elected.



Taft was obese, Buchanan was a closeted friend of Dorothy, JFK was a philanderer, Nixon cursed heavily, Bush drank, Obama did coke. What did a sordid past have to do with fuck all?

Hoyt Wilhelm may have never hit another home run but as a pitcher he rode his knuckleball to the Hall of Fame. Orson Welles and *Citizen Kane* still reign as the quote-unquote “greatest movie of all time.” And eventually, after a prolonged break, I was having sex with women again. They were impressed at the guy I had become.

When I was a high school virgin, I dreamed of having a girlfriend. But after finally having sex I quit believing in monogamy. I thought it an unnatural repression of a man’s true carnal desires to “spread his seed.” Never trust a man who excuses his shitty behavior via his rudimentary knowledge of Darwinism.

I never thought I’d be monogamous but then I met Ash and everything changed. I didn’t want to look at other women, touch other women, fuck other women. She didn’t even have to ask me to commit to her because I wanted to.

I’d fucked only her for the last two years and now I was single again. Now I wanted to be more promiscuous than Wilt Chamberlain during the off-season. I started kissing Shoshana. My dick sprung to attention.

Then it hit me, I still had never had sex in reverse cowgirl from a seated position.

“You want to have sex in my childhood favorite position? It would bring back good memories from the past.”

## 7 | **HOW TO FAIL**

ALL THE WAY TO ROCK BOTTOM

“Fuck me, you white boy beetch!”

I came out of a drunken fugue to find myself having intercourse with a woman from behind.

I came out of my shit-faced blackout to find myself doggy style tagging this thing. 350 pounds, ashy skin, offensively malodorous, a Don King-esque tuft of hair topped off by a backward Yankees cap. The interlocking NY stared me in the face and my erection deflated.

“Don’t let that cock get flat, yo’ white boy faggot!” she chided me as I drifted back off.

In the morning, I thankfully awoke alone, her putrid scent the only remaining remnant, like a skunk that had crossed the road.

I had been going to the Wee Pub every single day since Ash had dumped me. Getting over a breakup can range from depressingly difficult to “Thanks-for-dropping-the-guillotine-blade-so-I-didn’t-have-to” easy. When a relationship ends, one can lose a plethora of things from love to sex to companionship to friends to children to pets to apartments to a zillion other possessions. My ex-girlfriend and I had no children, pets, or apartments, and we

were rarely having sex any more so that wasn't much of a loss. But I had lost companionship and I was quite lonely. It's weird how just having a warm body beside you, even one you've grown contemptuous of, makes one less lonely.

The biggest loss, though, was in filling my time. Mondays had been for trying to make home-cooked meals Ash and I had seen the dumber chefs prepare on the Food Network. Tuesdays, game night with Keith and Erin, usually Scattergories or Cranium though occasionally Taboo if we were feeling frisky. Wednesdays we did something "cultural" which usually meant "boring" and always occurred at places that only served chilled white wine. Thursdays were happy hour at J. Monroe's and, yes, we only stayed an hour and they were rarely that happy. Friday nights were for ordering greasy food in, catching up on DVR'd TV, and sleeping. Saturdays were for outdoor activities like biking in Central Park, flea-marketing in Brooklyn, strolls through Soho, window shopping on Fifth Avenue. And Sunday Funday was for fucking in bed all morning until the Giants kicked off.

Now my days were empty. I should have relished my free time, taken advantage of it, but I didn't. This Saturday would be about doing some more drinking to forget.

"Eh, yacome backta pickupyer cayrd? You left 'it 'ere last night."

"Not exactly, Lynn. Gonna stay here for a few, so feel free to just keep my tab open."

"Nice, the twentyfourhours plooos bayr tab, that's aclassic fersure."

"I've had a rough week."

"'ou've 'adda ruff munt, brotha."

I glanced around and noticed that Lynn had finally

taken down those Valentine's Day decorations that had been up three months too long, that should have never been up in the first place. The Wee wasn't exactly romance central.

There are many people that think they go to dive bars. They laugh at the surly bartender who gives them a foggy pitcher of macro swill, are amusingly grossed out by the unisex bathroom with a standing water floor and graffitied walls, tickled by the jukebox full of David Allen Coe and George Thorogood ditties. But successes don't go to dive bars, they go to faux-dives. Bars intentionally shitty just so bored successes can pretend to slum it for an evening. Calling these dive bars is like an eleven-year-old claiming he went to a truly haunted house last October 30th when his parents drove him to that warehouse off the highway and paid \$35 apiece for some drama club failures to spook the youngster.

Real dive bars are on Twelfth Avenue, nestled between storage facilities, motorcycle repair shops, secret brothels, and hot dog cart supply companies. Not Zagat-rated French restaurants and free trade coffee shops. They have names like Ollie's and McCullough's and Joe's. If they have names at all. Most are anonymous, just a blacked-out sign, a neon High Life in the tinted window, a door with a few nine millimeter holes in it. Aside from those holes, you can't see into these bars from the street so it's a major gamble every time you enter. Inside you'll find a bartender with a Rollie Fingers handlebar mustache. There'll be the guy playing pool with a "Mad Hungarian" Al Hrabosky mop of hair, a guy stuffing his Mitch Williams curly mulleted face with free pretzels, and a guy shooting Canadian Club and then slurping the excess whiskey from his Goose Gossage fu

manchu. At real dive bars the male population always bases their personal style on that of a former Major League relief pitcher, like the guy near the door with the Kent Tekulve aviator shades who is considering killing you for looking at him funny. You don't look at anyone funny in a real dive.

The Wee Pub was neither a faux-dive nor a dive-dive. It hovered in that middle purgatory, populated by neither wild successes nor abject failures. The Wee Pubbers were people with jobs, who had wives and girlfriends, sometimes even children, nice apartments perhaps, too. But they all had one thing in common: an inability to live a perfect twenty-four hour day. An insatiable need to fuck up their lives just a little. The Wee Pub was their stress relief ball from the miseries of the status quo.

I had started going to the Wee Pub back in my early-twenties to watch Knicks games, back when Van Gundy coached them and they were still decent. I had quickly become friendly, though not friends exactly, with all the regulars. When I started dating Ash, the Wee Pub and Knicks games became my excuse to go off on my own a few nights a week. My ex-girlfriend detested basketball (too many stoppages, she said) and though I invited her to join me, Ash never called my bluff. Now single again, the Wee Pub had become my respite, my daily oasis from the misery of life.

The door opened and Smelly Ted entered. Theodore "Ted" Shelstein. Age indeterminate. Most likely in the fifty-five to seventy-five range but his off-the-wall stories hinted at someone much older and occasionally, someone much younger. We called him Smelly Ted because...well he fucking smelled. A mixture of old man-ness, geriatric ointments,

unlaundered clothing, Wild Turkey, and cheap “victory” cigars, though the Knicks were winning so rarely nowadays he just smoked them after every game, considering it his own personal victory at having watched forty-eight minutes of awful basketball.

Smelly Ted had taught English at Stuyvesant until a year ago when he had been fired for falling asleep during a class he was teaching. Passed out right in the middle of a discussion of *The Decameron*. He was wasted. Luckily, at around the same time, Smelly Ted’s wife—name unknown and never before seen—had been laid off from her high-level job at one of the big banks and given a golden parachute massive enough to assure that she and her smelly hubby could live the rest of their lives in workless glory. Smelly Ted’s wife had chosen to spend her retirement by doing charity work, mostly for teens with STDs. Smelly Ted, on the other hand, had decided to get into acting.

I still remember the first time Smelly Ted told us he had decided to become a thespian. We chuckled to ourselves, thinking, “How in the world could this old, stinky, ugly, and surely ungifted man all of the sudden think he could be an actor?!” Later that night I had been telling the story to Ash over some Buffalo Lady Birds at First Ladies when Patricia had overheard. She was pissed. “I bet within a week he has an agent and soon enough he’ll be booking things!”

“Smelly Ted? But how?!”

“There’s a huge need for non-famous old white guys!” Patricia angrily spouted as she slung her Lucretia Garfield wig at the wall.

Smelly Ted sidled up to me.

“Had two auditions this morning. Stuck the first

one but forgot my sides for the second...”

Smelly Ted spent every day now going to auditions or to set. The second he was done for the day, he'd head to the Wee. There he'd drink Wild Turkey on ice after Wild Turkey on ice until he turned to drunken stone and fell backwards off his barstool at which point Lynn would hit “2” on his speed-dial and Smelly Ted's wife's limo driver would rush to the pub to pick up the man and take him home to their seven-bedroom condo on the Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

“...this afternoon I had to film a scene for this indie I'm in. I play a drug kingpin...”

Smelly Ted was wearing a pinstriped suit and had placed a fedora on the bar in front of him, quite different from his typical outfit of an ancient Knickerbockers sweatshirt and dirty Levi's.

“...and I have to have a go-around with this young actress playing a prostitute. Reminds me of my days back in the merchant marines. I don't know if you've ever been to El Paso but it's a real shithole. Not a goddamn chick in the whole area. You wanna get your rocks off you had to lay down with a sportin' girl.

“Every Saturday a bus would come to base, pick us up, and drop us at a designated spot on the side of this dusty road. Waiting for us would be a lineup of hookers. Some ugly, some uglier! The second the bus hit the brakes, you've never seen men make such a mad dash for such ugly broads. But we were a horny lot. Only time I ever paid for it in my life.

“Now this girl today is gorgeous and a helluva young talent. So before the director says 'action' for our big

hump scene, I say to her what Sir Laurence Olivier once said to a young lady before he had to film a sex scene with her: 'I apologize if I get an erection. I apologize if I don't!'"

Smelly Ted playfully punched me on the shoulder.

"Now during the scene—and I didn't get a boner, I might add, but I still can, I also might add—a bunch of the prostitute's brothers catch us in flagrante delicto and a brawl ensues. I may be old, but my character is supposed to be a real tough mook, able to kick some ass, if you know what I'm saying. The second I see these guys I reach inside my jacket pocket and pull out a dagger."

Smelly Ted mimed reaching into his pocket for the weapon.

"I took a class in stage combat down in the Village with the legendary Saggy Minnow, so I know what I'm doing. Here, you're a kinda young kinda fit guy. Take a swing at me. Seriously, take a swing. I can handle it."

I would have loved to but, instead, I mimed a slow motion haymaker at Smelly Ted's face which he immediately sidestepped before miming sticking a blade into my rib cage.

"That's a move that dates all the way back to the great Douglas Fairbanks."

I nodded.

"Oh, look at that, my Wild Turkey is..."

Smelly Ted started loudly shaking his glass, rattling the rocks. The only, and I mean only, way to get out of a conversation with Smelly Ted was to pray he ran out of whiskey.

"LYNNNNNNN!!!! LYNNNNNNN!!!!"

"What da' fuckya wont, Ted?"

"Justa 'nother Wild Turkey, partner. And not such



a light pour this time, wouldja? You're totally shortin' me, man."

At this point, Willy and Tristan entered, spied me, and started cracking up. Willy and Tristan were lifelong best friends and still roommates to this very day living in Hoboken. Both made tons of money as something-or-others down on Wall Street, but neither loved the New York businessman lifestyle. They hated going to steakhouses and fancy lounges, rubbing elbows with boring financial folks. They liked to spend their money on getting loaded, hard, every single night, on Jack and Cokes. Luckily, they both stored a few spare shirts and ties in their office closets cause neither knew whether they'd sleep at home, if at all, on any given night.

Tristan was the quiet one. Fat and doughy, all he thought about was food, what he'd eaten the previous meal, what he wanted to eat for the upcoming meal. Painfully shy, Willy and I were the only people in the world he would engage with.

Willy was better looking than Tristan and more outgoing, too, but he had his problems. His parents had died in a car wreck when he was just two and, for the next sixteen years he had been passed from foster family to foster family. He had little trust in people and was incapable of getting close to anyone.

Willy and Tristan were the only two of the Wee Pub crew I actually hung with outside of the bar, though, admittedly, we only went to other bars, Tristan's beloved strip clubs, and the occasional Knicks game when their company threw them a free luxury box we could get loaded in. The rest of my Wee Pub chums also began filing in with a

Saturday afternoon tip-off just ten minutes away.

There was Frozen Freddie, a squat toupeed man who sat at the bar never speaking to anyone, only opening his mouth to spout off arcane stats. "That's his 505th career three-pointer, moving him past Trent Tucker to fourth place all time for the Knicks." We suspected Freddie was autistic. Or at least Aspergic.

There was Ricky, a British bloke obsessed with fighting. He insisted America was a pussy country for not having any hooliganism surrounding our sports. He was a terrible tipper.

There was Dante, who somehow figured out a way to cram his "girlfriend" into every sentence he said. "God, these chicken fingers are terrible. You know who makes great chicken fingers though...my girlfriend."

There was also Jonny, a curly headed ginger freak whose normal speaking volume was yelling at the top of his lungs. "DID YOU SEE THAT SHOT!!!! HOLY SHIT AND LOOK AT THOSE CHICKS OVER THERE, THEY ARE SO FUCKING HOT! WAITRESS, I THINK I'LL HAVE A QUESADILLA, PLEASE! GOOOOO KNICKS!"

"Willy, Tristan, what happened last night?"

Willy smiled slyly at me and Tristan started laughing so hard he began coughing.

"What? What?"

"We were getting loaded when, next thing I know, you're running around ripping the Valentine's Day decorations off the wall," noted Willy.

"Where was Lynn?"

"In the back, banging some chick he met at the bar."

Tristan added his two cents. "You took the

cardboard cupids and stacked them in the middle of the floor. Then you stomped on them like a whiny little kid before you whipped your dick out and pissed all over them. Then you tried to light the pissy sign pile on fire with some bar matches.”

“We were aghast, dude. I was gonna stop you but you sprinted from the bar and up the block yelling, ‘DON’T. EVER. FALL. IN. LOOOOOVE!’”

“Lynn returns and he’s all, ‘Whoot the fook happened?’ We lied and said some bum came in here and did all that. He believed us, I think. The winos in this neighborhood are insane.”

“They’re mostly rummies,” I mumbled.

“But that doesn’t explain how...”

I had to. I told them how I had awoken from my drunken fugue.

“Had to be a hooker, Stu.”

“She couldn’t have been a hooker. I had no money. Plus, I left my only card here and you know I never have cash. I eschew cash.”

“You probably duped her to come back to your place.”

“Why would I ‘dupe’ such an ugly broad?”

“Beer goggles. I bet she was pissed when she found out you had no moolah. Probably stole some shit from you as payment.”

My bulging eyes betrayed me.

“She did steal something, didn’t she?”

Tristan poked me in the sternum with his meaty sausage finger.

“Didn’t she?!”

“Only my laptop. And cell phone. iPod. Pretty much every electronic device I own.”

As they laughed at me, I bemoaned my misfortune.

“Quit laughing! With no laptop, how am I going to get any work done?”

That just made them laugh harder.

“Work?! When do you ever work?”

“You know I’m writing that script about the building of the Alaskan Pipeline. It’s gonna be an epic on par with *Citizen Kane*, *Giant*, *There Will Be Blood*.”

“You don’t write. You just come here ever day.”

“That’s cause I’m trying to get rid of my writer’s block!”

I put my head on the bar. On MSG, the Knicks starting line-up was being introduced. “A 6’1” guard from Duke...Chriiiiiis Duhon.”

“WHERE DO YOU THINK THESE RICH LOSERS LIVE?”

“A 6’6” shooting guard from Depaul...Queeeeeentin Richardson.”

“These pussies should be in jail for how bad they’ve been playing. If they were in the Premiership...they prolly would be in jail.”

“A 6’10” forward from Italy...Danilo Gaaaaallinari.”

“My girlfriend’s seen him shopping at the Versace store.”

“A 6’9” forward from St. Patrick’s High School...Aaaaaaaal Harrington.”

“Most the players live in Westchester County. White Plains.”

“And...the man in the middle, from Florida...”

*Daaaaaaaavid Lee."*

I raised my head and looked at Frozen Freddie.  
"What'd you say?"

"Most the players live in Westchester County. Specifically White Plains in Eddy Curry, Channing Frye, David Lee, and Danilo Gallinari's case."

"Shit, what time is it?"

"Five after one."

I slammed my drink and raced outside. I was late and had no time to get to Grand Central to take the Metro North. Luckily, I was drunk enough to not give a damn about money. I tried to hail a cab.

"Where to, buddy?"

"Uh...White Plains."

"Fuck off."

I looked up the block. Smelly Ted's wife's limo driver leaned against his limo reading the *Post*, waiting for Ted to get wasted so he could drive him home and punch out for the day.

"Hey, I need a quick ride up to White Plains and Smel—I mean, Ted said I could use the car."

The driver looked at me like a cop looks at you when you claim you're just urinating on the sidewalk because you believe indoor plumbing is harmful for the environment.

"I needed to be in White Plains thirty minutes ago. The Knicks just tipped off and you know Ted won't be passed out for another hour or two." The driver considered it.  
"Hundred dollars. Cash."

"Patikha at your service, friend."

Soon we were cruising up the West Side Highway at eighty miles per hour. I found a fifth of Wild Turkey stashed

under the seat and used the limo's phone to call ME.

"Where are you, Stu? I've been trying to call all morning. Danny is really disappointed you're gonna miss his fundraiser."

"I'm not gonna miss it."

"Then where are you?"

"Gather everyone out front in ten minutes."

My stretch pulled up to Danny and ME's McMansion at the end of the cul-de-sac. Their driveway was packed with people: Danny and ME, Jack and Kirsten, Keith and Erin, plus at least a dozen other couples and their kids from ages baby to able-to-probably-converse-with-me (I'm bad at guessing kids' ages).

I was about to open my door when Patikha quickly threw on a driver's hat, jumped out, and sprinted to my door to assist me. As I rose from my seat and exited the vehicle, Patikha winked at me and whispered under his breath.

"It always impresses."

I walked up Danny and ME's driveway. The little children stared at me like I was a god. Some huge celebrity who deigned to present himself to such inferiors. They gathered around my legs. It looked like when you see a photo of some seven-foot NBA star who goes to a third world nation to do charity work and has all these poor children gathered at his legs in wonderment. These kids weren't in third world rags but instead first world Burberry and DKNY. Their parents stared at me like, "Who is this douchebag?"

"Quite an arrival," Keith extended his hand as Erin handed me a bright pink drink.

"Freshly-squeezed watermelon martinis. I made

them,” noted Kirsten.

I stared at it suspiciously. We headed to the backyard where the adults resumed schmoozing and the little children resumed playing Wiffle ball.

I looked around for some beer or whiskey. None. For some hot dogs, burgers, or chips. None. I leaned against the deck drinking my watermelon martini and eating some croque monsiers. They tasted pretty good.

“Trying to steal my thunder?” Danny sidled up beside me. Despite the warm weather, he wore a sweater vest, dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and some khakis.

“I...uh...”

“Just messing with you. I’m really glad you came, Stu.”

“I’m sorry, I...uh...didn’t bring my donation check with me.”

“You’re unemployed right now, buddy. You don’t need to donate anything. Your friendship is more than enough. Save your money for extravagant limo rides.” Danny smiled at me. “Hey, I gotta go work the room. Work the yard, ha! Enjoy yourself and we’ll talk later.”

I looked around. What the hell to do at a campaign fund raising party with all these...adults around. No good food to eat, beer or whiskey to swig, women to hit on. Just a bunch of married men’s married wives. My friends had changed on me and I’d been left in the dust. I was glad to be dusty, but still.

I looked at the kids playing Wiffle ball. I liked being a kid. I had been successful as a kid. I kinda wanted to be a kid all over again. I walked over to them.

“Either of your teams want to add a big bat to the

lineup?”

The team that was a player short stuck me in right field which was actually only about forty-five feet from home plate and just to the left of a picnic table. Soon, the adults couldn't help but turn their attention to the game and away from their discussions of campaign finance reform, public contributions, and PACs. They were touched by the twenty-nine-year-old playing a game with their ignored children. Amused as I sucked down watermelon martinis from my fielding position, enlisting a little girl, Charlotte, to freshen my drink every half inning.

The first two times I came to bat, this strong-armed twelve-year-old gave me nothing to hit and I could do no better than accept a walk and poke a single into center. A smart strategy as the little pischer pitcher's team lead 8-5 heading into the bottom of the ninth. I was the sixth man up in the inning and badly wanted to get more cuts in before I was too wasted to stand. After a pop-up, two singles, a walk, and a strikeout, I had my chance.

I dug in. “You gonna pitch around me again, you little pussy?” I was luckily slurring my words so I'm not sure anyone understood my profane inquiry. “Ya gun pish aroun' m'agin ya lil' puzzy?” Even youngsters have pride though because, even though pitching around me was a much better strategy, he decided to go after me. He threw a massively Wiffle-y 12-to-6 curve which I jumped out of my shoes in trying to crush. I missed it. “Fuck!” The pitcher and his teammates laughed. He delivered again. A sidearm slider. “Jesus Christ!” I nearly fell to the ground as I missed the pitch by a good foot. Those watermelon martinis had gotten me loaded and the twelve-year-old pitcher had morphed



into three kids. He wound up and delivered one final time, three breaking balls heading at me at once. I swung at the Wiffle ball in the middle. I uncorked a blast deep over the tomboy center fielder's head and watched as the ball rolled for awhile in the massive backyard, eventually stopping in ME's herb garden.

I tore around the bases. One run came in. 8-6. Then a second. 8-7. A slow-moving nine-year-old scored to tie it up as I flew around third base. I don't have an excuse, but remember, I don't possess things like a house, a car, a wife, a child, a pet, or even dignity. All I had was the desire to score the game-winning run. The tomboy retrieved the ball from amidst some basil and threw it to the lanky shortstop who cut it off and threw it to the pitcher who gunned it home and next thing I knew...

"I'm not going to say you were like Pete Rose barreling into Ray Fosse in the 1970 All-Star game. Or even as bad as Ty Cobb coming in with his spikes in the air. But, still, you slid in hard on an eight-year-old."

We were in Danny's Jaguar XF cruising down the Sprain Brook Parkway and back to Manhattan. After my slide into home won my team the game 9-8, and after the adults stared at me in abject disgust while the little children just pitied me, Danny had escorted me from the premises and insisted I allow him to drive me home.

"Is Cory going to be alright?"

"Yeah, he just had the wind knocked out of him."

"Sorry for ruining your party."

"You didn't ruin my party. We were happy to have you."

"I should have never come out to the 'burbs, Danny."

“What’s that mean?”

“Watermelon martinis and political discussion, children and wives. The suburbs just aren’t for me.”

“You could get a wife, Stu. You should get a wife.”

“No thanks. Sixty percent of marriages end in divorce.”

“You know you make up stats to fit your agenda.”

“No. I read it on...Wikipedia.”

“What? You’re going to date as many women as you can for the rest of time?”

I shrugged. “You know what Oscar Wilde said: ‘Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same.’ Then again, Oscar Wilde was gay, wasn’t he? So what the hell did he know?”

Danny laughed. “He was probably abusing nineteenth century Irish pub glory holes like they were a pinball machine.” I started laughing, too, Danny could be really funny when he didn’t have a stick up his ass. We drove over the Harlem River and into Manhattan.

“Let’s get you a wife and she’ll inspire you to get a better job. One where you can use your talents. Where you get the respect you deserve. Your boss giving you ‘atta boys’ and promotions. Soon you’ll have enough money saved up to own a house. From there, everything will fall into place. One kid, maybe two. By then, the adoption papers will have gone through on our kid and they’ll be friends. On the weekends, you and I can golf and, in the winters, our families can go skiing in Vermont.”

That didn’t sound that awful, honestly. I smiled to myself and considered it. Hey, wait a second, Danny was trying to have a secret suburban intervention with me!

"You're a smooth talker, Danny. You're going to be a great politician. You almost convinced me I'd like a stereotypical suburban life full of crying children, trips to Home Depot, and missionary position sex."

Danny laughed. He looked at me with pity in his eyes.

"That's what you think it's like?"

I shrugged.

"You don't get it, Stu. Did you not see *American Beauty*?! It's caaaa-razy out in the suburbs!"

I rolled my eyes.

"Don't believe me? The neighbors to the right of us got arrested last year for skinny dipping in the community lake. A neighbor down the block was just caught having an affair with her kid's principal. Our neighbors to the left throw monthly key parties. Do you know what those are?"

"Of course I do. I've seen *The Ice Storm*."

"But I bet you've never been to one, Mr. Cool. Shall I go on? Tell you a few things about your best friends?"

"I know everything. Your wives have loose lips."

"I'll thank you not to call our wives loose, but did you know that for Jack's thirtieth, Kirsten engineered a little threesome?"

I sat up, nearly choking on my seat belt.

"Kirsten's mom watched Anna for the night and a hot twenty-two-year-old from Kirsten's Pilates class watched both of them."

"Jack and Kirsten would never!"

"They did. Or how about Keith and Erin going to a special Kama Sutra nudist retreat?"

"Please."

"You remember their trip to Phoenix a few months ago...?"

I did. "Well, what about you? You're boring as hell."

"ME and I play in a coed flag football league on Thursday nights."

"That's it?"

"And after the games we go back to our team captain's house to smoke a little...marijuana."

"You smoke weed? Conservative, stick-in-the-mud, wet-blanket Danny smokes weed?"

"I have a few times." Danny smiled naughtily as he pulled up in front of my apartment.

I got out of the Jaguar, confused. Danny leaned out the window.

"See you next week."

I was shook up a bit. "What's next week?"

"Your birthday dinner. The big three-oh."

"Oh."

"Think about what I said. It can be a nice life."

I had to get him back. "Danny, as Lily Tomlin once said, 'I worry about being a success in such a mediocre world.'"

Now lying in garbage, everything Danny said began to make sense. He may have looked like a boring suburban stiff, but maybe he was actually cool. I may have looked like a bum, but maybe I still had the capacity for success deep inside of me.

A huge swell of noise came from the south. It sounded like a parade was heading my way but all Manhattan parades take place on Fifth Avenue, not Eighth. Parades also didn't start this early. This early, the streets would be lined

with observers of said culture/ethnicity/persuasion being celebrated, swaddled in the appropriate flags, faces painted, already drunk on their official cultural tippie.

New York had parades for the Irish and the Puerto Ricans, the Dominicans and the Chinese, the Polish and the Greeks, the gays and the blacks, and the mermaids even. There was annually even an elephant parade to celebrate the arrival of Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus. What parade could possibly be today? With such poor attendance? I shouldn't have waited to find out because, once the parade did make its way past me, I would no longer be able to cross the street to head west and home, segmented from my part of town.

The lead float arrived. The smell came first, arriving some thirty-eight feet and four seconds before the visuals. The stench of body odor, cigarettes, fortified wine, and urine. Then came the men, standing atop a flat bed truck typically used to haul lumber. Men covered in soot, street grime, and unkempt body hair. All of indeterminate race, like chimney sweeps with unshowered black faces ala Jolson. Other men followed on foot, walking, stumbling, in a slow drunken gait as they slugged from paper-bagged malt liquor bottles.

Some men played instruments. Junior high school band recorders. Tiny ten-key battery-powered keyboards, beat-up guitars, rusty saxes. I even saw a didgeridoo. A cacophony of busking sound, each musician playing his instrument to a different beat than his fellow man. Rhythmless as if they didn't even hear each other.

Other men sang and chanted. To no one in particular, certainly not to the beat or lack thereof. Just mumbles and indecipherable squawks, the occasional

Tourettal shouts, “Fuck! Shit! Cocksucker! Feta! Gouda! Brie!” and maniacal laughs.

It was grating on the ears. The absolute opposite of beauty.

These men and their floats kept coming. A never-ending line of stench and noise. It was too much. I couldn’t handle it. My head was about to explode. I stopped a cop, frantic.

“Officer, what...is...this?!”

“Why, this...this is the Homeless Person Pride Parade.”

I glanced back at the parade in awe. The cop glanced at me in genuine sorrow.

“I’m sure they’d love for you to join them.”

If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. I stepped in line next to a guy with a beard made completely out of pocket lint. He smiled a toothless smile at me, handed me a triangle and a metal stick to hit it with. “Wabladoopboogiewoogiebugleboypoop!”

We marched north playing our instruments and chanting, people gawking at us, tourists sprinting from us, I even made fifteen bucks en route, and just as we reached Central Park South, it started to sprinkle and I separated from the parade and headed back to my apartment.

It was then and there that Christian’s bedroom door was open and I finally saw his slat bed.

“Hello, Stuart. It is raining outside. They expect nine inches.”

Then, the shit hit the fan, the sky began to fall, and my ceiling began to droop. My life had hit rock bottom. There was no way it could get any worse.

What was that Sissy had said? That a cat has a better chance of surviving a fall from a building the higher it falls from it? Maybe before I just hadn't been quite high enough in my fall from grace. I needed to fail more, get higher up on that building, so that I would reach terminal velocity and pleasantly coast to the ground where I would finally find success.

## PART TWO | **UWS**





## 8 | **HOW TO LIVE** ON A COUCH

“Mornin’, Mr. Fish! How you doin’?”

“Excellent, excellent, Larry. Yourself?”

“Not too bad, sir. Thank you for asking.”

Larry Lo, my building’s head doorman, spins me through the revolving door and into the Upper West Side.

The doormen I pass on Broadway tip their hats to me.

The old ladies at Fairway smile as they wheel their grocery carts around me.

The baristas at Aroma give the kind of prompt service that befits me.

The illegal immigrant dog walkers in Riverside Park move out of my way, not wanting to anger such an important man.

And the mommies on West End Avenue, whether gossiping with each other or exercising, pushing their double-wide strollers or walking their tiny dogs, nod and say “Hello” to me. I am part of their exclusive club. These women trying to kill all day until seven when their husbands get home and they can go to nice dinners. Me trying to kill the same hours until my friends are done with their jobs and

I can go get drunk with them, fuck them, whatever them.

Every young, blond ponytailed one of these mommies quickly giving me pause, making me think I've finally run into "her," which would really wreck my day (please see **Footchapter 8-B: How to Avoid Your Ex in a Small Town**).

When I first moved into the Ola Dubh Building on W. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, I used to tiptoe around, certain one of the over-perfumed Jewish ladies, old enough to answer "where they were" when Czolgosz shot McKinley, no doubt screwed by Madoff in the past year, would menacingly stop me: "What's a failure like you doing in here?" But they don't, because, just like the West End Avenue mommies, I'm part of the club and treated accordingly. If you live in my building you must be a success, or married to or divorced from one, as you must be able to own a million(s) dollar apartment or at least pay \$5,000 a month to rent one.

In the elevator, surely the third or fourth Otis ever installed, my fellow building denizens nod approvingly at me, never prying, "Who are you? Where do you live?!" Never critiquing my cheap clothing, wondering why I don't work in the middle of the day.

After today's morning walk, I returned to the Ola Dubh. Larry sprinted to spin the door for me.

"Cut the shit, Larry."

My first few days in the building, Larry gave me the standard treatment befitting coddled UWSers: holding the door for me, looking down in deference to my power, assisting me with any heavy bags, and never daring to strike up a conversation. Ola Dubh doormen aren't supposed to fraternize with tenants any more than "How ya' doing?" and

"Have a nice day."

"I've told you, you don't have to treat me like I'm anyone special."

"I treat everyone like they're someone special!"

"Larry, you treat me the same way Sam treated Rick Blaine."

"I always admired Sam's obsequiousness."

"I don't belong in this building, Larry. You know that. I'm jobless, homeless, loveless, sexless, aimless. Less, less less."

"Less is more. And you're just getting back on ya' feet."

"I sleep on a couch."

I handed Larry a *Post* and the coffee I always bought him.

"If not for you, I'd never even touch newsprint. You know you can get scores quicker online?"

"Eh, not for me, Mr. Fish."

"Stu. You know, Larry, sometimes I feel like you're mocking me."

"How so?"

"You seem to get a real charge out of treating me like I'm the wealthiest resident in the building. Like I give you a \$10,000 tip on Christmas! Especially when other tenants are around. Then you're 'sir' this and 'Mr. Fish' that. I know you purchased that official referee whistle at the NBA Store just so you could flag down cabs for me."

Larry winked.

"Great. Now the building thinks I'm some big shot! They all but bow to me in the elevator. 'Who is this rich wunderkind?! A Broadway producer? A real estate mogul?"

A venture capitalist hot shot?!” I patted Larry on the back. “Whatever the case, thanks.”

Larry and I quickly became friends due to our love for the Knicks. Every morning, we spend a half hour shooting the shit as grumpy residents exit on their way to another miserable day of work. Larry knows a ton more about the team than me, and I love hearing his tales about Walt Clyde, Earl Monroe, Willis Reed, and Phil Jackson.

The couch I’m currently sleeping on is My Lesbian Wingman’s. She wakes up at 7:30 to shower for work. Her girlfriend, Brandi, showers the night before. They get ready quickly because they’re not girly girls and are usually walking out of the apartment together between 8:30 and 8:45. I make sure I’m awake and up-and-at-’em before they’ve left the house. Don’t want them to think I’m sleeping the day away on their dime.

First, I unmake my bed. Or, rather, make my couch. Being my wealthiest friend, no small feat, a six-figures-a-year-earning intellectual properties lawyer for Bored, Miserable, & Suicidal LLP, My Lesbian Wingman owns very nice stuff. A Bausman armoire, Habersham dressers, a Millender coffee table covered with glossy Annie Leibovitz books, a chair from Laz-E Man (Laz-E Boy’s high-end line), and a couch from Bakerfield. This ain’t the cheap put-it-together-yourself-while-drinking-a-box-of-wine IKEA garbage I’ve spent my entire adult life owning and shuffling from hovel to hovel.

The Bakerfield couch is 6’7” across with an interior space between the armrests of 6’4”, more than enough to accommodate my 5’10.5” height. The depth is over three feet, making it about as wide as the twin bed back in my childhood bedroom, again more than enough to

accommodate my ten-pounds-overweight, ballooned to 34" waist, 185 pound body.

Every night before bedtime—and I don't get to decide my bedtime as I get to go to "bed" whenever My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi have decided they're done with the living room, usually between midnight and one—I have to make my bed. I awkwardly wrap a fitted sheet of a low thread count over the sleeping surface, remove the throw pillows and neatly place them in the corner, add a duvet and some soggy sleeping pillows. I've gotten to the point where I can make my couch bed in ten seconds. Fifteen if I'm shitfaced.

It's not the perfect sleeping arrangement, but I'm grateful to have a rent-free place to live while I "get back on my feet," just like Larry said. It's obviously quite worse for My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi as it has seriously cut into their sex life.

"Stu, I can handle it. It's Brandi, though. She refuses to have sex with you sleeping in the living room."

"Do it quietly. I'm a heavy sleeper."

"Lesbians fuck loudly. Much louder than you heteros."

"Really?"

"Oh, right. You probably think of your own sex life and, sure, it seems fairly noisy."

"I sleep on a couch. I don't have a sex life."

"Well, when you did I'm sure you thought it was loud. Maybe not wake-the-neighbors loud, but certainly loud enough. You surely recall the porn you've seen. The rhino hung man pummeling his co-star, the bed rocking back and forth, headboard slamming into the wall, the

girl's head slamming into the headboard, uh uh uh uh uh uuuuuuuuuuh, and an ejaculation like the cannon fire from Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture: Da du du du du du dunt dunt du SPLOOGE! da du du du du du dunt dunt du SPLACK! Da dudududu du du dunt dunt du SQUIRT!" My Lesbian Wingman smiled at me. "Well, lesbians are louder than that."

"I had no idea. Tell Brandi I apologize."

"I can't tell her that. She's very demure for a dyke."

"Then what do I do?"

"She has her plans."

Brandi's plans were to punish me for screwing up her screwing by assigning me household chores to "do my part." I'm now the house maid, the laundry boy, the butler, and the apartment's cook. You may ask yourself, "How could a failure be domesticated enough to know how to do those things?" At first, I wasn't. I've spent my whole life living in squalor, not sure how to clean anything, eating every meal out, unable to even make scrambled eggs.

"Lesbians like things surprisingly spic and span, Larry."

"You teach me a new thing about lesbians every day, my man. You're like the Dian Fossey of lesbos."

At first, I was dedicating most my afternoon to cleaning. I detested this part of my day. It was worse than actually being a white collar worker and I was terrible at it all. But now, I'm not only good, I really enjoy it. Cleaning is so zen. The hot water flowing over the dirty dishes as I sponge them clean. Or, sponge them full of more bacteria. Sweeping the floors like I'm fucking Cinderella and my sisters have gone to the ball. Dusting, mopping, vacuuming.

Shopping for food and figuring out recipes. Do hotel maids have this much fun? None of them exactly whistle while they work, but they all look fairly content.

“You’ve never told me, where did you meet Ms. Gunther?”

I was at the Wee Pub, talking with Willy and Tristan, when I heard the laugh. One of those tilt-your-head-back-and-ejaculate-noise kinda laughs. She might have literally said “HA.” HA! HA!! HA!!! I didn’t need to turn, I knew who had entered the bar. I prayed she didn’t sit by me lest my night be ruined, but she slid her butt into the chair abutting mine.

“I’m staaaaaaaaaaaaaarving.”

Her coworker drinking buddies stared at her like “How can that be? We saw you eat two slices of Sicilian pizza at your desk. Yeah, we know you dabbed them with napkins to sop up the grease. What, now it’s health food?”

Her companions had to be one of four types: the exact same kind of person (doubtful), an uncool homosexual, a hard-hard-up heterosexual, or a coworker simply unaware of her outside-the-office persona (likely!).

“Poppers? Anyone want jalapeno poppers?” she asked to no one in particular.

When the food came, she scarfed it down, taking more than the share implicitly allotted to her. Then, she had the gall to ask, with one final popper left, “How many did everyone have?” scanning the circle. “Three...three...you had three...and, let’s see, I had...three. Hmmm...the math doesn’t seem to add—”

“Oh, just take it.” One of the hag’s fags cut her charade off.



She quickly bit into the popper, the Velveeta exploding out the fried back end, hitting the bar like a Peter North cum shot splattering over a girl's tattooed coccyx.

Now pumped full of empty calories, she began to aggressively drink. By the end of drink number one, she began flirting with the guys that walked by like she was Mae West. ("Why don't you come on over and see me somet— whoa, why you running so fast?")

By the end of drink two, she began to dance, jiggling around.

By the end of drink three, most of her companions had deserted her for "previous dinner plans," and she resorted to hitting on an unhappy Lynn, sloppily asking if she could get up on the bar "for a little show."

And by drink four, she had annoyed me so much that, coupled with the Knicks' blowout loss and another shitty performance from Marbury, I had to tell her off.

"If you haven't figured it out by now, Larry, 'she' is a fat girl, the absolute worst creature in the world."

"I like girls a little thick."

"Don't be a stereotype."

I hadn't noticed, but the fat girl was still sitting with someone. A sexy-but-not-quite-attractive girl with bangs rakishly swept across her forehead. A constant smirk like she knew something we didn't.

"Are you gonna loudly gab all night, Miss Piggy? You're annoying us all."

Her drinking companion snorted.

"Don't hate on me just cause I'm voluptuous and you can't handle this."

"You're right, I'd need a team of construction

workers with heavy machinery to handle you.”

“Fuck you.”

“I’d rather not. It would be a struggle to find your vagina under that FUPA. Your cancles slung over my shoulders. FUPA, cancles, hey, what other body parts of yours have merged? Wrorearms? Thnee? Noulders?” I looked at her drinking companion, explaining. “Neck-shoulders.” She nodded as if to say, “I got it.”

“Don’t hate on me just cause I’m not anorexic. I’m a real girl.”

“I don’t hate you because you’re fat. I hate you because you are annoying. Quit overcompensating for your insatiable love of fried foods by trying to be interesting and ‘steal the show.’”

“You got a fat friend, too, you hypocrite!” She nodded toward Tristan who stood like a dunce in the corner playing BrickBreaker.

“People wonder how a guy can hate fat girls while having countless fat friends. That’s because fat men like my friend over there are no more or less annoying than in-shape men. But fat women are almost always as annoying as they come.”

Her sexy friend just kept smirking, taking big gulps from her Guinness pint.

“I’m exercising. I’m starting boot camp next week.”

“Girls like you think if you just lost that final fifty pounds every man would want to fuck you. Sober. Actually, you probably don’t think that because you are delusional and already think everyone likes you. But if you do think that, don’t. Because even if you became skinny, you would still be the most annoying thing in this whole bar. If you were

skinny, you might not have such a massive well to produce those loud basso wails from, but you would still suck.”

The fat girl was stunned by my coup de grace. She threw her Malibu rum and diet Coke into my face and marched out of the bar. Her friend reached for a stack of cocktail napkins and began patting me dry.

“I hadn’t showered today anyways. Though that rum is kinda sticky. Say, aren’t you going to follow your friend?”

“She’s not my friend.”

“Coworker, huh?”

“She seems so normal at the office. Been trying for months to get me to join her and the rest of the paralegals for cocktails.”

“Was I too mean to her? I kinda feel bad now. I promise I’m not an irredeemable asshole. I’m quite redeemable, actually.”

“Honey, she’s so awful, you probably weren’t mean enough. You did her a favor. She’ll be skinny and kind before you know it. She’ll come back here to thank you one day.”

We instantly hit it off. We had the same likes (drinking, yelling, NBA basketball) and, more importantly, the same hates (taxes, married couples, fat girls). The same ideals, dreams, and favorite songs. We played a game of “Do you like to?”

Do you like to show up for work hungover?

Do you like to be the center of attention?

Do you like to mock morons and castigate idiots?

Do you like to masturbate and procrastinate?

Do you like to get 86ed?

Do you like to get 69ed?

Do you like to carve your own miserable path through life?

Do you like...TO FAIL?

She liked these things! Liked them far more than I did, especially since she had just gotten out of law school and was now miserable in her associates job. She was my doppelganger and, being a clinical narcissist, I was in love with Bonnie.

"Do you want to be the Bonnie to my Clyde? We'll lay waste to this isle, going from bar to bar like bibulous satyrs, throwing alcohol down our gullets and wreaking havoc on this town."

"I've never seen the movie..."

"Don't like the classics?"

"...but I get the reference and enthusiastically agree."

I moved in for a kiss.

"HOLY SHIT! LOOK AT ALL THE ACTION STU'S GETTING! HE'S TOTALLY GONNA FUCK HER!"

Smelly Ted, dressed in stage tights, told us to "Get a room" before sparking up a stogie.

Ricky took a picture of us with his camera phone.

Frozen Freddie blurted: "They've been kissing for 245 straight seconds. That's longer than the final kiss between Jane Wyman and Regis Tommey in *You're in the Army Now* which was a mere 185 seconds."

Bonnie retracted.

"I'm sorry about those guys, they don't really know how to function in society."

"It's not that, Stu." She took both my hands. "I think you're great, but I gave you the wrong impression..."

A histrionic soap opera pause. "I'm sorry to say...I'm a lesbian."

She had nothing to be sorry about. The second Bonnie told me about her sexuality, I had a "Eureka!" moment. I saw our future. She would be my lesbian wingman and I would be her heterosexual wingman. We would travel around, seducing women from all ends of the gay/straight spectrum.

The next night, My new Lesbian Wingman and I game-planned. Our biggest dispute was regarding where to go. Bonnie thought an upscale sports bar. I thought a chic nightclub even though I detested them. We decided on a party celebrating Hillary Clinton's announcement just that day that she would be running for president.

At the downtown restaurant where campaign workers and supporters gathered, we found a pretty redhead passionlessly slugging gimlets.

"Gay or straight, Stu?"

"Straight."

"I have gaydar and can tell she is very much gay."

"Well, I have straightdar and can tell likewise."

"You men think all women are straight."

My Lesbian Wingman sidled up to her as I stood a few steps back.

"Hillary fan?"

"Aren't we all?" the redhead coolly replied, eyeing me over Bonnie's shoulder.

"We aren't."

"Then why are you and your boyfriend here?"

"We like a good party. But he's not my boyfriend."

"I'm not a Hillary fan either. My website is making

me cover this shit show. Brandi LeBleu on the scene. I write for *The Woodrow Report*. It's like *HuffPost* except even less people read it."

"You say this is a shit show?" I slid in.

"Hillary doesn't have a chance."

"You're crazy. The Democrats have no one and the Republicans are even worse. Who else could win?"

"I don't know, but not Hill."

"That's a shame," I sarcastically noted.

"The shame is women outnumber men yet refuse to band together. What if women unionized? Like automakers or teachers or baseball players, what if there was a female union? The leader would be more powerful than the president. Hillary should form that union if she wants success in this world. Wrest control of this country away from old white farts. Come up with a list of demands for how we want to be treated. Make men adhere to the demands lest we begin withholding things."

"Withholding things?" Bonnie raised her eyebrows.

"Withholding those things that men can only get from women."

"You mean vaginal sex?" I noted. "Or help cleaning the bathtub?"

Brandi smirked at me. "Not just that, but emotional, tender, nurturing things as well."

"That's seriously fucked up, Brandi," Bonnie laughed.

"It would never work. One skank would fuck it up for everyone." For the first time, Brandi broke and started laughing.

Neither My Lesbian Wingman nor I could tell which one of us was "in." So we broke protocol, got wasted, and

soon the three of us were in bed together at the Ola Dubh. That was nearly four years ago.

“You see, Larry, Brandi was a lesbian. Bonnie was who she liked, not me. She just didn’t know how to shake me.”

“Ho-lee shit, Stu. You the fucking man. That’s why everyone in this building bows to you.”

“I’m not the man, Larry. I am essentially a prisoner. A man who has his freedom and is technically allowed to do as he wishes, but a prisoner nonetheless. Like a prisoner I spend most of my day reading old paperbacks, shooting the shit, trying to cure my boredom. I do menial chores for no pay, sleep on a sliver of a bed, never have a reason to shower nor make myself look presentable for there are no single women around.”

I shrugged.

“At least like a prisoner, though, I’ve started to work out a lot. Jogging, sit-ups, push-ups. I do pull-ups on the scaffolding around the corner, abdominal dips between the kitchen counters.”

“You are looking more toned.”

“I should be writing like MLK did from his jail cell but I’m not even up to that just yet.”

Outside on the Upper West Side, I’m like Dorothy in Oz. The second I pass the mezuzah, my life becomes full technicolor. Success! At least the appearance of it. But back in apartment 26G, it’s black & white and I’m still a failure.

“Gonna head back upstairs, Larry. Good talking to you.”

I used to detest the Upper West Side. Considered it a chore to go see Ash, even though I only lived twenty-five blocks away in Hell's Kitchen. I never wanted to see her again when we split and never thought that would be an issue either. Unfortunately, My Lesbian Wingman's high-rise is only seven blocks south, one point five avenues west, and twenty-three stories of altitude higher from my ex-girlfriend's pad. Now, I exert daily energy trying to avoid Ash, so fearful of running into her in this small town.

You chuckle when I call New York a small town. Why, because it's not Mayberry? Manhattan is only 22.7 square miles with some two million official residents plus plenty more if we factor in daily commuters, tourists, and illegal immigrants sleeping fifteen to a room in dungenous Canal Street flop houses.

With so many people in such a packed space, and Ash just a hop, skip, and subway stop away, it seems inevitable our paths will cross. Something I decidedly do not want to occur. Though, I'd wager my chickenshit ex wants to run into me even less than I want to run into her. I assume we've made some sort of cosmic pact with each



other though. People that date and fall in love, date and fall in love because they have similar lifestyles, favorites, and preferred haunts. It would be easy to avoid Ash if she was an S&M loving, vegan, teetotaling Muslim that worked the graveyard shift at Riker's. But she's not. She's just like me.

The funny thing is that us men are naive enough to think our ex-girlfriends' lives are exactly the same after splitting from us except, you know, minus us. Well, is that how your life is now? Exactly the same as before just minus her? Of course not.

Once you split from someone, you become so attuned to who they are as a person. "Oh, I can't go to Longfellow's tonight to see that new band. Ash would totally be into them. She always loved ska-rap." "Shit, I probably shouldn't hit Sheep Meadow this afternoon. Ash would absolutely drag Trevor there today for a little R & R." "I can't capitalize on the all-you-can-eat grilled cheese deal at Chuckie's. Ash'd be all over that." If I'd been this attuned to her needs way back when, we'd have never broken up in the first place.

I keep telling myself I'm happy to be single. But I'm really not. Single, that is. Nor happy. I'm not single because, in many ways, I am still committed to Ash. Committed to avoiding her. Call me crazy, but I got a map of Manhattan and, like a war general, marked off the places I can go, the areas I can be, the train lines I can use. At rush hour, off-peak, holiday, and weekend times. It's constantly changing.

It's best during the workday when I'm a wild horse free to run. Ash works in the deplorable Herald Square part of town, a place I'd only go if I wanted to rub guts with fat tourists, buy cheap tchotchkes off the street, perhaps get

fast food poisoning, so I'll never run into her there. That means that Monday through Friday, I can roam anywhere but Herald Square from nine AM until six PM. I better make it 9:20 until 6:10 just to be safe, since my ex is a frenetic mess always running late. I never have to worry about her not working because, even though she's a huge hypochondriac like me, she never uses sick days. In that regard, she's more of a success than I am, and that's probably why she still has her job.

As for non-work hours, in our cosmic pact, I have divvied up our locational assets and I assume she has done the same. So, even though Ash loves the baked ziti at Georgiana's, I introduced her to the place, and if she has any dignity, she will never visit there again. She introduced me to Beale Street, a cool bar despite the fact the owners think Manhattanites want to party like they're in Memphis, so even though they have an excellent tap list and splendid dart board, that's hers for eternity. Luckily, I have better taste than Ash so she's surely thankful she never has to go to all those "yucky" Thai, Turkish, and Indian restaurants I adore. I'm happy I no longer have to accompany her to the Times Square Applebee's. She's pleased she no longer has to go to the Wee Pub. I'm psyched I never again have to hang with her coworkers in the midtown Sheraton hotel lounge.

Sometimes, like once a month, due to a friends' party, some meeting, a random event, I'm unable to avoid her favorite spots, her part of town, her area, and have to enter the "danger zone." Though these times are rare, I'm scared shitless and unable to enjoy myself, my neck constantly on a swivel. I probably shouldn't be that worried, though. Let's break it down mathematically:

Ash uses the same train lines as me, the A/C and, more often than not, the I, which is right by her apartment. I'm typically able to avoid those trains by taking the 2/3 express which bypasses Ash's stop since she lives in a slightly worse neighborhood than My Lesbian Wingman. But what if I do have to take a I train? Say northbound around six on a weekday afternoon, right about the time Ash would be taking it in the same direction.

OK, there's a train every four minutes and thus, fifteen trains per hour during that particular rush, meaning there'll be around ten trains in the 5:50 to 6:30 window. With an average of 9.5 cars per train, that gives me a little more than a 1% chance of ending up on the same car as her. Less considering I know she tends to gravitate toward cars in the middle of the train right near the stairwell and I can avoid riding in those if at all possible.

Factor in that cars are sixty-seven feet long and at that time of day will have approximately sixty seated and another hundred standing sardine-canned people in them and, even if I unluckily land in the same car as Ash, there's a good chance I still wouldn't bump into her. Nevertheless, I keep my head down and eyes up to spot her before she spots me, allowing escape before any sort of awkward engagement.

I have to factor Trevor's likes into the equation, too: playing kickball in Park Slope, drinking kombucha at neo-beatnik coffee houses, showing off his dilettante harmonica skills at The Hole in the Wall Tavern in Harlem, and ranting in Union Square about there not having been a truly small-D democratic president since Andrew Johnson, who he contends was unfairly impeached and that America should

do the right thing and reinstate him. It's highly unlikely I'll run into the happy couple on days Trevor gets to pick what they're doing.

I can't keep avoiding things to avoid her. It's making me miserable. The inevitable will happen one day, I know it, and I better be ready. Joe DiMaggio always dressed to the nines because he wanted people to remember him looking his best whether it was the first, last, or only time they ever saw him. My clothes suck and I certainly can't emulate the great Joe D., but, lately, any time I travel to areas Ash might be, I make sure to be showered, soberish, and looking good.

I pray some piece of ass will be on my arm and sticking her tongue down my throat when I finally encounter Ash again. I've gone over in my head a zillion times what I'll do, but I guarantee I'll choke and be forced to improvise. I'll try to be cool, confidently aloof, do as little talking as possible, but I'll probably instantly unleash some low blow, say with a shit-eating grin as I firmly shake Trevor's hand:

"Good to see you two. Trevor, you lucky devil, getting to enjoy her fat ass and droopy cunt lips. Her shoddy trim job. I take it her favorite B positions are still The Ballerina, The Bridge, The Bullfrog, and The Butterfly?" Before they even react, I'll probably walk away, calling over my back: "Oh, and send my love to your wonderful parents, wouldja?" I'll grab a piece of the piece of ass's ass as we walk into the sunset.

My rude comments will gnaw at them for the rest of the night, Trevor probably longer. When he tries to have sex with her next, he won't be able to get me off his mind! "You know honey, The Bullfrog just isn't doing it for me tonight." He'll think in his head, "Hey, her labia are kinda

droopy!” His boner will deflate. I will be responsible for making a man lose his erection!

It will insure that Ash will try even harder to avoid me in this small town, lest I metaphorically pop her in the snot box again. That’s all I ever really wanted to accomplish in the first place, now isn’t it? I guess running into her actually wouldn’t be so bad.

## 9 | **HOW TO FAIL** TO EXTEND YOUR FAMILY TREE

“I’m into very amateur pornography.”

“You’re a romantic, Stu. What can I say? I’m more into that hi-def stuff. Blu-Ray. You can buy five DVDs for twenty-five bones down on Canal.”

“That porn is soulless, Larry.”

“How so?”

“The sets are unfurnished McMansions in the Valley. The women, with their overinflated lips, tits, and asses. Skanky tattoos on their bodies. Flawlessly waxed vulvas.”

“Oh, I like that! Keep on painting...”

“The men, shredded beefcakes with six-pack abs and twelve-inch cocks.”

“Now you’ve lost me.”

“The sex is so choreographed! Get naked, straight to titty fucking, he eats her out, she blows him, standing doggy, woman on top, reverse cowgirl, pounding pounding pounding, moaning moaning moaning. Maybe a little anal, back to a blowjob, and, ultimately, a pop shot right in her kisser. Soooo predictable.”

“Life is chaotic. I enjoy the predictability of porn.”

“Not I. I like the kinda porn shot on a handicap

bought at Best Buy.”

“Eighteen months no interest!”

“Grainy footage, maybe using the Nightvision, from a camera sitting on the dresser. The locations are crummy bedrooms, living rooms, or dorm rooms in split-levels, trailers, or community college student housing. The rooms stocked with black leather furniture, dirty laundry, beer can empties, and dime bags. Those places house people that tape themselves and then lose the tape.”

“Sounds like my brother, Clarence! He once accidentally disseminated his seminations.”

“I gotta meet Clarence. He sounds like my kinda guy.”

“Oh, he’s the best.”

Larry and I laughed as he flapped open the sports section.

“Even D’antoni can’t get the job done.”

“Speaking of family, my mom is coming to town this weekend. Will you help me pretend I live here?”

“You do live here.”

“I mean, pay rent here and sleep on a bed here.”

In my adjustment to life as an Upper West Sider, I had scrapped my meager dreams of the first thirty years of my life and decided to simply strive for hedonistic happiness. Essentially, drinking and watching porn all day while Bonnie and Brandi were at work. In fact, I’d watched so much porn in the last month I had figured out my fetishes down to a T.

I liked the homemade stuff I’m sure most people thought boring. Two un-beautiful people—too skinny, too chubby, small tits, sloppy tits, beer bellies, tiny pricks, hair aplenty—having at it. Because they wanted to, because it

was turning them on, not because it was making them a buck. Kissing—people actually kiss in homemade porn!—before undressing and revealing their subpar bodies. Foreplay, body kissing, unskilled fingering, nonrhythmic fellatio.

The men wear condoms in these videos and I'm titillated by the realness of that, which is funny because, like any good failure, I detest prophylactics and often eschew them when I'm drunk, horny, and stupid. But here, I love watching the gawky teen struggling to open the Trojan, the fat hillbilly smarting over his inability to correctly roll the jimmy on his jammy, the old creep trying to get his semi-flaccid semi-hard in order to put a balloon on.

I love the unadventurous positions too. Some stilted missionary, some lazy spoon sex to relax his doughy biceps, some awkward doggy style where the man's dick keeps popping out, then back to missionary where the only way you know he's come into his spermicidal reservoir tip is by the slight epileptic twitch and collapse onto his partner.

(While I love true homemade porn, I detest the phony "amateur" porn that predominates the internet right now. You can tell it's faux-homemade because the "actors" are too terrible at improv to be believable and too good at sex, likewise.)

In the porn most men prefer, the women are so orgasmic you're certain they have a disorder. Constantly moaning and screaming and "Oh fuuuuuuuck, I'm gonna cum!!!!" and I'm thinking, "Would you please shut the fuuuuuuuck up?!" You're simply not a good enough actress to convince me you are at that height of ecstasy. Meg Ryan wasn't even good enough in that iconic scene from *When Harry Met Sally*, and Meg's a Golden Globe nominee.



But the women in homemade porn have actual orgasms. Beautiful, funny, loud-but-not-too-loud, involuntary orgasms. I've come to realize my number one sexual fetish is seeing women orgasm. Making women orgasm.

I know it's bizarre. Perverse! What man cares about a woman's pleasure?! It would be better, if I had a normal man's fetishes:

- squirtings
- double penetrations
- bukkakes
- fistings
- chokings

But no, I just like to make women come. Which can make me seem like an attuned lover, one who cares about the women's pleasure above his own. I'm really just being selfish.

Bringing a woman to orgasm gives me a sense of accomplishment. Makes me feel like a success! Playing her clitoris like I'm Nero, tickling her G-spot, parting her lips, all the time monitoring her breathing, her pleasure, faster and slower, honing in. It ain't always easy, it certainly ain't always quick, and it's a good thing I have Popeye forearms and mad dexterous fingers, but it's worth it because I get so excited when a girl's eyes roll into the back of her head, her skin goes flush, her clit retracts, her vagina, uterus, and rectum contracts, and her whole body twitches.

Which brings me to my next point: an orgasm actually increases a woman's chances of pregnancy. An orgasm tilting her cervix, the contractions helping move sperm up her Fallopian tubes. Thus, the unselfish act of helping a woman achieve orgasm aids in creating the most

selfish person on planet Earth: the new mother. Upper West Side mothers are the most selfish people around. As if the world exists simply as a playground for them and their kids.

My mother and I stood in line at H&H Bagels. She was in town for a spring break math teachers' conference but had this Sunday morning off. We weaved through several giant strollers as we tried to get to the counter. On the Upper West Side, parents take their strollers everywhere—tight sidewalks, narrow grocery store aisles, museums—it doesn't matter.

"Did you feel self-entitled when you gave birth to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, after you 'tried' with dad and got pregnant, decided not to abort me—thanks—and I made you fat, gave you stretch marks, completely altered your wardrobe to a place it's never recovered from..."  $\int$

(Today's shirt: "Calculus is  $e^{xy}$ .")

"...and you were rushed to the hospital and put into a paper gown, legs in the air, your furburger shown to all. And when I parted the labial seas with my cranium and was pulled out, did you now feel the insatiable desire to be rude to everyone around you?" I waved my arm in an arc around me like a magician—tada!—presenting several parents in line. "Because all these mommies act like, 'Look buddy, an eight pound object was ejected from my slit, does that not give me the right to live how I want?'"

"Shhh, they'll hear you."

"No, they won't, Ma. They're too self-absorbed to notice anything going on."

At the cooler, a curly-haired toddler slammed the door open and closed, rattling the orange juice cartons. A man read the bagel choices aloud to his illiterate toddler: "...and you can get a poppy or an egg or a pumpernickel or how about an everything, Hudson, you want an everything?"

"You won't feel this way once you have children, Stuart."

A women with an SUV of a stroller blocked the entrance to the store, the sensor bell perpetually ding-donging as she loudly talked to her daughter: "Yes, Lexington, after we get bagels we will go to Zabar's. Can you say Zabar's, Lexington? What do we get for you at Zabar's, Lexington? That's correct, we get you your favorite, whitefish salad."

"No, Mom, I don't think I'll ever behave like these awful people. I'm certain I'll be in at least the 90th percentile of parenting. How can I not be?! As long as you pay attention to your child and enable them to live healthily until eighteen and don't coddle him and don't infantilize her and don't pussify him and teach her manners and never cause him to have SIDS or her to roll down the stairs or choke on a piece of cardboard or wear a shitty diaper for a few hours. If I just do those things I'll be in at least the 90th percentile of parenting."

"By that regard, your father and I were in the 90th percentile of parenting?"

"Better."

"Weren't you just bitching a few months ago how you wish we had treated you badly?"

"Well..."

"If you're saying these parents treat their children badly, then I guess these children are going to be successes?"

Math teachers are often good with logic.

We got our bagels, scooted past the loud mother—  
“Yes, you do like nova, Lexington, but you prefer whitefish. Lower mercury levels, Lexington, better for your keppie, remember what we discussed?”—and headed back toward the Ola Dubh.

“This is silly because we know you’re never going to make me a grandmother.”

A group of five mother friends pushing five massive strollers five across, forced us into the dirty street to pass.

“Sixty years old next month and nowhere close to being a grandmother,” my mother cried, inadvertently demonstrating a rare good thing about the Upper West Side: with everyone so self-absorbed, you could go ape shit in the middle of the street and no one would notice.

“What about Sissy? She actually has a significant other. Why aren’t you giving her shit?”

“She has a higher calling!”

“Ah, yes, she would never bring a child into the world when there are so many suffering squirrels.” A kid on a leash stumbled into my knees, his mother glaring like I was at fault. “I wonder if Sissy could spay or neuter me?”

“You’d like that, right? Never have kids, go on living a selfish life all for yourself?”

“I’m selfish? These parents are selfish. Having children in order to give themselves purpose. Make them feel successful. Look at these poor bastards around us, they don’t stand a chance.”

“They’re not bastards. Nor are they poor.”

“Two more reasons they’ll be failures.”

“How can you tell these kids will fail?”

“Because they aren’t learning to fend for themselves. Led around by their mother’s hand, their father pushing them in a stroller. They don’t even need to pay attention. They don’t need to be funny or smart or interesting, they just need to continue being their parents’ kid.”

My mom used her sleeve to wipe the tears from her eyes.

“Look at that kid, Montgomery. I see him every day. Hudson, Lexington, Dylan, Brinley, all ludicrous vanity names. Up here parents treat the naming of their children the same way most do coming up with something clever for their license plate. Montgomery? That kid is so fucked.”

“It’s a nice name. Adds an air of class.”

I pointed toward a girl, Chastity, in a small mink stole.

“These ridiculous outfits. Chastity in a \$5,000 mink stole. I hope a PETA whack job pours some red paint on her head. You know she’s gonna grow up to be a huge slut with that name.”

Nearby, a balding man in a button-down, shorts, and sockless loafers, with a scarf, held out a crescent roll to his begging son.

“Uhn uhn uhn. Say it in French, John-Michel. If you really want it, say it in French.”

“Poo...poo...pooo...”

“Peux, yes.”

“Je pren..dre...”

“Oui, oui!”

“Le croissant.”

“Tres bon!”

“The arrogant Francophile who forces his kid to

learn French before he learns how to shit by himself.”

Nearby, bored kids waited in line to get into the Museum of Natural History

“The kids dragged to museums for a ‘learning experience’ as opposed to being allowed to play sports, ride bikes, go to movies.”

“Education is bad now?”

“Looking at stuffed wooly mammoths is hardly educational.”

“What’s wrong with what these parents are doing?”

“The problem is these parents are creating a colony of little sissies with dumb names and absurd outfits and no balls and passions of their own. Not exactly a recipe for success in the real world once you’re no longer getting pushed around in a stroller. Although, if they can survive for a few more decades, they’ll soon be getting pushed around in a wheelchair. All you got to do in modern America is survive those few standing years between stroller and wheelchair.”

We reached the Ola Dubh where Larry stood looking quite regal.

“Mr. Fish, how’s ya’ Sunday going? It’s great to see you!” He heartily shook my hand before turning his attention to my mother. “You must be his sister I’ve heard so much about! I just love your shirt. Very clever!”

Inside the elevator to the 26<sup>th</sup>, my mom was beaming.

“That doorman sure seems to like you, Stu. You been giving him big tips or something?”

Bonnie and Brandi had left that weekend to go to a Cooperstown bed and breakfast, making it easy for me to pretend I actually lived in the place.

“How old is this building, honey?”

“I think it’s pre-war.”

“It looks kinda new.”

“Uh...pre- the first Gulf War.”

We entered the apartment which I’d cleaned as best I could.

“Stuart, what a swank pad.” My mom looked around in awe. “But why so many Georgia O’Keefe paintings?”

“I, uh...find her flowers relaxing.”

“I bet. You must need to relax after such a hard day’s work. I bet sometimes you miss your old nine-to-five but that great promotion is sure keeping the lights on, huh?”

We sat down at the Millender coffee table to eat our bagels. My mom looked at me and smiled.

“You look so good. I can’t believe that awful dinner we had with you and Ash was just last year. You have to admit your father and I must have really lit a fire under your toosh. You look thin, nice haircut, even your teeth are sparkling. You must have a great dental plan now.”

No, I just lived with two lesbians that bought the best toiletries in the world—fancy shampoos, expensive lotions, countless tooth care products—and I had started using them as I now had plenty of time and could afford wasting a full ten minutes a day brushing, gargling, and flossing.

“I’ve come to find out dentistry isn’t overrated, Mom. I feel very healthy.”

My mom walked around studying the apartment some more, touching the possessions of two wealthy lesbians.

“You’re not telling your mom something, are you?”

I raised my eyebrows.

“You’ve moved in with a girl, haven’t you? Is it that Bonnie you always talk about? Where is she right now?”

I didn’t say anything.

“It’s alright. You’ll introduce her when you’re ready. I’m just glad you’re happy.”

We finished our bagels and I walked my mom to the door. She hugged me hard, the sequined equation on her shirt cutting into my ribs.

“Everything is working out great for you, honey. I’m so proud. Maybe you knew what you were doing all along.” My mom winked at me. “Now how about you get married and make me a grandmother?”

I bit my tongue.

“OK, I won’t pressure you any more.”

After my mother left, I exhaled, unbit my tongue, and called up some amateur porn on my computer. While in the midst of pleasuring myself to two Alabamans going at it in their unfinished basement, I looked down at my sack, wondering if it was full of semen swimming around. I’d long assumed years of over-masturbating, microwave dinners, and resting my laptop on my lap top had contributed to a near-nonexistent sperm count, but who really knew?

I should make an appointment at a sperm bank, I thought. Maybe it’d even net me a few bucks without harming my unemployment benefits.

Did I truly want kids? Truly want to extend the family tree? Maybe one day, but not now. Now I just wanted to have sex with someone else in the room at the same time. I pulled up my pants and pulled my phone from my pocket.





You speak in the rare second person while penning a tale of erotica.

You are making out in her bedroom. This is clearly NSFW. You're impressed by your surroundings. Does she own this place? Surely not. That would run her at least...ah, but now is not the time for real estate math.

You pull her halter top over her head. An unexpected surprise: no bra. You start kissing her breasts, the kind of firm, early-twentysomething Cs that would make you question their realness were she older. You lick her nipples which go erect the second the sweet taste buds on the tip of your tongue flicker them. Perfectly sized, shaped, and colored, like erasers atop a #2 pencil that has yet to erase anything. This must be the first mistake she's made in her twenty-two years.

You know that foreplay for women doesn't start in the bedroom. It starts the second you meet for the evening. Amy was so promising, you thought. Tall, leggy, an athletic build like she went to spin class (whatever that is). Long auburn locks and a smile that could light up a dark pub. You didn't even notice any fillings. She must have had a good

dentist as a child.

Amy had seemed excited when you'd texted her earlier in the week. It's hard to be flirtatious, yet get your point across, in only 160 characters, but you're a master of brevity and wit and luckily her name is only three characters.

"hi amy was good meeting you at blank bar on fri. you still wanna grab a drink on thurs nite?"

"who is this? ;)"

"the guy who had to apologize to the bartender for tipping him with coinage."

"oh right. sure ill go out w/ u."

You weren't sure if she was committing to dinner or just drinks so you picked this place, Rudy's, that has a variety of cheap pitchers and offers free hot dogs. You told Amy to meet you at eight, but got there at seven, needing to put a few down beforehand to still your nerves.

By 8:10, you were working on your third solo pitcher and flirting with a bar floozy beside you who in the daylight no doubt looked like Dennis "Oil Can" Boyd. You'd totally forgotten why you were at Rudy's in the first place when you got a tap on your shoulder.

You spun in your barstool to see Amy. She seemed perturbed at your aloofness, upset you were hitting on another girl. You now knew she would spend the rest of the evening slutting herself out for validation.

"Nice place," she said, looking around as she brushed dust off her stool. You may have been drunk but you knew sarcasm when you heard it. And this clearly was not sarcasm! Amy loved this place, completely, earnestly. You laid on the charm.

"You look hot."

You went in for a hug and a kiss on the cheek but slipped, causing your gynecomastic pecs to mash into her breasts, your face inches from hers. She smelled fantastic. Like she had shampooed just three minutes ago.

“They got anything to drink here besides beer?”

Amy was frisky already, wanting to accelerate the evening, putting her foot on the pedal until it touched the floor mats. You didn’t even need to consult with her.

“Hey, Bobby, two tequila shots.”

She looked at you scared, “Oh, no, I don’t do tequila.” How coy, you thought. But she did do tequila. Which would not be the only time she’d do something that evening she claimed she didn’t “do.”

She hadn’t wanted to drink beer, something about watching her figure, not being into ingesting thousands of calories of “sugary poison,” but after some goading she eventually said, “When in Rome.”

“When in Rome...what?” you wondered. Had you been taught in high school what happened in Rome? Wait, wasn’t Rome where old men buggered little boys in the ass? What exactly were her plans for the evening? I mean, there was that one time you let Ash strap on a...uh...strap-on, but she was a long-term relationship, not a first date. Even so, you’d spent the next few months wondering if you were gay because you had kinda enjoyed it.

Ooooooh, she was just using a common expression you realized. A rolling stone gathers no moss. A stitch in time saves nine. When in Rome. Goddamn, how had you gotten wasted so quickly? Your mind was functionally retarded now. You hoped your cock still had an IQ of 135, though, because your seduction seemed to be going well.

"I'm hungry," Amy slurred a few drinks later.

"For cock?" you wondered.

No, for wieners. Amy took Rudy's free hot dogs like she was a porn star trying to win a deep-throating contest, shoving the franks into her pie hole in one motion, doing her uvula no favors.

You black out for awhile but next find yourself outside the bar on Ninth Avenue, Amy trying to hail a cab.

"It was nice meeting you, but I really gotta go to bed, Stu," she kept slurring.

You pull her in for a kiss, tasting the yellow mustard on her breath.

Only a slut explicitly asks a guy back to her place to get explicit, and you know this, so you hop into the cab with her.

"What are you doing?"

"Going back to your place."

"No, you're not."

You grab her waist and pull her in for a kiss.

"Yes, I am"

"Fine. But you're paying. I don't have cash. 14<sup>th</sup> and Second, please."

As the cab speeds away, Amy looks at you and lips, "We're not having sex."

Now you know you're having sex. She can't stop talking about it!

You kiss down her breasts removing her skirt, start vigorously fingering her under her thong.

"Slower."

You go faster.

"Slower."

You furiously tickle her cervix ceiling, toying with Grafenberg's mythical spot.

"Slow down, Stu."

Geez, it's like she doesn't know how to operate her own equipment.

"Not so fast."

Perhaps she doesn't like world-record orgasms, you think.

She pushes you off and gets on top. Removes your shirt. You notice your pits smell, you haven't applied deodorant since, like, eight AM. You hope she doesn't notice.

Amy removes your jeans, your scraggly boxer briefs. You should have worn your "A" pair, dammit, those forty dollar Ralph Laurens. Ash got you for Valentine's Day '07. Why didn't you spend an extra ten minutes doing some topiary work on your pubes this morning? No girl's gonna put that furry...

Oooh...

Your mind tells you you're turned on, but your cock ain't listening. She slurps up and down, but it's just a wet noodle. Linguine, no, fettuccine, and there's no Alfredo sauce in sight. She doesn't seem to mind because she keeps going. She must have a strong neck and be good at breathing out of her nose. You wonder if she played an instrument in high school. Perhaps a woodwind. The tenor sax. Maybe some brass. The trumpet or trombone. You make a mental note to ask her about her musical background along with your queries about her property ownership. Post-coital questions, assuming you ever get coital.

Whoa, and looky there, your wizard's wand just got a little life in it. Not exactly standing at attention, but

somewhat inflated, like an air mattress after a full night sleeping on it.

Amy rotates into 69 position, your nose right between her cheeks. How is it pretty girls never have stinky ass? It's mind-blowing. You get that they might not defecate a lot, sure, but walking about creates friction and sweat in that area where the sun don't shine.

You start licking her vagina—at least you think that's her vagina—causing her to moan. You're no gourmand but you know the difference in tastes. Just like a sommelier can blindly differentiate between a chardonnay and a pinot noir, you're pretty sure you can tell in a darkened room whether you're performing cunni- or analingus. One tastes like yeast, sodium chloride, mucus, and Bartholin's glands; the other like bacteria, gut flora, spicy cumin, bile, and Charmin.

Amy's sopping wet, her juices getting all over your face. You wonder if this will hurt or help your complexion, recalling you have an issue with adult acne around your upper lip, no doubt due to your consumption of greasy foods like Rudy's free hot dogs.

"I want you inside of me," she blurts out, the six most erotic words in the English language after, "1) Do 2) you 3) like 4) your 5) balls 6) licked?"

You switch positions to the legendary missionary (est. 2454 BC).

"Fuck me hard..." she says, actually speaking the ellipses, making you wonder if she forgot your name.

"Are you on birth control?" you ask, not really concerned but interested nonetheless, thinking that something you should ask for ethnographical purposes.

"Yes!" she moans as you kiss the nape of her neck.

You wonder if it's rude to press her on what kind. Standard pills? No, you'd have noticed that weird disk-like pill tray on her nightstand. You see no patches on her body so she must not utilize that. A shot? An implant? Surely not that god-awful vaginal ring that always slips out and gets stuck on your cock like you're a hitter in the on-deck circle with a weighted donut on your bat.

Maybe an intrauterine device then? An IUD? "Intrauterine" is a fun word to say, now isn't it, you think. Weren't there health risks associated with those? Should you warn her? No, she surely has a skilled gynecologist. It's not like she gets her vagina examined in some back alley.

Then what the fuck does she use to fuck? Should you be wearing a condom? They're so uncomfortable. Ah, screw it. All sex is caveat emptor and you say *carpe diem*. (Like that sentiment has never led to some...what's the Latin expression for "festering sores on your one-eyed pudding shooter" you wonder?)

You still not at full attention, she mashes your dick into her. You begin thrusting hard but keep slipping out. Is her pussy mispositioned, you wonder? It seemed to be in the correct spot when you were eating her out but now you're having a devil of a time with it. It seems to be too high on her body and you simply cannot find an angle of insertion.

You realize her modellesque height is making sex unwieldy. In missionary, you feel like a little ant trying to stay balanced atop a giant hill of soil, no place to dig your toes in for traction, your upper body strength too paltry to hold it for too long. You can't throw her legs over your shoulders because it feels as if giant scissor blades are about to lop



your head off. Doggy style, her ass is at your chin. The only positions that kinda work are woman-on-top (but you need binoculars to see her face, it's so far away) and face down. You feel like a drunken virgin trying to have sex with Amy. Nevertheless, you persevere, constantly asking for updates. "How does that feel? Does that feel good? Do you like that? Are you liking that? Is that feeling good? Are you about to cum?"

"I want you to cum with me," she says.

What am I, a synchronized cummer, you wonder?

"Are you ever going to cum?" she demands to know a few seconds later. Jeez, enough with the pressure, you think.

"You go ahead if you're ready," you say.

She is ready and gets back in the mood, diddling herself which eventually leads to a massive orgasm and her short of breath.

"You look funny when you orgasm," you tell her and then vibrate your body and roll your eyes back seizure-style in aping her, all the while still thrusting, in out in out.

"So are you ever going to fucking cum?"

You realize no. You consider faking it to save face, but your face needs no saving. You roll off her and immediately pass out.

The sunlight shines into her room, waking you. You're in bed by yourself on some sopping wet sheets, wetter even than curbside garbage. Your dick hurts.

You don't quite recall the details but you're pretty sure you knocked it out of the park last night. Fucked it out of the park. Yet again.

You look up at Amy standing beside the bed,

showered, fully dressed, a stern look on her face.

“Get up. You have to go.”



## 10 | **HOW TO GET** LAID ON A COUCH

First we were amoebas in the primordial ooze and we did a thing called binary fission which was essentially an asexual gene exchange. Not very erotic. Then we were lower apes and, when we weren't hurling shit at each other, we'd find a few seconds to screw whomever would accept a screwing. From there, we became greater apes and, just like in high school, only the stronger chimps in the group got any action. Evolution accelerated like an arms race, all for the explicit goal of getting laid.

You crawl around on all fours? Shit, I walk upright. And that's not the only reason they call me homo erectus. Your body is hairy all over? Disgusting. No woman wants to lay down in her hut with that. A mutation has rid me of my hair, leaving it only in a few pertinent places. You still speak like an animal, no syntax, grammar, nor poetry; while I'm walking around the savanna all, "Evenin' ladies." Even prehistoric chicks loved a man who could talk to them.

Around 6:30 AM, I entered the Ola Dubh to Larry's big Kool-Aid grin.

“Late night or early morning?”

“Larry, I’ve learned while I always thought having a girlfriend was preventing me from having all sorts of glorious sex, that wasn’t the case.”

“You still twisted?”

“I didn’t get much sleep.”

Cabbing home from Amy’s, I had realized if I’d been single for the last two years and not dating Ash, I would have probably:

1. Kissed a truly gorgeous woman once. Because she was drunk and making bad decisions.
2. Had sex with a few attractive women a few times.
3. Gotten a blow job or five from some above average women.
4. Had nights of whiskey-dicked intercourse with maybe a half-dozen average women.
5. Had countless terrible hook-ups with countless terrible women.
6. And had cold spells, droughts, and slumps for weeks if not months at a time.

“Was this Amy the first girl you’ve had since Ash?”

“Well...”

“That bad? Gimme some names, man.”

“Their names hardly matter, but the general experiences, those are seared into my brain, man.”

“Let’s hope something hasn’t become seared into your genitals for the rest of time, Stu!” (please see **Footchapter Ten-C: How to Acquire the STD That’s Right for You**).

There was Brandy, who was not a fine girl, who I

never once thought what a good wife she would be as she had a bush like the gorsch at the British Open or one of those novelty “pin-pressions” executive desk sets.

Rita wasn’t a meter maid (she was in catering, I think) nor was she lovely. She was also surely a hemophiliac because fingering her with a poorly filed middle finger opened a laceration which bled like the Red Sea. Moses’s staff wasn’t risen to part it, but my staff quickly lowered.

Allison never let any of my friends take off her party dress—so far as I know—but she didn’t have a problem with having a threesome in the supply closet at some after-hours bar with another ugly broad. Surrounded by mops and detergents, once the lights were turned on by the morning janitor, I wanted to pour industrial bleach on my face.

Cecilia didn’t break my heart, she didn’t shake my confidence (daily!), nor did we make love in the afternoon up in my bedroom, it was more like threeAM in the alleyway. Cecilia’s were the aforementioned 30<sup>th</sup> birthday Dali tits.

Michelle was decidedly not ma belle, but rather one big Goth cunt with “Abandon all hope ye who enter here” tattooed above her vagina. McCartney would have struggled to write fawning lyrics about her, I’m certain of it.

Speaking of, if you ever go out with a girl with the same name as a famous song written by McCartney or Simon or Costello, you’ll quickly realize the sleazy sex you’re having in the alley is nowhere close to being the ideal romance the eponymous song speaks of. Perhaps that’s why there doesn’t seem to be any good songs of recent vintage named after women. Life’s just more complex now than it was in the 1960s.

Finally, there was Maggie, who told me to “wake up”

as she had something to say to me: “Get the fuck out of my house. You’ve just pissed on my mattress, you drunken imbecile.”

I had been having all this terrible sex on the road. At girls’ places, supply closets, hotels, motels, and literally the road as in alleys, darkened sidewalks, and children’s playgrounds. I’d traveled far and wide for such terrible sex, across bodies of water, over bridges, through tunnels. Jersey City, Brooklyn, Queens, Yonkers. I’d gotten there via train, subway, tram, limo, black car, taximeter cabriolet, ferry, motorcycle, Vespa, bicycle, hansom cab, pedi-cab, and rickshaw. Most of which I’ve had terrible sex in, too.

I walked into the apartment. My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi were sipping coffee and working a crossword together on their laptop. They even got up early on weekends.

“Five-letter word for what Stu was doing last night?”

“‘Whore?’” Brandi began sniffing the air.

“Doesn’t fit. ‘Skank,’ maybe?”

“I smell fish. D’you bring us some bagels and lox?”

“Vaginas stinking like fish jokes aren’t just insulting, they’re trite.” I elbowed My Lesbian Wingman in the ribs, scooch over.

“Can we have a bio?”

“Just another slut bored enough to take a halfway decent-looking drunken man-boy back to bed for a night. I am no hero. I do not deserve your accolades. Just happy to stay out of your hair.”

My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi looked lovingly at each other. I bet our neighbors got no sleep last night.

"I'd like to be proud of myself one of these mornings after."

"At least get some decent masturbation material."

"My hook-ups are just mental ipecac, causing me to vomit whenever I think of them."

"That bad?" asked Bonnie.

I thought about it.

"I think I'm scared to succeed with a quality woman, so I intentionally sabotage myself. I get loaded, act charmless, don't put forth any effort. I subconsciously must want to fail because if I succeeded and made a girl love me, then how would I explain my situation?"

"Jobless, homeless, sleeping on two lesbians' couch," noted Bonnie.

"Everyone struggles, Stu. But if you meet a real girl, not some gold digger or wannabe trophy wife, that likes you for the great you that you are, then I think she would think it a funny quirk that you live on a couch."

"That's the sweetest thing you've ever said, Brandi."

Bonnie added, "You shouldn't be scared to succeed with women. Be confident, shameless, fearless. Say proudly, 'Yeah, I'm unemployed and I sleep on a couch, love me!'"

I laughed hard.

"Go out and tell some hot little number about your couch, and when she still likes you, feel free to bring her back to your couch to fuck her good." My Lesbian Wingman patted the couch. Brandi punched My Lesbian Wingman in the shoulder.

"Hey!"

"Sheets down, of course. This couch is crazy expensive."



My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi giggled.

“Pretty soon, this couch is going to be like a porn set.”

“Stu’ll invent a new genre...Couch Cummers.”

“Sofa Sexers.”

“Futon Fuckers.”

“That would be masochistic!”

They were mocking me, but I would have nothing of it. I had been injected with a boost of confidence and even their lampooning could not phase me. I knew what I needed in my life. No longer simply hedonism, I needed my next girlfriend. My next girlfriend would be my salvation.

“A good girl, though. You can’t keep picking them up at bars, Stu.”

“Yeah, you can’t have a successful future with a girl you meet at a bar.”

“That’s funny, Bonnie. Didn’t I meet you at a bar?”

“Yes, but I’m a lesbian.”

“Didn’t you meet Brandi at a bar?”

“She’s a lesbian, too.”

“So where am I supposed to meet girls? I don’t have a job. I can’t dip my pen in the company inkwell. I don’t go to church so I can’t meet a girl there. And there’s something about picking up a girl at the supermarket or Barnes & Noble or while waiting for the subway that just seems sleazy.”

“I hear you there,” nodded Brandi.

“Guys, this isn’t the Roaring Twenties. This is 2010! Who doesn’t go to bars?! I say, you can most certainly meet your future wife at a bar. It just depends what kind of future wife you want. What kind of man you are...”

## DIVE BAR

*She:* is an underemployed alcoholic who ends each night vomiting wherever she sees fit.

*You:* are an emetophiliac.

## FAUX DIVE BAR

*She:* is into drinking pitchers of beer and isn't concerned about getting sawdust on her shoes.

*You:* enjoy the bohemian notion of being a Bukowskiesque barfly, but are too cowardly to start drinking at nine AM, get into alley brawls, and ruin your liver because, even though you hate your accounting job, you really don't want to lose it and have to tell your mother.

## MIDTOWN HAPPY HOUR BAR

*She:* rarely goes out and only did this time because coworkers forced her and now she's gotten drunk off two white wine spritzers and will soon start loudly singing along to *Brown Eyed Girl* even though she thinks its opening line is "Hey there, Rodrigo!"

*You:* are not into loosening your tie just one millimeter before heading to the bar because you think women are impressed you have a job that necessitates a suit, even though most wealthy people nowadays don't wear suits while occupations such as doorman, theater usher, and parking attendant are always besuited.

## HIPSTER BAR

*She:* lives in Brooklyn on her parents' dime, listens to bands you've never heard of, reads books you've never read, and

has lots of scruffy male friends who bitch that the bar sucks ever since it replaced its old-fashioned jukebox with one of those awesome digital ones that hold 100,000 songs.

*You:* have no issues with pretending you've heard of her obscure bands, read her obscure books, hanging with her friends you are certain fuck her and make fun of you behind your back for ordering The Who from the digital jukebox, and having two-borough walks of shame in the morning.

### IRISH PUB

*She:* is a bit chubby, a prodigious drinker, eats most of her meals at the bar, and gives frequent mouth congress.

*You:* consider romance to be dates that begin with a shared Shepherd's Pie followed by countless pints of Guinness and a relationship that culminates in a wedding which includes you dancing your first dance to U2's, not Metallica's, *One* because you're a moron that doesn't realize the song is actually about breaking up.

### GAY BAR

*She:* is so annoying no women will be friends with her.

*You:* are into faking you are a homosexual in order to capitalize on insane Men's Night drink specials (2 for 1 WooWoos!) and are willing to capitulate to an "Ivy League rub" at the end of the night if you strike out with the bar's sole fag hag.

### LESBIAN BAR

*She:* is a lesbian.

*You:* are so daft you think the rainbow decal on the front door means the bar is welcoming to leprechauns but

wonder why the place is packed with such stuck-up bitches you can't spit game to.

### HOTEL BAR

*She:* is a recent divorcee that had a tiresome day window shopping on Fifth Avenue and is very much into scoring a self-esteem boost from a "real New Yorker" before returning to Tulsa.

*You:* are into intentionally guessing women are fifteen years younger than you know they really are, drunkenly making out while the piano player pounds out *Lover's Concerto*, breaking your personal "record," and ordering twenty-five dollar room service omelets in the morning on her tab.

### AIRPORT BAR

*She:* likes killing time during layovers by drinking Bloody Marys, wanderlusting, and flirting with strangers.

*You:* always kill time by getting drunk, flirt with anything that will listen, and have enough hubris to think telling her you are from New York will get her to drop her panties in the airplane lavatory.

### KARAOKE BAR

*She:* is a slightly overweight drama queen with a lot of gay friends.

*You:* are a slightly underweight effete that thinks performing an ironic duet of Neil and Babs's *You Don't Bring Me Flowers* will act as sufficient foreplay before heading back to her apartment for mammarian outercourse.

## WINE BAR

*She:* is a snooty lush that still lives her life according to *Sex and the City* and has a bookshelf packed with pink covered books about the “dos” and “don’ts” of dating.

*You:* are either on a date or a homosexual. Seriously, no single man goes to a wine bar alone.

## STRIP CLUB

*She:* is a stripper.

*You:* are a rapper or professional athlete with a tattoo and fake tit fetish who wants a few more illegitimate bastards in your life.

## CHILI’S RESTAURANT BAR

*She:* lives in a crappy burg that doesn’t have any better place to drink at, forcing her to sit at the overlit chain restaurant swigging margaritas and praying this is the night a man finally walks into the bar that she didn’t go to high school with.

*You:* are in some crappy burg on business and couldn’t find any other place to get a drink. But, seriously, Chili’s margaritas are fucking delicious.

## GOLF COURSE BAR

*She:* is a fourteen-year-old high school freshman inexplicably allowed to bartend.

*You:* are a pot-bellied old creep that likes to drink single malts, overanalyze every one of your ninety-eight strokes for the day, and flirt with fourteen-year-olds.

## FANCY RESTAURANT BAR

*She:* is the kind of gal that sits alone nursing a fifteen dollar

Manhattan (heavy on the sweet vermouth) waiting for some rich loser to offer to buy her dinner. Or, she's a high-priced hooker.

*You:* are the kind of rich loser that can only obtain female companionship by offering to buy a steak for them. Or, sex from them.

## SPORTS BAR

*She:* is either a "guy's girl" that truly has a passion for sports while knowing she looks cute in a tight football jersey or a girl that thinks it pretty savvy to go looking for dick at a bar with a 90/10 male/female ratio despite the fact that the former is intently watching the game while sloppy on beer and covered in wing sauce.

*You:* don't subscribe to the "bros before hos" credo and will, at the drop of a hat, quit watching a game you're supposedly passionate about to flirt with a marginal girl who doesn't even know who Lebron is, raising your friends' ire.

## LOUNGE

*She:* is a moron that will assume you're rich and come talk to you if you wear a blazer and get bottle service.

*You:* are moron that wears a blazer, gets bottle service, and can only ejaculate via irrumation.

## DANCE CLUB

*She:* doesn't like to wear underpants and can only seduce men who never get a chance to hear her speak.

*You:* are a bad conversationalist, ugly, dumb, maybe wealthy, don't like your ear drums, enjoy dance floor frottage, possess drugs.

Of course, there was also the Wee Pub, where four months earlier I'd met Katie. My one-night stand with her was like so many. A great girl, why had I dismissed her after only one go-around? Why was I so cavalier with women like an endless stream of them would keep coming?

I searched for her e-mail address, ultimately finding it scrawled on the business card of some headhunter my dad had set me up with months ago. Surprisingly, Katie answered my reintroduutory e-mail which should have sent up a red flag. A Hollywood agent asshole who once told me I had no future in the business had also told me that when someone he had mistreated in the past still answered a call from him, it meant he had them in his control. I tried to convince myself that Katie was just bored, not desperate.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't think Katie was without flaw. Attractive and never-married women in their thirties who actually want to be married are usually one of two things:

1. Overly picky
2. Fucking crazy

We met up at Rudy's on her suggestion and I found her far more attractive than I had recalled. Sparkling eyes neither too dead nor fidgety, a nice amount of looking into my peepers and nervously looking down as we ate free hot dogs. A kind smile that spread just the correct amount between the ears and showed an exactly sufficient number of teeth depending on the circumstance. Beware the women that smile too much or too little. That are ear-to-ear when you make a lame pun. Who show every tooth like Mr. Ed with peanut butter on his gums when you crack a

mild joke. Who spit-take with hearty laughter when you so much as comment on the bartender's bad haircut. But also beware the ones that don't even crack a half-grin watching Eddie Murphy *Raw*. They're either depressed or dumb.

I spent the first half hour of our first real date scrutinizing Katie like Sherlock Holmes examined a crime scene. Eventually, bluntness took over.

"So what's your deal?"

"My deal?"

"Yes. How can a great girl like you be single?"

"Guess I'm just one who slipped through the cracks."

OK, so Katie was a little obsessed with relationships, with finding "the one," but aren't most women? She didn't seem to be one of those insufferable singles, home at night with a stack of bridal magazines snipping out pictures of her favorite dresses, floral displays, centerpieces, and making a hypothetical wedding collage.

Our date was going swimmingly. I wasn't drinking heavily, I was focused, enjoying myself, and starting to think my plan had worked. I could have my next girlfriend. My salvation.

Katie had a competitive streak just like me, which I loved, and suggested we play a game of pool. She was pretty good—though not so good you'd wonder if she ever left the bar—and beat me in our first game of 9-ball.

"This reminds me of the time I met A-Rod at the Soho Grand. He made me go back to his apartment to play pool. I sure had to call in sick to school the next day!"

"A-Rod? As in, like, Aaron Roddenberger? Or as in Alex Rodriguez, three-time MVP?"



Casually. “Nicer guy than you’d think. Unbeatable in pool, too. You wouldn’t believe how good he is off the bumpers.”

Later, after a few more games, a warbling John Mayer song came on the jukebox.

“God, I always hated this one. I was actually there when J wrote it. Just grading my papers.”

There were more. Seemingly every single thing that came on TV or the jukebox or silk-screened on an imbibing hipster’s t-shirt reminded her of a celebrity encounter she’d had in the past. She never said she dated these men, per se, certainly never said she had intimate relations with them, and she was not even bragging, she was just casually, and somewhat angrily, mentioning them in the same matter of fact way I could have gone:

“You know that dumb bitch Julie sure liked rum and cokes.”

“That terrible skank Tracy sure thought she was good at darts, too.”

“Whoa, boy, did that miserable Ash always act like she knew a lot about baseball.”

Then, the Yankees won and the local news came on the bar TV.

“Ugh...I hate Steve Beasley.”

“Who’s that?”

“Channel 2’s weekend anchor.”

“I don’t really watch local news. I find it irrelevant.”

“He’s a major stalker. I went on one date with him a few months ago and now he won’t leave me alone!”

Katie had gone from dating an A-list baseballer in her knockout early-twenties to a B-list rocker in her still-

smoking mid-twenties to a sleazy Z-list local anchorman earlier this year as her looks continued to fade.

"I'm tired of talking about the past. Let's talk about you, Stu. How's the writing going?"

It hit me. Katie obviously had an adult goal of gathering ye rosebuds, gathering a rich celebrity mate, while she could. But that had all but passed her by and now she was forced into a new stratagem: prospecting.

"I told you about my writing?"

"Right after we had sex that first time!" She snuggled up to me.

"We had sex more than once?"

"You're funny. I can see how you'd be a good comedy writer. Did that big meeting with Warner Brothers ever pay off? For that script about the guy that becomes... what was it? A foosball man?"

"Life is grand, Katie."

She was prospecting and thought I might be her final shot at glory. I'd obviously lied and told her I was a writer. No, I'd exaggerated, had her believing I would soon be a fairly successful writer being that I already dealt with successful people at places like Warner's. She, thus, thought I might soon be a rich famous writer who could support her. That's why she never cared about her own career.

It's amazing how the false guise of success can actually lead to a success. I'd always said that, were I a celebrity, I wouldn't mind women throwing themselves at me for no other reason than my fame and I certainly didn't mind a groupie throwing herself at me under false assumptions.

"Shall we go home and have sex, Katie?"

She smiled coquettishly and leaned into my ear.

“A little casual sex?”

“Oh, I think I’d prefer something more formal.”

“How’s semi-dressy suit you, Stu?”

“Perfectly.”

“Your place or mine? I just oiled the Murphy bed. It’s pulling down with a nice silent ease.”

“How about we go back to my new luxury highrise?”

Katie raised her eyebrows, impressed, thinking her plan was working.

In the elevator, she couldn’t keep her hands off me.

“Look at you, Mr. Humble. Acting like he’s nothing special. Hitting dive bars, dressed like a slob, pretending to care about some stupid day job. The second you get back to your building the doorman treats you like Mr. Big.”

“Please don’t make *Sex and the City* references in my building, it could get me evicted.”

Katie smiled at me like I was kidding. On the 26th floor, I insisted she quit speaking. Katie looked confused. “Why?”

“Roommates.”

“Roommates?” She hit the S like a hissing snake. RoommateSSSSSS.

I opened the door and we walked into My Lesbian Wingman and Brandi’s living room. They were sleeping. I turned the living room dimmer up a click.

“Welcome to my bedroom.”

“This is a living room.”

“In the daytime. But at night, it’s my bedroom. That couch is a couch, but at night, it’s my bed.”

“What are you talking about, Stu?” Katie seemed

frightened, like she was dealing with the sleeps-on-a-couch version of Hannibal Lector. Unemployed Lector. Hannibal Leeches-off-Lesbos.

"The fact of the matter is I'm not a successful writer. I'm not a successful anything. I have no writing career, no job, even. No money, no apartment, no bed. I have nothing but a little ingenuity which has allowed me to not sleep on the street, usually, and to once in a while trick a woman like you into sleeping with me."

She had her mouth open like all she had heard was a "Claaaaaaaarice" deliberately coming from my mouth.

"I'm sorry for wasting your time. You can slap me across the face or just leave in a less dramatic fashion if you'd like."

I smiled at Katie, making sure to blink because, if you know anything about *Silence of the Lambs*, Anthony Hopkins never blinked once on-screen, thinking it would make Lector all the more creepier.

"Do you have something in your eyes? You're blinking a lot."

"Uh...no."

"You're cute, actually."

Katie moved in and started kissing me. Now I was confused. This wasn't how my prank was supposed to go.

"I really don't feel like trying to get home at this hour."

She kissed me again. Grabbed my crotch. I pushed her away.

"Hold up, I need to put on some protection."

I went to the cabinet and got my sheets.

"Protection for these nice couches."

She reached out to grab a corner and we made the couch together. We sat up and started kissing but struggled as we tried to advance to sex. Even undressing is difficult on a couch. I had to keep putting a foot onto the floor to brace us. Had to drape our bodies over an armrest to create space. Had to use the oddest of positions, ones the Kama Sutra deck didn't even list. Entry was tougher than a hot Soho nightclub.

Eventually, we found a position that kinda worked, that was more pleasure than intense workout (by a ratio of about 55/45), and I focused hard and I came softly and we were both relieved when the disaster sex was over. Falling down post-coitally onto the couch was a pleasure and we quickly passed out.

The next morning, coming into the kitchen to get a Pop Tart, Brandi stumbled upon us naked and spooning in couch. "Booooooooooonnie!"

Katie and I awoke as Bonnie sprinted in with a wry smile on her face. A stunned Katie rolled onto the floor, hitting her head on the coffee table.

"I put a sheet down," I insisted.



## **chlamydia.**

*Go to:* your local branch of the We Refuse Pap Smears Club...

*And look for:* women that feel perfectly healthy, “Except for that slight bladder infection I got last week from hot-tubbing in the nude...”

*If you want:* the tougher-to-spell-than-diarrhea **gonorrhea**.

*Go to:* a public high school in some podunk town...

*And look for:* boys wrestlers complaining about “fever blisters” and applying a daily dose of Orajel to their crotches...

*If you want:* to be a pederast with **herpes**.

*Go to:* Baltimore...

*And look for:* streetwalkers with corroded, rust brown spots on the palms of their hands and the bottoms of their feet...

*If you want:* to be knifed by a street pimp. But also if you want **syphilis**.

*Go to:* a secret government laboratory housed fifteen stories underneath the Pentagon...

*And look for:* a Klansman in a lab coat (a whole lotta white there)...

*If you want:* **HIV**, which was always just a lab-created plot to wipe out people of color. The conspiracy theorists were right.

*Go to:* the index of Magic Johnson’s unauthorized autobiography *No Look Pass at Her*...

*And look for:* female names which you will cross-reference with online phone books from the NBA’s thirty cities...

*If you want:* full-blown **AIDS**.

Let's be honest, it would be a piece of cake to acquire all of these if you just went to a Chelsea bath house (do those still exist?) or even small-town Louisiana and stuck your dick into any orifice you saw. But there's no skill nor feel of accomplishment in that, so be a man and earn it.





## 11 | **HOW TO BE**

HAUNTED BY DEMONS

Katie and I sat in Riverside Park. She'd called in sick for the day. She called in sick a lot, her coworkers probably thought she had some disease. On this Tuesday afternoon, the park was populated by mommies pushing strollers, foreign nannies pushing strollers, and the stray out-of-work celebrity pushing nothing (please see **Footchapter Eleven-A: How to Be Aimless and Uninspired**).

"There are no other unemployed people on the Upper West Side."

"I haven't seen French Stewart over there appear in anything in years."

We chuckled at the former Emmy nominee, now down on his luck, too.

"If you lived in Brooklyn or Astoria or even the far east Upper East Side, there'd be tons of other people on 'funemployment.'"

"The fun is dying. Look at everyone up here. Wealthy and bulletproof, just like my successful friends."

"Am I ever going to meet those friends?"

"Doubt it. I never see them myself. They're

too busy. Too unexpendable, too big of rainmakers, to even consider firing them and freeing up their lives.”

“Now, now, Stu. You weren’t fired. You were ‘laid off.’”

“I love semantics, Katie.”

“You’re friends probably think I’m like Snuffleupagus. Some imaginary girlfriend they’ve never seen.”

It was getting brisk outside. Fall was soon to be here. The UWS mommies were already adorning their children in baby Uggs.

Katie and I had become reluctant boyfriend and girlfriend, though we never called each other that. Neither of us had anything better to do for the time being. We did love each other’s company and promiscuousness. She also thought she could mold me into the successful man she wanted. I was willing to let her, acquiescing to her little games. She had become my life coach.

“What’s your dominant hand?”

“You don’t know? I’m hurt.”

“Sadly, our relationship hasn’t advanced that far yet.”

“Well...I write, throw, bat, golf, wipe, and eat with my right hand. I flip the remote with my left. I can masturbate ambidextrously.”

“How erotic.”

Katie snatched my right paw and examined the palm.

“They say the right hand predicts the future.”

“I would have never guessed you’re one of those girls that believes in hokum.”

Katie scoffed. “Look at your lifeline.” She rubbed

her pointer over a crease in my palm. "Your vitality is lacking."

"You can tell?"

She touched another line. "But you have a good heart."

I smiled.

"Let's dig deeper. I'm into phrenology, too. The study of the brain."

"Don't you need sort of scalpel or lasers for that? Magnetic resonance imaging? Computed axial tomography?"

"Just my fingers."

She weaved her fingers through my hair, touching the top of my skull. I wished I'd shampooed today.

"Anything up there?" Lice? Dandruff? Tumors?"

"I'd rather not say."

"That bad? Sorry, I was in a rush."

"You are a very unhappy man."

"Who taught you how to do this?" I snapped.

"My babysitter when I was nine. Of course, once I learned I had the gift, I took more advanced classes. I'm accredited by New York state, don't worry."

"I'm impressed." What a weirdo. Why did I even reluctantly get involved with her?

"I have a gift."

"Not just a gift, you're a renaissance women." And you have amazing tits. Oh, right, that was why. "How about voodoo? Can you cast a hex on all those that have wronged me?"

"Voodoo is a pseudoscience."

"Ouija boards?"

"A children's game. What I do is real."

“Do you own a crystal ball?”

“A few. But I rarely bring them with me. Too cumbersome and my stupid brother stole my carry bag for his bowling league.”

“Bummer.”

“Hey, want to go to my place to see my balls?”

“I’m usually the one that asks that.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not so sure Bonnie and Brandi like when I come by.”

Katie grabbed my hand and we headed back to her pad. Inside, Katie pulled down the Murphy bed, it had started creaking again, and we sat.

“I’ll admit I’m good at palmistry and phrenology, but that’s not my true expertise.”

She kissed me hard, slightly missing my mouth and not landing completely flush.

“My real skill is in the practice of phallistry.”

“Falstry?”

“Phallistry. Dick reading.”

“A Scanner Darkly? Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? You never told me you were a sci-fi nut.”

“No. Dick reading.”

Katie reached down and grab my Phillip K.

“Oh!”

She unbuttoned my jeans and threw them to the ground.

“Hands and skulls aren’t 100% accurate. Shampoos and lotions and callouses and sun damage can really pervert the readings. But the dick, the dick is pure. The dick tells the truth.”

She touched my penis with her fingertips. Lifted it,

pushed it flat against my stomach, rubbed her finger along its underside vein.

“The true vein of knowledge. The true predictor of a man’s future.”

She closed her eyes and rapidly rubbed the vein.

“I see good things for you. Success. Fame. Fortune. Love. If you just...”

Katie jumped out of her clothes and relieved me of the rest of mine. She guided me onto my back and began rubbing my penis with her hands, her forearms, her biceps.

“Phallistry is very difficult. It’s hard to execute an accurate reading. But the payoff...”

She rubbed her stomach on my dick, her firm breasts all over my unit, her neck on my schlong.

“May I privately speak with ‘him?’”

Katie put her face near my penis, cupped her hand, and began whispering into the urethra.

“Your aura is very loud today. I am having trouble hearing. I’ll need to get closer.”

She wrapped her lips around it and began bobbing up and down, coming up for air every few seconds to relay findings.

“Ah, yes! Now I can hear you loud and clear. What’s that?”

Bob, bob, bob.

“You’re looking for a relationship?”

Slurp, slurp, slurp.

“You need more support to succeed?”

Fuuuuck yes.

“You are on the precipice of greatness?”

She lifted her head and looked me in the eyes.

“We’re not quite there yet.”

Katie climbed over me and impaled herself. Began bouncing up and down, her breasts spinning in tight, clockwise circles.

“I’m totally getting something. Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I can feel it. This is great!”

This was insane. This women was crazy.

“Oh, yes! You have always been looking for love!”

What drives a human being to become obsessed with hokum?

“Oh, yes, oh, yes...I think we are a good match for each other!”

To look normal but have such a fucked up brain?

“I see great things for you!”

To believe in things that 99% of the world doesn’t?

“For us!”

To believe in things that 100% of scientists know are garbage?

“You are going to be a success!”

Wait, why was I not wearing a condom?

“Oh yes yes yes!!! I’m totally getting something here.”

She came.

“Oh YES!!!!!!!”

I came...and then I came to my senses, pulling out at the last second and ejaculating all over Katie’s stomach.

They say you lose approximately eight IQ points for approximately eight minutes immediately following an orgasm. But after this one, I gained hundreds. Like the apes in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, my semen-crusting dick stood as a monolith and my world was rocked. I was ready to ascend

to a higher dimension like the Star Child.

Katie pushed me away and jumped up to look at herself in the full length mirror on the wall.

"The way you ejaculate, the unique patterns that form from one's sperm, can tell us the ultimate secrets to the universe."

Katie gazed strongly, examining the spunk all over her belly. She gasped, clenching her chest.

"Stu! You need to head to Hollywood."

The flight from JFK to LAX cost one and a half weeks of unemployment pay. As we showered together postcoitus, Katie urged me to call Wesley to see if I could stay with him.

"You can't afford a hotel and I don't want you playing Gross Gal or Grate."

"What's Gross Gal or Grate?"

"GROSS GAL OR GRATE!

THE MOST EXCITING GAME ON THE PLANET!

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

TRAVEL TO A CITY WHERE YOU CAN'T—

OR DON'T!—

WANT TO GET A HOTEL ROOM AND SIMPLY  
ROLL THE DICE.

GO TO THE BARS!

DRINK!

AND BY NIGHT'S END EITHER HOOK UP  
WITH A GROSS GAL SIMPLY TO HAVE A BED OR...

SLEEP ON A STREET GRATE LIKE A COMMON  
BUM.

THAT'S GROSS GAL OR GRATE!"

Even ignoring her beliefs in hokum, I was starting to



realize Katie was truly crazy.

“Yeah...I’ll just give Wesley a call.”

And I did.

“What a pleasant surprise, Stuey. Of course you can stay with me. Plenty of room. Do you prefer a waterbed, a sandbed, a Murphy bed, or a normal bed?”

At LAX, I’m greeted by a limo driver who looks like he’s related to Smelly Ted’s limo driver. I ride a lot of limos for such a failure. Then again, anyone with one-hundred bucks can ride one.

“Come with me, sir. Your car is waiting.”

“But you don’t know who I am.”

The driver held up a decade-old picture of Wesley and I. Both so skinny, so young. One arm around each other, the other holding cans of Genny Cream, the preferred cheap brew of our college. Looking at it, I felt as if someone had pulled out a picture of Genghis Khan and Mangas Shan from their college days. Who is Mangas Shan? He’s the guy that didn’t conquer the world.

“Mr. Hardin sent me to get you. He’s sorry he couldn’t come, but he’s busy finishing some pages for *Trampoline*.”

“His screwball comedy about a fluctuating romance?” I’d read about it online. “First they see eye-to-eye, then they don’t? Then they do? Then they don’t?”

The limo driver drove fast, weaving through traffic, using side streets, neglecting the 405 and 105 as we headed to Santa Monica. If I didn’t know better, I would’ve thought he was trying to confuse me so I’d never be able to find Wesley’s place again.

Near Culver City I saw a billboard for *Rumulen and*

*Juliort*, Matt Gordon's new movie. If I'm being honest, I can't blame anyone else, even my parents: Matt Gordon is the reason I am where I am.

I'd always pictured Matt Gordon as being 5'7", a luscious head of Ronald Reagan hair even though he must be fifty-eight or so. Surely the hair is dyed, just like his face is tanning-bedded, just like his teeth are bleached.

Matt Gordon wears French-cuffed shirts in pink, light blue, and cream. He wears them with cufflinks despite going sans jacket, though sometimes he rolls them up in that way campaigning politicians do when they're visiting blue collar towns and trying to be "of the people." (The same way Danny wore his shirt during his fundraising party.)

Matt Gordon keeps the first three buttons of his shirt unbuttoned, revealing a swatch of graying chest tufts. Designer jeans? Natch. Prada loafers? Double natch. Sockless? You bet your sweet natch.

Back in 2001, just out of college, I decided to write a commercial project to try and score a quick payday so I would then be free to work on more artistic stuff. My first attempt was about two aliens, one from Jupiter, one from Mars, that fell in love despite their families' long standing interplanetary feud. It made *Romeo & Juliet* look like a small-town joke between a bunch of hicks.

I was using a low-rent agent I'd met one afternoon when I was drunk and I decided to cold call every single person listed in *The Screenwriters' Guide to Agents and Managers*. William Woody was one of the few that had taken my call and the only one who had listened to my pitches. I suspect he was drunk that afternoon as well. William Woody was a nice guy but he didn't have any connections

and he worked out of his garage somewhere in the Valley. But he was enthusiastic and one week after I'd mailed him my *Rumulen and Juliort* spec he called.

"This is it, Stu! This is going to make both of us big-time! We'll send it out tomorrow morning and I bet it'll be bought tomorrow afternoon! Bidding war!"

Elated, I went to my fridge to find the closest thing I had to champagne. (Diet Mountain Dew.) My phone rang again two minutes later. William Woody again.

"Check the front page of *Variety*."

If this had been a scene in a Matt Gordon movie, the hack director would position the camera behind my back. He would slowly move it upward as I simultaneously lifted *Variety* upward for examination. As *Variety* got to eye level the camera would lock in a position just over my head in order to see my silhouette and the trade paper's headline in their characteristically pithy argot:

GORDO'S GAGA FOR ROMEO & JULI-E.T.

This article was the first time I'd heard of Matt Gordon as it detailed his selling of a pitch identical to what I had just finished writing.

Incredibly bad luck, but what could I do? Matt Gordon was a veteran Hollywood producer with countless credits to his name, huge B.O. numbers, and numerous awards, though most of them were Razzies. He'd worked with every film industry somebody you could think of. I was a nobody you couldn't think of. I bought a handle of cheap vodka, mixed it with the Diet Mountain Dew, and drank myself into a stupor. Three months of work down the drain.

I moved on. Spent the next three months hard at work on *Zeta Beta Venus*. A comedy about an abandoned

Venutian trying his damndest to fit in at a Big Ten university. He even joins a frat and he's incredible at keg stands due to the fact that he breathes out of his eyes!

"Stu, check the top story on *The Hollywood Reporter*."

# MG TAKING FRATERN-E.T.TO THE TOP

I think of everyone I told about *Zeta Beta Venus*:

- Dun Tang, the Vietnamese deli worker who makes a chicken salad sandwich to die for (he adds a dash of dill) and who speaks fifteen languages well. Except English.
- the Pakistani cab driver (cab #059382) who took me home from a bar after I got 86ed.
- my college roommate Even who I hadn't seen for years who invited me to his birthday party and who I found myself pounding Jameson shots with at four in the morning.
- Stacy who I had the pleasure of one-night-standing one night. I told her postcoitus as she didn't have cable television and we needed some entertainment during my refractory period.

Surely none of these people had Hollywood connections, knew Matt Gordon, were familiar with intellectual property law. If only I'd known Bonnie back then, maybe we could have had a lawsuit.

I brushed it off, said nuts to alien scripts, and wrote *Sine Cosine*, an animated vehicle for Billy Zane in which he was to play the senior senator of America's newest fifty-first state who finds himself in a cross-country car chase with lots of explosions.

Nikke Finke's *Deadline Hollywood Daily*: MA-GO TAPS BI-ZA FOR SI-CO.

Frustrated, certain my computer was being hacked into, I bought a Remington typewriter before I attempted my next script. I never got to that script though as the Remington was too damn noisy to work on. Even worse, one can't procrastinate by surfing the internet and checking out porn sites on a typewriter. Probably why Mark Twain was so productive. I quit taking William Woody's calls, and last I heard he was organizing Siamese twin wrestling matches in Van Nuys.

The limo pulled up to a mansion with one of those circular driveways with gravel instead of finished pavement. The super rich and poor trailer trash favor a lot of things the middle class simply don't "get": gravel driveways, crystal meth usage, bad tattoos, and wife swapping, to name a few.

In Wesley's home, we went hallway to hallway, room to room, past bed after bed—he's clearly a collector—before finally locating him in the screening room watching a 35 mm reel of *You've Got Mail*. Meg Ryan scrunched up her face on screen. Wesley had a tear in his eye but noticed us enter and quickly clammed up.

"*You've Got Mail?*"

"Old buddy!"

Wesley stood and gave me a long hug. He backed off and pointed at the screen.

"I always watch *Y.G.M.* when I need motivation. It's the quintessential commercial rom-com."

"Isn't it a little dated? Look right now, Meg Ryan is using dial-up."

"Doesn't that add a certain charm?"

I'd been thinking about technology affecting relationships ever since Ash had dumped me. One's considered a rube or pathetic sentimentalist if he hangs on to technologies of a bygone era, except when it comes to dealing with women. Nowadays, if you don't own a cell phone or claim ignorance with how to use a computer, you're rightfully mocked. If you listen to vinyl records or read dirty newsprint every morning you're correctly labeled an eccentric. But if you only text or e-mail the women in your life you're considered a bad son and an asshole of a boyfriend by them.

I'm sure 1850s women were up in arms when men started sending them telegraphs instead of handwritten letters (WE STILL ON FOR NEW MICHAEL BAY MOVIE STOP MEET YOU AT DOWNTOWN CINEPLEX AT EIGHT STOP WE CAN GET ICE CREAM AT COLD STONE AFTERWARD STOP). I'm sure they were likewise angry when, in the 1960s, they started being called on the phone and no longer got telegraphs. In the 1980s, women surely got mad when men left messages on their answering machines instead of calling back until they got ahold of them. And now, in 2010, women are mad I'm e-mailing and texting them instead of calling?!

If people like my mom and Ash were mad I didn't call them enough then they should have also been mad I didn't send them enough telegraphs and letters and didn't slap paint on enough cave walls for them. But they weren't, because those technologies had passed into history and soon, phone calls would, too. Oh, shit! Was I going to have to video chat with women in the very near future? That sounded awful.

“I’ve had a rough week. What say we get shit-faced, Stuey?”

And shit-faced we did say what, as Wesley and I headed to some nightclub on Hollywood Boulevard.

“This place is so cheesy, Wes.”

“Jesse Owens’ great-grandkids party here. And that chick over there is related to James K. Polk.”

Beside us, a scuzzbucket leaned back as two fake-titted wannabe models spooned either side of him. With a free hand, he entered 2:30 into a Maytag microwave on a side table.

“Why is there a microwave at that table?”

“You don’t have that in Manhattan yet?”

“Why would we?”

“It’s the hottest new thing in H’wood. Nuke service. You can get a microwave brought to your booth so you can spend all evening heating shit up. Pizza rolls, chicken fingers, miniature corn dogs, whatevs.”

“Stupid.”

“Trendy.”

“What’s that run these buffoons?”

“Five hundo for the rental and then market price for the frozen apps.”

“It’s a helluva market.”

“It’s a helluva town.”

\*BEEP\*BEEP\*BEEP\* The guy’s microwave went off. He shoved the girls off him to get the door. He opened it and removed a plate of rubbery taquitos.

\*BEEP\*BEEP\*BEEP\* My cell phone’s alarm goes off. I have a pounding hangover and slap at it without opening my eyes.

\*BEEP\*BEEP\*BEEP\* I open my eyes to see a risen and shined Wesley standing above my bed.

“Beep beep beep, motherfucker. Get up and get dressed. Big day today.”

“I’ll just sleep in, Wes. Got a headache. This sand bed is really comfortable. Straight from the Giza, ya’ say?”

“You didn’t come all the way to the City of Angels to sleep the day away! I got you some huge meetings set up. The first one will be of particular interest to you: Mr. Matt Gordon.”

I popped up like the sand bed had an ejector seat. Wesley handed me an IV bag. “Here, put this in your arm. It will make your hangover go away lickety-split.”

Two hours later, we sat in the waiting room of Flashing Gordon Entertainment. Posters of all his triumphs hung on the walls. Posters of my ideas!

Wesley nudged me in the ribs. “Holy shit, look who it is.”

“That old lady with the Dorothy Hamill bob cut?”

“That’s a three-time Oscar nominee you’re making fun of.”

“Ingrid Bergman?”

“Nora Ephron.”

“She makes me sick. A lot of things make me sick in this town though. Starting to think I should carry a vomit bag around.”

“I’ve got to go talk to her. Tell her how much she has inspired my career.”

Soon, I was even more nauseous as I glanced at Wesley, engrossed in conversation with Nora who laughed uproariously. Perhaps he was suggesting her next romantic



comedy be about a man who is literally neutered.

scene from *No Ma'am, Yes Ma'am* by Wesley C. Hardin:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sarah and James kiss.

SARAH

I've wanted this for so long.

JAMES

You don't know the half of it. Or  
the full of it for that matter.

Sarah removes James shirt.

SARAH

I love your skin. So smooth and  
hairless.

JAMES

Hairlessness is all the rage now,  
isn't it? Heh heh.

SARAH

Other men don't care about my needs.  
About getting their gross hair all  
over me.

JAMES

Oh, I do.

SARAH

I think I love you for that.

Sarah removes James pants.

JAMES

Slow down.

Sarah removes James's boxer shorts.

JAMES

Slow down!

Her eyes bulge. Where is his bulge?

SARAH

Where...where...where is it?

JAMES

That's what I've been trying to tell  
you since our first date.

SARAH

I loved that date. I've never dirty danced so close before. You didn't even get a boner.

JAMES

That's the thing. Or rather, I lack "the thing."

SARAH

Huh?

JAMES

I'm a eunuch.

Sarah looks down at James's groin then back up to his eyes. She smiles.

SARAH

Frankly my dear, I don't give a shit.

They kiss.

CUT TO:

Wesley excused himself from Nora and we followed the assistant toward Matt Gordon's office.

"Can I get you guys anything to drink?"

"No, I'm fine. Unless you have any good Scotch. Single malt and nothing younger than twelve years."

The assistant looked confused. (please see **Footchapter Eleven-B: How to Piss People Off, Alienate Yourself, and End Up Alone**)

"I'm kidding, of course! I'd even be happy with a shitty blended with minimal aging."

Wesley glared at me, surely wondering if I was still drunk, before speaking to the assistant.

"Bottled water will be fine for the both of us, hon."

We entered the office and I saw him: my personal demon, Matt Gordon. How to describe him?

Fat

Piece

of

Crap.

He wasn't the dashing man I expected, but rather some old dude behind a desk covered in coffee-stained scripts. He looked like he bought his clothes at the Salvation Army, and not one in a cool hipster part of town.

"Wesley! Good to see you. *Trampoline* on schedule?"

"I'll have pages next week."

"Super. Now sit down and hurry up, you said you friend Stud here had some pitches for me?"

"Stu. My name's Stu."

"Ah, looked like Stud on the memo. God, my assistant's a fucking idiot. Stud is a better name. Consider

changing it. OK, I don't have all fuckin' day. Pitch me your ideas, Stud."

After deciding to go to LA, Katie and I had scrambled to come up with some commercial pitches. She actually helped a lot. I pulled the notecard from my wallet. Cleared my throat.

"Teammates on a Stick:

*"Giuseppe Villarreal is the greatest goal scorer in international soccer. But his club never wins because he is a ball hog and his teammates hate him. During a game with his team's biggest rival, Giuseppe's noggin nails the goal post rendering him unconscious. When Giuseppe awakens, he finds a sliding bar through the middle of his torso—he has become one of eleven indistinguishable men on a foosball table. Now, at the whim of drunks sliding and spinning him around, he is forced to be a teammate if he wants to survive. Will Giuseppe succeed in this endeavor and help Steven Gilbert win the local pub's foosball championship, or will he never learn what it means to be unselfish?"*

"Not bad, I could see The Rock in the role. What else ya' got?"

"The next one's called *Grocery List* and I envision it as a Robin Williams's vehicle."

"Always works. I don't know why it always works, but it fuckin' does."

*"Supermarkets keep getting bigger and bigger, while American men keep getting dumber and dumber. Thus, when embittered housewife Barbara Johnson is forced to send her daft husband, Jerry, to the store with a three-foot-long grocery list, she is not the least bit surprised when he hasn't returned after two hours. This real-time comedy follows Jerry's supermarket*

*(mis)adventures as he tries to locate everything on the massive list (what the heck is arugula?!) while dealing with a hilarious cast of characters such as Linus, the stoner shelf stocker; Pete, the blind fresh fish man (“Well, it sure smells like tuna!”); and Suzy, the sassy checkout gal (“Get yo’ zebra code out my face!”)*

“Stud, you know how idiots always say to think ‘outside the box?’”

I nodded.

“Well, start thinking inside the box as much as motherfucking possible.”

“Uh..how bout a sitcom pitch? *Always in Bed*:

“*Similar to shows like According to Jim and The King of Queens—where a gross fat guy is married to a hot piece of ass—Always in Bed takes that relationship several steps further, proving bigger is better, pun so motherfucking intended. Jessie Rose is an international swimsuit model married to Ricky Dumond, literally the world’s fattest man, tipping the truck stop scales at 1354 pounds. Bedridden and unable to move, hilarious hijinks surround Ricky with Jesse having to frequently sponge scrub every inch of her husband’s blubbery body. And you will be stunned by how much food Ricky packs away during romantic breakfasts in bed. But, through it all, love (and woman-on-top sex) is always on the agenda. This is the show that presents a couple so smitten with each other that they literally spend ALL DAY in their reinforced California king size bed.*”

“Sounds like a Learning Channel program I saw while in the opium den room in my house. You should really get one as soon as you can afford it, Wes, baby. I converted one of my fifteen garages. OK, what’s next? Got anything else?”

I looked for anything on my notecard.

“Three...Two...UNO:

*“Family film adapted from the legendary card game. There’s nothing hotter nowadays than poker. But why should adults have all the fun? Atlantic City third graders Davey, John--”*

“Enough!”

Matt Gordon started pacing behind his desk, eyeing me.

“You want my spiel, Stud? You want to know why your pitches are so irrelevant to me?”

I nodded.

“To succeed in Hollywood, Stud, you need to come up with a lights out idea then butcher it in execution. Simplistic plots, dumb characters, unoriginal scenes, hokey scores, explosions, sex, aliens, blows to the gonads. That’s what moviegoers want. That’s what’s made me a rich man.”

He pointed at a sign on his desk: DON’T BE AN ARTIST.

“No offense, and I say this with pure admiration, but Wesley here is not an artist.”

Wesley smiled like he’d been complimented.

“Woody Allen’s an artist. Why his movies don’t do shit at the box office. Nora Ephron’s a hack. Why her movies do so well. She’s the best kind of hack because she doesn’t realize she’s one. She thinks she’s fucking Shakespeare but more incisive. But I can’t tell about you, Stud. I think you might be an artist in hack’s clothing.”

Wesley cleared his throat.

“Stu is good people, Matt. He used to think he was an artist. Every script he wrote he tried to make all existential. Used all sorts of arty techniques. Voice-overs and asides and long dialogues. He had far too many fucking

f-bombs, too, because artist types think cursing is a sign of literacy. But we know it's simply a sign we won't get a PG-13 and our B.O will drop 45%. But now Stu wishes he was successful. Like me. He's a hack now, don't worry."

I looked at Wesley, gritted my teeth, looked at Matt Gordon, and nodded.

"You know, Stud, I'm not a writer. I can't spell, I can't be grammatically correct, and 'syntax' sounds like a VD to me. I should know VDs, I was once stationed in El Paso. My assistant writes all my e-mails. My wife, all the letters. My mistress composes notes for me. My twelve-year-old boy pens everything else. I can't write, nor can I come up with ideas. But I can steal them."

I started turning red.

"I don't swipe my ideas from people, though, as you may think. I steal my ideas from life."

What?

"These very vague titles, or ideas, I sell them. The trades write about them, hack writers vie to bring them to life, and I move onto the next project counting my dough. I really laugh en route to the bank. I don't just grin. I fucking laugh, I L-O-fucking-L, all the way to the bank. Once, a cop even pulled me over for reckless driving I was laughing so hard. I had the loot for the ticket though. About ten million times over!"

He laughs all the way to the bank. I cry at the ATM.

"These writers we hire take my vague ideas and run with them. Write hundreds of pages. Yet, no matter what they do, I get a 'created by' credit. I get an executive producer credit. I get points on the box office. Yet, these hacks are thrilled to make a half-million dollars for essentially



giving me their heart, soul, and brain. I resell those body parts for dozens of millions of dollars per quarter.”

Matt Gordon walked in front of his desk and sat on it.

“I love looking at a hack’s driver’s license and noticing they haven’t checked the organ donor box. ‘You should check it,’ I say. ‘You’ve donated your heart, soul, and brains to me already. And you keep regenerating those body parts and donating them to me again and again.’”

“Why are you telling me this, Mr. Gordon?”

“Because, Stud, it’s not information you will ever use to your advantage. Guys like you are shrouded in fear.”

“Fear?”

“Fear. Writers operate in fear. You take such lame offers. Like if you don’t take this ass-fucking we’re giving you then you’ll never get another shot at success. But, guess what, we like ass-fucking and we’re all hornier than a motherfucker. So we’ll gladly offer to ass-fuck you again.”

He smiled.

“You guys need to have some balls. Instead of being eunuchs. You’re all just eunuchs. Hmmm...that gives me an idea for a rom-com.”

He hit the buzzer.

“Hannah, is Nora still out there? I might have a project for her.”

Matt Gordon looked at me.

“Are you ready, Stud?”

“For what?”

“For me to ass-fuck you.”

My eyes got big.

“That’s all you need to do. To show your loyalty.”

Was he being serious?

“Turn around and put your hands on the desk. It’ll be quick and easy.”

I laughed nervously.

“I’m being serious. Ask Wesley.”

I looked at Wesley who remained stonefaced.

“When it’s over, I’ll buy one of your ideas. Six figures.”

Would it be worth it? To so quickly get the success I’d been thirsting for? Was he serious?!

“Let you script it. I won’t guarantee we’ll make the movie, and we’ll probably hire other writers to rewrite your shit, but the money will be guaranteed.”

How much would it hurt?

“Let’s be honest, we make so many shitty movies here that there’s a pretty good chance we’ll make your shitty movie, too.”

Would it make me ‘gay?’ No matter, I had to do it right?

“I don’t have all day. Wesley and I got a meeting with DreamWorks in a half hour, so what do you say?”

What did I say?



“You wouldn’t let him put in it you? You’re so provincial.”

“Yeah, like you would.”

“Brandi and I do that all the time. You’ve never had a girl strap one on for you?”

I sat in Kleinfeld’s as Bonnie tried on wedding dresses. Her and Brandi had gotten engaged during their Cooperstown trip and I’d been immediately enlisted for the kind of boring duties usually assigned to maids of honor.

“Uh...no comment.”

“You have, Stu?!”

“Is that...gay?”

“It’s not gay if a girl is doing it to you, dummy,” noted Bonnie as she headed back into the changing room.

God created heaven and earth in six days. On the seventh, he rested. Humans created a lot of paperwork, inbox messages, memos, billable hours, and invoices in five days. On the sixth, they watched college football, gorged themselves on fried, salted, and battered foods, drunk cheap American macro beer, and maybe got lucky with their own wives. On the seventh they put on business casual

clothes and “rested” by going to listen to some old virgin tell them why they should be thankful for the previous six days. (Despite the amount of us that are accountants, Jews apparently can’t count because we spend day six glorifying God. This deficiency in counting might also explain why Jews typically prefer pro football to the college game.)

I didn’t like that I had to waste my Saturday doing an “adult” thing. I liked to spend my weekends nursing hangovers and masturbating, hanging with Katie. What was with successful people trying to get everything out of their weekends, too?

Up early, as early as they get up on weekdays because, of course, the single glass of Malbec they had last night doesn’t make them to hungover too function. They actually shower. Who showers on the weekend?! You don’t have to. And they have so many plans!

Today, Danny and ME had a couples’ shower to attend. I didn’t know what that was, and envisioned some steamy wife swapping party taking place in a giant shower room like professional sports teams use, but it’s just a boring fete where an expectant mother is given a lot of tiny clothes.

Jack and Kirsten were going car shopping, finally making the upgrade to a van.

Keith and Erin were brunching with other couples (and their children) that also weren’t hungover (and were waaa-waaaing).

Meanwhile, I was stuck reading the July issue of *Veils and Trains* while waiting for Bonnie. At least they gave me a complimentary mimosa to suck on.

“How about this one?”

Bonnie emerged wearing a white pair of dress

skorts with a sleeveless vest on top.

“Kinda dykey looking.”

“That’s what I’m going for.”

Bonnie twirled to show off the back of the skorts.

“Then get it.”

“Are you trying to rush me?”

Bonnie sat beside me and grabbed her own mimosa.

“What am I good at, Bonnie?”

Since I’d returned from L.A. a month previous and had decided I was done with my screenwriting dreams, I’d been bored. Looking to fill my time, I’d begun trying to learning new crafts. Not crafts that would earn me any money, just stuff that could impress nerds at parties. I learned to juggle, taught myself origami, yo-yo trick shots, and I’d even gotten pretty good at oil painting, using those paints I’d bought Ash for her birthday but which I’d never given her.

“Well, what do you like?”

“That’s the thing. I don’t think I like anything.”

“Most people don’t like their jobs, but everyone’s gotta work,” noted Bonnie. “Just suck it up, join the status quo, and get a lucrative office job. You’ll be somewhat unhappy but at least somewhat loaded. And off our couch.”

“That would be great, but I’m not sure I can join the status quo, I’ve been out of it for so long. I got no connections, no impressive former jobs, and those useless college majors.”

“It’s not like I majored in the field I’m now in. I was a finance major. Brandi was in biology.”

“You two are seriously trying to compare those majors to mine? I majored in film and English. Perhaps the

two most useless majors in America after General Studies.”

Other useless majors would include:

- **\_\_\_\_\_ Studies**—Women’s, African-American, Rock ‘n’ roll? These aren’t “studies,” your parents are just paying money for you to goof around. Watch a documentary on said “study” and you’ll know more than enough. If you’re a woman or an African-American, your life is your study.
- **Hotel/restaurant management**—If this necessitates a major then why are so many restaurants running just fine under the helm of nineteen-year-old dropouts? What’s there to know at a hotel? Mexican women clean up the rooms. Black men mop the floors and unclog the toilets. White girls run the front desk. Gay men work the phones.
- **History**—The major for lazy people that think they’re intellectual and like owning lots of books.
- **Latin**—Studying a dead language is always savvy.
- **Physical education**—You must be kidding.
- **Teaching**—Can’t you pretty much teach something the second you learn it? A second grader could teach a first grader how to be a first grader, right? A ninth grader could teach an eighth grader. A twelfth grader could probably even teach, like, a eleventh grade honors class. Both Katie and my mother confirm as much.

“The problem is you can’t major in the stuff you really should major in: being awesome, becoming famous, picking up hot chicks.”

“Yeah, those sound majorly worthwhile, Stu. You sound like a child.”

“My major in film is particularly useless considering my school was using equipment D.W. Griffith would have laughed at.”

“And that was a man that thought racism was hilarious so you know he’s got a bang-up sense of humor.”

“Exactly. So I didn’t even major in film but actually majored in something like Antiquated Filmmaking.”

“Then what about your other major? English is always a good degree to have.”

“An English major is like being in a book club that costs \$40,000 a year, has only annoying people in it, offers no refreshments at the meetings, and where people actually read the books.”

“Stu, grow the fuck up. Most people major in as equally worthless shit. Yet they all manage to find work. Why can’t you?” Bonnie angrily retreated to the changing room, leaving me to think about her words.

I should have just skipped college like Anthony Lee. Sure, I would have gotten laid less between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, would have played far less beer pong, known none of the intricacies of keg stands and that thing where you stick your key into the side of a beer can and chug, but I would have...oh, I don’t know, had four more years of failure on my permanent record. No one besmirches a non-college grad who’s a failure.

Life in this era was so different from the past. I think I would have been happier in the past. You had less opportunity, less chance to dream. I would have been born in an orphanage and from early on only had a goal of



eating three squares a day. I wouldn't have gone to college, I wouldn't have dreamed of fucking as many a women as possible, I would have just dreamed about getting a job with a paycheck and a woman, any women, to be my wife.

I'd get hired at the coal factory, work my butt off under sweatshop conditions, bring home a few pence a day, and marry some ugly hag from the neighborhood who'd give me several ugly kids, many of whom would die in childbirth.

In Horatio Alger's books, his characters didn't dream about becoming internet start-up billionaires, auteur filmmakers, Formula One racing champions, no, they dreamt of working their tails off as newsboys, peddlers, and shoe-shiners. Lifting themselves up by their bootstraps to "make it" in America.

The modern American dream had created more failures than successes. Just like women's magazines had created image disorders—"I never knew I could be *that* skinny!"—the nebulous concept of the American dream had just made people miserable. We didn't even know we were failures until the American dream taught us we could have been wild successes.

I knew one thing, I never wanted to work in a soul-sucking cubicle again. Be told when I had to arrive and when I may leave. May lunch. May vacation, may be sick, may have a personal day.

"You have to show up at nine o'clock on the dot."

"Why? I'd prefer to come later. Or earlier."

"You have to stay until five o'clock."

"Even if I'm done with all my work?"

"You get exactly one hour for lunch. You may use it how you wish, but it's only one hour. It has to be used some

time between 11:30 AM and 2:30 PM.”

“I’m hungry later in the day. Why does it matter when I eat my own lunch?”

“You have to wear dress clothes.”

“No one sees me all day but you.”

“Button-down shirt tucked into slacks. No jeans.”

“I’m comfortable in jeans. I work better in jeans. Wouldn’t you prefer me to work well than to work in slacks?”

“No. You have to wear slacks. It is of the utmost importance.”

“Why?”

“That’s just how we do things.”

The phrase “just how we do things” was why so many industries were floundering. Why we were in the economic mess we were in. There was no longer such a thing as white collar and blue collar jobs. What was any different between being bossed around on an assembly line or being bossed around in a climate controlled office? There was no longer white collar and blue collar, just bitch collar and boss collar. As in you were a dog with a collar around your neck behind held by a boss.

I started thinking how anyone good at anything in this world was in many ways a con man. Salesmen are. And lawyers. So are doctors and actors and, of course, writers. Writers con your emotions. Why not just cut out the charade of trying to be a writer, and try to be a con man?

How could I become a con man? I’d loved *The Sting*. Would that work nowadays? I needed to find a dupe. Some pigeon. Where did you find these dumb rich people? How did they get so rich if they were so connable? Man, Ash

could have really helped. She worked with a lot of rich buffoons that threw tons of money in grants to her museum.

What lie could I sell? I always liked the story of Victor Lustig, an early 1900s con man who sold the Eiffel Tower to a scrap metal dealer for half a million dollars. I didn't think you could get away with that nowadays. The world is too cynical. Plus, people know to Google everything.

I couldn't con anyone into buying a landmark, but maybe I could get them to invest with a whiz bang company. I'd just need to come up with a great idea for a product, make some business proposals and then, boom! Get these suckers to offer seed money.

I'd take the money and pretend to start the company. Buy office space to make it look legit, go in every day wearing a suit and sit at a desk. Get business cards and name myself CEO. Have some guys mock up proofs. Maybe just go ahead and make a prototype, just to make it seem real to the guys I'd be conning.

Now I'd be working like fifteen hours a day on this con, ninety hours a week, and it would surely take months and soon we'd decide to actually release the product and it would do pretty well so we'd decide to hire more people and ramp up production and make the product in other colors and with new added features and now...

Fuck! That sounded like a real job! I wouldn't be a con man, I'd be a *conned* man.

There truly were no shortcuts to success. Bonnie returned from the dressing room wearing an all-white jumpsuit.

"How's this, Stu?"

Ever since my couch bed dalliance with Katie, I could tell Brandi had been peeved. But she had no right to. I had been on my best behavior. Quiet, I only spoke when spoken to. Orderly, I made sure my small bindle stick worth of possessions was always neatly tucked away. Sober, I had recently put a personal moratorium on drinking inside the house as to not appear too decadent. I was even giving Brandi and My Lesbian Wingman their space, always trying to have evening plans, staying with Katie as many nights as I could, and, when I didn't, going for long walks up and down the Hudson River, thinking about my life.

"That apparently isn't enough. I have become Brandi's pet peeve. Imagine that, existing entirely as a person's pet peeve!"

Katie and I sat at an upscale bar. She'd texted me earlier that day that we "needed to talk." I knew what that meant.

"I'm sorry, Stu. She can't be that mad, can she?"

Brandi no longer offered me the daily greetings that form the backbone of an esprit de corps amongst three people crammed into a small one bedroom. No "his" and

“byes.” No “mornin’s” and “evenin’s.” No “take cares” and “seeyoulaters.” I could handle that. It was her issue not mine. The passive aggressiveness I couldn’t handle.

- “Apparently we’ve decided we prefer to dispense the toilet paper under the roll as opposed to over the top? Did I miss the house vote?”
- “Is sleeping on a couch as comfortable as you make it appear to be when you’re snoozin’ until noon, Stu?”
- “Your job search strategy of sitting around hoping something will be handed to you seems most effective! You should write a self-help book on it!”

The notes were even worse:

*Dear Temp. Roomie:*

*Did you enjoy all my risotto you drunkenly ate last night at 4 AM? I sure didn’t want to eat any of those expensive leftovers from Nicole’s so I’m glad you did.*

XO

*Brandi*

“It’s making my living situation very uncomfortable, Katie, and I already sleep on a couch so how much more uncomfortable can it get?”

Earlier that night, Brandi had entered the apartment and immediately started sniffing, histrionically bobbing her nose up and down. I’d been walking on egg shells with her for far too long and I was ready to stomp on Humpty Dumpty.

“Something wrong, Brandi?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“It looks like something’s wrong. Bonnie’s not here,

she's at that work happy hour, if something is wrong, you can tell me."

"No, nothing's wrong. I was just wondering if you liked the smell of dirty dishes? Because you forgot to clean them."

"Ah, there's the passive aggression I've been waiting for! Flawlessly played. Bravo."

"I wasn't being...passive aggressive."

"Yes, you were. You could have said, 'Would you mind washing the dishes, Stu? They're starting to stink.' Just say that. This is your apartment and I'm your tenant."

"Must be great to be a 'tenant' that doesn't pay rent."

"There you go again! If you're too chickenshit to say things to my face, then don't fucking say them!"

She started tearing up.

"You're crying? I hardly said anything bad. Would you rather me say it passive-aggressively to you? 'Brandi, I absolutely love when you passive-aggressively tell me what you hate about me.' From now on we'll exist totally passive-aggressively:

"'Are you trying to miss spots when you vacuum or do you just think our rug looks better covered in lint?'

"'Yeah, Brandi, I thought the lint spots would go great with those muddy boots you wore into the house and got over everything.'

"'I thought you'd like that, I did—'

"STOP IT!" Brandi exploded. "Stop it! You're tired of my passive-aggressiveness? Well, I'm sick of living in the same shoebox as the man who had sex with my fiancée!"

"Once! You were there, too!"

“I hate being reminded of that, as well.”

“I’m sorry! Do you want me to unfuck you? I’m sure scientists are working hard on building a time machine so people can go back in time and not fuck each other. Can you imagine how great that would be? All the avoided pregnancies, abortions, diseases, miseries. That would be great, but you know what?! It doesn’t fucking exist yet!”

I stormed out of the apartment and continued storming downtown and soon I was at the Wee Pub. Lynn was shocked to see me.

“Yeezus H. Christ, ‘aven’t seen you in fookin’ ages.”

“Yeah, sorry, Lynn. I moved and well...”

“God damn, not even Tristun and ‘illy knew where ya’ve been.”

“I’ve been a bad friend.”

“Ya, ‘ell thar not here tonight. But the uther guys are.”

At the end of the bar, lined up like drunken ducks in a row, hunched over their drinks, were Frozen Freddie, Dante, Jonny, and Ricky. They looked depressed. They usually looked depressed but tonight they looked really bummed. Was I their George Bailey, returning to see what their lives were like without me? Maybe, because they all looked like they had seen a ghost when I approached them.

“What’s up, guys? Everything alright?”

“Ted died.”

“Smelly Ted’s dead?!”

“Brain aneurism last night at 8:48 P.M. He was on set shooting a sex scene. He was taken to St. Vincent’s but only survived another 147 minutes.”

“We’re drinking Wild Turkeys in his honor.”

“JOIN US, STU! LYNN, ANOTHER ROUND!”

Lynn brought us some Irish car bombs which we downed quickly.

Poor Ted. Now dead. Had he accomplished anything in his fifty-five to seventy-five years of life? He'd bummed out a few friends for the night. I'm sure his wife was wailing. Lynn's income for the year would go down a few thousand bucks and I bet a certain limo driver had to look for new work now. Aside from that, though, what had been the point?

Modern life was so fleeting. You could spend all day reading blogs, jerking off, sending e-mails, watching reality television, playing video games, drinking beers. This era had made it so easy to do nothing with your life. To be awake but not living. Just like I was.

It was then when I had gotten the “We need to talk” text from Katie—texting, another fleeting time-waster—and had excused myself to go to the bathroom but had really walked out the backdoor of the Wee, probably to never return. I'd need to call Willy and Tristan to make other plans for Knicks games.

The second I walked into the Size 2 Lounge, Katie started crying.

“Don't cry.” I touched her shoulder. “You're right to dump me.”

She looked surprised I knew what was coming. Especially considering she was accredited by the state for fortune telling. Even more so that I was accepting it so calmly.

“You're a great guy, Stu, it's just...” She cried some more.



“You’re right to dump me. Don’t worry about it. You can’t afford to waste even a few months stuck in a relationship that isn’t headed where you want it to head. Life is too fleeting.”

She nodded as she wiped tears from her eyes.

“It’s like the internet. The whole internet is designed to trick you into clicking on things. *Top Ten Movie Sex Scenes Involving Food*, *Easiest Ways to Make Money Without Showering*, *New Study Finds Drinking Vodka Makes You Better in Bed*. They all sound so enticing. You excitedly click on the article, read a few lines, and quickly realize that it may be a great premise but it’s a terrible article. Or it may be a great idea, but the execution isn’t there. You see another link that sounds intriguing. *Manhattan’s Best Chicken Salad Sandwiches*. Same deal. So you quit reading that and click on something else and next thing you know you’ve wasted an hour. Modern relationships are like that, too. My headline would be *Cool Writer That Likes to Drink Wants to Date You*. You clicked on me and what did you get? An emotionally stunted underachiever with a foul mouth and intimacy issues. You should have quit reading after one night, clicked on someone else. No, actually, what you should be doing, what we should both be doing, is not wasting so much time surfing the internet of life.”

By now, Katie had sucked it up and the tears had quit falling. “I don’t exactly understand what you’re talking about.” She laughed. “But I’m pretty sure you just dumped yourself, Stu.”

“I wanted to make it easier on you.”

“Thank you. You really are a great guy.” She stood. “Can I have a hug?”

“Of course.”

“Do you think we can still be friends?”

“Of course.” I knew I would never see her again.

Soon, it was two AM and I was still drinking at Size 2 which was ironically full of a bunch of size 22s. Speaking of size 22s, I really was no better than that fat girl that had brought Bonnie and I together. We both suffered from cognitive dissonance. She had convinced herself she was voluptuous, attractive, and the life of the party. I had convinced myself I was hard-working, unique, better and smarter than everyone else. That a successful life should just be handed to me.

I was tired and alone. I couldn't go back to My Lesbian Wingman's place. Not until morning when her and Brandi were at work. Where could I sleep? The bars were open for two more hours but I didn't feel like drinking any more both from an economical and soberical standpoint.

I, of course, couldn't afford a hotel and thought it would be weird to stay in a hostel in my own city with those European stinkers. It was well past Keith and Erin's bedtime so I couldn't bother them. And, of course, Jack and Kirsten and Danny and ME were out in the sticks, the suburbs, and I'm not even sure the trains out of Grand Central and Penn Station still ran at this hour.

I could play Gross Gal or Grate but I wanted to be done with my fleeting life of one-night stands and meaninglessness. Not to mention, the women still remaining in Size 2 were really ugly. Even wasted, I could tell that.

Luckily, the storage facility was open twenty-four hours a day. It was dark and scary in the warehouse but no one was around and since you needed a passkey to get in I

would be safe. I unlocked my unit. I hadn't been to it since nearly a year ago when the ceiling had come crashing down and I had been forced to leave Hell's Kitchen.

I examined my meager possessions. Why was I paying \$180 a month to store these things? I'd wasted \$2000 over the last year to store stuff that wasn't even worth that much. I'd been perfectly fine existing the past year without any of it.

I began removing things and tossing them in the dumpster. A crappy Ikea nightstand, gone. The set of old Pings I hadn't shot a good round with since that South Carolina summer, gone. My ugly collection of jackets and shoes, gone. My paperback books, gone. They obviously hadn't taught me much.

Soon, I had cleared everything out save my old mattress. I lay down on it, closed the door of the unit behind me, and went to sleep in the dank darkness. It was one of the best sleeps of my life.

## 12 | **HOW TO HAVE**

A NEGATIVE NET AND SELF-WORTH

They're labeled "Assholes" in my phone, but they're not the assholes, I am. The Assholes include Discover Card and Fleet, MBNA, Wachovia, Visa, and Provident. I owe them all money. I quit paying the monthly minimums on my credit cards right around the time Ash left me, right around the time I lost my job.

The Assholes pepper me with calls. My left thigh has lost sensation from all the incoming call vibrations I don't answer as the cell sits in my pocket. I really wish I hadn't blown a week's unemployment on a new iPhone. I'd love to be phoneless right now.

The Assholes leave messages:

"This is Jane at Fleet Financial. Please call me back for some interesting information I have regarding your current credit card—"

(DELETE.)

They always say that: "interesting information." Like I'm that daft. Well, maybe I am. I am the one that quit paying my balances. I am one of the reasons this country is in such dire economic shape. The Assholes should use reverse psychology on me: "Fine, DON'T call

us back, see if WE care here at Fleet.”

I’d call them back: “Hi Jane, I hear you have some interesting information for me?”

“Yeah, the interesting information is that you owe us \$5,000, you motherfucker!”

But Jane wouldn’t yell at me. It’s not her money. She doesn’t own the credit card company I’m treating with as much respect as college freshmen treated the BMG Music Club’s twelve-CDs-for-twelve-cents offers back in the mid-1990s.

I giggle thinking about the crack team of high school dropouts working in Wilmington, Delaware who get to the office at eight A.M. sharp every day to face the unenviable task of calling me. I always receive an Asshole phone call at 8:01 A.M. I wonder if the same operators are calling me. I should log their names.

Jane at Fleet and Steve at Wachovia, Jose at Visa and Stacy at MBNA. They call me more times a week than my mother. Call me more times a day than Keith calls Erin when he’s out of town on business (“Hi, honey. Just checkin’ in.”). I wonder if during coffee breaks they speculate how big of a loser I am like sex talk operators surely speculate how perverted their clients are (please see: **Footchapter Twelve: How to Network**).

The Assholes also send me letters. At first, these were cordial, back when I was only forty days late and sixty dollars short.

*Dear Valued Fleet Costumer:*

*We wanted to notify you that you seem to have forgotten to pay your most recent minimum. This was clearly an oversight as we know you are committed to making your payment timely and...*

Quickly, though, the emotional qualities began changing. There are six more levels of letters you will get from an increasingly-growing-irate credit card company once you quit making payments.

### THE SURLY ADMONITION

(stark white envelope; lavender paper; originating from Wilmington, DE)

*Mr. Fish:*

*When you acquired a [Credit] card you agreed to a binded contract with us. We have held up our end of the agreement, why are you now refusing to hold up yours? That is not fair to us. Please remit payment immediately or...*

A little scary I suppose. In a ninety-pound-weakling-hysterically-yelling-at-you kind of way. This used to freak me out two years ago when I thought I had a wealth of things to live for. Back then, the surly admonition was enough to get me to flap out my checkbook and remit payment. But now that I'm a certified, bona fide failure, a letter by itself can't scare me. Especially one with made up words like "binded."

### THE PATHETIC PLEA

(larger multi-chromatic envelope; fancier paper stock; “signed” by the company’s Financial Officer; Wilmington, DE)

*...Your [Credit] Card is seriously past due and it would be unfortunate if you were to permanently lose your privileges. We know it’s a card you depend on for benefits and purchasing power at thousands of locations worldwide. Even if you can’t pay right now, you’ll find we are reasonable people willing to work with you to find affordable solutions. Give us a chance to help you and we’re confident we can correct your account delinquency. It’s up to you. Do the SMART thing and call us at...*

Oh, God, yes, was it ever a “privilege” to not have to work for this money! To spend money that wasn’t mine at thousands of “locations” (read: bars) nationwide. And to now NOT do the SMART thing. These credit card companies still didn’t have the decency to hand-sign the letters and I refused to be scared by ambiguous threats signed by a computer or autopen machine.

### THE “NOVELTY” PLEA

(USPS Priority Mail Package; high-grade card stock; Wilmington DE; enclosure)

*Mr. Fish:*

*Maybe your problem has been in knowing exactly how you could go about contacting us to clear the current overdue balance on your...*

Included with this form letter was a ten-minute

calling card with which I was encouraged to call my scorned credit card company. Like I have a landline! Like I would put my ear on a dirty payphone! Like I don't have a cell phone they are calling every half hour! And like it would take as few as ten minutes to actually handle a problem with the jackass illiterates that man their phone systems!

At this point, I began to wonder. Being that I hadn't sent a payment in months, answered their calls once, responded to a single letter ever (they went straight from mailbox to garbage can), did the credit card companies not consider the possibility I was either:

a. Living in a different locale and not receiving the letters and phone calls?

b. Deceased?

If they pulled up their own records to see what I'd used their "privileges" for, a sordid picture of a truly failed life would have quickly emerged:

\$3000 bar tabs at the Wee Pub

\$1000 liquor store purchases

\$500 three AM diner food

\$250 four AM cab rides

\$200 Johnson's Home Sundries (clandestine credit card code for Delia's House of Sin)

It wouldn't take Sherlock Holmes to deduce that a man who spent some 80% of his non-earnings on alcohol, who bought no tangible items (clothes, home furnishings, mail order brides, etc), could be dead in some Chinatown opium den. Elementary, my dear, Visa. Surely Discover Card has an actuary who could look at one's spending habits and calculate the likelihood of that person dying with a needle in his arm and a five dollar hooker on his lap.



Yet, some how, Providian knew I was not dead. Just avoiding them. Maybe they do have an actuary? Is it possible that I'm NOT that big of failure?! That they have bigger fish to fry? That I'm not even the most successful failure around?!

### THE MEMBERSHIP-REVOKED, PLEASE-DESTROY-YOUR-CARD LETTER

(menacing-looking white envelope; courier-fonted-so-as-to-appear-it-came-from-a-typewriter letter; Wilmington, DE)

Dear Sir or Madam:

After your repeated disobedience of the stipulations of your credit card agreement with us, we have no recourse but to revoke your membership to [Credit] Card. Please destroy the card for your own safety...

For my own safety? Aww, how sweet. They do still love me! (Despite not knowing my gender.)

### THE COLLECTION AGENCY LETTER

(cheap envelope stock; cheap white paper stock; originating from Topeka, Kansas)

*...the above referenced account has been referred to our office for collection. Previous attempts have been made by our client to resolve this debt voluntarily but, as of this date, those attempts have been IGNORED. Unless you notify this office within thirty days after receiving this....*

THE LAWYERS FINALLY CHECK IN

(USPS Priority Mail Package; high-grade card stock; signed by the company lawyer; originating from Canton, Ohio)

*...ATTORNEY PLACEMENT PENDING...If we do not hear from you by 4:00 PM Eastern Standard Time on March 30, 2010, we will be forced to obtain judgment for you.*

Ironically, on March 30<sup>th</sup> at four PM EST, I was sitting on My Lesbian Wingman's couch watching daytime television when one of those loud credit solutions commercials came on. People that watch TV during the day seem to have credit problems, be hard of hearing, and speak English as a second language: "BAD CREDIT? LOW CREDIT? NO CREDIT? NOOOOOOOOOOOO PROBLEMA!"

I thought in my head: "Nooooooooooooo problema, exactly! So long as you don't care about renting cars, buying houses, or a stupid FICO score."

It was the day after my fight with Brandi, the day after I'd slept in my storage unit. That morning I had gone home and cleaned myself up, then bought some Magnolia cupcakes and visited Brandi at her office. I apologized and told her I would pack up and move out ASAP.

"To where?"

"I don't know."

"You have nowhere to go."

"I still have a storage unit for fifteen more days."

"You're not sleeping in a storage unit. Bonnie would kill me. Keep staying with us."

"I'm trying to get a job, Brandi. I swear. I'm going to join the status quo."

"I know you're trying. I'm sorry for acting like you aren't."

The buzzer buzzed and Larry informed me that a courier had just hand-delivered something. The piece of paper, in triplicate, which I removed from a manilla envelope, looked a tad fraudulent, like a Nigerian internet scam, so I showed it to My Lesbian Wingman when she returned from work.

"Is this real?"

"This is very much real, Stu."

"Shit."

"Are you an idiot?! You just quit paying your credit cards?"

"There's a lot of people in America. I thought they'd lose me in the shuffle."

"They obviously didn't."

"Do I need a lawyer?"

"What you're really asking is do you need me as your lawyer?"

"Correct."

"I'm in intellectual properties. I deal with nerds that invent Teflon-coated toilets and geeks that come up with new ways to quickly chill beers."

"Don't you know all areas of law?"

"That's like asking a plastic surgeon if he knows how to do brain surgery."

"You won't help me?"

"You don't need my help. This is open and shut. Do you owe this money?"

"Technically...yes."

"Then, technically...you're gonna lose."

“What’s the dress?”

“The dress?”

“At court. What’s the dress?”

“It’s not a wedding, they aren’t going to put the dress on your summons. Instead of ‘black tie optional’ it’s not going to say, ‘Timberlands and do-rags not recommended.’”

“Right. One more question. Since there’s a good chance I’ll lose and I have no money to pay them back...”

“Yeah?”

“Is there such a thing as debtor’s prison?”

“Is that a serious question?”

“Yes.”

“Come on, Stu, that’s some Charles Dickens shit that hasn’t existed in a century.”

The next week, I threw on business casual attire, not worn since they day I was laid off and not laundered since then either, and headed downtown to the courthouse. I was, by far, the best dressed failure in the joint amidst a crew of tattooed, dreadlocked, cornrowed losers in untucked shirts, multi-pocket jeans, even sneakers.

I was excited to be in court, to make good on my debt. I was ready to get my life back on track. I wanted to be new again, just like when I was twenty-two and a recent college graduate, the world my oyster. A Rockie Mountain oyster, I would later learn.

Back at twenty-two, I hadn’t had any money but I hadn’t owed any either. I didn’t have any women but I didn’t have any terrible women. I had no sordid past, I seemingly had a positive future. I felt healthy, not miserable. Back then, my self-worth was more positive than my net worth, but both were in the red now.

### **Credits**

\$1250 remaining severance  
\$350 twenty-five year savings bond (Bar Mitzvah gift)  
\$200 clothing  
\$800 401K (unclaimed, penalty fees assessed upon removal)  
\$45 one share, Disney stock  
\$80 (approx.) sperm, blood, plasma in body to be pawned  
\$170 contents of storage unit  
\$248 unemployment/week

### **Debits**

\$5245.72 credit cards  
\$180 storage unit fee/month  
\$85 cell phone/month

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-\$2492.72

I was worth less than the wino I passed entering the courthouse. I would have to succeed quite a bit to get back up to his net worth of zero. Though, considering all the aluminum cans he was sleeping beside, his net worth was probably more like fifty bucks.

As for my self-worth, expressed in monetary units:

### **Credits**

\$50 False exterior appearance of success

### **Debits**

\$7000 Happiness  
\$5000 Confidence

\$6899 Sexual Satisfaction  
 \$2000 Feeling Loved  
 \$1500 Addictions  
 \$10,000 Dignity  
 \$2472.72 Economical Fears

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-\$34,821.72

While others could brag they felt like a million bucks, I could note that I felt like negative \$34,821.72 down to the cent. Again, I was doing worse than the wino who had a giant smile on his face. Then again, he was masturbating as he watched me get metal detected. It was quite easy for him to masturbate at work, apparently.

I was forty-fifth on the docket so I had plenty of time to scope out the scene. I took a seat in the far back of the decrepit courtroom. Our tax dollars were certainly not going to this place, and why should they when they could be much better put toward the new Madison Square Garden.

You have so much time to think when you're waiting in court. The repetitive lull of the overhead fluorescents, the metronome of the plastic wall clock, the lack of distractions from television or the internet, and a paucity of pretty women to ogle. I didn't have to be Swami Christian to have focus here, though the rock-hard wooden pews did remind me off his bed. While most of my fellow defendants read the *Post* or slept or secretly played BrickBreaker on their cell phones which were supposed to be turned off, I studied the proceedings to see if I could get an edge.

The Honorable Mary Dean seemed surprisingly pleasant. As each slobbily-dressed nogoodnik presented

himself in front of her with a litany of excuses, she showed an amazing amount of calm, understanding, and willingness to listen to bullshit. She knew she dealt with the fuck ups of society, but she treated them like human beings.

On my iPhone, I Googled the lawyers I would be squaring off against. Hofstra and Queens College Law. Terrible rankings according to *US News & World Report*.

What went wrong in our lives? I wasn't in as bad of shape as the people around me, but I'd surely began life with a head start. Wealthier, healthier, better educated, more opportunities. Nothing went wrong with them. They did what was expected. Failure. Something did go wrong with me. I wasn't necessarily supposed to wildly succeed but I wasn't supposed to fail.

"Case #045. TMI Collections versus Stuart Fish."

I approached the bench through waist-level swinging doors that made me feel like I was entering a Wild West saloon. Gunfight at the OK Coral. Lying My Ass Off at Debt Court.

They didn't even swear me in. The probably just assumed everyone at debt court was a liar. Or an atheist.

Judge Dean examined some papers. "TMI claims you have rung up a debt of \$5245.72. Do you agree with that, Mr. Fish?"

"I don't."

"Oh, you don't?"

In debt court judges talk to you like they are a parent and you are their stupid kid.

"Why would they claim you owe them so much money?"

"I'm not sure."

“Care to speculate?”

I tapped on the lectern I stood behind. I decided to go for it.

“TMI Collections is a faceless corporation. As you can see, even today they are not present, they just sent their lawyers. Hofstra and Queens College grads, so not even particularly good lawyers. But TMI surely likes that because mediocre lawyers are more willing to be sleazy. TMI is a for-profit enterprise. They literally care about nothing but profit. They buy outstanding debts from credit card companies, department stores, and banks for doughnuts to dollars with a goal of strong-arming debtors into settling with them or losing to them in court.

“TMI is a scourge on society, providing nothing of value, only trying to exploit us. Turn our failures into their successes. They do not care about accuracy, only locating a debt and having a name, any name, attached to it. In this most unfortunate case, my name.

“But it is not my debt. From my admittedly quick online research, I find at least twelve people with my exact name living in the United States. A twenty-four-year-old bartender in Union City who is divorced from two women and has three children. A nineteen-year-old junior college dropout from Sausalito who posts on football gambling message boards. A thirty-five-year-old restaurateur in Cheyenne whose Chinese fusion spots keep going belly up. A fifty-one-year-old pharmacist in Alexandria whose wife has gone through extensive brain cancer treatments over the past year. I see no reason why this debt isn’t just as likely to be theirs.”

The Hofstra Law lawyer started laughing. “That



is ludicrous, your honor! We have all the defendant's information. We know his D.O.B. is 02/11/79. We know his social security number is \*\*\*-\*\*-\*\*\*\*. We know he lives on Tenth Avenue in the Clinton District of Manhattan."

"Is all that true, Mr. Fish?"

"The first two are. Oh, and thanks for releasing that info to these thugs seated behind me. The third factoid is not. Guess they didn't do their research well enough when crafting a phony profile for me."

"Phony, your honor? May I show some evidence?"

Judge Dean gave a nod and the Queens College grad approached me. "Here we have the standard contract prospective cardholders sign to obtain a Visa."

He handed me the form, pointing to a line where my name was written in cursive.

"Is that your signature, sir?"

"That is my name, but not my signature."

"Not your signature?!"

"I never dot my I's nor cross my T's when I autograph something."

"You don't?"

"No, sir. Too laborous. Would you like to see how I sign my name, your honor? I've been perfecting it since age twelve when I thought I would become famous and need to autograph a lot of stuff."

"He's just gonna write with his left hand or something, your honor!"

"None of this will be necessary," noted Judge Dean.

"If I may speak, Madame Judge, why would I rack up a huge debt? That's not how I was raised. I was raised in an upper middle class, loving, two-parent home."

I turned to face the other defendants as yet uncalled on the docket.

“Show of hands, how many of you were raised in upper middle class, loving, two-parent homes?”

No one raised their hands. No one was paying attention.

“Mr. Fish, please do not survey my courtroom.”

“Just proving a point. Look at my fellow defendants here today. Now look at me. My hair is neatly combed. I have shaved, brushed my teeth, I’m wearing a tie, and shoes that don’t employ velcro anywhere. Listen to them. Now listen to me. I am well-spoken, loquacious, and use words like ‘loquacious.’”

I turned around again.

“Show of hands: who here knows what ‘loquacious’ means?”

“Mr. Fish, if you survey my courtroom again I’ll hold you in contempt!”

“Sorry, your honor, just trying to prove another point. Successful people like me don’t ring up debts. It’s the failures behind me that do. No offense to them and I hope none of them kicks my ass and tries to steal my identity once I leave the courtroom.”

Judge Dean looked at the prosecutors whispering amongst each other.

“Your honor, we could note countless statistics to show that quote-unquote ‘successful’ people are the most likely to abuse credit card companies. But we’re not going to because this is debt court. Not a battle between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. Debt court is a joke. We all know it. My partner and I are on this beat

because we are the two most mediocre lawyers in our firm. Mr. Fish is right. Debt court may be boring, but it's usually unchallenging. So, even though we know the defendant owes this large sum, we will dismiss our case against him."

"I don't like this precedent. You allow a defendant to annoy his way to a dismissal? What if others learn of this tactic?"

The judge looked at the other defendants on the day's docket.

"Quick survey: raise your hand if you hear me."

"None," I noted.

"That's a relief. OK, then I guess you're dismissed, Mr. Fish. Now please start spending within your means, for goodness sake."

As I exited the courthouse I gave the wino a twenty-dollar bill.

"T'anks! Hey buddy, didn't we once march together?"

My net worth was back in the positive, and my self-worth was headed that way as well.

“How’s the suit fit?”

“It fits as in it surrounds my body and prevents me from being naked, but the shoulders are too foamy and I hate pleats. Feel like I’m in genie pants. Why is the waist so high, Dad?”

“That’s what a suit is supposed to look like.”

“We bought it from a guy in a sandwich board.”

“Those guys sell the same designer suits the ‘real’ stores on Fifth sell. They just don’t have the high overhead.”

“I think the guy in the sandwich board looked better than me.”

“That’s a great idea. You could have bought your own sandwich board. Put a nice message on it. ‘Hi, I’m an unemployable moron who hates to network. Wanna hire me?’ On the back you could put your weak resume.”

“Let’s just go inside.”

“First, stand up straight, and think of something funny.”

“Funny?”

“Not funny. Happy. Happiness is infectious and people will want to be around you. Now quit slouching and

stand erect.”

“It makes me happy when you say ‘erect.’”

“You’re lucky I scored you a ticket to this event, Stuart. It’s usually only open to paying members of our networking organization.”

I didn’t quite understand why people paid to be in a networking club, but if this was “the road most traveled” to get work, I was determined to follow. Determined to earn enough money to get back to having my own apartment. I’d had to finally admit to my dad I was unemployed. He took it surprisingly well. The guy loves to help, I will give him credit for that.

We entered the ballroom of the Clinton Hotel a minute after the eight PM start time. It was already buzzing.

“We’ll take a lap of the room, scope out where the movers and shakers are, then schmooze.”

“Can I grab some hors d’oeuvres and a drink first?”

“En route. You can nosh after we schmooze.”

“What’s with all the Yiddish?”

“Yiddish is the dialect of networking.”

We began our lap, my dad walking so erect it seemed he had a stick up his jacket. A smile plastered on his face. He was “How you doing?”-ing and “Good to see you”-ing every person that made inadvertent eye contact with him.

“Do you know those people, Dad?”

He talked through his smile. “Not at all, don’t be a schmuck. But that’s part of networking. *How you doing? Good to see you.* A skilled networker can make a complete stranger feel they do know me. *How you doing? Good to see you.* You don’t know how many times I’m schmoozing

someone and they say, 'Hey, how do I know you? Networking event in Little Rock? Perhaps the annual convention in Boise? Are we LinkedIn contacts?' *How you doing? Good to see you.* They're shocked when I tell them, 'We've never met before.'"

He stared at me like he had just rocked my world.

We stopped at the food and drink station in the corner. Rows of soggy appetizers straight from a frozen bag. I wondered if they had nuke service here.

"Scotch, neat."

"I'm sorry, sir, no alcohol," replied the bartender.

I looked back at my father, his head on a swivel, "How you doing? Good to see you."

"Not even wine? Or beer?"

"Just soft drinks."

"But beer is soft."

I suppose it was fate. I shouldn't have been drinking anyhow if I was truly serious about this. I ordered a Diet Coke and returned to my father, wondering when they would make powdered alcohol. Something in a little packet like Sweet 'n' Low I could store in my wallet like a high school kid stores an expiring condom.

"Son, good lord! What are you doing?!"

"What?"

"You're holding your drink in your right hand."

"So...?"

"Your right hand is for shaking. Always hold your cocktail in your left. That way your right stays dry. That's Networking 101. Do you even read the books I send you? The Zig Ziglar articles I forward?"

I shrugged.

“OK, I’ve picked out my targets to schmooze. That thirtysomething man in the toupee. The attractive redhead who doesn’t know she has a run in her stockings. And that old fella with the cane. Something tells me he is a mensch I need to know. Great, have you picked out your targets?”

“Targets? Uh...” I scanned the room. “That fat schnook who can’t keep his shirt tucked in over his gut going to town on the chicken fingers. The brunette dressed like a high-end escort kibitzing with that peanut gallery. And the weaselly looking schmuck with the ponytail rubberbanded up for the first time in who knows how long.”

“Interesting choices. Well, good luck. We’ll reconvene here after we’ve made the BCP.”

“BCP?”

“Business Card Pass. Jesus Christ, that was in the first chapter in the *Acrobatics without a Network* e-book.”

My dad got even more erect, even more smiley, and confidently marched toward the thirtysomething man in a toupee who already kept a half-circle of other networkers captivated.

Faux-captivated, I’m sure. I’d never seen a room of such phonies. Holding their drinks in their left hand so they were prepared to unleash an overzealous handshake with their right. And the winking! I thought winking as a social message had gone out with the Studebaker, but not here. Here winks accompanied everything: introductions, salutations, unfunny jokes, bad puns, fake flirtations, awkward real flirtations, goodbyes, BCPs, everything. I’m assuming it even extended to electronic communication. ;)

I’d never been at a place with so many outwardly happy people. Likewise, I’d never been at a place less happy

in actuality. There's no way these people were enjoying themselves; yet, they all kept saying: "I just love to meet new people!"

No you don't. No one does. Men like to meet women that will have sex with them and women like to meet men that'll marry them and everybody likes to meet the rare person that can make them laugh so hard they pee their pants. But no one likes to legitimately meet new people.

We spend our lives trying to cultivate systems where we have to less and less deal with strangers. We created caller ID so we never had to answer a strangers' calls. Invented e-mail and texting so we no longer had to speak to someone. Telecommuting so no one had to go to the office and deal with wretched coworkers. Conference calls so people from across the globe could conduct business without having to look at each others' ugly faces. So everyone could do the "Do you believe this yutz?" jerk-off motion to their secretary whenever anyone else on the line said something dumb. E-commerce came about so we'd never have to go into a bookstore and talk to the bookish nerds to acquire that well-regarded biography on Chester A. Arthur. So we'd never have to go into Blockbuster and deal with the smelly cinema nerds when we wanted to rent a movie. So we'd never have to deal with the gay couture nerds when we needed new jeans. Sure, this has led to a country of people wearing slightly ill-fitting jeans, but we all prefer that to dealing with strangers. But these people relished all the glad-handing.

Is it any surprise the wink was a phony gesture right from the get-go? Back in the fourteenth century, or



whenever “explorer” was a viable occupation you could put in the objective portion of your resume, a Spanish explorer found himself on an as-yet-unknown Scandinavian island full of the most beautiful people he had ever seen. When the leader of these people, the most handsome of them all, invited the explorer to a feast, he was greatly flattered. Now the Spanish explorer didn’t exactly enjoy his meal of smoked fish sandwiches—he found them too dry and in need of some cream cheese—but he was intrigued by the way his host continuously closed his right eye at him. True, it felt a little...how to put this, awkward, like he was being hit on and, believe me, our explorer did not swing that way, but it was also very cool. When the explorer returned to Spain, he introduced this winking gesture and soon enough it had swept Europe, becoming even a bigger craze than slavery or corseting fat women. Only later did anthropologists figure out the Spanish explorer’s handsome host had a severe case of blepharospasm. A chronic eye twitch.

Well, fuck it, I couldn’t knock it until I tried it. The fat schnook standing by the tray of sliders looked so lonely. I approached. Erect. A smile on my face. I winked.

“Uh...how you doing? Good to see you.”

“I’m sorry, do we know each other?”

“No, I was trying to be charismatic. It’s actually my first time at one of these things.”

“Mine, too. My pops made me come.”

“Me, too.”

“Bought my ticket and everything. He’s sick of me being unemployed and living in his basement. I’m not even sure what I’m supposed to be doing here, though, and this food’s for shit.”

“Not a How to Fail Ale in the joint.”

“Don’t these people repulse you? I mean, I know I’m obese and visually repulsive, but these people are far worse.”

“You’re not obese. You’re husky.”

“That’s a nice word for fat. Look at these... networkers. Bragging about how many LinkedIn contacts they have. How many Facebook friends and Twitter followers they got. But ask these schmoes, ‘Hey, does having all those contacts and friends and followers ever garner you anything?’ and they just stand there dumbfounded. ‘I got ten-thousand contacts,’ they drool out.”

“What I don’t understand is, why don’t these people just call a spade a spade, admit why they’re here in the first place, cut the charade, and just...”

*“Hi, I’m Steve and I’m looking for a consulting firm that will hire me at a salary of around \$85K per. Do you work for a ‘Big Five’ firm?”*

*“No, I don’t.”*

*“Do you know anyone who does?”*

*“Not at all. And I won’t lie and say I do just to keep you interested in me because I’m not interested in you. As for me, I’ve created a line of compact frozen yogurt makers for use on commercial airliners. Do you know anyone who could buy this idea from me?”*

*“I don’t and I think it’s a terrible idea, quite frankly. I’ve never once wanted a fro-yo while eight miles high.”*

*“Shall we exchange business cards?”*

*“Nope. I have no interest in wasting the ninety-five cents each of my cards costs by giving it to someone who can’t help me in the least and will probably just toss the card in the morning.*

*I'd rather put it in a fishbowl at my local chain restaurant to give me a chance at winning a free lunch."*

*"You smell bad."*

*"Your teeth are yellow."*

*"Good meeting you and I hope to never see you again."*

*"Ditto."*

*"...and they'd part ways. Nothing gained, but nothing lost."*

*"I'm Arnie."*

*"Stu."*

Arnie reached his hand out and I shook it.

*"Your hand's wet."*

*"Oh, sorry. It's from my drink."*

*"Just messing with you. My dad says you're supposed to use your left hand to drink at these things so your handshaking hand doesn't get clammy."*

*"Ha. Then what hand am I gonna jerk off with?"*

*"Exactly."*

*"Hold out your Diet Coke for a second."*

Arnie pulled a flask from his jacket pocket and dumped something into my drink.

*"What is that?"*

*"A twenty-year Highlands Scotch."*

*"Seriously?"*

*"Fucking of course not, it's rotgut rum."*

*"I'm not supposed to be drinking, but that'll do."*

*"So you need a job, Stu?"*

*"Yep, I need a job. I don't want a job, but I need one. Nothing seems to work. I check the job sites every day. Monster, Careerbuilder, Indeed, Craigslist, Shitcareer, Jewjob. Has anyone ever gotten hired from these piece of*

shit sites?”

“At least it’s a better way to not find a job than it was back in the 1960s.”

“Cheers to that. Can you imagine being unemployed back then? Wake up every day and actually put on clothing...”

“I’m upset if I have to wear socks on any given day currently.”

“Scrape together some change to go buy a paper at the corner newsstand. Take said paper to the public library...”

“No Starbucks back then.”

“...where you’d uncap a red pen to circle things that may be of interest. Call said things and ask if you can submit a resume. Pound the pavement in the afternoon, office to office, passing out resumes. Resumes you carefully typed on a typewriter and then mimeographed additional copies of.”

“And if some place actually liked you, you had to throw on your suit, put on your hat, grab your briefcase, and hoof it to the office. How shitty.”

“I don’t know about you, Stu, but I wake up at noon, grab my laptop, and send my resume to 214 different companies in a matter of seconds. Job searching for the day completed by 12:15.”

“My resume sucks, Arnie. Makes me embarrassed of my thirty years of existence. What have I been doing with my life?”

I flapped open my faux-leatherbound document folder with the pharmaceutical company logo on it. My father had gotten it as a freebie, but insisted these were de rigueur on the networking scene. A quick scan of the room told me he was right.

“Here, check out my resume I made this morning.”

Fed up, I had just made the most crazy, over-the-top resume possible: undergrad degrees from Princeton and Oxford, law school at Harvard, medical school at Columbia, business school at NYU, drama school at Yale. Personal recommendations from Barack Obama, George H.W. Bush, Coach K, and Ringo Starr. And so much legitimate (I made up) work experience, I needed to scale my font size down to 6 just to fit it all on the page.

“Not bad, dude. But I think mine is better.”

Arnie handed me his resume. All that was typed on it, in the absolute center of the page was:

**Call Arnold Galloway for a good hire.**

His phone number was listed under that.

“Oh shit, my dad’s glancing over here. We better go network, Arnie.”

“Network?” We were already buzzed.

“Yeah!”

“Let’s go network!”

“NETWOOOORK!!!”

It was like when you’re drunk with your buddies and someone gets an idea (“Taco Bell!”) and you all can’t help but agreeing with that idea and chanting that idea (“Taco Bell! Ta-co Bell! TA-COOO BELL!”) until that idea is brought to fruition.

Arnie split to one side of the room, I to the other. I walked up to two old guys, the two best dressed in the room. Or, maybe I just had a bizarre case of beer goggles that made cheap suits look a lot better made.

I stood slouched. Barely grinned. I presented a clammy right hand.

“Sorry fellas, I’d present a friendly wink but I just can’t individually control my eyelids today.”

The two men looked surprised by my brashness but then had a good chuckle.

“Well, blinks are surely doubly as good as a wink!”

They were drawn to me. They liked my energy, my confidence, my carefree attitude, and my slight slurring. They liked me. These morons actually liked me!

These hookers that didn’t fuck. These networking sluts who spoke in social networking buzzwords. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and, hey, “I’ll send you a follow-up e-mail tomorrow.” Great, now I was gonna be flooded with more spam in my life. From people that had no real interest in me as a person. People that just wanted to keep me as a possible link to one day satisfy their own desires, and not even carnal ones. I threw some of my phony resumes at them and headed back to reconvene with Arnie.

“That was worthless. Let’s jet, Stu.”

As we slinked out of the room, I saw my dad handing out fortune cookie cards. His new network all uproariously laughed as they saw the fortune on the back of them. If my father just saved all the money he spent on networking he wouldn’t need to actually go network to find more people, work, and ways to make more money.

“Arnie, we didn’t find anyone to network with because there was no one cool, no hot girls, no drinkers, sports fans, sluts, or bartenders here.”

“Then let’s go where those folks are.”

“Let’s network with them.”

“You know a bar nearby?”

“You been to Size 2 yet?”

## 13 | **HOW TO FAIL**

TO BE NORMAL

I sat on the microfiber couch that looked as if it came off the factory floor ten minutes prior. Perused the magazines on the coffee table. Trade publications for a trade I knew nothing about and didn't really want to know about either. A trade that could soon be my trade.

"Here for an interview?" the front desk girl spoke, keeping her eyes on a large monitor.

"Uh, yeah."

"Good luck. Though you're already doing well."

"How's that?"

"You're wearing a terrific suit. Love the broad cut of it. Most the guys that've interviewed came in looking like real slobs, swimming in their cheap suits."

"Thanks. My dad recommended this...brand." I hoped she didn't ask what brand that was. I hoped Mr. Richard didn't notice it was the same one I was wearing when we met. Then again, I didn't really remember meeting him. Hopefully he had been as drunk as I had been.

"Well, it works for you. Thanks for not flirting with me either."



“No problem.” I guess.

“All the other interviewees have since I’m so hot. I don’t say that in a conceited way, just a passive observation of myself. One second, hold please.”

Why hadn’t I hit on her? Why was I always so different from the masses at large? Today was the day I might finally become normal.

“Mr. Richard is ready for you. Good luck again. Would be nice to have a cute guy working here. I don’t say that to flirt with you.”

“Just a passive observation?”

She lifted her head and looked at me for the first time. She winked.

I walked through the doors and onto the main floor of the office, greeted by a burly bear of a man.

“Look the same as I did at that networking shindig?”

I had indeed had quality suit beer goggles. His three-button was just as cheap as mine. Probably from the same collection.

“You sure do, Mr. Richard.”

“So do you. Call me Big Richard.”

“Big Richard?”

“Good golly, Miss Molly!” He smiled at me.

“A little humor. Though I’d love if we could get a receptionist named Molly. The girl you met is named Holly but it just doesn’t have the same ring to it. Great suit by the way.”

He led me toward his office where we took seats on our respective sides of his desk.

“Your resume just had us laughing our butts off and we knew we had to call you in.”

I nodded.

“Now let’s get serious. Tell me why you want this position, Stuart.”

“I...”

“Stop. Let me tell you why you want this position. Job interviews are as much about us wooing you as they are about you impressing us. And hey, we’re already impressed or else we wouldn’t have called you in. From the second I met you at the Clinton, I thought: now that kid’s special. Not ‘special’ like retarded, that would be an insult, but special like special.” He leaned in, “But speaking of retards, we do follow the Americans With Disabilities Act here so even if you were retarded ‘special,’ we’d have to grant you an interview.”

“I’m not retarded.”

“No, you’re not! Check in the positive column! But you’re still different from the other slack-jawed kiss-ups I’ve already dealt with, swimming in their cheap suits.”

Yes, I was different. Special. There was nothing wrong with not being normal.

“You ever read those How To Interview For a Job books, Stuart? Heck, you might have read one on your ride over here.” Big Richard pulled a stack of books from the floor and fanned them out on his desk like a blackjack dealer.

*301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions, Sell Yourself!: Master the Job Interview Process, The 250 Job Interview Questions You’ll Most Likely Be Asked, Winning Job Interviews, Job Interview Secrets, Becoming Mr. Job Interview, How to Turn an Interview Into a Job, and, of course, Job Interviewing for Dipshits.*

“Ever read any of these? No, not you. Bet you think these books are jokes. Written by folks with made-up

titles used to dupe the public:

Dr. Paul Powers, Interview Psychologist

Bucky Davis, President and CEO Bucky Davis  
Career Placement Firm

Joanne McAller, Professor Emeritus Occupational  
Motivation, Washington & Lee University.”

Big Richard flipped the books over to the back covers, again like a dealer. Had he worked in A.C. or something?

“Look how ugly they are. How can we trust them to give us advice when they can’t even stay fit enough to not disgust us by their author photos? These losers have never interviewed for a job in their lives. And you’re supposed to take their advice?!”

I smiled nervously.

“You read these books, Stuart? They’d have you think a job interview goes something like this:

## **I. Why are you looking to leave your previous job?**

“I’m not an idiot. It’s obviously boring or your coworkers are ugly or, most likely, the pay is garbage. But you’re not ‘allowed’ to say these things. You’re supposed to say: ‘I’m eager to conquer a new challenge.’ Ha! Like you’re Sir Ed Hillary.”

“I’m unemployed.”

“Even better. So you desperately need money? Although I know New York state unemployment is quite sweet.”

I nodded in confirmation.

## **2. What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?**

“I’d be happy for someone to say, ‘I’ll arrive every day, usually not hungover, I won’t give 110% because, why would I? Not like I own the company. But I will give around 85% and only surf the internet for about five minutes every hour.’”

I wiped the sweat from my brow.

“As for weaknesses, what a dumb question. It could be reworded as: ‘What is an awesome strength of yours you can make sound like a debilitating weakness even though you know very well it isn’t?’ ‘Oh, I’m so embarrassed to admit this, but I’m a perfectionist. I always have to make sure to do everything to the best of my ability even if it takes a little longer.’”

He pointed at me.

“Other ‘weaknesses’ could include: caring too much about a job well done, devoting yourself fully to the company, and working long hours to the detriment of your social life. So I ask, Stu, give me a real weakness of yours.”

I could only think of one thing.

“I have to masturbate in the office bathroom at least once a day.”

“So do I. Which is awesome because I have my own private bathroom, as you can see. People wrongly assume the rich guys with nice offices don’t whack off in them.”

## **3. Quick! Name the color spectrum from most to least refractive.**

“Uh, Roy G. Biv. Red orange yellow...uh, gre-green blue, I for...indigo! Violet!”

“Nine seconds. I was testing how you handle stress. I figure that’s better than asking you to relate some anecdote about the time you pulled an all-nighter to finish a project. I gotta say, we’ve had some decent candidates pass through these doors, but raconteurs they are not.”

#### **4. What do you think the most rewarding aspects of this job will be?**

“Don’t say something about responsibility, initiative, or motivation, Stu.”

“Getting paid.”

“Very good. I would have also accepted, and I’ll say these in bullet points:

- getting to work in this state-of-the-art facility. Have you seen my desk chair? All three wheels rotate at once. You know how fast you can zip through the halls late at night?
- free lunches every day at the office cafeteria. Good stuff too! On Thursdays we have a make-your-own fajita bar. Pollo or carne asada.
- getting a corporate card you will use to buy drinks at least once a month for your buddies. That’s not allowed but our accounting department is full of idiots so they’ll never catch on. Heck, after a few months here, press your luck and start doing it twice a month!
- the chicks here are hot.”

## **5. Ooh, this is an important job interview question: Why do you want to enter this field?**

“The books say you’re supposed to spew out pabulum about the industry being in line with your passions, your calling in life. Let’s be honest, you don’t really want to enter this field, you just need a job. Like a kid applying to work at Burger King or Best Buy. Maybe you’ll be excited for the first few days, weeks, even months, but you’ll eventually hate this job like you’ve hated every other job you’ve ever had. Yeah, me too. I hate this job. But I like being rich. I like laughing all the way to the bank.”

“Lately, I’ve been meeting a lot of people with that same hobby.”

## **6. What are your goals?**

“‘Facilitate’ is a word you should say no matter how you answer this question: ‘To facilitate the growth of the mergers & acquisitions department.’ ‘To use my position to facilitate a relationship with overseas markets.’ ‘To facilitate intercourse with the hot girl at the front desk.’ Let’s get real, your only goal should be to not lose your job, maybe occasionally get a raise. Aside from that, fuck facilitating goals at this place.”

## **7. What kind of salary are you looking for?**

“We hope you’re an idiot and want something lower than we’re gonna offer. You want something too audacious,

we don't want you. You'll be too hard to control and we'll assume you're always looking for something better.

"Here's a pen and Post-it note. Write the salary you're looking for, fold it in half, then slowly slide it across the desk. The books say I shouldn't embarrass you by making you say anything aloud."

I wrote an audacious number down, 300% larger than my previous salary and 500% larger than my unemployment "salary." Big Richard held the Post-it just under his eyelid.

"I'm going to look at this but I'm not going to offer any comment, good or bad. Instead, I will make a series of histrionic facial expressions which you will try to decipher in order to figure out what I think of your request."

Big Richard looked at the Post-it. His expressions over the next ten seconds went, in order: curiosity, slight shock, concern, thoughtfulness, confusion, anger, sadness, happiness, elation, post-coital sleepiness.

"Good. We'll fly that up the HR flagpole and see if anyone salutes it. Now one final question:

## **8. Do you have any questions for me?**

"Long as you ask a question you pass. A normal person would say, 'No. Think you covered everything' because, indeed, I did cover all the bases and only a moron would still need to know any thing. But job interviews are about finding the smartest moron. So ask any question you can so I can tell the big wigs—not the big Whigs like Zachary Taylor—that you asked a question in the 'Do you have any questions?' portion of this interview. Ask about accrued vacation days, our profit sharing program, health

care benefits (please see **Footchapter 13-A: How to Be a Hypochondriac Without Health Care**)..."

"Where did you get your tie, Big Richard?"

"That's a question! Had a question mark at the end of it. If we were Spanish it would have an upside down question mark. It would be acceptable on *Jeopardy!* You pass. It's from Lord & Taylor. The Pat Sajak Collection. I like your tie too. Macy's? Phil Jackson Collection?"

"Century 21. Annie Lennox Collection."

Big Richard reached his hand across the table to shake mine.

"We really thank you for coming in."

With each handshake pump, Big Richard brought me to my feet like I was a car jack lifting up a flat. When I was fully erect, he walked me to the door.

"You did a great job today."

"It was...fun."

I had barely spoken.

"Don't forget, the second you get home, write me a thank you note. Classy stationary, never e-mail. I won't read the card and will just throw it in the trash, but it's a must you send it. It'll do nothing to facilitate you getting the job, but don't send me a note and these books tell me your chances of getting hired will be irrevocably scarred."

"Note. Noted." I nodded.

"You'll hear from us by Monday."

"Great!"

"I'm lying, of course. You'll hear nothing from us by Monday. Tuesday or Wednesday either. You'll get nervous, start second guessing yourself. 'I guess I screwed the pooch. Guess they didn't like me.' You'll start consulting your job



interview books, asking your friends, 'Should I contact them? See what's up?' 'What could it hurt?' your friends will say. 'If you don't have the job, no big deal. If they're still on the fence, you'll have shown initiative and they'll admire that.' These clowns never consider a third option: we do want to hire you, we've just been too lazy to go through with it. Bugging us on the phone just makes you look needy. We hate needy and I hate answering the phone. Please don't bug me, I assure you, you will be contacted. Or not."

Big Richard opened his office door.

"Now hurry outside to call your mommy to dissect everything I said."

“Did you do well, honey?”

“The guy loved me. He barely made me talk.”

“Well, you’ll have to thank your father for taking you to that great networking event.”

“I will, Mom.”

“Think they’re going to make you an offer?”

“I’d imagine so.”

“For a guy who hasn’t had a job in a year—and who was lying to his dear mother about that—you don’t sound enthused.”

“I am. The job just seems a little boring.”

“Boring is fine, Stuart. Not having health care for the last 295 days is not fine.”

“I’ve seen no need to waste \$380 a month on a private carrier.”

“That’s really stupid, honey.”

“I’m what they call an ‘invincible.’ Young adult males that simply don’t need health care unless they break a leg or get AIDS.”

“Don’t be so certain you won’t.”

“I got basic rules I follow to assure I stay healthy,

Mom. I trod very carefully through life. Walking.”

“Walking is fine as long as you don’t jaywalk. Use crosswalks only, honey. Better yet, never even step off the curb. What if you get hit by a car?”

“I just take square laps around my building all day.”

“During those laps, don’t walk too close to the buildings. What if loose materials, a poorly installed AC, a curious cat, or a suicidal leaper lands on you?”

“I got that covered, Mom. I wear a helmet at all times like I’m a retarded five-year-old. Gloves, elbow and knee pads, and shin guards too.”

“You’re forgetting a cup, Stuart. Underneath that you should wear a condom too.”

“Mom!”

“Just in case. Perhaps two. You can get them at the free STD clinic if you don’t want to spend money.”

“What about my balls? Should I wrap them in Saran wrap? Wear a dental dam at all times in case inadvertent cunnilingus befalls me?”

“Now you’re being absurd, honey. Just be sure to avoid skanky women.”

“Only virgins? Virgin orphans, for that matter. I can’t afford to get in a fight with an angry former virgin’s overprotective male relatives.”

“You can’t get into fights at all. Only go to bars, restaurants, libraries, and religious facilities where you’re certain you can kick everyone’s butt, honey.”

“They’ll need to be certain of that fact too, Mom.”

“Don’t be a wiseass to people. Don’t be rude, don’t stare, don’t hit on their girlfriends, don’t bring up their mother, even in a positive way, and absolutely don’t wear a

Red Sox cap.”

“What else? I can’t visit leper colonies. Even if I hear about a great Zagat-rated restaurant there.”

“Don’t visit anything. Don’t ride in a car, a train, a bus. Just keep slowly walking around that same square block.”

“At least my square block has good restaurants.”

“Don’t participate in sports, especially X-treme ones. No skateboarding or skiing or jai alai. Run in place and swim in your bathtub to stay fit.”

“I’m considering living solely on the internet.”

“Watch out for carpal tunnel, though. Use ergonomic furniture.”

“I’m eating all my meals in. From bland cuisines that run zero risk for food poisoning. Which won’t crack my teeth since I have no dental coverage either. I can get delivery, but only from restaurants that use delivery men of a race that won’t try to stick me up. Thus, only unbuttered whole grain toast from the diner that employs Guatemalans.”

“Quit drinking. Only have filtered water. Quit smoking. Sugar free candy cigarettes, if need be, to satisfy your oral fixation. Shower and brush your teeth every hour to stave off disease. Douse your body in Purell every other hour to fight off bacteria.”

“I’ve already starting using Purell to masturbate!”

“Don’t! If it gets inside your urethra you will get an infection that will necessitate pricy antibiotics.”

“That about covers it all, huh, Mom?”

“Quite frankly, Stuart, you should never leave your house again until you get a job and health care.” She exhaled. “So are you going to take this position, honey?”

“I think I’m planning on it.”

But only because I had a bump on my penis which was either an STD from Katie or an ingrown hair or cancer or any other number of things which I self-diagnosed via a website for hypochondriacs. I was going to need a health care plan. My mom was right.

“Hurt yourself, pal?”

“No. Why?”

“You’re limping.”

I stood in a circle drinking bottled mineral water with Keith and Jack who drank Coronas, which is essentially just marginally alcoholic dirty water. Agua.

“Guess I’m sore from that half marathon I ran yesterday.”

“Which one, Stu? The Yonkers Fun Run? The Battery Park Classic? I’ve thought about doing the Teddy Roosevelt Road Race myself.” Keith was intrigued.

“Just ran one for the heck of it.”

“Just for the heck of it?” Jack was surprised.

“Been trying to get back in shape and thought it was time to try a long distance run.”

“Why not enter an actual mini-marathon? Or marathon?”

“I don’t need that, Jack. Don’t need a number safety-pinned to my tank top. Don’t need to claim a plastic medal at the finish line. Don’t need my name listed on the internet, 917th place in my age group. And I don’t need

friends to come out, waste their busy Saturdays standing on the side of a blocked-off road cheering me on for the five seconds I pass by them.”

“Erin and I would have been happy to come out and support you.”

“Kirsten and I too. It would have been Anna’s first mini-marathon! We would have even made signs.”

“I appreciate it, guys. But it was something I wanted to do for myself.”

“Well, you look healthy.”

“Best I’ve seen you look in forever.”

“Thanks. I’m gonna go get a lemonade.”

I limped away. I hadn’t realized I had apparently looked so shitty. My only goal in resuming exercise was to kill some time in my boring day and to make myself highly fuckable again. And, true, I wasn’t drinking any How to Fail Ale this afternoon and I had run a mini-marathon, but I’m sure my weight loss was more a result of being worried sick about where my life was headed. About my inevitable dick cancer. I’d had the bump for a few weeks now and though it hadn’t gotten any bigger, it was causing me to limp. Which was quite possibly a psychosomatic side effect, though, if you suspect something is psychosomatic, can it truly be?

Danny and ME were hosting a Labor Day BBQ at their new place in Pleasantville, New York. They had upgraded to a five bedroom now that the papers had finally gone through in adopting an Israeli baby.

ME had gone a bit crazy and had begun wearing padding under her clothes to make her feel more like she was actually the one giving birth. This was a new radical form of adoption created by some quack doctor from Ossining.

With such a high rate of children being mistreated by their adoptive parents, he thought adoptive mothers would be more loving of their non-related children if they underwent the same rigors as birth mothers.

Dr. Worthington encouraged adoptive mothers to slowly begin padding their bellies in correlation to what they might look like were they actually at certain stages of pregnancy. Of course, Dr. Worthington's company was the only place where people could purchase these faux-pregnancy pads (available in first trimester, five months, and then each month thereafter until term, all available on his website). He also encouraged would-be mothers to binge on oddly craved food (he offered a delivered meal plan on his website, as well), to force men on the subway to relinquish their seats, and for these mothers' husbands to wait on them hand and foot.

ME sat in a cushy pool chair drinking a virgin daiquiri. I smiled toward her, Erin, and Kirsten just as ME shouted at Danny: "You know I can't have salmon! Too much mercury. No aged cheeses, either! Just bring me the damn cocktail olives!"

I was curious if Dr. Worthington's plan explained how ME would soon give birth to a nine-month-old Israeli with a fuller head of curly hair than Billy Crystal circa *Soap*. I prayed they didn't give the kid another bris for authenticity purposes.

I was already sick of eating croque madames and kosher pigs in a tallit, sick of not drinking, sick of listening to conversations about work and politics and the economy. I entered Danny and ME's new pad to look for something interesting to do.



The kitchen was nice. Big enough I could probably move off My Lesbian Wingman's couch and into the space beneath the island. The interior had more square feet than many Manhattan studios and all it was being used for was crock pots and rice cookers they got as wedding gifts.

I limped into Danny's man cave room, awestruck by a 85" flatscreen mounted on the wall, flanked by a 58" on either side, thinking about the piece of shit 29" tube TV I'd tossed from my storage space, now surely at the Staten Island garbage dump.

I stared at the electronic wonderment, wondering if I would I ever get any of this in my life.

Would I ever get the stainless steel beer fridge and kegerator?

Would I ever get the closet full of designer suits, the electronic tie rack with five dozen beautiful nooses on it, the drawer of pricy cufflinks commemorating swank events I'd attended?

Would I ever get the California King canopy bed?

Would I ever get the jacuzzi bathtub, the toilet with the heated seat so you didn't get a chilly ass in winter, the bidet?

Would I ever get a garage stocked with a Lexus, a fishing boat, a set of Callaway irons?

Would I ever get the Tag Heuer watch?

Would I ever get the wife in a Lilly Pulitzer sundress?

Would I ever get the frolicking toddlers, running around, being admired, being a mess?

If failure isn't instantaneous, then neither is success. Unless you win the lottery, or get drafted by the Lakers, or impregnated by George Clooney, you don't go from being a

nobody to a success overnight.

If failure is a few errors in judgment repeated every day for years, then success must be a few correct decisions repeated again and again and again. Yet, I can still pinpoint the exact day I grew apart from Danny and ME and the others. It was on a Memorial Day weekend, seven years earlier, part of Fleet Week in New York City, and we were at a long forgotten dive bar, The Town Fool, in the Meatpacking District.

We habitually went to the Town Fool because they had five buck pitchers of Miller High Life and we loved the smell of vomit on a Saturday night. Skanky cheapskate women also went there which was why it was the last place I would have expected Danny to pick up his future wife. The last place you would have expected ME to hang out at. But that fateful night, amidst partying sailors, she was there on some sort of slumming-it bar crawl. And from that point on, our lives quickly diverged, like chimpanzees splitting from humans so long ago in sub-saharan Africa. Did chimps ever forlornly look at us and go, "I could have had that!"

One day you're a bunch of apes walking around throwing shit at each other, the next, you realize you're still a chimp while your buddy thinks he's a holier-than-thou Neanderthal about to create fire, use tools, invent the wheel.

One day Danny, Keith, Jack, and I are trying to get as laid as possible, the next, they are happy to have sex once a month with their wives.

One day we're scraping together coins to buy a pizza, the next, they're bitching about \$180 prix fixes.

One day we're trying to figure out whether a twelve dollar pitcher or a fifteen dollar bucket of beers is

a better deal, the next, I'm being asked whether I'd like my glass freshened from a \$125 bottle of single malt or a \$90 bottle of blended.

One day we're considering going to Thailand because we hear the drugs are cheap and the women cheaper, the next, they're considering going to Portland, Maine because it's a great B & B town.

One day we're counting down the hours until five PM, the next, they're ecstatic they don't have to work on Saturdays.

One day we're trying to score some morning-after pills ASAP, the next, they're discussing their favorite children's programming.

Call me cruel, call me rude, but these people weren't my people any more. I wasn't theirs. Instead of networking to gain more friends, more contacts, more acquaintances, I realized it was time to cut and run. To start over with people with the exact same beliefs as me. I needed to quit cramming my round peg into their square lives.

I looked at Danny and ME's house. It was beautiful, but it could have really used a new paint job.

## 14 | **HOW TO FAIL** TO FAIL

Subtitles appear on the screen: “SIX MONTHS LATER.”

The bride wore a...I don't know, white dress with straps and shit. Do I look like a critic for *Veils and Trains*? The other bride wore a white pants suit type thingy.

I took my seat at the amphitheater on Lake Champlain. I turned to my right to see Ash and Trevor perusing the program. I wanted to crawl into a hole, I wanted to avoid her, I wanted to insult her, but instead, all I could manage was: “Who invited you?!”

“Brandi is a frat brother of Trevor’s.”

Trevor butted in: “At Bard, we didn’t believe in exclusionary policies in our extracurriculars.”

Oh. How convenient.

“You look well, Stu. Like you’ve lost some weight.”

Ash looked like she had gained about ten pounds. Trevor looked like he had gained about twenty-five hairs in his soul patch.

“What’s it been..?” Ash rolled her eyes to the back of her head that way people do when they’re pretending

to do basic math, as if there's an abacus somewhere between their nasal and lacrimal cavities. "Fifteen months?"

My silence was awkward but I refused to break it. My ex-girlfriend nervously struggled to think of more to say. Finally: "I heard you're doing well."

"I am."

"I heard you're living in a ritzy high rise on Broadway."

"True."

"I heard you're raking in the dough."

"Doe as in deer?"

"Dough as in moolah."

"Very true."

"I heard you've been dating a supermodel."

"That's not quite true. She's not super though she's hardly subpar. She's a superb-model."

"I heard you've finally become the success you thought you would."

Ash exhaled deeply. She always did that when she was conflicted.

"I don't know how to say this, Stu, but..."

Ash turned toward Trevor who played BrickBreaker on his cell.

"...you need to hear this too, Trevor."

"I was about to break my personal record, but competition doesn't mean anything to me so it's no big deal if I end the game," noted Trevor as he pocketed his Blackberry.

"Trevor, you are the kindest man I have ever met, but I have lost the spark for you."

"No biggie. I don't believe in the monopolization of

sex or love. Worse than Microsoft or the World Bank.”

“How could you date this buffoon?” I wondered.

“I don’t know. I made a mistake. I don’t want to be your ex-girlfriend any more.”

“You want to be my ex-ex-girlfriend?”

“Exactly.”

I paused in thought. Ash was decent, but that superb-model I was dating was so much better. The only reason to take back Ash would be out of pure ego.

“Hey!”

I turned to see Dough (pronounced Doug) vigorously slapping me on the back.

“Dough?”

“To quote Rowan, or was it Martin? ‘You bet your sweet bippy.’”

“Uh...nice cummerbund, Dough.”

“My wife said men wear vests, nowadays, but nothing beats a classic ‘bund in my opinion.”

“What are you doing here? How are you doing here?”

“My wife teaches with Brandi’s mom.”

“That’s enough to get a wedding invite nowadays?”

Dough (pronounced Doug) shrugged.

“I was excited to see you and I just needed to approach. Whoa, I’m nervous! Ya see...I owe you an apology. We should have never laid you off. You were the only one in the department that had,” Dough (pronounced Doug) looked around conspiratorially, “his shit together.”

“How so?”

“Don’t know if you’ve heard, but the office went on a precipitous decline after we let you go. We’ve heard about

your remarkable success of late and can't help wondering if, well...if you'd come back and run the department. 345% raise from your departing salary. That's 74% more than I understand you are currently making. Plus a signing bonus."

Ash looked impressed, again using her cavity abacus to estimate my current salary.

"Hey! Hey! Hey!"

I spun to see Danny & ME, Jack & Kirsten, and Keith & Erin. I hadn't seen them since that Labor Day debacle. I handshook the men. I kiss helloed the women.

"You guys don't know Bonnie or Brandi."

"Au contraire," noted Keith.

Danny: "I played Ultimate Frisbee with Brandi in grad school."

ME: "I drew up Bonnie's will."

Jack: "We have the same acupuncturist."

Kirsten: "I met them both in Whole Food's produce section and now we share recipes."

Erin: "We're in the same bookclub."

Keith: "I'm Erin's plus-one. Hey, Stu, we need to say something to you."

"Yes...?"

"We were wrong to have that intervention with you. All along, you had your eye on the prize. You were several moves ahead of us. Playing chess while we played checkers. Now, you're richer and more successful than all of us."

"I don't know what to say. I'm stunned." I didn't know what to say. I was stunned.

"Son!"

"Honey!"

I spun to see my father, my mother, and Sissy.

“Look, bro! No scrubs!”

My sister was wearing the first non-scrubs outfit I’d seen her in since her vet school graduation. She looked good in a dress. Her Israeli boyfriend quietly stood off to the side in his Air Force dress suit. Stunning and well-appellated.

“OK, seriously, why are you guys here?”

“Your mother and I happened to be in town for the Networking Olympics and we thought we’d drop by to...”

My mother wore a tiny broach (“Off-Duty Math Teacher”) on the shoulder strap of her dress.

“...to apologize,” noted my mother. “We should have never criticized you. Stifled you. Questioned your decisions. We should have simply encouraged you.”

By now the amphitheater was filled to capacity and everyone had taken their seats, except those gathered around me. The organ music struck up.

“You should probably take your seats,” I said to those gathered ‘round.

“No. You go up to the front and speak,” my dad urged me.

“Yeah, do it, honey,” said my mom.

My friends urged me on too. As did Dough (pronounced Doug).

“Do it for me,” pleaded Ash.

Trevor winked at me. “Go for it, sport.”

I looked at Bonnie standing up the front under the chuppah. She smiled.

I nervously looked at Brandi. A stern look on her face. Then she broke into a small grin. “Go ahead, Stu, please usurp the greatest day of our lives. I mean it.”



They beckoned me to them. I left my seat and approached the front. Bonnie and Brandi kissed me on separate cheeks. With all eyes on me, I cleared my throat. I cleared it some more. Goddamn, was I choking? Larry Lo, dapper in tails, sprinted up and handed me a lozenge.

“I see all the faces out there that have been a significant part of my life for the last year or so. I also see about 95% of you who have no idea who I am and are staring at me like: ‘Is he seriously fucking up this wedding?’ although you probably don’t use words like ‘fuck’ even when you’re having thoughts in your own head because you’re good, non-vulgar people that even think G-rated.

“I stand before you because this is the denouement, where I give a long, heartfelt, uninspired, stereotypical speech whereas I detail all I’ve learned and how I have changed for the better. Of course, I could just give this speech to a close friend or two, better yet, keep it inside my head, but that shows no flare for the dramatic.”

I turned toward Brandi and winked. She playfully clenched her fist into a knuckle sandwich as if to say, “Why I oughtta...”

“When we are young we have silly dreams. Dreams of being astronauts and second basemen, of marrying movie stars, living in penthouses, winning Oscars and Nobels, McDonald’s Monopoly pull-off games, and appearing on *Wheel of Fortune*. We have these dreams because we don’t know any better.

“I was a failure until recently because, I too, didn’t know any better. I thought I deserved fame, fortune, and the Boardwalk piece on my supersized soda. It took most of you only eighteen or nineteen years to know better.

To learn this cold dose of reality. But it took me until my thirties and it took the help of a lot of good friends.”

I turned to offer a lipped “Thank you” to every person there I knew.

“Just in case some of you are struggling with my point, I will now summarize the morals I wish to pass onto you. I will do this in a blunt and on-the-nose fashion, so listen up and print this portion out to place above your desk or on your cubicle wall:

“Be as big of a pussy as possible. Never take risks. Have no balls. Follow the status quo. Don’t rock the boat. Don’t dream big. And always make one woman your salvation.

“Do that, and you will make it in this world. *How to Fail?* No way. *How to Succeed?*”

The audience erupted in applause.

The priest stepped forward. “No need to go through with the formalities because, hey, as Mr. Fish might say, what do I know, I’m just a forty-five-year-old virgin!” The priest slapped me on the back before turning to Bonnie and Brandi. “I now pronounce you wife and wife. Kiss your bride!”

Brandi and Bonnie were married and the audience not only applauded louder but started walking to the front to congratulate us all.

I saw Christian: “Your chakra is strong, I see it floating above you like the Goodyear Blimp at the U.S. Open.”

Not to mention Wesley: “You are daring to imagine that you could have a different life!” He winked and leaned in: “*You’ve Got Mail.*”

Everyone from Ash's family gave me a collective, "THANK YOU."

Even Nora Ephron: "I'm retiring from the writing game."

Lynn shouted from the wet bar: "Canju belief they dun't even 'ave any Jamizon 'ere? Fookin' C'ndee-an whiskey."

Then, the crowd parted and Matt Gordon sauntered up.

"I absolutely loved your little speech, Stud. I want to option your life story, with this very scene as the penultimate scene of the book. The first book that is. Because I don't just see *How to Fail* as a one-off, but rather a series. *How to Fail for the Teenage Soul*, *How to Fail for the African-American Soul*, *How to Fail for the Expectant Mother's Soul*, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera! Of course, you won't have to write those, we'll get a ghostwriter that can copy your voice, but you'll still get your name on the cover, plus resid. We'll do *How to Fail: The Major Motion Picture* and a *How to Fail* HBO miniseries which will be bigger than that suckfest John Adams one. Ooh, and *How to Fail* the Broadway musical. For that we'll get you a possessive on the marquee. *Stud Fish's How to Fail*. Tyler Perry will feel like such a fucking loser. Merchandise too. Action figures and ring tones and video games and all that shit. Whadaya say?"

Whadal say?

"Whadaya say, sweetheart?" Ash wrapped her arms around me, wanting the most potent kiss of her life.

I say...

I say...

I say...that of course that didn't really happen.

F. Scott Fitzgerald said “There are no second acts in American lives” but he was wrong. There are no acts in life.

We sometimes forget our lives aren’t movies. Lives aren’t neatly tied together at social engagements where people play dress up. Our lives are not stocked with characters. They are full of real people with their own motives, dreams, lives. Lives don’t follow an Aristotelian drama pyramid. They don’t have a commercialized plot. Life is chaotic and unscripted. Not everyone becomes a success. Or, even a failure. Most people just are. They don’t even consider what they are. They just are.

Though this is the end of my book, it is not the end of my life. I didn’t know anyone at Bonnie and Brandi’s wedding because why would I? It was a standard boring wedding, yet, it was so beautiful, just like a Poconos sunrise. I didn’t make a dramatic ass of myself, I just sat and enjoyed it, had a few beers, did a little dancing.

In the last six months, I hadn’t accepted that job from Big Richard. I didn’t care if it would make me more money than I’d ever had before. It wouldn’t have made me happy. Arnie and I started a little house painting business, painting houses out in Westchester and Long Island, beginning with Danny and ME’s place. It was easy, peaceful work, made us a few bucks, and gave us plenty of free time. I had finally gotten back into writing, and Arnie, coincidentally, happened to be amazing on the phone. He was actually a kickass networker and, as my new manager, spent his free time trying to sell my writing projects. He really believed in me. That felt so good.

We moved into a tiny two bedroom in Astoria. We stored our painting supplies in one room, did our writing

and managerial work in the other room, and each slept on separate couches in the living room. One week, I got the sofa while he slept on the love seat, we'd flip the next week. I was always better rested and more productive those weeks I got the couch. But I was always happy now. I was an American success, goddammit.

## EPILOGUE | **HOW TO WRITE**

A SUCCESSFUL BOOK AND BECOME RICH

Clifton Hillegass was born in Nebraska in 1919 and attended Midland Lutheran College where he liked to enjoy temperance beverages, wear beaver skin clothing, and go to ice cream socials. A math and sciences major, Clifton must have hated English, because upon graduating, he opened a publishing company for the express purpose of condensing literary classics into concise volumes, dubbing them *Cliff's Notes*, and allowed the next fifty years of high school and college idiots to never have to read another book again.

Of course, *Cliff's Notes* made Clifton a very rich man. And, even though he's dead, I don't like his estate potentially earning any more money off of my book, so I'll offer my own note. There's just one:

Success is what you make it.

I wonder what Cliff would think about the current state of literature? Would he even see a need to make *Notes* for the books coming out nowadays? Were they even worth studying, remembering, saving?

If you've read something old, like an old edition of the Bible or *The Canterbury Tales*, you know that, though

it kinda looks like our modern language, it isn't completely the same. It's written in Old English, and I don't mean the malt liquor.

Around the late fifth century, Germanic forces invaded England and caused the local Celtic Brythonic language to slowly begin forming the English language we know and marginally love today. Language is still evolving. Or devolving, if you'd rather.

As our language currently devolves, people have begun writing in a completely different way:

- little capitalization
- little punctuation
- bad grammar
- shortening of words (ie. u for you, ur for your)
- and a litany of acronyms LOL, all to, as quickly as possible (ASAP!), deliver a message, usually trying to fit it under a certain character limit, usually numbering either 140 or 160.

One day this sentence you are reading will be considered Old English, and *The Canterbury Tales* Old Old English, and modern people will laugh at these sentences the same way we laugh at "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote, the droghte of March hath perced to the roote."

In the New English, the previous sentence will be written: wen tht ap. w/ shors soote, drot mar. h/ pcd 2 root

Eventually, written communication will be whittled down to simply emoticons. By then, tangible books won't exist so if you want to read something, for either education or entertainment, you'll call the work up on your hand-held device and...

:O :-D :-P :X :(

That was a chapter from a Gerald Ford biography, *Swell Guy*.

:-\* (3( oo>(( :O :) (--)(--)zzzzZZZZZZ

That was from a steamy romance novel entitled *Duvet Rendezvous*.

\*& &C )))# 2D\*\* (()

That's the first chapter from my book, *How to Fail*.

Yes, I would become famous by saving literature. By writing an awesome book that people actually wanted to read. Even cool people that get chicks and stuff. I should have never been a screenwriter in the first place. I should have always been writing prose. It's what made me happy. Whether a billion people read what I wrote, or whether only me and Arnie did.

Now being happy with who I am is hunky-dory and all, but...I still want to be rich and famous. I guess I really haven't learned any lessons from the past fourteen chapters. I mean, I brush my teeth more often and I haven't been mistaken for a bum in 382 days and counting. I only have protected monogamous sex with a great girl I met at Brandi and Bonnie's wedding. I've cut down on the drinking, and I'm healthy, happy, and look fantastic. I even purchased health care.

But I still want to be rich and famous. I still want



to one day autograph this book to you with a special note (though no Bible verse citation). You've already done your part in helping facilitate my road to richness by reading this book, but now you can help spread the love further by posting an overwhelmingly positive review of my book on Amazon.com.

I won't lie, I've read thousands of books in my lifetime and never once posted a review on Amazon. On the other hand, I've read tens of thousands of reviews written by others, which have very much helped inform my purchases. I wouldn't dare ask you do something I wouldn't, that's why I've made it easy for you, by providing these forms.

### **Please fill out before proceeding:**

Adjective: \_\_\_\_\_

Something a fisherman does: \_\_\_\_\_

Part of a book: \_\_\_\_\_

Same part of a book: \_\_\_\_\_

Word that rhymes with "door de source": \_\_\_\_\_

Adjective of a negative connotation: \_\_\_\_\_

Term relating to labyrinths or perhaps even mazes: \_\_\_\_\_

Characters: \_\_\_\_\_

Literary technique: \_\_\_\_\_

Smallish unit of time: \_\_\_\_\_

Punctuation that ISN'T a period, comma, colon, semi-colon, or question mark: \_\_\_\_\_

Bodily function: \_\_\_\_\_

Body part: \_\_\_\_\_

Things bodies do with other bodies: \_\_\_\_\_

Classic work of fiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Synonym for meager: \_\_\_\_\_

Author of previous classic work: \_\_\_\_\_

Number between one and one-hundred: \_\_\_\_\_

Group of people: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_

Next, close your eyes and pick a number between 1 and 3. Got it? Good. Now go to that number and fill in your above words in the appropriate spots.

#1

“How to Fail” is a/an \_\_\_\_\_ book that \_\_\_\_\_  
adjective something that a fisherman does  
 you in from the very first \_\_\_\_\_ and won’t let you put it  
part of a book  
 down til the very last \_\_\_\_\_. In this  
same part of a book  
 \_\_\_\_\_, the unnamed narrator helps the readers  
word that rhymes with “door de source”  
 piece together his own \_\_\_\_\_ life. The author’s  
adjective of a negative connotation  
 \_\_\_\_\_ plot and the addition of  
term relating to labyrinths or perhaps even mazes  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and the frightening use of \_\_\_\_\_  
characters literary technique  
 make the story all the more enjoyable. An utter laugh a  
 \_\_\_\_\_. This perfect mix of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
smallish unit of time bodily function body part  
 and \_\_\_\_\_ jokes help to create a highly diverse  
things bodies do with other bodies  
 story like no other, not even a sui generis work such as  
 \_\_\_\_\_. By reading “How to Fail,” you will never  
classic work of fiction  
 be able to feel, think, and look at \_\_\_\_\_ works by  
synonym for meager  
 piddling authors such as \_\_\_\_\_ in the same  
author of previous classic work  
 way ever again. I plan on buying \_\_\_\_\_ additional  
number between one and 100  
 copies to hand out to \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_.  
group of people holiday

#2

The \_\_\_\_\_ “How to Fail” is so incredibly sexy that you can  
adjective

\_\_\_\_\_ hot chicks with it just by dangling a  
something a fisherman does  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in front of them. Although, sometimes it may also  
part of a book  
 take your creepy friend to simultaneously be dangling another  
 \_\_\_\_\_ behind them, ha ha. Which would truly be THE  
same part of a book  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of pleasurable activity in your other-  
word that rhymes with "door de source"  
 wise \_\_\_\_\_ life. But, after reading this book, your  
adjective of negative connotation  
 life will vastly improve, and not in some \_\_\_\_\_  
term relating to labyrinths or perhaps mazes  
 way but in something simpler than that. In \_\_\_\_\_ you  
characters  
 will now have friends for 350 starting pages of \_\_\_\_\_  
literary technique  
 who might even cause you to make a mess in your pants in just a  
 \_\_\_\_\_. You'll be so addicted to this book \_\_\_\_\_ You'll prefer  
smallest unit of time punctuation  
 it to even \_\_\_\_\_ or touching your \_\_\_\_\_ or  
bodily function body part  
 \_\_\_\_\_ or even going to a book burning, not because  
things to do with other bodies  
 you're religious or something but because you like to burn shitty  
 books such as \_\_\_\_\_ by such a \_\_\_\_\_ au-  
classic work of fiction synonym for meager  
 thor as \_\_\_\_\_. You'll burn \_\_\_\_\_ other  
author of previous classic work number between one and 100  
 classic books too because they all pale in comparison to "How to  
 Fail." Shit, they might even have to make you and your  
 \_\_\_\_\_'s book burnings into a national holiday which would  
group of people  
 be even bigger than \_\_\_\_\_.  
holiday

## #3

yo i just finished reading the \_\_\_\_\_ motherfucking book in  
adjective  
 my hole life. ill b honest, i dont normally read and shit because that  
 stuff is for fruts that also like to \_\_\_\_\_ with homos  
something a fisherman does  
 using stuff like \_\_\_\_\_ and other implements. da  
part of a book  
 \_\_\_\_\_ about that \_\_\_\_\_ was da  
same part of the book word that rhymes with "door de source"  
 shit i don't even think i used that last \_\_\_\_\_ word  
adjective of negative connotation

correctly. my walk home today was all \_\_\_\_\_  
term relating to labyrinths or perhaps a maze  
 and shit and i kinda felt like \_\_\_\_\_. i apologish, dis is my  
characters  
 1st ever book review and shit and i feel like y'all be like, who this  
 nigga think he is like he some siskel and ebert for books. but i ain't  
 dumb, and ill prove it by getting all serious and saying stuff like that  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in the middle portion of the book was dope. i  
literary technique  
 reread it so many times that i made myself late and only had  
 \_\_\_\_\_ to get readie for my date w/ dat honey that just moved  
smallish unit of time  
 in da spot below me. da I wit da big ass \_\_\_\_\_ she musta liked my  
punctuation  
 flow tho because she didn't care that i did a \_\_\_\_\_ before  
bodily function  
 i unleashed my \_\_\_\_\_ and did some \_\_\_\_\_  
body part things bodies do with bodies  
 all up in her. much more fun that reading shit like \_\_\_\_\_  
classic work of fiction  
 . you ever heard of that book?? you should see the picture of the  
 \_\_\_\_\_ author on the back cover. \_\_\_\_\_  
synonym for meager author of previous classic  
 trying to look all serious and shit LOL. "how 2 fail" is much better  
 than his shit and if all books was this good ida read at least  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of dem in my life. alright im out, gonna go hang  
number between one and 100  
 with \_\_\_\_\_ and that big ass girl i done previously  
group of people  
 referenced. we gonna lite up fireworks like its \_\_\_\_\_.  
holiday

Good. Now visit Amazon.com and add your  
 "personal" review to this book's page via a cut and paste  
 job. But how do we "cut and paste" from a physical book  
 onto a digital screen? Good question. I guess you should  
 probably get a Kindle or an iPad. They're really cool, not that  
 I can afford one just yet.



# ABOUT **THE AUTHOR**

AARON GOLDFARB

Aaron Goldfarb has written screenplays and stageplays, most notably *The Honey Trap*. He lives in New York. He thinks authors who try to be funny in their bios are lame. He has a collection of short stories about the sexes, sex, and sexiness in New York called *The Cheat Sheet*. *How to Fail: The Self-Hurt Guide* is his first novel.

Chat with him at [aaron@aarongoldfarb.com](mailto:aaron@aarongoldfarb.com).



"GOLDFARB'S SATIRE TURNS THE GENRE ON ITS EAR... WARPS IT LIKE A FUN-HOUSE MIRROR, TO HYSTERICAL EFFECT. **PISS-YOURSELF FUNNY.**"

—The Philadelphia Lawyer, *Happy Hour is for Amateurs*

## HOW TO FAIL: THE SELF-HURT GUIDE

a novel by AARON GOLDFARB

*How to Fail* is the world's FIRST Self-Hurt Guide, the polar opposite of a self-help guide. In *How to Fail* follow the misadventures, misgivings, and massive mistakes of this satiric novel's narrator Stu Fish as he tries to find success in 2010 New York. With hilarious chapters such as *How to Fail to Make Your Parents Proud of You*, *How to Fail to Do Something Productive All Day*, *How to Fail in Love*, and *How to Fail All the Way to Rock Bottom*, and even more ribald "footchapters" such as *How to Masturbate at Work*, *How to Develop an Addiction*, *How to Get Usurped by Your Girlfriend's Ex*, and *How to Acquire the STD That's Right for You*, there's not an aspect of life that *How to Fail* doesn't tackle and offer a terrific non-solution for. All of this is delivered in perfect single serving-size chapters for our modern A.D.D. culture more used to reading blog entries on their phone while riding the subway or waiting in line at Subway than in carefully reading a book.



"Attention mom, The Pope, rabbis, priests, and future would-be employers everywhere: nasty word warning! *How to Fail* is lurid and HILARIOUS."

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