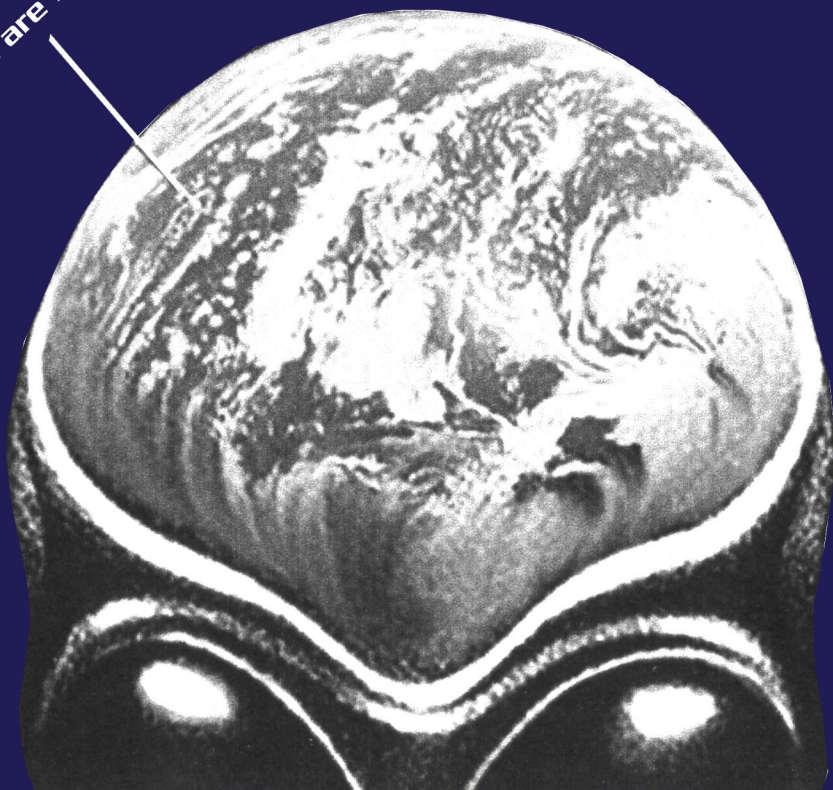


"[A] wild ride with many curves and loops...fascinating" JIM MARRS
author of *Rule by SECRECY*, *Alien Agenda*, and *Crossfire*

I KNOW WHY THE ALIENS DON'T LAND!

you are here



Jeremy Vaeni

I K N O W W H Y

the aliens don't land!

Other Titles by Norm De Plume

Peeing On The Side of The Road Less Traveled

*Honorable Mention: My Life of Failure
and the Ribbons I Wear*

Armchair Psychology for the Self-Help Addict

Anger Management for Dummies

*Free Space: The Real Life Story
of a Bingo Queen*

The Idiot's Guide To Gettin' Laid!

I K N O W W H Y
the aliens don't land!

Jeremy Voeni

Kynegion House

Kynegion House

© 2003 Jeremy Vaeni
All rights reserved.

ISBN 0-9746854-0-2

Cover design: Raphael Lino

Printed in Canada

*To Whitley Strieber, without whom I might not be here
today...and to my father, without whom I would not.*

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Jim Marrs for having the courage to review something slightly left of his field; Whitley Strieber for showing me how to work around copyright issues. *The Hartford Courant* for use of their article, and Ken Wilbur for leading me to Krishnamurti, who lead me to....

Very special thanks to Khurram Hussain who, when asked if this collection of pages even works as a book, not only said yes but got—and kept—the ball rolling on its production; to Raphael Lino, who drew the ball for less than food; and to Kim Kahne and Umber Libero, who proofed...um...the ball. (Does that work in the metaphor? I can never tell.) Also, Ahren Patrick, thank you for the sex—funding! Thank you for the funding!

Finally, to Edwin Vaeni for his early support of my creative endeavors; Mary Vaeni for her later support of my creative endeavors, and Kara-Lynn Vaeni for raising the bar on what it means to create. This book is too self-involved to say what is always true: I LOVE YOU.

Prologue

Jeremy and I first became aware of one another in the summer of 1994. I thought he was a strange fellow right off the bat. We shared political and comic sensibilities but he had something else in him, some unnamable thing. A quality? A concern? I never bothered to ask.

At the time I was working on a crude answer to author Dave Barry's witless claptrap hogging up space on bookshelves at unsuspecting stores. *My* witless claptrap was titled, *Not Just Another Lame Humor Book*. Sadly it was never published. That's the main reason why when Jeremy caught up with me in December 2000 and asked me to help him with this project, I was an easy recruit. He told me my role would be as an interviewer in a book about him. Naturally I had to ask, "A book about you? You're twenty-seven years old! What could you possibly have to say?" He smiled at me and told me I could have a whole section to write whatever I wanted. I had no idea what my rantings could possibly have to do with him, but...okay. I was in.

Honestly what, though? Here is a man who used to come up with twisted truisms like, "Beauty is only fat deep," and "He who shampoos his pubic hair never gets laid." Here is a man who would make funny offhanded racist and sexist remarks in one breath, yet in the next denounce not only racism and sexism but also people who make those kinds of jokes then hide their obvious prejudices behind the word "joke."

I called him a hypocrite once and he said, "No. Fart jokes and witticisms are both that entity called 'comedy.' Comedy is comedy."

That was it.

You know what would make a great joke is if this thing

10 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

were only funny to me. Unfortunately, I'm certain that won't be the case. He's stupid but he ain't that stupid.

So what does he have to say? We may never find out because I'm not a professional interviewer, so my questions might lack whatever discipline goes into the task of skilled inquiry. Here's hoping he has a plan for that, too.

Norm De Plume

April, 2001

An Introduction That Is the Conclusion

stop reading now!

Do not merely read this book. Witness it. When you witness the whole you can always go back and read for amusement. The reverse is not true. You cannot grasp the whole from reading with the intent to read.

This book is as much me as it is you. Whatever brings us to the table together—whether you want to hear dirt on celebrities or political espousing or why the aliens don't land—chuck it. You will not learn anything that is not inside you already. If you do learn something that is not inside you already then that knowledge is unimportant.

This book claims to be a true story. If it is true then there is no protagonist, no matter how many times I set myself up as such. This is one example of how it is in your best interest not to accept or deny anything within these pages. Again, don't read; witness openly, that is, without prejudicial leanings. Leave your past, your conditioning, at the open door.

And do not walk through.

My youth was filled with very human and not-so-human concerns. Both are we. What does that mean where aliens are subject? Are they myths? Time travelers? Doctors from afar? Space brothers? Skateboard decals? Kodak commercials? Government smokescreens? Rescuers? Deceivers? Enslavers? All of it? None of it?

12 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

I remember spontaneous fear. Lots of spontaneous fear growing up. My parents separated when I was in third grade. Shortly thereafter I was molested by a downstairs neighbor. It was a one-day thing, not prolonged. I lived with my mother and sister on weekdays and father on weekends. I gained weight and bid farewell to my school grades. This was an immediate result of depression. Depression over the divorce and molestation, clearly.

This fear that I mentioned didn't appear until around sixth or seventh grade. It was a fear of the night. Not of the dark, of the night. When the faceless terror struck me, I had to sleep with my mother. I spent so many nights in her bed she got sick of me and kicked me out. But I couldn't go back to my room so I took up residence on the floor beside her bed. For years I slept there.

It was the same when I visited my dad. When I grew too big for the bed, he made me sleep on the couch. I would scream bloody murder, such was the animal violence of my fear.

My sister was a fine actress at a young age. On those nights Mom brought her to rehearsal, I'd wait until I heard our car pull out of the driveway, then I'd race into the kitchen for the sharpest knives in the drawer. I'd encircle the reclining chair in the living room with the knives and sit there. Alert. Waiting. Terrified of the slightest creak.

In high school I suddenly developed this irrational fear of peeing. Not just in public restrooms but at home, too. This was especially odd because I was used to urinating with the door open around my family, and public bathrooms never made me nervous. Now, out of nowhere, this panic so bad that if I threw a party and had to piss, everyone had to exit the apartment while one friend stood guard.

Where did these irrational fears originate? Now I want to say it was a late reaction to divorce or molestation—I do want to say that. But that isn't the answer. The dysfunctions those two blasts to the psyche produced appeared immediately—cause and effect. This evolving fear was an effect of a cause I couldn't name until now.

For those of you who say alien abductions are bullshit, you are wrong. For those of you who say alien abductions are real, you are wrong. You are both wrong in the same way and you don't even see it. I'll give you a hint why this is so: Fear, like all emotions, is not a collection of incidents. Fear is not fragmentary, it is whole. It is one large expression and it is an illusion. When you see the whole of fear, you see that it is a mirage. In so seeing, fear vanishes.

These aliens, these visitors, these humanoids are every bit as real as you and me. However, in order to see that you have to slough off all your theories and interpretations—all of them. Everything you've read or seen on TV or in movies is fantasy and fantasy is produced by fear and longing—longing, which is fear—so really just fear. And fear, as you know, is an illusion. These are not word games, these are facts.

When you strip away the fantasy you are left with something and that something is not enigmatic. In fact, nothing in life is enigmatic, that's silly. We're done with silly.

Pick a bible, any bible. What have you there? Words? Thoughts? Lies? A tinge of truth, maybe, but it is not truth born of you so it is worthless to you. Realize this; live it.

What about astrology?—Misunderstood language of the sunspot cycle that weakly affects fetal tissue.

What about psychic aptitude?—Latent abilities in most, rooted in biology.

And the list goes on. So what have we left when we've tucked away the "mystical?" We have ego and we have holism. Ego is you using your intellect to interpret experience. It is the delusional dominant thought that thinks it is the thinker. Holism is everything, is all, is the ever-present. Holism transcends ego but is necessarily inclusive of it. Holism does not deny ego but ego denies holism. Holism being everything, ego being you trapped in fear.

Why is that important for this book? Because that **is** this book. When this ego named "Jeremy" runs his course of rationalism, stinky poetry, self-serving diatribes, blame, abusive pseudonyms, and fake belief systems disguised as the path of truth, he is left with one thing: himself.

14 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

But if I am the ego, how can I perceive myself? Because I, you, we am more than ego.

Now having said all that, I promise I'll do my best to keep you entertained. Your job in this inclusive endeavor is to ask yourself how you see the truth of why the aliens don't land. Thus, translating these words into a bunch of shit that makes you feel comfortable or analytical is not part of the job description.

My job is to tell you why that's important in the first place. Are you ready? Of course you are. You were born ready. So here we are at the table together. Let us feast.

Jeremy Vaeni
April, 2001

Chapter 1

Norm: Let's dig right in....

Jeremy: Okay...

N: Taking a cursory glance around your bedroom, the observer can't help but notice two things: an overabundance of Michael Jackson posters—

J: Ha! No such thing!

N: Well...okay.... And an extensive collection of alien abduction or what you would call UFO books.

J: Yes. Actually, you're very observant.

N: Well they're everywhere.

J: Right. But you'd be surprised how few people see either. It's a great experiment in human psychology and in...undermining the illusory agreement we in the West call CONSENSUS REALITY. I've warned friends that my walls are covered with Michael Jackson posters, but time and again, they come over and go, "Nice room." And then I say something like, "You don't find the posters weird?" And they invariably *wake up* to their surroundings, like, "*Holy shit!* you're right!" They literally block out what is all around them because it is so utterly strange that a heterosexual adult male would have wall-to-wall Michael Jackson posters. Then they look around the room in astonishment, like they're lost in some apple-tossing OZ forest. Then comes the nostalgia with some of the older posters. They remember when they liked Michael's music

16 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

and had his posters. Then they accept it on that very premise.

N: So you're saying it's acceptable to them because they used to own Michael Jackson posters?

J: Right. They remember when they had wall-to-wall posters and suddenly I'm not so strange. The connection that never happens is that when they owned these types of displays, they were children. They were in like fourth grade or something, you know?

(Norm laughs)

J: I'm telling you, it's the weirdest thing.

N: So is that why you have them? To be the weirdest thing?

J: No. Michael's an awesome force of Nature. Next question.

N: Okay....

J: I'm kidding. I'll cover this whole Michael obsession later.

N: Then the UFO stuff....

J: Ah, yes. Alien abductions. That's another thing people don't notice on first visit: my books. First the Michael Jackson poster shock cancels out the observer's ability to see anything else. And even when that's not the case, my guests generally see a collection of books and say, "Wow! You read all those? You must be smart!"

N: It's not *that* big a collection.

J: We're a dumbed-down generation, what can I tell you?

N: So what is the fascination?

J: The UFO/abduction phenomenon is ever evolving. It's not like the Loch Ness Monster or Bigfoot or ghosts, where people claim to observe, maybe even interact, with some

non-ordinary thing. The stories of these creatures never evolve. The Loch Ness Monster never leaves the Loch, never whisks people away on its back or flies. Bigfoot howls and shits and runs off. Ghosts.... Well, they're ghosts, aren't they? Creeping people out? Maybe tossing clothes out of one's closet, but never transporting one to Narnia. Never mutilating cattle or manipulating plant cells to bend in kooky patterns in English wheat fields.

N: Not sure I follow the significance. Can't aliens—can't all things that go bump in the night—be explained away in psychological terms?

J: No. Or they haven't been yet, at least. And that's the thing that gets me with abduction phenomena: either humans are interacting with beings of seemingly higher intelligence—and that's the most important event in human history—or there is a worldwide mass delusion going on. And wouldn't that be one of the most important psycho-sociological issues in human history? I mean, where is the science here? Where is the professional wonderment? Even if it's as simple as myth in the making, where are the mythologists? The philosophers? Why is everyone in officialdom so fucking silent and scared when it comes to abductions? It boggles the mind.

N: So your attraction to this phenomenon is purely scientific?

J: No. Nobody obsesses over anything for purely rational reasons. There must be something at stake. Something missing from their lives. Most scientists are like the rats they keep, clawing away at their cages. They need to be unbound. They need to unravel the fabric of our universe. They need the freedom they can visualize to materialize, and they achieve this by attempting to poke holes in space-time or diddling around with biology. I say "attempting to" because true freedom doesn't lie in the accomplishment

18 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

itself. Freedom lies in process.... Am I rambling now or what? *(laughs)*

N: A sure sign you're hiding behind words, is it not?

J: Very good, Norm! So why do I own all those books on abductions and UFO's? What is my obsession? Ask other questions first. I like people to know others things about me before I delve into the sublime. This way they know I'm not a nut.

N: Not a total nut at least. *(laughs)*

J: Or if I am, at least I'm in touch with my childhood. With my feelings.

N: Which segues nicely, then.... Childhood. How'd *that* go?
(both laugh)

J: Hey, wait. That's not funny.

Chapter 2

WHAT he DID TO ME

I don't know what it was that drew me to him. All the other kids warned me, said he was weird. But I felt bad for him. How could they judge this poor man like that? This poor fucking asshole of a man? This married, dysfunctional God-fearing guy?

I couldn't understand.

He used to buy us stuff. All of us. There was a whole neighborhood full of kids for him to love. And smart as I was, I loved back.

I remember the talks we used to have, Jim and I. We chatted about God and Jesus and "The 700 Club," because it was his favorite show on television. The other kids and my sister Kara and everyone didn't like me watching TV with him. But they just thought I was being stupid.

I was stupid.

I was blind.

I was stupid.

So then one day after school I went to his apartment for a visit. He lived two floors below Mom, Kara, and me. Mom and Dad had been separated for months now, so Jim filled the father role nicely. He was the father, I was the son, and this day, he was the holy host. He had a grownup friend over. They conversed about God. His friend left. Jim—my friend—locked the door behind him.

We watched "The 700 Club" for a while. I sat on the brown plush recliner; he lay on the couch.

"I had a hard day at work. Will you rub my feet?" he asked while kicking off his shoes. His feet looked like raw

naked hate screaming for a touch of the child. Something Jim must have lost at a young age.

Where's your wife? Can't she do it?

"Sure," I stuttered timidly. I didn't want to touch him. Didn't want to rub my fingers between his sweaty smelly hairy, middle-aged toes.

But I did. I massaged the ache out of his feet and into my stomach where hundreds of charcoal butterflies flapped about abuse and divorce and...now this.

I don't like this.... I don't like this....

"Would you please rub my back?" he politely requested.

Well how could I possibly resist that, you prick?

I rubbed his back with my precious, tiny, seven-year-old hands. I felt the bumps and moles and smooth spots of the devil's back. Yes, the devil. This was what it was to burn in hell. And Pat Robertson was watching me every step of the way.

"Go lower," Jim instructed.

Lower how? Like your ass? Like I have to rub the crack of your ugly white adult ass?

MOM!

DAD!

Why doesn't God love **me**?

He wants me to—Oh God! He wants me to rub his stomach and then his—

Mother fucker, I will not rub your dick.

—penis! And I do!.... God help me, I do.

It rose and smelled funny and loved me with all its dement. He wanted to do the same to me but my zipper was stuck. I eventually did get it open and he touched me. He fondled my innocence like he were a god.

Maybe he is God. He's the devil; he's Satan. He is aberration, cunning and brutal.

No, he's just a man. A broken human telling me not to let Mom and Dad know or they'll think we're bad people. They'll hate me, he said. They'll send him to a bad place because they don't understand.

But he didn't understand. He must not have known the bad place we were already in. At least I had the option of leaving. And I did. I told him I had to wash the dishes. He let me go.

It would be an entire month before I could admit this incident to anyone. It was hard to comprehend exactly what had happened. It was hard to forgive.

It was difficult finding the piece of me he kept stored in his closet built special for the smiles of children.

Thank God I finally have.

Dear Diary
this weekend
my grandmother
came down to see
me. I went up to
my father's house.
I got a balloon.

Dear Diary I feel like
running away or
killing my self. My
mother and father are
divorced. And things
arent going so well.
My school grades
are going down and
I'm sad. Every thing
else is going wrong to.
And I dont know
what to do. I have
always been sad
and always will be.
I just dont know

what to do, I have
seen a councilor its
done nothing for me,
I need help fast before
I do run away or
kill myself or something
else thats bad, I wish
my mother father or
councilor could help
me, But I just know
noone can help me I
just know it, And right
now I'm not to crazy
about living or life,
The trouble is nobody
likes me or understands
me, Not even my own
family, it may help
if I go to a different school
and I really do need help
before its to late, I just
dont know what on
earth to do, I just wish
someone on earth could help me.

Chapter 3

Norm: So that was childhood?

Jeremy: No-no! That was part of childhood. An important part in the development of...well...me. It was a bad couple of years living in Brockton, Massachusetts. We had our first break-in while on vacation; my parents separated and eventually divorced; I was molested by my favorite downstairs tenant; and some drunken neighbor of a friend smashed me up against a wall and tried to exact a confession out of me.

N: Confession of what?

J: Well, he originally came stumbling up my friend's steps. His nickname was "Tiger" because he was feisty and had freckles. My friend, that is, not the drunk.

N: Gotcha.

J: So this guy picks Tiger up by the shirt collar and starts ranting about how his daughters said he had made them get naked and roll around in the dirt. And wouldn't you know it, just as I opened the door to get Tiger's mom, Tiger blurts out, "I didn't do it, *he* did!"

N: *He, you?*

J: *He, me.*

N: Did you do it?

J: No! God, no! I didn't even know them. But the drunk guy didn't care about that. He blocked my entering the house with his knee and tossed Tiger off the porch at the same time. Then he lifted me up by the collar and started pound-

ing me for confession. I was crying and protesting. Tiger's mom came barreling out of the house. She punched him so hard in the face that he dropped me and literally flew off the porch. She screamed profanities, chased with, *and don't come back!* Then she locked us all in the house. The guy went away and I never heard from him again. I don't remember her calling the cops, but I do remember her asking Tiger repeatedly if he made that guy's daughters roll around naked in the dirt, to Tiger's consistent denials. I think even his own mom didn't believe him.

N: That's horrible.

J: Yeah. But he probably did it.

(both laugh)

N: Did your parents believe you about the molestation?

J: Yes. And that was right before child molestation became a publicly acknowledged thing. I mean the police didn't really believe me. They asked him if he did it, he said, "No." End of investigation. That's the unfortunate fact. I remember the day we moved out, my mom bumped into him in the hallway and cussed him out. She shoved him a few times, called him a dirty old man, that sort of thing. Meanwhile, there's Jim's wife holding their yelping poodle telling Mom she's crazy. That I'm a liar. Talk about denial, my god! But it meant a lot to me that my mom did that. Physically stuck up for me. That was more therapeutic than playing board games with shrinks.

N: Did you do a lot of that growing up?

J: After the divorce, and then this? Are you kidding? I was a shrink's wet dream! But, man, I couldn't stand going. There was one guy who literally just wanted to play games with me. I was always asking Mom, "Why do you pay him to play games with me?" I mean I knew he was trying to get

to know me, but come on! How many sessions of that do we have to have before he takes another approach? Kids see through that shit.

N: What could he have done to get through to you?

J: Nothing! I don't think kids can suffer tragedy after tragedy like that and then be force-fed therapy. Unless I'm willing to open up to somebody on my own, what is some psychologist going to be good for? Diagnosis? "Well, Mr. And Mrs. Vaeni, your son was molested shortly after you two separated. I'll betcha dimes to dollars that's why he's so fucked up."

N: Were you *so* fucked up?

J: Probably not as bad as I should have been. I'm still amazed that I never ended up a total bully or strung out on drugs or something like that. Weight gain and declining school grades were about it. Well, that and severe depression, although I think that one would have gotten me regardless.

N: Are you a depressed person now?

J: I don't even know what that means anymore. I could just as easily laugh at a joke as fantasize jumping off a rooftop. Is that depressed?

N: It's *depressing*.

J: I suppose. Maybe it is clinical depression, but I doubt it. I can't tell if I hate myself or not and so I must not. Hell, I'm still here, right? I'm a conflicted man to say the least.

N: Sounds like clinical depression to me.

J: Well, okay. I don't think so, though. I think there is a difference between depression and fracture. I'm certainly fractured. Fractured but integrated. In touch, you could

say, with all my sides, from happy to egotistical to female to male to killer to animal to molester to lover to healthy to, yes, depressed—and on and on....

N: That's an interesting outlook.

J: The implication being that it isn't plausible. That it's all in my head and not "objectively" "true"—two words we presume to understand. That being said, it IS all in my head. Everything having to do with my make-up as a sentient carcass is now "in my head." And so, yes, fractured.

N: So there.

J: So there. (*sticks tongue out like child*) *Mmth!* I think it is also probable that at any time in our lives, but especially when we're young and forming, the direction our neural paths take can be altered. LSD can do this. Spiritual epiphany can do this. Divorce and molestation, particularly in close proximity to one another, can do this. "Alien" "abduction" can do this.

N: Have you taken LSD?

J: No. I've never used any illegal substance. Heck, I don't even drink or smoke. How "good" am I?

N: Have you had a spiritual epiphany?

J: Once, but it didn't last. Back when I was a teenager, there used to be these TV ads for this free Christian book called, *Power For Living*. I thought it would make a great birthday gift for my grandmother on my Mom's side. She's a God-fearing kind of gal. She goes to one of those fire and brimstone churches, you know, like *Footloose*? Dancing is bad; sex is bad; money is bad; here comes the collection plate.

N: Gotcha.

J: So I ordered the book and in it, it had a prayer—an

incantation, really—that would bring the power of the Lord straight to you if you spoke it and meant it. I read the prayer, the plea for salvation, aloud several times. I felt pretty stupid doing this. But then I took a deep breath, centered myself, and spoke the words with feeling. I meant what I was asking. The second I finished, I felt what could only be described as a wave of great joy and absolution. I knew then that God was “real”, God was “love”, and all my “sins” from birth to present had been forgiven. It remains the most ecstatic moment in my life.

For the longest time after that I couldn't stop smiling. I actually cried tears of joy—Steven Spielberg couldn't have directed a more heartfelt scene! I remember my Dad came to pick me up for the weekend and I couldn't stop babbling about this. I had truly and sincerely been touched by the Creator and given a fresh understanding of what it means to live and love. I thought I'd be a changed man...ah, well, *boy*...from that point on.

N: “Thought?”

J: Yeah. It didn't last. The day-to-day misery of puberty and the conflicts that it brings overturned my inner ruling to become Christ-like. In other words, that one moment of personal epiphany was no match for the objective material world and all its harsh experiences. I hardened.

N: It's interesting that you know this about yourself.

J: I suppose. But knowing something and feeling something are different processes. Quick story: my Junior Year of college, I was working at the Konover Campus Center at the University of Hartford in Connecticut. I was taking a basic philosophy course at the time, which really got the rational wheels turning. We were reading various theses and debates from famous dead thinkers on the existence (or nonexistence) of GOD. As I was sweeping up the main

hall after a function, the answer came to me. Numbers—mathematical formulas—would exist without humans having evolved into sentience.

The whole reason scientists are listening for an alien signal from radio telescopes is because they believe that some other civilization out there in the vast universe must have evolved into sentience, into self-consciousness. They, like us, would have discovered numbers. They would find that the universe is built on the same mathematical principles we earthlings know and love. Therefore, numbers—mathematical formulas—would exist even if we didn't. If we were to wipe ourselves out with a nuclear war tomorrow and a million years from now cockroaches evolved into thinking beings, they would necessarily discover numbers.

But numbers exist only in the mind. They are thought applied to the material universe. So if they are something that we didn't invent, if they are a "discovery" that we evolved into understanding, then they exist outside of thinking beings. Wipe out all life in the universe, you still have numbers. You still have a thought construct. But as we all know, you cannot have thought without a thinker. This thinker is what we call GOD.

N: Whew! That just came to you one day?

J: Yip. Sometimes it happens that way. You let your guard down and *BOOM!* Spontaneous insight. For the longest time, I thought I was a genius. Nobody could touch my argument. Then earlier this year I read *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, by Ken Wilber. He made two things clear: (1) I didn't invent that particular argument because...well...I am nowhere near genius. And (2) As a result of being nowhere near genius, I couldn't see the flaw in the argument, which is that GOD can't fully be arrived at rationally because GOD is bigger, broader, deeper than the flatland of scientific rationalism. God is found with the eye

of contemplation, not the eye of mind or body. God is not there simply to prove objectively, but to know personally.

This, I haven't done in any honest way since I read that *Power For Living* prayer. However, because GOD, or Universal Mind—we aren't talking about a religious god here—is ALL, the truth of this shines through on every level of existence. Thus, I can have a quasi-insight on the intellectual level but it will always be partial because rationalism, as I found out, isn't the whole story. Rationalism is a function of the brain and is often confused with the thinker. The thought that thinks it's the thinker, you see? This is what we've conditioned ourselves to believe. But it isn't true. We are not our egos—we are not that!

N: Yes. So you know God exists but you don't feel it.

J: God has no personal meaning to me other than what I can jot down on paper. GOD is truly a light at the end of the tunnel, just out of reach. I'm hollow inside but there's hope for me yet.

N: There's always hope.

J: I hope so.

(both laugh)

J: Interestingly, if I may, there is another rational way to arrive at GOD that I came up with my Senior Year of high school. It's a proposition I have never heard before. It's still kind of shaky but physics seems to be on the verge of bearing witness to this.

N: Quick question: How well did you do in science and math in school?

J: Failed and flunked, my friend. Failed and flunked.

(both laugh)

J: But don't let that get in the way of hearing me out.

N: Never.

J: Alright. So my proposition is this: If at any point in the history of the universe consciousness exists, then the universe must be conscious.

N: Why?

J: Because you cannot have a *quantity* of consciousness. You can have a *quality*, such as the difference between a toad and a dolphin and a human and a rock but you cannot have a quantity. Consciousness can't be measured, it isn't a physical thing. Thus the universe is conscious, self-aware. Thus GOD.

Now, the most basic argument against this is that the word CONSCIOUSNESS describes a yet-to-be-revealed function of the brain. That, in fact, when our bodies die our awareness dies too. That my hypothesis is bullshit. However, recent studies have shown that there is a cluster of particles hovering in superposition around our heads. New Agers call this AURA; scientists aren't certain what to call it. They think it is related to consciousness. So do I.

I believe these particles may have to do with the part of us that lives after our bodies die. I think that would go a long way to explaining psychic ability, because particles are nonlocal. This means they can be in several places at a time: my head, your head, the past, the future—wherever. Nonlocal particles. Consciousness not bound to the body. *Unquantifiable* consciousness = conscious universe = GOD.

N: Wow, you're right! You *are* on shaky ground!

(both laugh)

J: I know, I know! It may all be crap, but what the hey? It's something to think about.

N: Sure. Now earlier you used LSD, spiritual epiphany, personal horrification, and alien abduction as examples of experiences that can alter or redirect one's neural pathways.

J: Yes. Don't think I don't see where you're going with this, by the way.

N: Fine. So you commented on all of the above except one. It's killing me, I've got to know: Have you seen a UFO? More to the point, Do you believe you were abducted by aliens?

Chapter 4

From out of the depths of 1967...

Scientist Hints Those UFOs May Be Ants with Glow On

DENVER, Sept. 21 (AP)—Are some of those unidentified flying objects recently sighted over parts of the United States merely flying ants or other insects with a “glow” on?

Norton T. Novitt, an amateur scientist whose hobby is the study of the electric properties of insects, thinks it's highly possible. Not necessarily insects with a built-in glow, such as fireflies, but insects which have somehow attracted an electric charge so great that they give off lights. In 20 years of UFO sighting reports other scientists have said the shiny-bodied insects might be mistaken during daylight for flying saucers.

But the glowing insect theory is original with Novitt, a scientific illustrator with the U.S. Geological Survey in Denver. And he believes it may account for a small part of the 7 per cent of UFOs which the Air Force admits it can't explain.

It all started with Novitt three summers ago when he was a member of a Denver moon watch team, volunteers who help the National Aeronautics and Space Administration keep track of some of the large artificial satellites.

Travelling Fast

Novitt had set up a telescope in a vacant lot to see if he could spot a satellite during daylight. He picked up a bright object

traveling too fast to be a satellite. It soon was joined by a second object. Fascinated, he watched the objects descend until they nearly reached the ground. Taking his eye from the telescope he was startled to find that the apparent landing site was in front of a nearby garage. He hurried to the spot and found two winged ants.

He surmised the bright light he had observed was sunlight glinting from their iridescent bodies.

Research produced the fact at certain times of the year male and female ants sprout wings to take part in an airborne mating ritual. The winged ants gradually group together into giant swarms, some estimated to contain 37 million, to set up new ant colonies.

Glued to Ball

He wondered what these giant swarms would look like at night if they could glow. Perhaps ants could pick up enough static electricity to make them give off light.

To find out he glued 24 ants around the outside of a ping pong ball. A static electric generator was connected to the ball with a thin wire. The ball was suspended to the ceiling of his home laboratory with threads.

Sure enough, when he cranked the generator the entire ball seemed to glow with a dim blue light. The bodies of the ants were discernible as brighter specks. The ball hovered, moved erratically as pulses of static electricity drained off with differing intensities from the ants. It also gave off crackling sound. Novitt said a swarm of several million ants would emit a very loud, humming or buzzing sound.

"No new scientific principles are involved," he said. "It is rather an application of a natural combination of the principles of three sciences – meteorology (atmospheric electricity), physics (electrostatics of assembled small airborne objects), and entomology (gathering of insects).

He believes there are at least four ways in which ants could pick up a glow:

Individual ants become [charged] and then join a swarm, creating a mass of many different electrical charges.

Ants fly upward through successively more highly [charged] layers of air.

Ants create their own static electricity by rubbing together in flight, much like a person does when he shuffles across a rug.

Ants often swarm right after a thunderstorm which has left the air saturated with a different kind of charge than there was just before the storm.

Chapter 5

Jeremy: The subject of UFO's and their occupants is the touchiest subject on the planet. It's about as interdisciplinary as one can get. It's political; it's personal. It's belief; it's fact. What are the facts? What are facts, period? We live in the stygian murk at the edge of postmodernism and whatever comes next. Holism, I suppose. Indoctrinating the bigger picture into our everyday lives, not just in a philosophical way or even scientific way, but in a way that will come naturally to us commoners.

Norm: What bigger picture is that?

J: As Ken Wilber might say, everything that *is* from thought to matter to spirit, et al. expands up and out. We live at an ironic point in human history. We're in transition from a belief system that says *we live at fixed points in human history* to a belief system that says *we live in transition*. Always up and out, ever-expanding. This isn't more New Age bullshit, I assure you. This is what happens when conscious beings move from tribe to nation to globe to nearest planet to...? Where to? And likewise move from animism to god; soul to spirit; Emptiness to Ground; Universal Mind to...Again, where to?

N: Where to, indeed.

J: You ask me if I've ever been abducted by aliens. I can't answer that. I can't answer that until I admit the traumas in my life, thus proving I haven't buried anything. You must first understand there's nothing in my human experience to mask. I can't answer that until I show what a fertile

imagination I have. I can't answer that until I've exhausted other possibilities.

There are two types of true believers: Those who take abduction reports as gospel and those who are die hard skeptics. Each have their own psychological holes to fill and have chosen this subject as their plaster.

The believers sadden me every time a television network trots them out like minstrels to dance before a hungry, lethargic public. They are the proof that nothing serious is going on. Sadder still are the skeptics because they are meant to be taken seriously to further prove that nothing serious is going on. And yet they are armchair-skeptics. Nine times out of ten they don't do any research. They latch onto hoaxes and cases of misidentification.

Meanwhile, certain factions within the government/military establishment breathe a sigh of relief year after year. The faceless people in high places know what's going on, but they're not talking.

N: Why?

J: Pin the tail on the answer! Whatever the final answer or answers is to that, I don't know. Who knows? Do they know anymore? I do know this, though—and this is the thing no one has figured out yet.... You remember the Roswell case, where an alleged alien craft crashed in New Mexico, in 1947?

N: Who doesn't know about that?

J: Right. Well it happened. It's not *alleged*, it's real. And for a whole heap of reasons, many researchers believe (that word again!) that those shady government guys **in the know** are slowly revealing "the truth" to us through the media. Getting us acclimated to the fact of an alien presence. This simply is not the case. See, they're going to have their cake and eat it, too. They're doing their damndest to

reverse engineer the technology that fell into their hands that fateful night.

N: Fateful night?

J: Okay, sorry for the dramatics. But they are! The vast majority of Americans already believes in UFOs. Hell, we already know what real aliens look like! Tiny gray guys, shiny bald bodies, large dark pools for eyes. We even know what they're up to: They're creating a hybrid race of alien/humans. Everyone knows that! It's popular wisdom. So the government doesn't have to reveal that. No, instead what the Air Force has done is given us a report on Roswell called, CASE CLOSED.

Now—and mark my words on this—they will begin to trot out that reverse engineered technology before the public. Craft that look and act similar to UFOs. They'll tell us it was top secret American technology we've seen flying around all these years. And we will believe them because it is true. But we'll also know in our heart of hearts that little gray aliens and their craft are also true. Aliens and NOT aliens; the imagined and the material coexisting in the same breath. Both equally valid to a hypnotized public watching a most deceptive magic show.

Aliens as cover for American technology that is alien in origin. Amazing! And we're swallowing it whole!

N: Why do you suppose that is?

J: For the very reasons outlined above. Once we know in the fabric of our being aliens exist, **then they exist**. Whether they do or not, **they do**. This is the tragedy of postmodernism. Subjective truth is equal to objective truth. Probability and possibility are meshed into one fake, bull-shit confused mess.

Clownish believers send us the cue that there's nothing to fear. Then skeptics come into the fold, which sends us

the cue that we should take this UFO business seriously because now there are two sides. MORE THAN ONE SIDE MAKES AN ISSUE. Whereas before we could laugh at the spectacle, now we are forced to have an opinion about this "issue". But an opinion based on what? For the vast majority of us, NOT RESEARCH. NOT INDEPENDENT THINKING. But MARKETING. And the same salesman who sells us aliens in a convenient, easy-to-swallow short gray caplet sells us the line of, "It was top secret military craft and sleep disorders all along."

Ah, yes, television. The interactive god. Don't think, watch. Absorb. And yet if you want to know the truth you shouldn't bother doing any of that.

N: Phew! That's a mouthful, what you just said.

J: I feel like my old man on the stump.

N: Except you're preaching anti-preaching.

J: Right. *(a beat)* What was the question again?

(both laugh)

N: Abductee? You? True? False?

Chapter 6

help wanted: memory engineers

Have you thought about a career in memory engineering? You should! Because now you can create memories from scratch! That's right!

Scientists have recently discovered what they think is the biological implement that causes memory distortion and revision. This mechanism may be responsible for False Memory Syndrome, wherein traumatic memory is replaced by a less horrifying fake memory or deleted outright.

What does this discovery mean to you? It means we are that much closer to inventing memories that could be implanted in the human brain.

"Need a vacation from all that boring thinking and doing? No problem! You can have a vacation from yourself within yourself—or your money back!"

Wouldn't you love to be able to tell that to your neighbors, family, and friends? Well now you can thanks to this capitalist growth venture! So find out more and have your friends and relatives saying, "Thanks for the memories!"

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 7

ruminations from super tuesday (november 7th, 2000)

The year is mythical. The year is real. The year is 2000.

There are no flying cars.

Happy birthday, Jesus. You've healed the cripples, turned them into cripples. Or maybe free will did that, in which case you really have been dead two thousand years.

There are no flying cars.

I'd like to give a shout-out to all my homies who voted for George "The Animal" Bush. Republican House, Republican Senate, Republican President.

There are no flying cars.

Flying cars for ban on abortion. Martian colonies for school prayer. *An' lynchin'! An' lynchin'! An' women in the kitchen!* And...perhaps not in sentiment alone.

A FAMOUS POLITICAL PIRATE ONCE CONFESSED....

We've made our money,
Let's make some more!
We'll pile our horde on
The backs of the poor!

Then reminisce fondly,
Days of yore!
Yearn for a time
Not rotten in core!

Chapter 8

Jeremy: You know, why does everyone always ask for the truth? 'Cause there is no "the." And there is no "truth." Truth is a prism.

There is no "the." There are as many ways of looking at a thing as there are lookers. The best we can do is whittle it down a bit. Again, probability versus possibility. Anything that can be conceived is possible. But the probability can still be zero. In fact, doesn't the whole possible/probable thing strike you as a bit narcissistic?

Norm: Explain.

J: Well, it's the age-old question. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it fall, does it make a sound? ...Yes! Why is this a tough one? Am I missing something? Am I to understand that if there isn't a human around to witness something, it A) at *least* might as well not have happened or B) at *most* never did? Does our species really still believe it is the only game in town?

I said this to a friend once and he told me the question has more to do with the mechanism of the ear than the observer. But as I explained to him, it is the observer that counts, not the ear. If a tree falls in a forest and a thousand squirrels are there to hear it but no human—deaf or otherwise—is there to record their reaction, does it make a sound?

This is what science has done to us. It has forced us to believe that there's a difference between invention and discovery and would have us forget that discovery is localized to our species. Things that are out there, whether they be

in the murk of our minds or the matter in the universe, exist independently of humans happening upon them, which kinda hearkens back to my original god hypothesis. So yeah, narcissism.

N: Talk about narcissism! You just answered a philosophical pondering thousands of years old!

J: Because it has an answer! It ain't rhetorical you know! I'm saying, what is narcissistic and dangerous is pondering a question that precludes everything but SELF. It's like me asking, If you walk out of the room right now, do you still exist? Or worse, saying If you walk out of the room right now, you don't exist anymore because I can't see you or hear you. I can no longer perceive you, so you must not be. So I ask you, if you fall down in a forest and nobody is there to hear you yell, "Shit!" Did you make a sound?

N: (*laughs*) To the best of my knowledge, yes, I still exist when not in your presence.

J: There's your answer. So much of the way we think is about "I." We really have to get over that if we're going to branch out in any meaningful way. We should put the answerable to rest and move on. Philosophizing is about the questions, not the answers. If there's an answer, you're finished. Mystery solved. This gets back to postmodernism. Its gift is its curse: the total meltdown of fact.

Chapter 9

time catches up with h.g. wells

Did you know that in the 1990s, while O.J. Simpson was being tried for double murder, surrogate mothering was a smoldering headline, and Monica Lewinski was giving President Clinton smoldering head, an experiment was conducted where light was sped up 300 times its normal rate of 186,000 miles per second?

If this experiment turns out to be true and repeatable, it could lead to the capability to view our past. (Relax, O.J. You've still got Double Jeopardy on your side.)

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 10

Jeremy: Postmodernism says there's so much contradiction on any given subject that it can't all be true, so none of it is true. But you're still left with the subject itself, you see, so *something* about it must be true. There's got to be a living breathing fact out there somewhere.

Norm: I take it you know what that fact is.

J: Good call. Here it is.... Deep breath.... Okay. Because things evolve up and out, because we live in transition, facts can only remain facts for a limited time. There is no stability. The earth is flat; the earth is round. There is only order; there is only chaos; beyond chaos there is order. There is only God; there is only evolution; God is the mastermind behind evolution. Earth is the center of the universe; Earth is a speck on the map of the universe. We are alone in the universe; the universe must be populated. A molecule is the smallest particle; an atom is the smallest particle; a quark is the smallest particle. There is only matter; there is antimatter. Can't break the speed of sound; can't break the speed of light. We cannot will things to happen; particles respond to thought. There are no Michael Jackson posters on Jeremy's bedroom walls; Oh my God! Where did Jeremy get all these posters? Get it?

N: Beginning to.

J: Facts are only facts until we've exhausted our ability to look at them from the same angle. Someone enters with a fresh perspective, convinces people in her particular field to see things her way. If it is valid enough to warrant inves-

tigation, it is presented to the rest of us as a new fact. Possibly, the next big thing, they'd say. And once it is accepted as popular wisdom, it is treated in such a way as to have seemed inevitable. We were foolish to have believed otherwise! Of course the world isn't flat! Of course we can break the speed of sound! Duh! Hello!?

N: That's a bit of an oversimplification though. I mean if I convince everybody in the room that a chair can talk, it doesn't mean the chair can talk.

J: Firstly, yes it is a major oversimplification. Secondly, no, the chair won't talk. There is a possibility that it will, only insofar as you can imagine that happening. But the probability is nil. Of the hundreds or thousands of aspects of a chair, one is certainly NOT that it can speak.

N: Unless it's built that way.

J: Tee-hee. But that's not what we're talking about here. I mean the chair is not alive. It has no consciousness. You won't convince a room full of sane people that the chair can talk without resorting to hypnosis or magic, because speech isn't part of the chair's true make-up. Even the dumber in the crowd could perform a simple experiment by talking to the chair. If they end up in a *long* conversation, I'm dead in the water!

(both laugh)

J: Sure, laugh now.... So to answer that, the fresh perspective must remain true to the object's proven and probable aspects for it to matter. Until we—at least in the West—wake up and acknowledge that facts are transitory, we will not be able to take that next step out of postmodernism. *Do not pass GO! Do not collect two hundred dollars!* Ironical that what would clear up so much of our confusion is realizing that the questions *are* the answers. Process, my friend. Process.

That's what evolution is. That's what life is. Include and expand, include and expand. Ken Wilber is on the money there.... I'm sorry, I'm rambling again.

N: You know, you have an amazing knack for throwing large generalizations out there without backing them up.

J: Show me a teacher who does the students' homework for them and I'll show you a teacher fired.

N: Yes, but usually a teacher gives his qualifications before getting the job.

J: Fair enough. So what do you want, a disclaimer? How do I prove I'm not wasting your time? Did I graduate from Harvard? Yale? Oxford? Nope. Did I flub my way through science, math, and philosophy during my school years? Yup. So I'm just a guy, right? A guy haunted by persistent questions. I'm figuring this stuff out as I go, just like you, it's just that in certain areas I have a head start. It has to do with a little thing called experience. I'm sure some of this stuff is naïve and wrong and some not so much. This is your call to arms, Reader, to discover which is which. More than that, though, it is within you to discover what in all of this matters.

N: And you'd better do it fast, because according to him, you only have a short time before the transitory nature of the facts transmogrify into a whole other truth!

J: Ever the wit. You know what I'll do? Here's what I'll do—

N: What'll you do?

J: I'll give you a suggested reading list at the end of the book, if you feel so inclined. Do with it what you will.

N: Very nice. Now, after having said all that, I have one more question for you.

J: Shoot.

N: Were you or were you not abducted by aliens?

J: Aw, fuck off!

Chapter 11

**time out for
song, poem,
story,
and
ranting**

All Good Things

All things end in suicide
All things end in suicide
All things end in suicide
All things end in suicide

Intestine tinsel on the Christmas tree
He got the blood, got the body
But the meaning is me

Dildo crucifix barely fits inside
He wanna love me, fill me up
It's hollow where I hide

All things end in suicide (x4)

Except Life....
Life....
Look at this pasty face
Devoid of all good grace
My bliss, my wrists must bleed
If I wanna truly be freed!

All things end in suicide (x4)

Except Life....
Life....
Take it from me!

—solo—

Look at this sultry face
Devoid all sense, all grace
My bliss, my wrists must bleed
Intestine tinsel on the Christmas tree

52 I Know Why the Aliens Don't Land!

Kill all the yuppies before they breed
Last thing this planet needs is more fucking greed
Step outside your hole you can't even breathe
Great idea let's chop ancient trees

His blood, His body, but the meaning is me

All things end in suicide (x4)

Except Life....

Life....

Take it from me!

Take it from me!

Lord, take me!

Jesus H. Christ

Talking apes made you more than a man
Next came Darwin with a brand new plan
King of Kings; king of rust
We are clay; you are dust

Does your DNA affect you?
Does your secret code infect you?
Do you have a vice to speak of?
Is it all about the Peace Dove?

I know you're nude underneath skin clothes
I know you haven't the time to pose
While peons return life after life
Eons pass and you wait out the strife

Can you read the Western mind?
Is it just a waste of time?

Buddha's beating down your back door
But you'd rather convert a whore

The Train Station

It was 7:33 p.m. and the birds weren't chirping. Usually back at the University dorm multitudes of cacophonous parrots and sparrows could be heard singing themselves to sleep. But in the city, everything is already asleep and there's no need to dream.

I waited on the guarded side of the tracks for my 7:34 Amtrak train. Then at the last minute I hurried over to the other side, the unguarded station, where my train would soon arrive.

The last time I'd ventured out to the unguarded side, I watched helplessly as a nameless character about my ripe old age of eighteen got mugged for his Walkman. Knowing my luck, I'd be next. So now I wait on the good side and run to the free-fire zone. On that dingy side you're anyone's target.

Remember what I said about luck? Yeah, well the train was a half-hour late. I decided to stick it out in no-man's land. I leaned back against the blue rusting bench and tuned out as train after commuter train whizzed past. One stopped. A herd of people unloaded. One man who struck me in particular was an African-American gentleman carrying a briefcase, wearing shades. He looked strikingly like Quincy Jones. I smiled to myself, paid him little mind.

My fellow travelers busied themselves with workers' chatter and elevator waiting. Some took the stairs but most opted for the elevator, dreading the urine perma-stench inherent to the stairwell.

So that man, the Quincy Jones guy, he walked up to a black man a bit older than I and tapped him on the shoulder. "Do you feel strong?" he asked.

The other guy sitting there turned his head toward the stranger and looked up at him wearily, possibly frightened. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess I do."

"Good," said the Quincy Jones guy. "You wanna help free your brothers?"

"Naw, man, you do it. You go right ahead and do it," the young guy said, turning back around, hoping the man wasn't insane.

Well the older man didn't care to hear that. He marched to the center of the tiny station and pointed to the young man he'd been addressing. "Young brotha' I am free," he shouted. "The Black Man is the strongest man on earth, yes indeed! The Lord told me so. It's in the Bible! You've got to fight! Yes, we've been fighting for eternity but we are free! We are strong and we are free! And don't let the White Man drag you down, oh no! You can jail my body but I will always be free! My soul will always be free!"

I don't know if he was expecting an *amen* or what, but he paused dramatically then left. I was shaken. I didn't really know what to make of the spectacle. Then he came back....

"You've got to be free!—Let me tell you something: the White Man can't drag you down! You are nobody's property. It says so right in the Bible...!"

He continued to rant with all the push his lungs and diaphragm could offer. The young guy just laughed. He said, "Okay...Alright...Hey, take that motha-fuckin' Martin Luther King shit elsewhere, huh?"

But the other man was obviously wrapped up in his own speech, a gift unto himself. Then he left again. I turned to his subject who was sitting across from me. "Man," I said, "the crazies are out tonight. Last time I was here I saw some kid get mugged and now this.... Only in Bridgeport."

"No shit. What do I have, ASSHOLE TALK TO ME stamped on my forehead?" he quipped.

"At least he's gone now," one woman remarked as she cuddled her miraculously sleeping infant.

"Oh no, he ain't gone; he'll be back," the young man prophesied. I started to laugh when, yes, the militant Quincy came back.

He took his familiar position center station and picked up from whence he had left. "The Black Man is free! You've got to keep away from drugs, needles! They wanna give you AIDS! The White Man wanna give you AIDS and kill you

off! But we won't be killed off 'cause we're the strongest race on the planet, yes we are!"

With that, he exited for the third and final time.

I wanted to argue with the man, tell him that his hardships aren't the product of any Black and White struggle, they're just a part of the human condition. But I figured people have murdered for less in the name of God so I kept my mouth shut.

I waited apprehensively for my train out of this foul dump, out of Bridgeport. How could any Black man be truly free living in a slum like Bridgeport? The preacher was wrong.

And so was I.

Pop Tarts 'N Slavery

Now that record companies and media conglomerates are monopolizing at a Guinness Book rate of speed, it has become increasingly apparent what sort of bland commercial shit bands they have in store (and in stores) for us.

In 1994, Kurt Cobain blew his head off. From his open neck wound a dark, insidious vapor poured and spread across the music world. It looked to most observers like a cloud that would soon blow over. But those observers were wrong. It didn't form a cloud, it formed a smog—dirty, strong, and ever-present.

Meaningless boy bands hop around in their latest fashions. Lip-syncing vaginas smile from behind their thongs. They too hop. They too wear the latest fashions. They too are meaningless. Or, should I say, are as meaningful as a dollar bill.

Meanwhile, in the cotton fields of Hip-Hop, Rap breaks its back raking in the dough for Massah. Used to be that White Americans sold Black slaves to other White Americans. Then, after much struggle, the White Establishment committed to paper equal rights for all. Strangely, this did not stop Blacks from singing the Blues. Nor did it stop Whites from stealing the Blues from Blacks, shining them up real nice-like, and selling the brighter, whiter package to Caucasian youths.

Cut to years later. Much of the progress afforded Blacks on paper never actualized in their not-paper world. Pissed off and disenfranchised, some of them began yelling rhymes about the predicament that was their lives. Somebody somewhere decided that this was a form of music. They called this noise RAP music.

Not since the Civil Rights Movement had Blacks found such a powerful voice. Some used that voice to boast about themselves; others used it to describe their neighborhoods and lifestyles. Still others used it to take political action.

They were uniters in the black community. They fought the power.

It wasn't long before Whites saw another potential Negro-based economy on the horizon. They swept—and continue to sweep—through the ghettos for the next Rap sensation. And because those political-type Blacks were so troublesome, these corporate-type Whites essentially did away with them. It would be easier, they decided, to financially rape lesser-educated boasting, egocentric gangbanger stereotypes than politically aware community leader types.

So with that policy in play, the Whites bought and sold Black youths to White youths at a rate not seen since prior the Emancipation Proclamation.

Airhead white bubble gum imitations; “hard” proud blue-collar criminals with street cred. We are suckin’ down trash like a porta-potty vacuum, folks!

Hip-Hop is not a culture or a subculture. It is a sub-sub-culture. It is a twinkle in the eye of pop culture. Pop culture is whatever sells, whatever makes money. And so pop culture is really consumer culture. There's nothing wrong with being a consumer so long as you know what you are and are not.

What you are is the purchaser of a product that keeps usually not-so-nice business men (and women) wealthy. What you are is an object. A target audience.

What you are not is buying music. Music is art. It is the soul heard. So what happens when music becomes profit? Purely and only profit?

Stifled, the soul creates an illusion that its surroundings are something other than what they are. In this case, it calls Hip-Hop a culture and welcomes you with honest open arms. You buy into this and who smiles? The artist, the art, or the CEO?

Welcome to the new slavery. Want fries with that?

Yeah...that's deep, yo.

Time back in...

Chapter 12

the king who would be boy

Norm: Can we broach the subject of Michael Jackson again?

Jeremy: Sure. What's the deal, right?

N: More succinctly, what's the fascination?

J: I don't understand why more people aren't as fascinated by him as I. He is a prototypical human. An experiment. There have been other child stars who grew up under public scrutiny, but none for as long and intensely as Michael Jackson. He is at all times art and genius and abuse and publicity and secluded and intrusive and naïve and shrewd and holy and bratty and kind and gentle. He's as genuine and introspective and he is image and stupidity. Calculated and miscalculating. Pyrotechnic flash, religious zeal, twitchy whiner. He is what honesty looks like from every possible angle. He is man, woman, and child. He is Black, White, Asian. He's not King of Pop, he's King Tut, for Christ's sake! The man excels at every art form he exposes himself to, whether it be singing, dancing, writing, acting—Is business an art form? How about charity?

N: No.

J: Well they are now!

N: That was a rhetorical answer, by the way.

(both laugh)

J: You catch my drift.

N: Caught it, yes.

J: No one can hold a candle to Michael Jackson, man!

N: Not his hair, anyway. They better not!

J: Oh, humor! You send me! Seriously though, he's a marvel of soul and technology. Of evolution and arrested development. Do you think Michael Jackson knows how or why he does half the things he does? Hell, no! He calls it GOD. And so do I.

N: So on a personal level, you arrive at GOD through Michael Jackson.

J: Yes! Logically, it's math. Personally, it's a crotch-grabbing crooner. I enjoy bewilderment. He is bewilderment.

N: Would you fuck him?

J: Let's just say I wouldn't kick him out of bed.

(Norm chuckles)

J: Come on, what kind of stupid question is that?

N: The stupid kind, I guess.

J: No I wouldn't fuck him. It's not about that.

N: If you met him do you think you'd be disappointed?

J: I think I'd shit myself, firstly. Then I'd clean up and.... Would I be disappointed?—I don't know. Everything I just talked about is what comes through on albums and TV. Most of that is calculated.

N: But you think it's true. You think the image he presents of himself is true.

J: I think he is all those things because *and* in spite of his

public projections. I think he's made good on adversity. I think we have that in common. I've had some major hardships early on in life and I never resorted to drugs, smoking, promiscuity, all that horse shit that leads to rehab and regret. Now here's a man who grew up Jehovah's Witness, abusive dad, enabler mom, intuitively I'm certain there was sexual abuse in his life—

N: What gave that away?

J: Right. I'm not claiming to be Carnac, here.... This is a man who carved a new face and his entire immediate family followed suit! Can you imagine? Mom, Dad, three sisters and five brothers all had plastic surgery to look more like their famous relative. Look at La Toya! She's lightened her skin and gotten enough surgery to be an MJ impersonator with breasts! He can't chip enough away before someone in the family catches up with him! That's fucking unfathomable, Norm!

N: Yeah, I never really thought about that. To what do you attribute that?

J: I don't know. There are other famous families—The Baldwins aren't chopping themselves up to look like Alec, right? It's odd. It's also odd that other Hollywood stars flock to him as they do. He's someone people have to be near. Emmanuel Lewis dressed like him and was practically his hand puppet for a number of years. Remember that long stretch where Corey Feldman had an identity crisis and actually thought he *was* Michael Jackson? He was dressing like him and DANCING LIKE HIM IN MOVIES THAT DID NOT REQUIRE A DANCE SEQUENCE!!! THAT'S NUTS!!! Liz Taylor is Hollywood royalty. She's by the man's side every chance she gets. Does this make logical sense? Any of it? No. But there it is.

Michael even went on *20/20* and told Barbara Walters

that he was psychic during an interview about the late Princess Diana. He hangs out with psychic spoon bender Uri Geller. The Amazing Randi told us Uri was a fraud way back when. He went on Johnny Carson and did the spoon bending trick himself. Oldest trick in the book, he said.

N: It's not?

J: No, it is. But what Randi didn't tell us is that Uri Geller was tested by U.S. military scientists back during the Cold War when we used Remote Viewers (psychic spies) to peek in on our "enemies." They found him to have a strong natural psychic ability, but didn't trust him. They knew he'd rather remain a trickster, a magician, than let people see what was true ability and true chicanery. Michael Jackson and Uri Geller have that in common. It has brought to them the same result: fame, fortune, following, distrust and disinterest. Well, in America there's a certain amount of disinterest. I don't know about the rest of the world.

THE WORLD, Norm. The ENTIRE EARTH is Michael Jackson's stomping ground. He is the first real citizen of the planet. The first absolutely free human is a Black American male.

Just an entertainer? Just a musician? Just irony? Just doesn't add up. So, yeah. God. Reminds me there must be. That's the short answer.

Chapter 13

better band: the kinks or the time?

Times they are a changin'. In fact, it is possible that they are a reversin' on the quantum level. This is due to kinks in the space-time continuum called, "geons." Within a geon, subatomic particles are affected by forces in the present as well as the past and future. So why can't the time flow reverse in the universe-at-large? Perhaps we will discover it can. Ultimately, perhaps, we will discover time does not exist at all.

Sounds kinky.

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 14

synchronicity

On some magical Friday evening not many years ago, I was watching a television program called *Millennium*. *Millennium* was an above-average sci-fi show and this night's episode was nothing short of spectacular. It detailed an end-of-the-world prophesy scheduled to doom us all on May 5, 2000. At that fateful turn o' the clock, a planetary alignment pitting earth against the straight-line gravitational pull of all other planets in our galaxy plus the sun and moon was supposed to have triggered a pole shift leading to a new Ice Age. This alignment, apparently, happens once every five to seven thousand years.

It was such a scary and well-documented story, it couldn't possibly have been fiction; it was such a scary and well-documented story, I lunged for the phone during a commercial break to call my friend Travis. Before my eager fingers touched the receiver, however, it rang. It was Trav.

"Are you watching this?" I asked.

"Oh my god, Jer! This is a fucking amazing show," he practically spit. Normally unflappable, his voice betrayed a slight quiver. He hadn't been this excited about television since the first few seasons of *The X-Files*, arguably the best sci-fi show ever.

"Do you think it's real? It sounds familiar. I gotta check my books, I think I've heard of this cycle," I said.

"I don't know, but I'm scared.... Oh, man!" he exclaimed. We paused while our minds raced in unison, only to be interrupted by the mighty Television God.

"It's back on," he alerted me.

I said, "Call me after," then hung up. Not one moment of

TV goodness was to be wasted on something as menial as politeness. When the show finished and the credits rolled I beelined to my favorite UFO bookshelves. There, on the back cover of Whitley Strieber's, *The Secret School*, a review from Dr. Fred Alan Wolf read, "... Strieber gives us nine lessons in life that most of us will need to learn as we approach the end of this 1000-year cycle." Pitifully, these few words were as close as I got to anything remotely sounding like a deadly five-to-seven-thousand-year cycle.

Weeks passed and that May 5th date haunted me only slightly. Fortunately, I had a ton of other cobwebs junking up my thoughts, so an episode of *Millennium* wasn't making me rock back and forth or yank out hair. Then one random day I accompanied my roommate Steve to his favorite crude chicken wing joint, Pluck U. I wasn't very hungry but he was as starving and lonely as a leper dingo in nuclear winter (kidding, Steve! ...To Reader: No I'm not), so I figured, *What the fuck?* and went with him.

Steve sweated it out in line while I found us seats. The only open table was covered by a ratty copy of *New York Press*, a periodical I had never bothered to read. I leafed through it, disinterested. It was there in those flimsy ink pages that an ad for Tower Books caught my eye.... And never let go. They were having a 40% off sale on all New Age merchandise. One thing Steve-o got to know about me right quick is that the degree to which I hate the term "New Age" is equal to the times I can be found perusing the New Age section of any given bookstore: a lot.

So when a large color print of a book cover entitled, *5/5/2000 Ice: The Ultimate Disaster*, by Richard W. Noone beckoned my attention like a sweet-bitch Siren, it was all I could do to not drag Steve's chicken-eatin' ass to Tower Books right then and there. Lucky for both of us, he went willingly. Or compliantly, anyway.

I bought the discounted book and consumed it in a few short weeks. This is a real feat for me because I have five or six books in circulation at all times. It's amazing how much stuff there is to know and yet most of it is not worth

knowing. Like vast old theories on spontaneous regeneration, for instance, or John McCain's war stories. But not *this* stuff, I told myself. This stuff *was* worth knowing if I wanted a gerbil's chance in ass of surviving the new Ice Age. A new AGE OF ICE. Who doesn't want to live through that?

Mostly the book is about how the Egyptian pyramids were erected, so the title is a bit misleading. But the material on the eminent disaster facing us Earthlings was scarier than a gerbil's chance in ass analogy.

Soon I couldn't help but find material relating to that wretched date. Graham Hancock's weighty tome, *Fingerprints of The Gods* deals with 5/5/2000 in a couple of terrifying paragraphs. It wasn't just the descriptions of disasters yet to strike foretold by ancient people who, by modern thinking, shouldn't possess such knowledge; it was the fact that Graham Hancock shrugged the prophesy off by throwing a disclaimer at the end of the section, in effect saying, Don't sell the ranch just yet. We cannot live in fear based on the beliefs of one or two ancient wise guys. That would be irrational.

What's so frightening about that you ask? Well, it just so happens *Fingerprints of the Gods* posits an end-of-the-world scenario scheduled to go down December 23, 2012. This is when the Mayan Calendar ends. It marks the end of the Age of Aquarius. You can see how the world ending in May of 2000 might interfere with the world ending in December of 2012. Graham is telling us—or maybe just me personally—not to worry about 5/5/2000 because it's too close to do anything about and it fucks with his theory and just don't listen to those ancient crackers because their science isn't worth the trouble, even though he went through the trouble of writing a series of books about their science and wrote a glowing review of *5/5/2000 Ice: The Ultimate Disaster*, which radiates from the front cover of Richard W. Noone's scary-as-cliché-to-a-dope-like-me book!

Then, like I don't have enough fear in my life, I happened upon an older book by Charles Hapgood called *Pole Shift*. Guess what that's about!

Everywhere I turned, something about 5/5/2000 popped up. Debates raged on internet chat sites. Astronomers dedicated web pages to debunking Noone's work. Even NASA chimed in with their anti-theories to quell the public's interest in all things space that don't fit into NASA's launch schedules, which are drafted to jumpstart waning public interest and thus reline NASA's pockets with the public's money. Fuck you, NASA. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out your PR is shit.

One fact was clear: contrary to the ratings recession that led to *Millennium's* premature cancellation,¹ Travis and I weren't the only ones watching. I would tell friends about how we're all gonna die and they'd already know! The Good News was spreading like fire that is wild! One soon-to-be-ex buddy of mine told me he heard 5/5/2000 was a miscellaneous date etched in stone in the Great Pyramid.

My mind was reeling. Alien abduction books told me humans would be killed off by natural catastrophe and be replaced by alien/human hybrids, and Richard Noone gave me the date.

Fuck!

Thank God he also sold useful *Armageddonian* merchandise through his website, such as hand-powered flashlights and a map of how the U.S. will look after she is covered and swallowed and fornicated on by sheets of ice. More succinctly, she will be fornicated upon by Mother Nature, making for some hot lesbo action and proving homosexuality to be an act of God once removed.

I pictured that very same God I thanked above smirking at all the pitiful humans—the moral majority, if you will—waiting for the world to end at the stroke of midnight, January 1st, 2000. The new year rings in and...nothing. So they party and feel invincible again and—POW! Out of nowhere, ICE AGE!

That's humor! That's the ol' *Godster* for ya! That's...! something that never happened.

Cut to 5/6/2000, stroke of midnight....

Yes, my friends ridiculed me. They are friends after all.

Yes, I had to rethink some things about myself. Yes, I was glad EQ replaced IQ as the most important way to judge another human being. Yes, I had to question my more-than-only suspicion that synchronicity has meaning. Yes, I had to reexamine the way I think, period.

No, I didn't prepare for imminent doom the way a good true believer should. No, I didn't stock up on canned goods and hand-powered flashlights. No, I don't now own, nor have I ever owned, a poster of the United States of Frostbitten America. No! No! No!

And in case you're a cultist who just can't face "reality"—
NO, THE WORLD DID NOT END!

Yeah, I know cultist! Me too!

1. Pertinent in many, many ways: Mr. Noone counts among his credits being an adviser on the "top-rated TV show *Millennium*."

Chapter 15

apocalypse then

According to many mystical and often poorly-bearded sages throughout the centuries, Earth life was supposed to be severely altered or outright destroyed in the Christian calendar year 2000. Well, according to Munich Re, the world's monolithic insurance company, that prediction wasn't so off mark.

The year 2000 set a record for most natural disasters in recorded history, with 23% of the damage attributed to floods and a whopping 73% to storms. Thankfully, the vast majority of these harsh weather conditions took shape in scarcely populated areas of the globe, so while the number of disasters rose sharply, human casualties remained low as compared to 1999 statistics.

Gerhard Berz, head of the Munich Re geo-science research group, points to global warming as the culprit of these natural disasters. "Global warming must be slowed down," he warns. "Otherwise, the risk situation for insurers in many of the world's regions will intensify."

Translated, this means that when literally half a million people were left homeless in Mozambique in February of 2000 due to massive flooding, the insurance companies were the true victims. So, yes, global warming must be slowed. It makes good fiscal sense.

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 16

Y2K didn't just suck—it bit!

Did you know the Y2K bug actually caused computer malfunctions the world over? From cash machines in Sweden to Japanese nuclear reactors to U.S. spy satellite imaging processors, the bug bit. Many of the malfunctions, such as the Norwegian high-speed express train totally crapping out, happened a year later. This is because some computers only count the standard 365-day year, disregarding leap years. 2000 was a leap year so these devices counted December 31, 2000 as January 1, 2001.

The above facts should put to rest the claim made by some that the Y2K bug was a farce, a hoax created by the U.S. government (whoever that is) to force companies to spend money on upgrades and protections they did not need. It's not that scheming money men were crying wolf, it's that there was a wolf. A baby wolf, sure, but one with real teeth.

Baby teeth, sure, but really sharp for a baby. And let's not forget it was a wolf.

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 17

did the world end in the year 2000?

Hey, general reader! Do you feel HUMAN? I do. But what is a human? I mean besides our self-awareness and decision making capabilities that seem to separate us from other animals, what makes us “uniquely human,” as they say? Emotion? Spirit? What?

I’m guessing all of the above. But let me add to that recipe the following ingredient: ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF A HUMAN BEING IS THAT HE/SHE HAS MERGED WITH NEITHER TECHNOLOGY NOR ANIMAL.

If humans could merge with animals, the offspring would not be entirely human, correct? It would be human-like, but not quite human.

If humans could merge with technology, the offspring would likewise not be human, correct? It would be human-ish, but not quite human. As a matter of fact, science fiction writers anticipate this merger in the not-so-distant future and have given the hybrid creature a name: cyborg.

Do we all agree that a human/machine merger would create a new species or sub species called CYBORG?

Good.

Do we also agree that in the Greco-Roman Year 2000 many learned humans were shitting bricks over the likelihood of a massive computer failure at the stroke of 1999’s final midnight?

Did their fears not include society as we know it being replaced by a Stone Age replica society, where it is every person for themselves, discovering how to function in a world of elements, as if for the first time? As if they had survived a nuclear winter and did not know where they stood

in the world, the universe, with God? As if they had been reduced to survival of the fittest?

I reiterate: Was this irrational fear not voiced by some of the most rational among us?

Do you think they were lying?

If it's one thing I know about really smart people, it's that if they have irrational fears, they generally keep them to themselves. But a whole bunch of really smart cookies put it on the line to warn us of what knuckle-dragging regression awaits us, should our computer chips fail.

Since all these really smart people agreed on the severity of the situation, is not the safe bet that they were truthful in their fears and that their fears were actually RATIONAL?

World society at large is now so built upon and dependent on a fledgling technology that it would cease to exist if the fledgling technology were taken away. If all the computer chips in the world stopped right now, we would AT THE VERY LEAST be thrown back to the 1800s for the lengthy interval it would take humans to reinvent the damned silicon nuggets.

This is because they seem to be a more efficient "brain power," if you will, than, say, transistors. Thus, there is no alternative because we've stopped making alternatives, deciding to forge onward in this technology alone, with no backup plan. We are so dependent upon—so merged with—computer technology that we are officially NO LONGER HUMAN.

We, ladies and gentlemen, are cyborgs. Not in the future, but now. The moment we equated the breakdown of technology with the breakdown of society, we ceased to be totally human.

We are presently SOMETHING ELSE. We look like our old selves and feel like our old selves but I assure you, we are not. Never before in human history have we been so interlocked with our own creation that it is equally important to our definition as food, shelter, companionship, and light.

And it's a new creation! We haven't even scratched the surface of computer capabilities! What stupid animal are

we that we've allowed ourselves to become merged with a technology still in its infant state, unexplored and open to possibility?

Do you feel human? I do. The way a ghost must after its body has died and it doesn't know it is dead.

The way all ghosts must have when the clock struck midnight that final eve of 1999. Unaware we are ghosts, we breathe a sigh of relief and continue with our chores, haunting the world, clinging to our shadow memory and living it. Pretending we are those independent beings we once were; pretending a new definition of ourselves comes next year. Always next year.

Don't wait up.

Chapter 18

anyone here seen “lawnmower man”?

“I remember going back to Harvard and feeling like being an alien landing on a primitive planet,” recalls Larry Smarr about life after working with supercomputers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. Dr. Smarr is an astrophysicist who helped create Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator and laid the groundwork for CGI (computer generated images) used in such films as, “Jurassic Park,” and “Star Wars: Episode 1.”

In 2000, Smarr met with a tribe of Silicon Valley lab coats to discuss the possibility of the internet spontaneously “waking up” into full consciousness. The net, he says, is evolving into a single global entity, “made up of billions of interconnected computers.”

“The real question from a software point of view is: Will [the internet] become self-aware,” says Smarr.

Then again, maybe the really real question is: if the internet becomes self-aware, will it tell us?

For more information, [click here.](#)

PoliTlCKing

Wherein Norm takes over the book for a while.

This may be offensive to some readers.

Discretion is advised...

Chapter 19

voting is for sheep, sheep is for eating

In 1998 when the threat of *Iraqi War II: This Time It's Personal* first broke, there was a so-called Town Hall meeting on CNN. During that glaringly obvious propagandistic mocking of Democracy, the Suits used the term “weapons of mass destruction” at least once per sentence. No exaggeration. It was as if Madeleine Albright & Co. read the Republican Manifesto on how to brainwash the public, just before going live, and followed it step by rigid step.

It was painful viewing.

Shortly thereafter, I was skimming through the editorial section of the *New York Times* searching for a piece I had submitted. Funny enough, I never found it. What I did find was a letter written by Joe Public stating, in short, that we must go kill Iraqi civilians because their government is hiding *weapons of mass destruction*. Hmm.... Now where would he get terminology like that? Not from freethinking, I'll bet!

Yes, this poor shmo had been suckered into internalizing the government bottom line. Catch phrases and Conventional Wisdom buzz words (like the ones found in this very sentence) are so easy to recite that the threat of war grows popular through them.

If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit! And fuck the reason it does not fit, and fuck all the evidence, and fuck me if the Simpson case wasn't won on a slogan!

Thank God we didn't go to war this time, but next time, Saddam might not get off so easy. Next time, our government/military establishment might come up with some-

thing slick like, "If they wear a towel or a dot, they must be hung! They must be shot!"

To which the thinking man might add, "Because they can't be bought!" And that's always the true bottom line. If a nation's leaders can't be bought outright, it is our duty as Capitalists to assassinate them and put in a puppet regime that will do our bidding.

I'm not saying Saddam isn't a sick human being who shouldn't be leading a country—he is. And he shouldn't. But, ditto Ronald Reagan. Ditto George Bush. Bill Clinton?—Yup, a war criminal. George Dubya?—Fuck, man! He's resurrected Reagan's cabinet like the "Thriller" video—what do you think the outcome will be?

So all of that being the case, I say any citizen who chants a slogan or repeats a catch phrase devised by our government to make us stop thinking and start being Patriotic DOES NOT GET TO VOTE.

Whatta ya think about that? Elitist snobbery? No. See, I have a real plan and that plan involves making the *whole next generation of voters* elitist snobs. That's right, my plan calls for a taboo word amongst politicians: EDUCATION.

First, we set up a fake war, a *Wag the Dog* kind of thing. Next, we monopolize the airwaves with our buzz words until the unwashed masses incorporate them into their vocabulary. They're good at that. Just look at Hip-Hop, know what I'm sayin'? Ya feel me? *ONE!*

Once this has been accomplished, once our special wartime catch phrases have been internalized by you the swine and your swine neighbors, we take a poll to see how many Americans FEEL we should go to war and how many THINK we should go to war.

I guarantee nearly the following result:

- 50% *feel* and *think* we should go to war.
- 25% *feel* we should but *think* we shouldn't go to war.
- 20% don't understand the question but are of the opinion that we should go to war.
- 4% don't *think* we should and thus don't *feel* we should go to war.

1% have no opinion whatsoever.

As our results clearly demonstrate, a mere four percent of the masses are washed, while the remaining ninety-six percent haven't bathed since afterbirth.

And even then, not by choice.

But that is soon to change, oh yes indeed! Because now what we do is take our results and see who voted which way. Those ninety-six percent—those human vats waiting to be filled with military bile so they can form an opinion—DON'T EVER GET TO VOTE AGAIN!

It's not so dishonest. I mean, part of the plan is to come clean with the whole scheme to the entire nation. In fact, to soften the blow, we can make "Coming Clean With The Whole Scheme!" our little national ditty. It will make sense of things to those about to lose their Constitutional rights.

Now for the other rub...

Kids are smart. Real smart. They catch on right quick. When they see the majority of their parents losing their rights, they will be outraged. Maybe not at first because it's kind of cool to see mom and pop being punished, but eventually it will dawn on them that they too may have their voting rights deleted.

Not wanting to risk this, they will educate themselves enough to be able to think for themselves. Conventional Wisdom will not work on these future generations. Their numbers will grow and grow, and soon this nation of ours will be filled with intelligent human beings. Plus, because they are self-taught, we won't have wasted our tax dollars on something as useless as the public education system.

What a beautiful fucking plan! Conscious, thinking beings forced to use their sentience due to the threat of having their say in "important matters" stripped from them like Iraqis!

There might be irony in there, I don't know.

Oh, I'm so proud of myself I could poop! *But Norm*, you ask, *Aren't there laws against breaking the Constitution?*

NO!!! That's the beauty part! The Iran-Contra Scandal already laid the groundwork for this type of thing! It's flawless!

As for any moral obligations, hey: if it comes down to Jerry Springer's audience getting the vote or sheep, I'm going farm animal every time.

In fact I could go for some farm animal right now.... Mmm.... See you next chapter.

UPDATE

In February, 2001 President G. W. Bush sent them war planes a'bombin' without any catchphrases, warning, or consideration for the concerns of the American People. To Iraq, it was the first swift and telling blow of his administration; to America, it was the second. (For info on the first, check out chapter 22).

If George, Jr. keeps up the breakneck pace, the chapter you are reading now will be null and void, for dictators need no slogans to win public sentiment. They need only brute force.

Jeremy is right: 2001 and no flying cars. But I'll take stagnation over regression any day. Any day soon would be fine.

UPDATE TO THE UPDATE

If you are reading these words, Saddam is out of power. Something eerily similar to this proposition has occurred. You may now, officially, weep for the future.

Chapter 20

abortion

One of the biggest bogus political non-issues to be shoved down our gullets year after year is abortion. To abort or not to abort, that is the question. Proponents of the procedure cite freedom of body, freedom of choice, and a heaping pile of scientific data as reason enough to keep abortion legal. Opponents of the procedure cite a moral obligation to protect gestating tissue as if it were a fully formed human being, in the name of their Right Wing “Christian” “god”, and a heaping pile of scientific data as reason enough to make abortion illegal.

Who's right? Who's wrong? Well, to figure that out, let's assume the scientific data on either side cancel each other out. What you are left with is freedom of choice and body on the one hand, and moral obligation based on RIGHT WING MALE INTERPRETATIONS OF A BOOK THAT PURPORTS TO BE HOLY. THIS BOOK IS ONE OF MANY THAT PURPORT TO BE HOLY AND THE INTERPRETATION THEREOF IS LIKEWISE ONE OF MANY.

This is a classic case of **A** right versus **THE** Right.

To help us better understand the logic of a typical pro-lifer, I shall now illuminate their mindset with a piss-poor analogy. Here goes....

Remember when you were a kid and you wanted desperately to, say, go outside and play with your friends? But what happened? Your grumpy old parents wouldn't let you, right? You remember that?

And you'd ask—plead, really—*Why?! Why?! Why?!* What was always their answer?

If you remember correctly, it was the time-tested,

BECAUSE, followed by more of your incessant whining and then the stern, *BECAUSE I SAID SO!* And if it wasn't ultra important to you that day to play in the sunshine, that would be the end of discussion.

Would it were that important to you, however, you would have kept at it: "But why, Ma? Come on, Dad, why?"

I TOLD YOU BECAUSE I SAID SO! invariably would come the, frankly, heartless reply. And that, ladies and germs, was endgame.

And so it is with pro-lifers. Why should abortion be stricken from the land? Because they said so. Or rather, because they believe their god said so. Same difference. Sane people know that, but just try telling it to a pro-lifer. You're liable to be shot.

Such is the way of morality, I guess.

Just because the Pro-life Movement's take on this issue is cock-and-balls stupid, does that make an antiabortion stance at large de facto cock-and-balls stupid? We'll never know unless we take a hard look at the pros and cons of abortion and weigh each pro and each con on their own merits.

Let the weighing begin....

Chapter 21

abortion pros & cons

PRO: You can piss off a lot of people who will never allow themselves to understand the circumstances under which you feel abortion to be the answer. Always fun because, since *ignorance* is bliss, *ignorants* are a blast to fuck with.

CON: You have to see those same people at church the next day.

PRO: No terrible twos to suffer through.

CON: You get to go to HELL.

PRO: No messy diapers to ruin your day.

CON: Doctor may fuck up and ruin your uterus.

PRO: Not pregnant anymore.

CON: Your God-fearing mother may wish she hadn't been pregers, either.

PRO: It's a new experience.

CON: So's killing a baby—but you're not about to do *that* anytime soon!

PRO: Virtually painless procedure.

CON: Except for the part that hurts. What's that called again? Oh, right: the *abortion*.

PRO: Overwhelming sense of relief from having executed right decision for you.

CON: Overwhelming mob of protesters waiting outside clinic to execute you for same decision.

PRO: Doctor gives out free lollypops after operation.

CON: Center of lollypop tastes odd, smells vaguely familiar.

Now go cast your vote. Unless your vote doesn't count in which case, fuck it. Get liquored up and shout a real lot.

We interrupt our regularly
scheduled chapter to bring
you this quick quiz.
It is exciting and informative.
Perhaps it will be used in
a CNN poll.
(They have to get their
information from
somewhere, right?)

QUICKIE QUIZ

T/F: The current legal drinking age is 21.

Answer: False. The current legal drinking age is 21, except on college campuses where it's still 13 and over.

T/F: Date rape is legal in some states.

Answer: False. Exempting the Kennedys, even Massachusetts has laws against date rape. And murder. And cocaine parties.

T/F: Institutionalized racism is legal in some states.

Answer: True. Ever been down South? Up North? East? West? Florida?

T/F: Life sucks and then you die.

Answer: False. Life sucks, then you find Jesus, and then you die.

T/F: Elderly people cannot read these words.

Answer: False. Elderly people cannot read these words.

T/F: Global warming is an authentic problem.

Answer: False. 'Member when in the winter, 'cause how cold it got? I mean, that's not.... Cold is not hot. Right? What am I, an idiot?

T/F: Buddha was a big fat bastard.

Answer: False. You're thinking of Meatloaf. Oh, you weren't?—Well now you are! In your face, America! Yeah! How does that feel? Thinking about him now, aren'tcha? ...Aren'tcha?!

T/F: A well-balanced diet will help you to live longer.

Answer: False. Living longer helps you to live longer.

T/F: Diamonds are forever.

Answer: True. So why are they worth anything? Asphalt is forever too, but that ain't worth shit. Might I suggest something in fucking as a gift? It's fleeting, momentary, and will mean so much more to that special someone. Unless that special someone is your mom, then stick with the diamonds. Or a pearl necklace.

T/F: Jesus loves you.

Answer: True. But so do I.

Now go cast your vote. Oh wait...wrong section.

**We now rejoin our regularly
scheduled chapter already
in progress...**

Chapter 22

Having attended the 2000 Green Party rally in Madison Square Garden, I didn't get the sense that Ralph Nader was in cahoots with George "The Animal" Bush. But the American Media was telling me he was to blame for Al Gore's loss. Interestingly, Al Gore was NOT to blame for his own loss to a silver-spoon-fed idiot oil monger of Dan Quaylian proportions.

I was confused. The media is objective, free press and all. They couldn't possibly be wrong or...or lying?

Then this e-mail came through to my desktop computer and all became clear....

The following is from an article in which a Zimbabwean politician was quoted as saying that children should study this event closely for it shows that election fraud is not only a third world phenomena, but it happens in the US too!

"1. Imagine that we read of an election occurring anywhere in the third world in which the self-declared winner was the son of the former prime minister and that former prime minister was himself the former head of that nation's secret police (CIA).

"2. Imagine that the self-declared winner lost the popular vote but won based on some old colonial holdover (Electoral College) from the nation's pre-democratic past.

"3. Imagine that the self-declared winner's 'victory' turned on disputed votes cast in a province governed by his brother!

"4. Imagine that the poorly drafted ballots of one district, a district heavily favoring the self-declared winner's opponent, led thousands of voters to vote for the wrong candidate.

"5. Imagine that members of that nation's most despised caste, fearing for their lives/livelihoods, turned out in record numbers to vote in near-universal opposition to the self-declared winner's candidacy.

"6. Imagine that hundreds of members of that most-despised caste were intercepted on their way to the polls by state police operating under the authority of the self-declared winner's brother.

"7. Imagine that six million people voted in the disputed province and that the self-declared winner's 'lead' was only 327 votes. Fewer, certainly, than the vote counting machines' margin of error.

"8. Imagine that the self-declared winner and his political party opposed a more careful by-hand inspection and re-counting of the ballots in the disputed province or in its most hotly disputed district.

"9. Imagine that the self-declared winner, himself a governor of a major province, had the worst human rights record of any province in his nation and actually led the nation in executions!

"10. Imagine that a major campaign promise of the self-declared winner was to appoint like-minded human rights violators to lifetime positions on the high court of that nation.

"None of us would deem such an election to be other than the self-declared winner's will-to-power. All of us, I imagine, would wearily turn the page thinking that it was another sad tale of pitiful pre- or anti-democratic peoples in some strange elsewhere."

With this perspective snapping at the synapses, I felt a whole lot better knowing that at least one world leader smelled something rotten in the state of Florida and spoke up. Better still that this e-mail must have reached thousands, perhaps millions of other Americans the way it had me.

How many coincidences have to occur in a row for them to not appear like random chance? The mass media is feeding us *patterns of coincidence, an absurd notion if ever there was one, instead of investigating any possible—shall we say—devious Republican behavior.*

Does this fly with you?

How many of us will remember the stink of this election? How many will give in to the CNN polls served by a friendly white smiling head, telling us how we all feel, like some evil psychological experiment?

Remember these very same polls told us that the vast majority of Americans would vote Bush in 2000. They didn't. They voted Gore.

And Bush won.

Remember this, please. Remember the tragedy of another Supreme Court WHITE JUSTICE(S) coup in the millennial U.S. election.

Remember how to fight.

Chapter 23

From out of the depths of 1990....

study concludes moral fiber of america's youth is weakening

NEW YORK (Associated Press)—Watergate was a word you learned in grade school. Your teenage years coincided with the “me decade.” And come job-hunting time, the “greed is good” mantra from “Wall Street” echoed everywhere.

You belong to a generation that is “less anchored in bedrock ethical values than any other,” a study by Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics finds.

“An unprecedented proportion of today’s youth lack commitment to core moral values like honesty, personal responsibility, respect for others and civic duty,” concludes the report scheduled for release Friday.

But critics—including educators, ethicists and some of the 18-to-30-year-olds in question—say the Los Angeles-based, non-profit institute’s study is overstated.

“I don’t see rampant amorality,” said Stephen F. Davis, a psychology professor at Emporia State University of Kansas. His survey on cheating among 6,000 college students nationwide was one of about a dozen studies on which Michael Josephson based his report.

“There are some messages in our data but certainly I wouldn’t go so far as to indict an entire generation based on it,” Davis said this week.

But Josephson said his conclusions, which were drawn from published and unpublished polls, articles and about 40 original

interviews, indicated “a meaningful, demonstrable...discernible disintegration” in moral standards.

“It’s a total picture that really tells a story,” said Josephson, whose non-partisan institute conducts ethics programs for the Internal Revenue Service, the Pentagon, several major media organizations and educators.

Among the indicators Josephson cites:

- During the 1980s, the majority of college freshmen surveyed admitted to cheating in high school.
- Young Americans are 40 percent less likely to identify frequent newsmakers than those over the age of 30; those 24 or under vote less than any previous generation.
- Professional resumé and reference-checking services estimate that from 10 percent to 25 percent of jobseekers—a large percentage of whom are under 30—falsify their credentials.
- A recent published survey found 70 percent of females under 18 were sexually active in 1989 compared with 54 percent a decade earlier; for males, the increase was from 66 percent in 1979 to 75 percent last year.

“I’ve been teaching now for about 18 years and I have not experienced a decline in either the ethical values that students espouse or their concern with those issues,” said John Gabarro, a professor at the Harvard Business School. “In fact, if anything I’ve seen a keener awareness and interest.”

“We’re trying to make ourselves happy...but don’t see a reason to abandon our morals,” said Laura Rich, 25, a medical student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

After more than a decade of surveying his students’ values, Arthur Levine, director of Harvard University’s educational management institute says he has noticed a welcome swing

in recent years toward community commitment and social awareness.

"I'm very optimistic about this generation," he said.

But Josephson's study concludes otherwise. "The new generation acts as if the world owes them, as if they have a right to win, as if they need whatever they want and deserve whatever they need," the study warns.

Chapter 24

man loses sense of disgust in one swift stroke

A twenty-five-year-old English stroke victim has lost the ability to feel disgust. When shown pictures of faces illustrating the full gamut of human emotion, the only one he could not relate was disgust. The same held true for auditory associations. He could, for example, identify laughter but not regurgitation.

Neuroscientists have concluded that the man comprehends the verbal meaning of disgust, but can no longer emote it. As a result, he now “gets” fart jokes, Jim Carrey movies, The Sex Pistols, The Irish—and has thusly had his status as “Englishman” revoked by the queen, Boy George.

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 25

Norm: Alright, since you're going to fight me on the alien thing, let me follow up on something else: Why don't you drink?

Jeremy: Can't I not drink?

N: Apparently you can!

J: Why does everyone get on my case about this? I don't drink, smoke, do drugs, have promiscuous sex...er...sex—

N: You haven't had—? You're still a virgin?

J: Come on, Norm! You know that about me.

N: Yeah, I just like hearing it. That's fucking weird.

J: You know, why am I the weird one? What, because I actually listened to my parents sometimes?

N: Alright, *Defensive*. Let's dissect this one step at a time, shall we?

J: Go easy.

N: Smoking. Tried it?

J: Yes, in third grade.

N: Really! So late?

J: Har, har. I hung out with this “bad kid” named Bobby Peoples. Brockton, Massachusetts again. He smoked and looked at his dad's porn mags, which were not-so-hidden under his mattress. I remember the first time he showed me a woman giving a guy a blow job. I didn't get it. I asked,

"What's so bad about that? She's eating an ice cream cone." That huge circumcised head just didn't register.

N: Like your Michael Jackson posters.

J: Right, like my whole room. Blow jobs just weren't part of my reality so I literally couldn't see them. He had to point it out to me, and I'd say, "Nah-ah!" But after a while, it sunk in and I was disgusted. Why would she be doing that?

N: Indeed!

J: Still boggles the mind, doesn't it, Norm? So that's the kind of kid he was. Smoked and read porn in the third grade. I wanted to fit in, so I would let a cigarette dangle from my lip every now and again, but I never inhaled.

N: Like Clinton!

J: Exactly like Clinton, but for real. Then one fine day, I was sitting around a kitchen with some smoking buddies. They caught on to the fact that I never inhaled and did the appropriate amount of razzing, so I gave it the ol' college try. Or third grade try, as the case may be. Anyway, I didn't so much inhale as I did swallow the smoke.

(Norm laughs)

J: Yeah. It was gross. I coughed up all this cottony phlegm for a few long minutes. I wouldn't pick up another cigarette again until high school. It was for a role in a short film my friends and I slapped together called *Madge The Usual*. If you ever get your hands on it, it is the most awkward lighting of a smoke in the history of cinema. I lit it before I put it in my mouth. My inexperience is documented. But whatever. You know we did several takes and that's the one they used. That's friends for you.

N: Did your parents ever catch you smoking?

J: Nope. My dad saw me and Bobby sitting on the porch with incense sticks in our mouths once and thought we were smoking. I said, "It's not a cigarette, Dad! It's just camel shit!" There's a lot about those two sentences he wasn't happy with but at least I wasn't smoking. Of course this was a man who had been giving me sips of beer since I was a baby, so what the fuck do cigarettes mean?

N: He fed you beer?

J: No. Just sips. I'm being a bit of a prick here, because it doesn't really offend me. Some of my fondest memories are of me and my sister Kara sitting on his lap while he read to us. He'd give us tiny sips of beer and his breath and burps reeked of the stuff. I always liked the smell of beer, always had that association: beer and Father's affection. It's a wonder I never touched the stuff, not even in college.

N: Did you ever want to?

J: To fit in, sometimes I wished I had the urge to drink. It's the same way I wished I liked sports so I could be a jock and fit in with the "cool" crowd. We've all had those moments, you know? When you think if you're someone else, life would be easier? But it never is. Most of those jocks are security guards at the local mall.

N: So who gets the last laugh?

J: It's not about that. We all have our foibles, Norm. You especially.

N: Thanks.... So no drugs, either?

J: No. Never even had the urge. Wait, that's not totally true. Part of me wants to try Peyote to see if it really is a gateway into another world or just a hallucinogen. But then a stronger part of me says don't bother. If it's a key to an ordi-

narily unseen world, there's got to be another key somewhere—a skeleton key to all worlds.

N: You think?

J: Yes. And if I don't discover it, or it isn't discovered in my lifetime, oh well. Let death be that key.

N: What is death to you?

J: Tunnel, light, ghosts, God. True. So is reincarnation. So is the possibility of those beings we call aliens intercepting your soul and giving you a new, “alien” body. So is the Great Empty. Oneness. Haunting the walls. Inter-dimensional travel. I believe the possibilities are infinite. I think the soul explores. I need to believe this. As my dad once said, “Could you imagine dying and ending up in Heaven with born-again Christians?” Fuck, who wants Pat Robertson disciples waving them into eternity? I couldn't imagine a worse hell. What, burning? Fuck that. It's not so bad once you get used to the pain. Try holding a conversation with the ignorant converted. Now try holding it again...and again...and again.... Fire is not as lonely. Solitary confinement?—Not as lonely.

N: Do you believe in Hell?

J: In high school, I played with a Ouija board with a group of close friends. We did this often and a plot line eventually developed involving one friend's mom's dead boyfriend who wanted to tell her who killed him. I'll cut to the chase here.... One fine day I decided to play with the board by myself. Supposedly this is taboo because a weak person cannot communicate with the dead alone.

N: Why not?

J: I still haven't figured that out. But I got a taste of it this day. I tried and tried to communicate with the spirits via

my Parker Brothers oracle, but they weren't coming through. I wasn't psychically strong enough or something. I could feel what seemed like heat rising from the board though. I stopped trying and turned on my amplified speakers. I wanted to play a CD, but only static came through. Well, that and a voice.

N: A voice?

J: Yes.

N: A voice?

J: Yes!—Shut up, I know! I thought my speakers were talking to me! I was alone in the house and it freaked me out! I knew there was a spirit trapped on the Ouija board that I could not communicate with to sign off. I didn't have a car, so I ran to the phone to call my friend Travis who did. I punched in his number and got a busy signal. I tried again and it rang. Every ring felt like scary lonely minutes as I waited for him to pick up. He didn't. I got an answering machine, obviously not his, that started off with heavenly harp-n-clouds type music. Then a multi-toned voice barked out like the devil in *The Exorcist*, NO ONE'S HERE! LEAVE A MESSAGE!, followed by more heavenly music and an angel's choir underneath what could only be described as a chorus of tortured souls with asthma.

(Norm laughs)

J: Yeah, now it's funny. But Jesus! I didn't wait for the beep! I ran out onto my porch like I was being chased. I didn't know where to go. I took a deep breath and went back inside. I called another friend who was home. He was kind enough to pick me up, no questions asked. I packed up my Ouija board and waited outside for him to bring me to Stacey's.

N: Who is Stacey?

J: She was my first true love, apart from Amanda in kindergarten, and my best friend. She, like her mother, claimed to be psychic. She could use the Ouija board without anyone else on there. When she played the plastic oracle would zip around the letters at an almost unreadable rate. Her mom lived in Hawaii, but Stacey lived in Taunton with her half sister. Oh and I forgot: I called them before I tried to call Travis, to tell them I was coming. They, in turn, called Paul. Paul was a punk rocker friend who was into Wicca at the time. He was something like five years older than the rest of us, going back to high school to get his diploma, blah-blah. What's important for this story is that he was a punk rocker whose image was intended to portray fearlessness.

N: How old was Stacey's sister?

J: Kim? Not sure. Early thirties, maybe?

N: Was she home?

J: Yes.

N: And she endorsed this kind of occult behavior?

J: Yes. She played along with us. You don't understand, their whole family was raised in this type of belief system. Anyway, when I got there, Scott—the guy who drove me—took off. He wasn't part of our inner circle of Ouija-ers.

N: So it's you, Paul the punker, Stacey the psychic, Kim, the...enabler, for lack of a better word, and—

J: That's it. Well unless you want to include Kim's twenty-plus cats.

N: She's one of those, huh?

J: You betcha! In fact, let's include them. Kim had a fiancée named Joe who didn't believe in any of this crap. He was a

very rational kind of guy who didn't fall for Parker Brothers' bullshit. But that morning he left a note for Kim telling her that the cats were acting funny. They seemed to be reacting in fright to some invisible thing or things. It freaked Joe out. The letter was asking her to stop playing with the Ouija board because even though it was all bullshit, the cats didn't think so!

N: But come on! It is all bullshit! It's just people moving the oracle unconsciously to answer their own questions.

J: Maybe. But if that's true, then why did the Ouija board "spirits" ask questions of their own? They did that frequently. One of them would comment on the church bells next door to my house, saying nothing more than, "Bells from a French church." The spirit claimed to be from France. The bells reminded him of home. These particular bells rang from a Catholic church full of primarily Portuguese congregates so I don't know if they were French in origin or not. But that's a fairly miscellaneous detailed thing for a high school kid to make up or have jumping out of the subconscious.

N: You're straying.

J: Sorry. I think it's important to realize that different "spirits" or "demons" or whatever had different personalities, different things they needed to tell us. I've kept in contact with my high school friends over the years and nobody has come forward to say they were the ones pulling a prank.

N: I guess that's important.

J: Oh, it is, Norm, it is! 'Cause here's what happened back at Stacey's that day.... I broke out the Ouija board. Kim called her dead uncle Bobby to the board and asked him if he could clear out any unwanted spirits I may have attract-

ed earlier. He did. Stacey had to go to work so it was just me, Kim and Paul. We continued to chat with Uncle Bobby for a time when, without warning, the oracle started moving in erratic circular motions. Heat rose from the board. Real heat, Norm. Not psychosomatic heat. Kim kept asking for Uncle Bobby. "Uncle Bobby, are you still there? ...Uncle Bobby?" In response, the oracle spelled out a bunch of swear words and told us it was the devil and we were going to go to hell and all this fun stuff.

The Ouija board entities didn't like me too much because I would crack jokes and be skeptical and cynical and was never a true believer. Today was no different. I mocked the spirit that claimed to be Satan, that claimed to own my soul. So did Paul. Finally, I said, "If you're the devil, prove it." At that moment, Kim's answering machine started clicking, a glass candleholder split in two, and the radio in Stacey's bedroom turned on and blasted static like my speakers back home! LIKE CLOCKWORK! *Boom-boom-boom*, one after the other.

Paul and I looked at each other and started crying. Crying! You have to picture this! A frumpy fifteen-year-old and an older punk rocker bawling their eyes out, freaked out by a \$14.95 Parker Brothers board game! It was ludicrous! Only Kim kept her composure. Somehow she beckoned Uncle Bobby back to the board. He apparently fended off the mighty Satan who continuously threatened to steal all our souls. Kim tried to lighten the mood. She said, "Uncle Bobby? Since the radio's on, can you pick out a good station for us?" Then, through the static, The Beatles' "Good Day Sunshine" played.

N: Shut up.

J: I swear to you, Norm. I know it sounds cheesy and stupid, but there it is. You make sense of it. You wanted to know if I believe in Hell and the answer is no. I'm too edu-

cated for that. But does Hell believe in me? That I don't know and I'm doing my best to not find out.

N: Except for that Ouija board thing you just took minutes off my life to explain. The Heaven-bound don't generally dabble in the mystic arts, correct?

(Jeremy laughs)

J: I'll let you know. Hey, what can I tell you: We didn't have the internet back then, okay? We had Ouija boards. And we liked it!

N: And thus it follows and thus it is writ: You do not drink and drug.

J: Wrong. But wouldn't that wrap things up nicely? No, the fact is I don't know why I don't drink or use. I used to know. First it was amoral. Then I didn't want to ruin any political influence I may have with people in the future with skeletons and questions about my past. Then I didn't want anyone to attribute certain things in my life to bad trips. Finally, it turns out my dad's an alcoholic, so I'd better not touch the stuff, alcoholism being a disease and all.

N: I sense cynicism. Isn't alcoholism a disease?

J: I don't know. My dad explained it to me, but he has to keep reminding me. I'm no expert, so please don't take this as anything more than my own stuff here, but.... If alcoholism is a disease then how can an alcoholic claim responsibility for his actions? How is it his fault that he fell into denial? Isn't that the nature of this particular disease the way, say, a person with HIV might not know he has it for months because it doesn't show up immediately?

My trouble with alcoholism as disease is the implication that the alcoholic is a victim who needs a good support system to successfully recover. If this is true then the onus is on me to realize that the alcoholic couldn't prevent his mis-

deeds because he is afflicted with a disease that makes him swallow toxic mind-altering liquids, which impede his decision-making abilities. That is, in order for me to do the proper thing, I have to cheer on the alcoholic's recovery because the true abuser is not he; the true abuser is alcoholism. Not the diseased, but the disease itself.

My contention is there had to be a point—if only one—in Dad's life when the thought occurred to him—if only in a brief flash—that he has a problem. Isn't that what denial is? You have to admit at least fleetingly to yourself that you have an addiction before you can cover it up, build walls around it, etc. There has to be something there to deny.

So when he was hiding booze from us and saying that his liver problems were from a bad diet; when he was ruining his marriage and fucking up his kids and trying to keep it under control, didn't it ever occur to him that he was an addict? It's not like my dad's a dumb guy. On the contrary, he's one of the smartest people I know. From politics to psychology, my dad is damn bright. He knew enough about addiction to name it.

I know in my heart of hearts there must have been a time, a moment, perhaps before a booze binge—maybe during—that he thought about how he was fucking up his life. How he was fucking up his children's lives. I'll bet he felt suicidal; I'll bet he drank it away. That's not called disease. That's called refusing to take responsibility for your life. That's running. That's evil. He's so complicated, my old man. Alcoholic, workaholic, therapy addict.

N: How did this come out? Did he hit bottom or something?

J: Oh, he hit bottom, all right. And he did his best to take me down with him. I'm the designated healer in the family. When my parents would argue I'd console my crying mother and yell at Dad. My mom used to be a big smoker until I started breaking her cigarettes and throwing away

the packs on a regular basis. This was around the time I choked on my own smoke in the third grade. And this is the role I play with friends, too. I'm the psychologist, the shoulder to cry on, the man with answers. I'm not complaining about this, I feel honored that people trust my advice about things I may have never even experienced, like sex for instance. But this weekend was supposed to be my retreat.

It happened right after my freshman year of college. I'd lost a good friend to Spinal Meningitis. The LA Riots had spilled over into our Connecticut town, we were all feeling it. On top of that, I had to transfer out of the University of Bridgeport because the powers that be sold it to the Moonies—a fucking cult, Norm!—after much student protest. They told us they wouldn't and then they did, so our degrees would be worthless when we graduated. Not that a college degree is worth anything anyway, but I didn't know that then.

N: I can't believe you didn't want to stay at the cult school. You should have fit in.

J: Yeah, right. Me with my Ouija board and about two thousand bald Korean kids praying to their living god, Sun Myung Moon. It's a match made in somewhere.... Anyway, those were the bonus pressures my depressed freshman self had to contend with. All I wanted was to see my Dad and have a weekend of zero responsibility.

So my dad arrives and falls coming up the steps of my porch. I'm like, "Dad are you okay?" He's saying, "Fine, fine! I'm okay, don't worry." Then on the way out, he falls again. Again he assures me he's fine. So we drive away and he starts swerving all over the road. I'm thinking he's sick or has a concussion or something. I tell him to pull over and let me drive. I drive back to his place; he sleeps most of the way.

Later that night, I'm watching TV in the living room and I hear a loud thud in the kitchen. He's lying on the floor, not responding to my voice. Not responding to my patting his cheek. Not responding. My dad.

I say, "Okay, I'm gonna call 911." And then he speaks up: "I'm okay, just let me sleep."

"No, I'm calling 911," I say. He protests like he's talking in his sleep. I call, an ambulance rushes him to the hospital, I wait around there for some answers, hoping he isn't dying. I see the nurses laughing to each other about how he's just drunk. LAUGHING. IN FRONT OF ME. PROFESSIONALS. HEALERS. Then one of them tells me that his blood/alcohol level is off the charts. He should be dead right now, they say. They tell me to go home and get some sleep, they would hold him overnight for observation.

Drunk? My dad? MY dad? No way! He's never shown signs of this behavior. He would get into what I called weird moods where he'd suddenly seem "out of it" and get angry about nothing. Like the time I pulled a shade down and he yelled me to tears. But those were just mood swings, products of clinical depression for which he was medicated.

N: And medicated...and medicated....

J: Apparently. I don't remember the exact order of people I called, but if I had to guess, I'd say I called my mom first for some grief counseling. I was stuck alone in this town I didn't know my way around. Then my dad's girlfriend, Nancy. Or maybe she called looking for him, I don't remember. But I do remember picking Dad up the next day. He denied knowing what those nurses were talking about. The doctors were all fucking assholes, all liars. Dad couldn't look at me the entire way home.

Nancy came over. She knew the score and the doctors had explained to me in no uncertain terms that my father was an alcoholic. He ignored us both. He lay back in his

recliner and didn't respond to us. Not with a nod of the head; not with a tap of the foot. He just tuned us out. I've never seen a human so scared and defeated as a person. He was pathetic, my dad. The man who raised me, taught me right from wrong, told me I'm worth something, loved me unconditionally. This heap of flesh, this preacher—Know what he did? Wanna know when he reacted finally? It was when he realized he had couples' therapy to conduct over at the church. He put on his coat, said he'd be back in a while, he'd be okay, nothing was wrong, he had a job to do, blah-blah-fuckin'-blah.

N: How did this end?

J: It ended with him in therapy per usual. It ended with him falling off the wagon and landing in a treatment center, AA, all that. It ended with him telling me and Kara, who was living in Seattle at the time and feeling shitty for being out of the loop, that we should go to Alanon meetings. It ended with him trying to control the situation right down to telling us where to go for therapy for the rest of our lives. It ended with us not doing that. It ended with my Mom admitting she knew it all along. She had always suspected he was a drunk but never said anything. Then, instead of feeling our pain like, say, a mother would, she shared her stories of abuse at the hands of our a-hole father with us and with my friends.

Fuck you, Mom, that's how that ended.

It ended when my dad proposed to Nancy, the daughter of an alcoholic whose ex-husband was an alcoholic. She said yes. They wedded and he forgot about me and Kara. Nancy has two daughters of her own. They were just screwed up enough for him to love and replace us with. We used to be the most important things in his life, Kara and I, his whole reason for living. He found another reason—that's how that ended.

Finally, Norm, you want to know how it ended?—I'll tell you: It ended when a man needed to hit bottom and chose his son who he knew would take care of him and could probably handle it without cracking. Then when he was done and all better, he threw away that son without ever saying so. Any relationship they would have together would be up to the son. And it's a shell of a relationship, believe me.

I'll tell you how it didn't end, though. It didn't end with Dad completing his 12 Step program. Oh, he got the cute little medal that says he finished, but he never really did, because one of those steps is calling everyone you know and apologizing. Taking responsibility for your actions over the years, for ruining the lives of your dearest and closest. I talk with my dad. I visit with my dad. I miss my dad. I'm still waiting for that call. Must be the disease, Norm. Must be the fucking disease.

That's how that ended. It never ends.

Chapter 26

whatchu talkin' 'bout, catch phrases?

Thanks in part to television shows such as *Diff'rent Strokes*, Generation-X has conditioned themselves to speak in catch phrases. Their favorite is a simple one-word retort to everything: “whatever.” A team of Harvard psychologists has recently decoded the meaning of “whatever” as used by Gen-Xers—and the truth is as startling as it is complex. There are three main components to the meaning of “whatever.” They are as follows:

1. I do not care about what you just said because
2. I am at least as smart as you—perhaps smarter—
so we both know you are exaggerating and/or
lying, but
3. I am helpless to do anything about it so my one-
word wall of cynicism will have to suffice for action
and/or emotion.

Worth noting is how all three components begin with the word “I.” Also worth noting is how taken together these components empower the speaker with a sense of self-righteousness, which does NOT lead to action. It is as if complacency is a proper substitute for action, provided the speaker is aware of his/her complacency. Given this backwards philosophy, there is no telling what tyranny man could impose upon man before man takes action. Action against...um...man.

Tss. Whatever.

For more information, [click here](#).

And Then Came This Lovely Anecdote....

Typically lame Mariah Carey pop trash pumped through the hidden speaker system of the club's intimate back room.

"Put it in the middle.... I want to feel it," the stripper teased. Her hot breath moistened his ear, made him tingle with a most foreign delight. He shifted his penis around out of the trap of his boxer shorts so that it stood at attention. She ground him so hard he thought it would pop off.

The aspiring actress gently clasped his right wrist and guided his hand to the damp tangle between her thighs. "Oo, you're making me so wet. This doesn't usually happen with clients.... There's just something about you that...Ooh...!" she moaned.

He thought to himself, "It wouldn't be that I told you I'm a producer would it?"

"Yeah. *You* should pay *me*," he joked.

She giggled and purred. Then she changed up positions, knelt between his wide-open legs. She caressed him with the back of her head, then lifted her eyes to meet his and did the unheard of: she playfully bit and teased his shaft with her lips through his dress pants.

Mariah crooned something about not breaking her heart as the stripper or "dancer" or "actress" methodically slid her near-naked body up his fully clothed lap, stomach and chest. She whipped her blond dye job out of her face and went for the left ear again. In it, she sighed a chorus of horny sex groans. She pulled down her sheer bikini top so he could have at those large whore nipples, licking and sucking, then she gently grabbed his erection and stroked it lustfully.

"I want you to cum," she whispered through her orgasmic suspirations.

He nuzzled his nose in her hair, traced the outline of her upper ear with it, and inhaled deeply the standardized imposter perfume of her. "I can't," he confessed. "I have to walk back to the hotel."

"You can clean up in the bathroom."

"No, come on. That's disgusting."



He who declares there is no sex in the champagne room has not visited the room without champagne. Or maybe he just didn't have five hundred dollars in Nickelodeon petty cash on him.

Chapter 27

Norm: So delving into the virginity thing really only one question comes to mind: Why?

Jeremy: Hmm.... That's another *I don't know*. It ain't puritanical dogma, I can tell you that. Waiting for mutual love? Fear? Both used to be true but I think I've outgrown them. There's something about it that isn't right for me. For instance, for the part of me that wants to go to strip clubs, there is a greater counterpart that lectures me on how these women are sexual abuse victims living in a female-bashing society who really hate men and themselves.

N: You're one of those, are you?

J: Yes. I'm the bane of my own existence. It's the same with one-night stands. I don't feel like I'm always questioning motive; rather, motive always comes to me. I have a very real ability to feel other people's deepest emotions without them knowing it. Often I'm asked why I look so sad. My face betrays me. I'm always thinking, always half in the moment. No matter what I do, I can't rid myself of the dominating feeling that our species is failing itself. Sex, drugs, money, TV, the politics of a planet taking evolutionary leaps based on profit margin instead of betterment.

N: Sometimes betterment results, though.

J: Yeah, but as a side effect. It isn't enough. I feel like yelling, *The sky is falling!* I have this recurring dream that I'm walking out of a grocery store with my mother and a UFO appears above us. All the people in the parking lot either freeze or continue with their milling about, oblivious

to the giant object hanging over them. In the dream I'm always tugging on my mother's arm, shouting, trying to get her to look up and see that this thing is real. But she won't do it. This is what I feel my life is. And on top of that is the dread that comes with what I take to be inherent knowledge: It no longer matters if she looks up. The game is over. We are walking the path of extinction. Sex? Drugs? Money? How could I possibly give a shit?

N: Okay, not that this is the point.... You don't want to have sex?

J: I do. But I'm a damn fool if I think it matters. Norm, that dream is a part of my reality. Like I said, I'm only ever half in the moment. The other half has stepped up and away. It sees what is going on and is helpless to stop it. I wonder if in the dream, if I ever get my mom to look up, she'll see me peering from a window in the UFO, stone-faced, post-weepee.

N: You're getting dangerously close to martyr territory here.

J: Boy, that's an understatement! What am I supposed to do, though? There are days when I feel personal longing, and there are days when I feel the longing of the world. Both are real.

I remember my sophomore year of college, there was this girl named Theresa who was dating a friend down the hall. You think I'm in a state of arrested development?—She takes the cake! She was really bratty, like a little kid. She'd kick me and pull my hair and laugh obnoxiously at inappropriate things, like, say, kicking me and pulling my hair. One night she wouldn't stop banging on my door. It was like two in the morning or something, and she kept kicking my door as hard as she could. I'd confront her and she'd mock me. She'd run away when I opened the door, then come back and kick it again as soon as I closed it. More than once I had to have her dragged from our floor. But

lamentably, she was dating my friend so I had to see her if I was to see him.

One day a group of us drove to the mall. She was acting up per her usual routine. At some point, she walked passed me and in a near-debilitating flash, I felt what it is to be her. I felt what lay behind the mask of immaturity. It was so overpowering, my knees buckled for a second. I thought I would cry and faint at the same time. It was an emotional surge on par with reciting that *Power For Living* prayer. At that moment and ever after, I could not despise her the way I had up 'til then. I just completely knew her. You want to talk about martyrdom? Lately, like in the past year or so, I have the overwhelming sense that I can lay on hands.

N: Come again?

J: Right. Exactly. I don't know if it's to physically heal people or to take away their mental anguish or both. I haven't had the guts to try it out. I'm not a fucking Christ child, you know? But I've always believed that there are two paths for us: God's and our own. I tried to bargain with the Creator. I always felt like my role was to help humanity in some way. Maybe become a shrink, or start a grassroots political movement. But I also know that time is running out for us and it is too late for baby steps.

What I really want to do is entertain, anyway. So the bargain was, if I were allowed to be famous and make movies, I would turn around and use my cult of celebrity and fortune to gather the great thinkers of our country: Noam Chomsky and such. From all walks of life, too: community builders, philosophers, politicians. I would dump money into our coalition to come up with a workable alternative plan for America and the world. The antithesis of corporate domination is out there, it just needs some advertisement bucks to get across—pretty much what Ralph Nader half-

assedly tried to do through the Green Party. That's what I've wanted to do since I was in high school.

N: Basically, you wanted to be Warren Beatty.

J: No. He didn't stick with it. I would stick with it. I'd form a shadow government that would watchdog and explain in real and simple terms what policies are on the floor of the House and what they mean for us long-term. We still don't have that because even the Green Party doesn't have the financial power to buy Prime Time TV the way, say, Ross Perot did. Could you imagine if he hadn't been a paranoid egomaniac how much real power he could have had?

N: Power corrupts though, does it not?

J: No. I am not corruptible. I couldn't give two shits about money. And you know what? I know all of this is going to sound lame, pretentious, cult leader-like and I don't care. It's who I am on the deepest level. I can't, nor do I want to help that. I'm not the smartest guy in the world or special in any way that I think is inaccessible to others. That's the key: maybe I'm wrong, but I think it's more than likely that everyone can feel the pain of the world if you're open to it. Just as anyone with the proper training can find higher states of consciousness through meditation.

N: But you haven't done that, right?

J: No, I don't meditate in any regimented way.

N: So how did you arrive at this sort of psychic intuition? Born with it?

J: No. There is another way. Initiation.

Chapter 28

damn dirty frogs!

First there was the pet baby alligator. Then came the pet rock. Now, in Paris, France—never a country to be outdone by anyone—there is the pet Barbary Ape. Like Mogwai into Gremlins, this endangered species grows from cute cuddle-bucket into scary bellicose beast. Ever since it became illegal in Paris to let dogs wander the streets unleashed, underclass gangs have taken to owning these creatures, which are smuggled into the country from North Africa. Unfortunately, when the apes grow unruly, these little bastard gang kids cut ‘em loose. It is then left to authorities to capture the blood-thirsty mini Kongs without killing them, due to their endangered status.

For more information, [click here](#).

**ain't love
grand?**

Chapter 29

No story is complete without true love. Even horror movies have lovers. Thankfully, this is no horror movie—this is my life! And these are the girls-cum-women I loved....

Amanda

It was kindergarten and she was beautiful. Brown-haired beauty, we would play at her house until dusk. I still remember the way my tummy churned when I would ring her bell. (No, that's not a euphemism.)

There was another girl in our class, Kelly, who vied for my affection. She had long light brown hair and used to kiss me all the time. Girl germs! Ew!

She was gross.

But Amanda...oh, Amanda. I have no idea what it was about her that so grabbed me, but my memory of her made me see stars all the way through middle school. Obsessive behavior struck early, I guess.

I haven't seen you since kindergarten, but if you're out there, Amanda, call me. I'd love to know how you turned out. If I ever have a daughter, I'll name her Amanda in your honor. I'm sure my wife would have no problem with that. I can say with equal certainty that I would not project any ill-conceived desires onto my daughter as a result.

Oh what a healthy family unit we would be. So yeah, avoid all this and call me.

Sonja

While technically not a love, I did have a big crush on her. So big that one fine seventh grade day, I sauntered over to her table during lunch and asked her out. She swore that if I got down on one knee and proposed in front of the entire cafeteria, she would go on a date with me.

A crowd of classmates had gathered and formed a circle around us. It was the type of audience you would expect to see at a fight during recess. Who knew seventh graders could be such romantics? Such lovers *and* fighters?

I glanced around nervously, if that's even the word. Then our eyes met, Sonja's and mine. I gently took her hand and gracefully swept down to one knee like a mythical, prepubescent Prince Charming. "Sonja," I squeaked, "will you go out with me?"

Her face ran flush with embarrassment. I don't think she expected me to take the dare. My classmates were chanting—no, ordering—"Do it! Say yes! Do it!"

She giggled a bit, then belted out an involuntary laugh, which enveloped a quite voluntary, "No." Her hand darted out of my palm like a recoiling garter snake. Not even a cobra, a fucking garter snake, for although her bite was harsh, she hadn't the venom to kill.

In a sweeping moment of kid justice, the entire cafeteria booed her all the way back to her French fries. I thought they'd go the other way, laughing me out of the building; beating me up the next day; forcing me to transfer to a private school where nuns dish out corporal punishment to budding standup comics.

In a warped way, the gods were on my side this day. I recovered quickly. Sonja never did live it down. Even in high school, friends would razz her about the time she turned me down. And by friends, I mean me. And by razz, I mean get her to laugh and feel guilty. And by all of this, I mean I asked her out again in high school.

My attempt was only half-hearted. It was the kind of

attempt a boy makes when his chemistry is stirring and he will fuck anything. Even a garter snake.

And by, *It was the kind of attempt a boy makes when his chemistry is stirring and he will fuck anything. Even a garter snake*, I mean she said, “No.”

Stacey Part 1

Here's where things get pitiful and the female readers write me letters of condolence because they would never treat me like this....

It all began the summer before sophomore year of high school. I was running around Bradlees with my Mom when the hormone radar locked in on the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. I followed her like a bastard spy hiding behind racks of cheap underwear, hazardous toys, itchy sweaters—I can't believe Bradlees stayed in business as long as it did, the shithole! Okay, sorry....

I stared her down so long, this femme fatale, I think I telekinetically moved her through the checkout isle. It couldn't be that she knew I was watching and needed to escape. I was too sharp to draw attention to myself like that. While other fourteen-year-old boys would have been salivating like rabid sperm whales at the sight of untainted brine, I mastered staying two steps ahead of my prey at all times.

And if she did by chance turn and catch me looking, I had also mastered the fine art of the poker face. I learned this by playing poker. I mastered it during whack-off sessions in the living room with a pillow over my erection to hide my extra-curricular activities. Every time my sister entered unannounced from her bedroom it was, “Hey, what's going on?” from me. She'd ignore me, grab the phone in the kitchen, then back to her bedroom. And for me, back to business at hand.

But I digress....

No, fuck that. I progress....

Mom made me get a job that summer. That's when des-

tiny kicked in. I chose the mighty career path of busboy with Bickford's Pancake & Family Fare. Back then this was the only twenty-four hour dive in town. It was the designated hangout joint for us high schoolers and a bunch of my friends already worked there.

As did SHE.

I wasted approximately zero time cracking nervous jokes around this exotic, lean shank of a girl. She looked like Cocoa from the movie *Fame*.

I told her as much and the nickname stuck. Soon, way soon, I began stroking her long, loose curls while making sheep noises.

"Why are you petting me? I'm not a dog!"

"No, you're a sheep. Baaaa!!!"

She actually let me do this all through high school, college, straight into adult life. Another mistake she made was laughing obligingly at my straightforward jokes when she thought I was weird, not funny.

LADIES: NEVER POLITELY LAUGH AT WEIRD GUYS' JOKES. THAT'S NOT JUST OPENING THE DOOR, IT'S TAKING THE DOOR OF THE HINGES AND BLASTING THE ARCHWAY!

Stacey and I had a mutual pal named "Carrie." And Carrie was a decent friend, one of those rare eternally good-natured persons you could never get angry at or hate. Especially me because she brought me to Stacey's apartment.

Now I doubt Stacey wanted me in her lair. At this point she had to have factored my intentions. There's no way for a teenage boy to keep his feelings secret. Not when he's petting HER hair. Not when he's cracking nervous jokes for HER benefit and fluctuating his attention between HER eyes, lips and breasts in a simulated wide-eyed REM sleep, while she laughs.

And certainly there's no way for a teenage boy to mask his feelings in gym pants. Eat me, gym class, you embarrassingly obvious excuse to train soldiers. Yeah, I'm wrong?—What the fuck was bombardment? Kill the man with the ball? Shirts and skins? (Oh wait...that has nothing to do with it.)

But I progress....

She may not have responded in kind to my advances, but we were becoming close friends. She was one of those mystery people you happen upon every now and then. The kind you think you must have known in another life. A soul mate, a splintered off piece of yourself. Intangible and indescribable—incredible! All the “in”-words, yes.

Stacey was my atrocious poetry.

Are you getting the point here? Do you see where this is leading?

One absolutely amazing thing about my mother is that even as a teenager she trusted me. Even with all the exposure to stories about teens having house parties that end in cops and broken pottery, my mom trusted me. Even with all the exposure to stories of AIDS spreading amongst the teen population and a rise in unwanted teen pregnancy, my mom trusted me. Why you ask? Why? Negligence? Nuts? No. My mom trusted me because she could.

But now that I think about it, she couldn't have known that she could. I was just a dumb kid swimming in the shallows of my experimental years. Hey, Ma, what the fuck were you, nuts or negligent? Whatever *comme si comme ça* parenting took place, I was definitely thankful. It afforded me the opportunity to sleep over Stacey's while her sister Kim and new hubby Joe traipsed away on their honeymoon.

Spending my first night alone with Stacey while her sister is on honeymoon. Hmm. There's something very... something about that.

We talked and talked and talked at her kitchen table. Remember all-night chat sessions? Remember when it was essential that every facet of your being be understood by your friends? What happened to that? I feel like now, when I meet somebody, I run down the skeletal checklist of personal history I've got stored in that part of the brain politicians and psychic hotline operators reserve for general answers that are all about forcing you to switch topics.

Stacey confided her deep crush on a mutual friend, Bill. My heart didn't sink, it climbed up my throat and plum-

meted several times like the free fall ride at Rocky Point Amusement Park. Cue poker face. Cue silent nods of affirmation. Cue a great and lasting misery.

Locked in her lair for the night, I squirmed inwardly like an Ebola monkey prepping for the final bleed. Mine dead eyes fixed upon her plump lips from which I assumed words were still being exhaled. I hovered there above the kitchen. I watched my corporeal shell feign interaction with her ripe, exuberant body. All manner of human left me then. I waited for Anubis to rear his lean doggy head and guide me through the horrors of the Duat.

I know in this book it is hard to tell what is literal and what is metaphor. (Imagine how I feel.) It's the same with love, damn it! It's the same with Stacey. When the time came for me to 'fess up my secret stalkee, I didn't just dodge the bullet, oh no. I climbed into my Dodge and ran it off the bridge before colliding with the Stacey bullet train. How's that for words not failing me?

Later in the evening, however, she wanted to rummage through my wallet. There's no explanation for this other than when you're that age, it isn't enough to understand your friends' entire beings, you also need to shove your truffle-hog snout into their rosy shit and route around. Although I could be wrong. The simpler Occam's Razor explanation might be that God hates me personally. The evidence for this lay in my wallet in the form of a poem I had written about her. I forgot all about it. She went right to it. Maybe she is psychic.

"What's this," she asked innocently enough. She began to unfold the lined notebook scrawl.

Now back in my body, I realized exactly what she had found. At that moment my eyes were all pupil, my face waxy white. I was done and I knew it. There was no escaping this, only damage control.

I barked, "No! Don't read that!" and lunged for the poem. She snapped it back and guarded it with a boxer's precision.

"What? Why can't I read it?"

"Just give it back!"

"No! Why don't you want me to read it?"

"Because it's mine!"

"So? Everything in this wallet's yours."

She had a good point. But so did I....

"Yeah, but that's **really** mine and I don't want you to read it!"

If I were a Dr. Seuss book, my title would have been *Oh The Sweat You'll Go!* This was not pretty, folks. And it lasted for hours. Or...well, minutes.

"If you don't want me to read it I won't." Yes! It worked! She caved! And yet she didn't give back the note. Funny that.

"Good. Yeah, don't." My voice wavered and cracked. I had more adrenaline pumping through me than Hulk Hogan slamming Andre The Giant at Wrestlemania III. Not more steroids, mind you; more adrenaline.

She held the thankfully still-folded paper between index and forefinger. She must have felt like one of the Fates cutting the strings of my destiny. I reached out weakly. With a flick of the wrist, she withdrew the script.

"Is it about me," she asked.

"Can I just have it back," I huffed.

"If you really don't want me to read it I won't. But if it's about me, you know I'd really like to read it. I mean, what is it?"

She put on the nice voice. The kind voice. The voice of understanding. The voice that says, *Hey! We're having a moment here and, ah, I swear to God I won't tell anyone. You, Jeremy Vaeni, will not be gossip. You, Jeremy Vaeni, can trust me.*

I sat in hot contemplation for a long time. For a very long time. For a very really, very really long, long time while she hovered over me. No more words needed be spoken. Her doe brown eyes did all the pleading from here out. In my mind, I ran through everything that was important to me and how it all might be affected, like Evel Knievel revving his bike at the Grand Canyon.

And like Evel Knievel, I jumped.

"It's a poem," I explained. Three words, three syllables, and I barely got them out.

You know the cliché about *her face lit up*? Yeah, her face **did**. This was so fucking pointless and hard. She liked Bill and I loved her. Maybe love would conquer like and I'd win, but.... This wasn't *The Wonder Years*.

Whatever else was said, ultimately she read the poem and was moved. I still think she felt truly honored and humbled—and for a hot chick who had guys whacking off to her image all the time, that's no small feat. But that didn't stop her from reiterating where her loyalties lie. And that reiteration couldn't stop me from whacking off to her image all the time. But maybe despite what she said, I wouldn't have to. Maybe despite the evidence, God didn't hate me personally. All of us, sure, but maybe not me personally.

I was there the night, wasn't I? Alone with the woman for whom I had ripped off my poker face like a *Scooby Doo* criminal? Who knew what was in store for us tonight?

Well...Stacey knew.

You ever meet a devious fifteen-year-old? Oh, they exist, friend. If Jesus died for our sins, Stacey lived for them. This was not going to be a night of peace, having exorcised the demons of secrecy and longing. It was going to be a night of cruelty and manipulation and it was going to start thus....

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Can you believe that was all prologue? Let's be honest, that's enough story right there to satisfy even the largest appetite for verbiage. But you know there's more. There's always more. And the more starts thus....

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Night falls like a fallen knight lanced by sunray straight through. I am the blood of the impaled. I am spilled life escaping the dead body, if only for a few extra moments of

breath. I am—Oh, fuck it! I'm sleeping on the floor, is what I am.

Stacey took her sister's queen-size bed and I dutifully took the floor. Stacey was kind enough to shoo away the twenty-plus cats and lock them out of our bedroom. This and someone else's prescription allergy medicine left in the bathroom cabinet made my sole allergy to cats real-time bearable.

I felt squeamish about these sleeping arrangements. Why would I be on the floor and she in Kim's bed when I could have slept on the couch and she in her own bed? I hope-hope-hoped it was part of a sick charade that would evolve into me sharing a mattress with the most sensuous girl-creature in all the land. I hope-hope-hoped this magical mystical night of honesty and shared feelings would end in bloodletting. I hope-hope—

"Alright," she said as if answering aloud an unspoken query. "You can sleep in the bed but no funny stuff. You've got to promise to stay on your side."

"Umm...okay," I replied shyly.

"But," she reiterated, "you stay on your side of the bed. You try to touch me and you're back on the floor."

"Umm...okay," I replied shyly.

I climbed in on the right side of the gargantuan bed. I knew me. I knew I could sleep with Beauty and never even graze her. What would I do with her anyway? Just being there was fantasy enough.

We chatted deep into the A.M., dishing on teachers and friends and bemoaning family. The amount of very detailed stuff we could learn from one another seemed bottomless. Then a dead calm swiftly overtook the atmosphere. It's the kind of quick-frozen quiet people achieve only when wholly engaged in one another's eternal present. Sometimes this phenomenon happens to couples, sometimes to whole rooms. First there is utter silence, then a beatific flash when all involved understand that no words need describe the moment for all have felt it at once.

This twin-soul's wink left me with perma-smile U-ing up

both sides of my face. Then she spoke in a commanding whisper. "In like a half hour or so, I want you to kiss me. I'm going to pretend you're Bill."

Say what?!

You read correctly: "In like a half hour or so, I want you to kiss me. I'm going to pretend you're Bill."

My U-face did a U-turn. The bottomless cup of conversation turned into a bottomless pit in my stomach. Various glands shot unfamiliar liquids into my bloodstream. I watched my mind race and placed bets against myself. I strongly felt I had a fighting chance of finishing last. But of all the "F" words, the one I did not feel was "fucked up."

Surely if I went through with her request, I would not win her over.... Or would I? Because it's not finishing last if I kiss her, it's honorable mention. No kid's a loser with honorable mention in play. Oh, I was smart, and I was justified because at most I would win her over with my romantic prowess. At least, I will have kissed the woman of my, and many a boy's, dreams.

Step right up! Everyone a winner!

Before taking the quantum leap into manhood, I made sure to cover my ass. "What if you fall asleep before I kiss you?"

"I won't fall asleep," she answered plainly.

"What if you don't like what I'm doing?"

"I won't let you do anything I don't want you to do."

We repeated the same questions and answers for about fifteen minutes. Never once did it occur to me to ask, "Why are you thinking of Bill and not me? Is it because you never knew your dad and your mom claims to be psychic and you live with your half-sister and her new husband who beats her? Or is it because your criminal brother raped you when you were younger and never asked repentance and it is now your life-vision to manipulate men through sexual control?"

No, for some odd reason it never occurred to me to ask anything that would not end in my saying, "Yes, I'll do it"; anything that would not end in regret.

A half-hour ticked by like a crappy slow-motion grandfa-

ther clock montage in an ill-conceived B movie. Then another half...Then another half.... In spite of desire I could not bring myself to cross her threshold. My skin—all of it—felt clammy like a newborn. My heart raced and I bet on that, too. I had to relearn properly paced breathing. Finally, at four-thirty in the morning, I made my move, my masterstroke if you will.

Stacey lay on her side facing away from me. I nuzzled up to her. She looked otherworldly in her cotton T-shirt and pajama bottoms, her face awash in thick black curls. I brushed them back, exposing her right cheek and soft brown neck. I stared at her ear, took in all the features. Every crease, every mole, her scent.... I lost control of my breathing again.

"Stacey," I whispered sharply. I winced and withdrew expecting her to wake and call it off. She stirred not.

"Stacey, are you awake?" She didn't answer, but that meant nothing. She said she'd be awake, so she was probably faking slumber.

"I'm gonna kiss you now, okay?"

I permitted myself to hear affirmation in her heavy sigh. I prepped myself mentally. I prayed a silent prayer that I wouldn't fuck up the kiss. Then, screaming nerves and all, I kissed her on the cheek.

My god, what a feeling! Stacey, are you feeling this, too?—Of course you are! You told me you'd call it off if you didn't like what I was doing! And you haven't, so.... You like me! Not Bill! Not some physically absent Bill, but me, the dumpy messy wit! The GOOD guy! Finish last?—Only so you can finish first!

I kissed her again, this time on her non-responsive—though very much alive and cartoonishly full lips. There was such a glorious YES! in her silence that I forged on. I sucked on her lobe and jammed my tongue in her ear. I licked all around in there real good, like I'd seen performed in *A Rage In Harlem*. Nobody in the movies tells you how fucking revolting inner ear tastes, so let me be the first:

KIDS: DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME! INNER EAR TASTES FUCKING REVOLTING!

Onward Christian Soldier....

I pulled back the covers exposing her not-naked-enough trim figure. This was not about me, this was about her. Pleasing her. This was my first loving sexual encounter and I was actually doing well. It was beyond survival of the ego, beyond honorable mention. I was moving into Don Juan territory now. Fuck **Bill**; I was Bill!

No, I was better because I loved her. Bill was a fantasy to her the way Cindy Crawford was a fantasy to me. She would never have him and that's okay. That's the nature of fantasy. I was the nature of her reality.

Like a rat chewing through drywall in search of a meal, I scoured her body for an entrance to those breasts. I rubbed them through her nightshirt, felt her nipples morph into hardened nubs. My penis belted out a primal scream, which scared the bejesus out of my testicles. The poor boys made that lengthy climb into my stomach where they cowered for the duration.

I needed more. The junkie needed his fix and bad. I tried to feel her up through her sleeve hole. This made for a frustrating couple of minutes. I thought about going up her shirt but it was a damn far journey. I feared the incidental contact my jittery hand would make with her pubis might disturb her. She might have thought I was trying to get into her pajama pants or masturbate her through them or something.

Instead, I did the noble thing and called off the hounds. I kissed her head and stroked her hair gently, then capped things off with a backrub. Dream actualized, I pulled the covers back up and rolled over to sleep.

The sheets hadn't settled from my movement when Stacey bolted straight up.

"Did you touch my breasts?" Her angry question threw me.

"Uh...yeah," I admitted.

She whipped the covers onto me and jumped out of bed. "I can't fucking believe you," she screamed. "You could have touched any other part of my body you wanted but these are mine! Nobody touches my breasts! I can't believe you took advantage of me like that! "

"But you said you'd be awake," I protested.

"Well I wasn't! And you're the worst kisser in the whole fucking world!"

Those two incongruous sentence out of the way. she threw open the glass double doors and stormed into the bathroom. I lay there angry with a dread/shame chaser. She came stomping back into the room brushing my taste off her teeth.

"I can't believe you," she mumbled, her mouth all foamy toothpaste. "Any other part of my body, but my breasts? God! What else did you do?"

To this day I hate lying. But if ever there were justification, this was it. "Nothing," I said. "I kissed you and rubbed your back, that's all."

What was I going to say? I nearly sucked a hole through your earlobe? I played "Bolero" on your eardrum with my tongue? I bit at your neck so much I thought it would pull off in soft chunks?

"That's it?" she demanded. She searched my eyes for hidden sin but found only the poker face.

"Yes. But you said you'd be awake," I defended once more.

"Well I wasn't," she spit, and again hightailed it to the bathroom. When she came back, she laid down the new and improved law. I was to sleep in her bed while she remained in Kim's. She was going to try and forget this ever happened and suggested I not tell anyone. She wasn't sure if she could remain friends with me or not.

I skulked off to her bed. I slept not a wink. I was at my suicidal best, plotting my demise over and over in my head. Jump in front of a car.... Jump off a roof.... Tie a bag containing a kerosene-doused rag around my head then jump up and down.... Do jumping jacks, fat boy—jump for joy—Whatever you do just fucking jump!

When a socially acceptable morning timeframe arrived, I dialed up my best friend with a car. I called the only friend I knew would be awake and ready to roll. Yes, folks, in a sicker twist, I called up Bill.

I left an apologetic note for Stacey on the kitchen table

and crept out of her layer, lest the dragon wake and breathe fire once more. This knight in shining armor hadn't the shield for another attack. Yeah, that's the other part movies don't teach you....

KIDS: SOMETIMES YOU ARE THE KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR BUT YOUR WANNA-BE SIGNIFICANT OTHER IS A DRAGON. IT IS THIS DRAGON WHO PUTS THE "CAN'T" IN "SIGNIFICANT." THAT AND YOUR PARENTS WAY BACK WHEN—BUT YOU'LL DISCOVER THAT REVELATION IN THERAPY. KIDS.

Bill understandably wanted to know what was wrong. I told him I didn't want to talk about it. He respected that with a level of maturity others his age could not. For that I loved him. Partly for that, Stacey did too.

I wasn't very hungry when we drove to Dunkin' Donuts. I wolfed down shit sandwich with egg and OJ. Bill had coffee and a jelly donut. Still not hungry, I too had a donut. Then another. Then another.

Far from being the end, this was only the beginning of my special friendship with Stacey.

I'll take those letters of condolence now.

Katie

Ah, yes, Paul's sister. My first real-live girlfriend. She was a huge New Kids On The Block fan. Her bedroom was wall-to-wall-to-door-to-ceiling NKOTB posters. Needless to say, we didn't have much in the way of conversation. Now granted my bedroom was (and remains) wall-to-wall-to-door (no ceiling) Michael Jackson posters, but come on! That takes guts! New Kids On The Block? Well that was just plain trendy.

"Just plain" is a fitting description of our two-month relationship. Not that it was all boring. She was the first girl to let me explore her body and admit it, though she never touched me beyond French kissing. I can't fault her there, though. Sometimes we'd be making out while watching

Cheers. Big mistake. While in the throws of more-scared-than-passion, Katie would shut her eyes water-resistant tight and I'd sneak a peek at the television.

Cheers, if you will recall, was a very funny show unlike most situation comedies then and now. Some punch lines were too good not to respond.

So, yeah, I laughed into her mouth so many times she must have thought I was administering CPR. I wouldn't have touched me either.

What she lacked in sexual prowess she made up for in gift balloons. She bought me helium filled signs of affection every chance she got. There was the Batman balloon and the giant heart balloon that stood on two accordion-style legs. It had accordion arms to match and if you pushed the little smiling guy, he looked like he was walking. The best and final balloon she gave me spoke. It had two grooved plastic strips that would say a phrase each if you rubbed a coin over them. One strip said, "I love you," like it meant it. But it didn't. Or it might have but she didn't. More and more when we'd chat on the phone it would be about how much she missed her ex and how much I loved Stacey. Or Renee. Or Natacha. Or, you know, whomever I loved at that point. That was a bad sign.

Another bad sign—I think an actual omen—was that we couldn't pick a song that best represented our pubescent union. Every teen couple has a song, so I took it upon myself to pick ours: The Beatles' *opus maximus* "Oh! Darling." Katie was agreeable for a few weeks. Then she decided it wasn't very *now*. So she changed it to Peter Gabriel's *opus conventionalus* "Red Rain." Fine. Good enough.

But it wasn't good enough! Songs and balloons and getting to third base—not enough! We were going through the motions of being a couple but we weren't attracted to each other. We were side dishes to each other's fantasy main course, baby, and it left us starved.

The day after our two-month anniversary, I gave my greedy whore fingers one last dance in her intimacies then called an end to our charade. She was pissed. I didn't know what about; after all we both liked someone else.

She called me later from work and asked, "Why did you fool around with me and then dump me?"

"Because I wanted to make sure I really wanted to break up with you. I wanted to see if there was still chemistry," I said.

"Oh. But on the weekend of our two month anniversary?" she complained.

"That's why I waited until the next day. I didn't want to do it on the day of our anniversary," I replied showing my sensitive side.

"Oh. Fine," she huffed.

"Also, I'm a grubby little teen who had never tasted girl juice before you came along. Imagine how hard it is to give that up? Besides, some brave soul had to retire "Red Rain" as his personal love song. But hey, if that's not good enough, I've got a balloon for ya. It's talking to me now. It's saying, 'Tell her, *Snout in the fries and fuck up, pig*—Get back to work! You both love somebody else,'" I wish I'd been arse enough to say.

Sweet Readers, let my foibles serve as a lesson to you all: Never fuck with The Beatles. If "Oh! Darling" is your song, *it's your song*. Changing it pisses off the Rock Gods and leads to divorce. Red rain may pour down but Archangel Gabriel will not save you.

Know when to leave well enough alone!

Stacey Part 2

For a brief few weeks Stacey got her wish. Bill, by now notorious for dating every hot chick in Bristol County (six, using the gold standard), said yes to her advances. Stacey entered Bill's world a girl and exited a woman. She was very candid in her descriptions of her sexual trysts with my buddy.

And when I say candid, I mean she narrated every sordid detail, every sexual position they explored. Back then I could have told you how many times she came and how.

Jealous? Yeah, I was jealous. And I remained jealous

for about half a year. Bill's not the bragging type. He doesn't turn women into dirty jokes or conquests like, say, I do. He's above all that. That's why he was getting laid when, say, I wasn't. Then one foggy Christmas Eve (actually, it was summer) Santa plopped a shit storm to end all shit storms.

Bill and I were driving down Route 44 when it happened. I broached the subject of his numerous affairs with Stacey as delicately as I knew how. "You are so fucking lucky! Why do you get all the hot girls? It's not fair," I blurted.

He laughed with only the slightest hint of ego. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, fuck!—What? I can't play acoustic guitar, so I'm the fucking Hunchback? My life is bullshit."

"Oh, Jer," he said with pity in his sigh. He always said with pity in his sigh like I'd never get it. Well, not *like*; I never *would* get it.

"God, I don't get it! You've had every hot girl on the planet from Lisa-Lisa sandwich to Stacey and I got nothing. Zip. Nada," I bitched.

Quick Definition: *Lisa-Lisa Sandwich—the two hottest blondes in our school. Both named Lisa; both doing right by Bill.*

"Stacey? What are you talking about," he asked.

"You know. What, I have to say it? You had sex with Stacey," I stated for the record.

He laughed an outraged, "What? No I didn't!"

"Yeah you did," I assured.

"No! I didn't! Did she tell you that?"

Uh-oh. What was this?

"Ah, yeah," I said meekly.

I thought Bill was going to drive us off the road he was so furious. You know that cartoon where you see the guy getting red and he has to count backwards from ten lest he explode? Yes, that.

"Jer! I swear to you I never had sex with Stacey."

"But she went into detail and everything. Positions.... All that stuff," I protested. One of us was clearly in denial.

"Positions? Oh my god, that's such a lie! This is what hap-

pened. It got to the point one night where we ended up in bed together. She asked me if I had a c. I said, 'A c?' She said, 'You know, a c.' I said, 'No, what's a c? You mean a condom?' She said, 'Yeah.' Jer, come on! I'm not going to have sex with a girl who can't even say the word condom! So I told her no and that was it."

"That was it," I asked, stunned. "What about—I mean she had very detailed...details."

"That's fucked up. Wow! She is so fucked up. It never happened. I mean, nothing ever happened," he said.

I then rehashed all the stuff she told me and the rest of our circle of friends. Bill was embarrassed. But not nearly as embarrassed as Stacey when I confronted her with the conflicting testimony.

This was bigger than big. This was life altering big. She pleaded guilty as charged and was shunned from our clique. She grew indignant, never understanding the severity of her crime. It wasn't a tiny white lie, it was a chunk of her life that for months we all believed was true. If this was a fraud, what else was? What about the whole psychic thing, huh? What about that? Would the real Slim Stacey please stand up?

She never did. Instead she quit school and started hanging around with "the bad crowd." She became like a character from an ABC After-School Special meant to teach kids what not to do. She tried every illegal substance known to the Free World. She moved to Hawaii with her mom for a spell, but ultimately ended up back in Taunton. Back in high school.

We patched up our relationship, which forced everyone else in our circle to follow the leader. Every clique needs a leader. I was he. The funny man. The advice guy. The only kid whose mom spent the weekends with her loser boyfriend out of town, thus leaving him with food money and a place to party.

Right before summer of Senior Year, Carrie, Stacey and I were tooling around town. Stacey was all excited about this ad she'd read for cruise ship hostesses that promised big bucks on the open sea as a summer job. The description

sounded too good to be true. I spoke to this and was told to fuck off. I was kindly reminded that I can be a cynical prick sometimes.

Not one to take criticism lightly, I upped the ante. I bet her that not only would she not get the job, but it would turn out to be a fraud. Now Carrie—also excited to work on the cruise ship—told me in so many words that it would have been easier to use the actual words, that I was a dick.

I snapped. I couldn't believe that my helpful warning was being twisted into words of arrogance. This hostile act brought out my best sadomasochistic self, who proceeded to help twist for them.

"You're psychic, Stacey. How about you make some predictions about me and I'll make some about you and we'll see who wins," I said.

"Fuck you," was her eloquent retort.

Undaunted, I forged. "Seriously. I'm no psychic, but I do know people. If you've got this power, accept the challenge. Should be no problem, right?"

"You know what? You're such an asshole, I will." She centered herself, cleared her mind. Whatever it is psychics do. Then she played her hand. "Your grandmother on your father's side is going to pass away this summer. You are going to be rich someday. And famous.... But you're going to die young."

I wanted to know how young but she could not or would not or could not tell me the exact date. "Twenty-five or twenty-six, maybe," she offered.

That was it. My turn.

"Okay, that sounds promising. Here's my not-psychic predictions: I predict that you will not go on that boat cruise this summer. I doubt you will even apply, but should you apply, you will find out that it is a bunch of bullshit. I also predict that your boyfriend will cheat on you with ____(*insert name here*)____. He'll leave you for her but she will end up pregnant with his baby and he'll dump her and come running back to you. I don't know if you'll be a singer like you want to, but you will do porn."

This got her really upset, especially the porn part. She wanted to know why I saw her in that particular occupation. Did I think she was a whore or something?

No, not a whore, Stacey. A porn star.

Let us now review the results of our contest....

PSYCHIC:

- Grandmother on father's side is still alive.
- Jeremy is not rich.
- Jeremy is not famous.
- Jeremy is past twenty-six.
- Jeremy is still alive.

NOT-PSYCHIC:

- Stacey and Carrie sent for applications for the cruise ship job. There was a hidden \$80.00 application fee. They did not apply.
- There was a local news report on cruise ship job fraud.
- Stacey never worked on any cruise ship.
- Stacey's boyfriend left her for that nameless concubine.
- Nameless concubine got pregnant.
- Stacey's ex bailed and ran back to her.
- Stacey is not a famous singer.
- Stacey has breast implants and is a stripper.

FINAL TALLY:

Psychic: 0 for 5

Not-psychic: 8 for 8 (or 7 for 8 if one does not count stripping down to the vagina as porn)

CONCLUSION:

I win. Me. This guy. Hey, over here! Interestingly, a number of alleged psychics have since told me I am going to be rich and famous and die young. Three different palm readers were baffled that I don't have a lifeline.

But whatever. My goals in life then included fame, which generally produces fortune, so it wouldn't be any great psychic stretch if my life went that way. But even if I had

become rich and famous and died young, Stacey loses because I made more predictions than she. This brings up an interesting question: If psychic predictions are equal or lesser in accuracy than not-psychic predictions, how useful is psychic ability?

As stated earlier in this book, I do not believe that just because The Amazing Randi can fake supernatural phenomena, supernatural phenomena do not exist. But it does call into question the value of such things other than their inherent novelty.

And oh yeah: I win.

Chapter 30

**it's the plumber! I've come to
fix the sink!
(but you already knew that....)**

N'Kisi is a very special parrot. Not only does it have an extensive vocabulary of 555 words, it is also psychic. Aimee Morgana, N'Kisi's owner, performs a neat little trick where she stares at pictures in one room and has N'Kisi name them in another.

Dr. Rupert Sheldrake, a plant cell biologist by trade, has tested the bird. N'Kisi named 32 of 70 images correctly in this blind test. Dr. Sheldrake was floored by the birdbrain stating, "You'd only expect 5.2 hits like this to occur by chance. This is staggering."

Staggering, maybe. But it would have been damn near impossible for N'Kisi to hit 5.2 targets correctly because there's no way to factor in a fraction unless the parrot is smart enough to use phrases like, "It sort of looks like...."; and, "It could be...." to describe any target of which it might not have a clear mental image.

For more information, [click here](#).

Mr. Liberal Goes to New York

Chapter 31

Some generations are known for enlightenment, some for war. My generation, not one to fight for a damn thing, is known for moving back home right after college. It is with much snotty pride that I did not.

My sister Kara was living in Seattle at the time, making a go at the acting scene there. She had an agent who told her the opportunity well was running dry and urged her to move to New York or Los Angeles, lest she waste away. She decided to find an apartment in Manhattan where I would meet up with her after graduating from the University of Hartford in the summer of 1995.

I had never visited the Big Apple previous to 1995. The culture shock was second only to the architecture shock. Everything about the tiny island seemed mammoth and uninviting. It is truly a testament to Human Will that so many people refuse to leave such an intimidating place in pursuit of their artistic aspirations. Moreover, it is truly a testament to Reaganomics that so many mentally ill folks wander the streets.

Talk about a city of contradiction. For every Victorian estate guarded by gargoyle statues, there is a symmetricaly boring Gap outlet. For all the artsi-fartsi intelligentsia, there is Wall Street. For every *Cats* “Now And Forever” we get rid of, we flock to a *The Lion King*. We claim to love theatre but only go to musicals with a has-been Hollywood hack even James Lipton wouldn’t suck off attached.

And you know the vast majority of residents weren’t born in Manhattan. Most of the people I meet are from Iowa or Idaho—small-town America. So where are the small-town manners? What is it about New York that allows people to leave their social etiquette at the toll booth?

I don’t know what I would have done without Kara that

first year. We lived in a railroad apartment in Chelsea. For the uninitiated, a railroad apartment is the technical name for when New York slumlords turn a hallway into a bedroom and jack up the rent. In this case, it was my bedroom Kara had to walk through to get to hers.

The apartment was typically small. The bathroom was a joke: the size of a small closet, the sink jutted out directly in front of the toilet so I had to stand to the side when peeing. The problem being, the door was mere inches from the toilet and sink, and the bathtub was practically connected on the other side. It took expert marksmanship and Jackie Chan balance to hit the bowl.

The other big problem with the apartment was that it was an exterminator's worst nightmare. First there were the obligatory cockroaches and water bugs to which I'd never been exposed. I don't know why some people get freaked out about roaches when water bugs are super-sized imitations. They're like brown mutant grasshoppers with antennae the size of Project HAARP. (Look into it....)

If roaches and water bugs weren't enough, we also had mice. They were small and black and kind of cute. They stayed out of our way for months, content to run along the edge of our walls. Eventually, they grew comfortable with us and started darting out across the floor. This was especially troubling to me because I slept on a futon mattress on the floor.

We lived on the fifth floor of a walkup. It was the top story so the heat pipes ended in our apartment. The one in my bedroom made loud clanging noises like someone was hitting it with a baseball bat and it spewed foul gurgling water. As luck would have it, my bed was underneath the pipe, so my face took a crap bath all winter long. I would have moved my mattress to the other side of the "room," but the mouse mob owned that.

The final battle in the Great Critter War of '95, as it came to be known, went down on a Saturday morning when I was visiting Taunton. Kara called me in a frantic rage from our apartment.

"Calm down, what's wrong," I asked.

"I was watching TV and then all at once a swarm of red ants rose up through the floorboards! I had to smack at them with the broom! It was fucking disgusting!"

Hey. They don't call it the concrete jungle for nothing, folks.

Chapter 32

The first thing that struck me viscerally about New York was the fact that I could feel the energy of the people. I mean physically feel it. Walking the streets was like surfing against invisible crashing waves. I was not prepared for the effect millions of souls in confinement has on one's person. But there it is. In all its New Age glory, there it is.

Epiphany experienced, it was time to get a job. As a graduation gift my dad paid my first three months of rent. You'd think I'd be job hunting somewhere in there, but I was too smart for that. I was certain that if I snuck into NBC Studios and slapped a couple of skits upside Lorne Michaels' gray curly head, I would land a writing gig with *Saturday Night Live!*

Stupid naïve kid you say?—wrong! See I realized that every dickhead writer this side of the Atlantic must have thought of doing that but chickened out because they realized that every dickhead writer this side of the Atlantic must have thought of it. I would be the **one** dickhead writer who would follow through with the inane plot **every** dickhead writer hatches.

Except I wouldn't because, in its totality, this highly intelligent plan of action was stupid and naïve. What I would do instead was sit on my ass and wait for work to come to me. This plan was equally brilliant from conception to execution.

The clock was ticking on my three-month freebee. Kara got a call from a friend asking if she knew anyone who wanted to help build the world's largest chicken potpie in Bryant Park. By God, if that didn't sound like my calling!

The job paid a hundred bucks for seven hours of work, which began at six in the morning. It was part of Kentucky Fried Chicken's ad campaign for their new potpies. It was

the most ludicrous spectacle I've ever had the pleasure to work on.

There were scientist types in white lab coats wearing goggles and jotting notes on clipboards. There were also security guys in black suits wearing coiled ear pieces like the secret service. They made themselves useful when a man in a President Nixon Halloween mask took residence in a nearby bush. He just stood there inside that bush judging us through Nixon's eyeholes. I felt pity for him. Like his life isn't bad enough feeling the compulsion to get up at 6 A.M., put on a mask, and stand in a bush, now he had to inhale the toxic mix of Kentucky Fried Chicken and plastic Nixon nostrils.

I believe it was for his own safety that security dragged him away.

Creating the pie was a lot like volunteering for the Peace Corps. We worker bees formed a human chain. We handed large sacks of ingredients down the line from truck to pie, where they would be dumped into a vat. Then we took plastic canoe oars and stirred the bubbling cauldron of goo, which was subsequently covered with a thick crust and called a pie. Later in the day this rooster tar pit was donated to City Harvest who would feed our shoddy work to the homeless.

Some guys from *The Guinness Book of World Records* were there to take our picture. I am the third Vaeni in history to grace the pages of *The Guinness Book*. My Dad's parents made it in for having the largest stack of horseshoes in the world piled up outside their aptly named Horseshoe Restaurant in New Hampshire. I'm hoping the next generation of Vaenis will carry on the tradition by, say, eating absurd amounts of aluminum foil, or bungy jumping off the moon.¹

Apparently building a cauldron of hen quicksand wasn't absurdist theatre enough, there were also carpenters erecting a stage. I joked to my colleagues, "Watch 'em have a pea and carrot kick line on that thing."

We had a good laugh. And then they had a pea and carrot

kick line on that thing. The vegetative Rockettes were grooving to the big band stylings of multiple Colonel Sanders blowin' brass and kickin' ass!—who says theater is dead in New York?

Yeah. But that dude in the Nixon mask was nuts. I think the Joker put it best when he said, "This town needs an enema!"

And after that well-deserved hundred large, I still needed a job.

1. Actually, I may be the first Vaeni, since I never found an official account of their record. Legend has it the horseshoe pile was also featured in a Ripley's *Believe It or Not* coloring book. We owned the coloring book but I don't remember seeing a picture of it in there. Since this book claims to be true I thought you'd like to know that this amazing factoid in my family history might be total bunk.

Chapter 33

The week prior to Halloween weekend, 1995 I got a call from my old college boss and friend, Mel. Mel is a very straightforward lady, so it was without fanfare that she spilled the bad news about a mutual pal.

"Jeremy, Lana's been in a car accident."

"Holy shit, are you serious," I said.

"A drunk driver smashed her from the side. Her car tumbled a bit. Now she's in a coma. If she hadn't been driving a Volvo, she'd be dead right now."

"Oh my god! How bad is it?"

"Ah, bad. They had to remove a rib and there may be permanent brain damage, they just don't know yet."

She went on to say that Lana seemed to be doing better for a while. When her parents held her hand, she would move her fingers in what was to them a compulsory, non-sensical manner. But when Mel held her hand, she realized that Lana was using sign language. She and Mel spoke in sign language from time to time and Lana, who could not wake from this coma, was using it now to communicate from the brink of death.

Instead of spelling out communiqués from deceased loved ones or giving a special message of God's eternal love for humanity, Lana spelled out, "L-O-S-E-R."

Mel was visiting her with another mutual friend, Rich. Both laughed at this. "Who's a loser," Mel asked.

"Rich is a loser," the unconscious Lana signed and pointed in his direction. This type of playful insult was the way Rich and she related to one another; this was the sign of recovery Lana's Born Again Christian parents had been praying for. Three days later, however, Lana relapsed deeper into her coma. The doctors were up front with their concern that she might not make it after all.

"Mel, I've got to get down there. You know if we go in there together we can make her laugh and wake her ass up," I said.

She chuckled to squelch the tears. "You're probably right," she said.

I arranged to stay with friends on campus and hopped on the next Greyhound to Hartford. Unbeknownst to me this was going to be the most freakish Halloween weekend I'd ever witness.

Chapter 34

cast of characters

Plant Man: Nickname of my good friend and designated driver, Mike Newson. Mike used to be a typical Jersey punk with the short hair and the chain necklaces. College changed all that. Now he bore the Jesus long hair/beard combo-punch and cared for all life in a sensitive, laid back, pothead without weed sort of way. When we roomed together, his job was to bring home hot women. Now his job was to breathe life back into ailing flora. Thus, Plant Man: superhero to all things chlorophyll.

Fatigues: I don't remember his real name. He was some guy who had a crush on Lana. He wore camouflage pants and combat boots. What he *did not* know was what her Born Again parents *could not*: Lana was a lesbian.

Closet-X: Lana's ex-lover who clearly thought if she stuck by her side through this tragedy, Lana would fall back in love with her.

The Born-Agains: Not limited solely to Lana's parents, this motley crew consisted of her extended family as well. They loved me for a while. I was "funny" and "edgy" like favorable reviews of sitcoms that get cancelled. I think they grew tired of me after day one. Hey, I grew tired of me after day one, so no hard feelings.

Mel: Simply one of the best people I've had the pleasure of knowing. She is kind and honest. It must have killed her to stay mum about her homosexuality in front of these white-picket stereotypes. Or maybe just types.

Jeremy: Hey, that's me! Court jester by day, maverick outsider by night. My dad and uncle were both ministers, so maybe God would cut me some slack, give me a power loaner.

These people. Their prejudices. Their agendas. Small waiting room. We'd better fucking wake her up—and soon!

When I arrived on the scene I wanted access to Lana immediately. She was a good friend, kind and honest like Mel. I didn't want to lose her. Not like this.

Oh, who am I trying to fool? The waiting room was a fucking molotov cocktail jouncing for a light. I wanted out ASAP but there was no ASAP in sight. Access denied.

Day one rolled in with a storm cloud. It had been pouring outside since I stepped foot off the bus. Plant Man picked me up and drove me to the hospital. A cursory glance around the waiting room told the whole story: I was not going to see Lana today.

I introduced myself to her family and said my hellos to my friends and acquaintances. Lana's mom updated me on her condition. She was still in a coma but stabilizing. It looked again like she may pull through. As she was explaining this to me, a nurse entered and gave the okay for visitors to see Lana.

"Who wants to go first," the nurse asked.

Fatigues, who stared out the window feeling at one with the gloom of rain, hesitated not. "Me! I'll go," he said, clearly envisioning himself the betrothed.

"Me too," chimed Closet-X, clearly envisioning herself the betrothed.

"Okay, come with me," the nurse said. She held the door for the two grieving fantasy addicts. The trio disappeared into the mysteries of the hospital.

I dutifully joked with everyone, trying to keep the atmos-

phere light—as light as tragedy can be. Fatigues and Closet-X did not reemerge until visiting hours were up.

I looked at Mel. Words were unnecessary phantasmagoric expressions of what my eyes conveyed best: Tomorrow, we have to get in there and make her laugh and wake her up at all costs. If my support system consisted of delusional *preterlovers* and family who would disown me if they knew me, I'd stay in a coma no question. I'd praise Jehovah every day for that coma. I'd keep my eyes shut and rig the hospital's equipment to read "comatose."

I'd be one thankful vegetable even Plant Man could not resuscitate.

Yes, my eyes said all of that. Mel laughed a hearty knowing laugh. We waited solemnly for tomorrow to fulfill its songwriter's promise of solutions and betterment.

We listened to the thunder and tried to find meaning in the rain.

Day two at the hospital included more get-to-know-you time with the Born-Again's and quiet searches through the alternately drizzling and downpouring sky, which busily painted our window canvas.

Hours chimed off our lives before the nurse came. "Lana's not doing so well today, so we're going to keep outside activity to a minimum. Who wants to see her," she asked.

The usual suspects jumped at the whistle. Evidently, Fatigues had little regard for Lana's actual friends and family. Like yesterday, the question was not left hanging for even a fraction of a second before he offered to go. At least Closet-X sacrificed a moment's hesitation to not appear rude. Or perhaps she didn't want to tip her hand and expose her identity as the lesbian ex to a rabidly Conservative Hee-Haw watching K/clan.

Either way, Fatigues was left with his cheese in the wind.

"Jeremy's come such a long way from New York. I think it would be best if he sees her first," Born-Again Mom said.

Darn tootin'!

B-A Mom took me in. I wasn't allowed to talk to Lana and I wasn't with Mel. She had done her best to prepare me for the shock of seeing Lana pale, helpless and scarred. But really, there was no preparation that could have made sense of the mess that lay in that bed.

I had never seen someone in a coma before, not in real life. Based on every movie and television depiction, I expected to see a clump of breathing flesh lying on an adjustable mattress. But this was not the scene before me.

Lana's defiant body tossed and turned; her eyes rolled in the back of her head. She looked like a possessed woman exorcising her own demons.

What is consciousness, I had to wonder? What the fuck is consciousness when a woman can communicate through sign language, whip her body around a bed, but cannot wake up?

I perused the shiny beeping gadgetry that was her surroundings. All this stuff to keep her alive and we still have no idea what "alive" means. This is what it looks like at the brink of an evolutionary leap: means but no meaning. An intuition that life is important enough to save the individual, but ultimately we do not know what we are saving. There's an impression, a personality. But we still haven't the language to articulate the levels and the meaning of raw consciousness.

Modern medicine cannot help "coma."

I stared at her in reticence. Her mother whispered pleasantries in her ear and smiled a bunch. I held her wriggling hand. I may have said hello, but that was it. I had been warned not to speak too much and respected the rules for a change.

The nurse escorted us out and that was the last anyone could see of her that day. She needed to rest. They were losing her in spite of her body's violent protest.

Comedy comes in threes, just ask anyone who worked on *Police Academy 4*. It was thusly fitting that on the third day of my visit I finally got to see Lana with Mel.

And we had speaking privileges.

Mel held her right hand while B-A Mom stroked her hair lovingly. I stood to the left of her bed by her legs. She was no longer writhing; tubes breathed for her. The doctors told us she was asleep but I thought maybe they drugged her or, God forbid, maybe she had given up the struggle to resurface.

I wanted to crack jokes like we'd planned but I didn't want to offend B-A Mom. Mel said I should do what I felt necessary and gently explained to Lana's mother that it was important for me to relate to her daughter as I always had. As...well...kind of an asshole.

She green-lighted the impending roast and Project No Doze went into effect.

"Hey, Lana, it's me. Yeah, you know, you really should wake up, this is embarrassing. I can see your toes, you smell like shit.... I'm not gonna lie to ya, you could use some sun. You look like Nosferatu at a wake. So seriously.... At least shave your legs! We're all Americans here, Lana...."

Mel, my favorite audience of one, laughed at the audacious comedy gold spewing from my face hole. Born-Again Mom?—Not so much. Thinking back on this, if Lana didn't wake up, I might have come across as the very Devil himself. The Born-Agains would have had crucifixion rights and I don't think I could have argued.

Thankfully there are forces in the universe smarter and better than I. And today, they were visiting Lana....

I cracked a joke; she smiled. I slammed her with an insult; she smiled again.

"Jeremy's funny, isn't he Lana," Mel asked.

She nodded the slightest nod. Her mother let loose the hysterical crying. We were all witnessing a miracle. I played through the final cord of my standup symphony when Lana—closer to death than life—woke up laughing.

"We did it! Oh my god! Lana, can you hear me," I asked. She was still giggling under her breath and clearly fully

conscious. She stared at me quizzically. Her mother pushed by me to get her father in the waiting room.

"Do you know where you are," Mel asked her.

"No," she whispered through her breathing apparatus.

"You were in an accident. Do you remember that," Mel quizzed.

"No. What's he doing here," she asked about me.

"He came to visit you," Mel said.

"I came to wake you," I added.

She looked sad and confused. Lost. "Where am I," she asked.

"You're in the hospital. You've been in a coma for a couple of weeks, Sweetie. Jeremy was just making jokes to you. He's funny isn't he," Mel said.

Lana cocked her head a bit and looked deep into my eyes. She was relearning how to access memory. I don't think she fully recognized me but understood that she should, like when you run into a childhood friend.

"Do you remember him making jokes just now," Mel pressed.

"No," Lana said, "I don't remember anything."

B-A Mom and Dad came barreling into the room. Her father swiped me to the side with his whole arm. They crowded her and kissed her and balled their eyes out. Nurses and doctors piled in. The room was small enough so Mel and I were escorted back to the waiting room. The two of us were reduced to vibrating nerves and uncontrollable tears.

Mel was stronger than I, so she told the room what happened. We all sat in shocked cessation. To my overloaded mind this was storybook ending enough. But apparently not to Our Lady of Fatima who must have been on hiatus from Portugal to give us a fourth secret she forgot to whisper to the shepherd children in 1917.

Fatigues gazed torpidly out the window, probably dreaming up Lana's and his future together, as he was want to do. Something big caught his attention. He hopped up to a kneeling position on his seat and beckoned us all to the window.

"Look at that! A rainbow," he exclaimed.

I thought, "No, that's got to be bullshit." I looked anyway. I wish I'd had a glass of water so I could do a spit take on Fatigues' dirty-blond crewcut. Not only was there a brilliant rainbow, the clouds had parted for the first time in three days and the sun was wearing its brightest fiery yellow suit.

"That's Lana's rainbow," he said deliberately.

I practically gagged and turned away. My half-closed left eye twitched in Mel's direction. While The Born-Agains agreed with Fatigues' astute observation, which brought him one step closer to their inner sanctum, Mel swallowed a laugh having caught my inadvertent facial gymnastics.

I ran to a payphone to tell my mother the exciting happenings. She said hello and told me there was a beautiful rainbow there right now before I could even say a word. Later in the evening, I called my sister. She too had seen a rainbow.

For those of you keeping score at home, that makes three rainbows seen in Taunton, Massachusetts, Hartford, Connecticut, and New York, New York, respectively.

For one day and one day only, I was a god. I had parted the clouds and woken the dead. Whether it was an act of a right-wing version of Christ or my evil slings that were the penultimate therapy I shall leave to the reader.

I have to admit there is something cruelly poetic about Lana not recognizing me, the friend who woke her, yet embracing her parents with whom she had a rocky relationship. That, as they say, is life. And thankfully, she's around to live it.

Jeremy: Court jester by day, maverick outsider by night. Hey, that's me.

Chapter 35

I visited Lana a few more times over the course of my stay. She was amazingly cognizant, a total reversal of her “dead” self. She was understandably irritable and had a noticeably different personality than the Lana I knew before the accident. It may be normal for victims of severe head trauma to undergo personality changes but it’s damn sad to witness. Her whole life used to be about art. Now she didn’t want so much as to pick up a brush.

The last of the weekend wasn’t nearly as melodramatic. A friend of a friend was having a costume party so I went to that. I felt real bad for this poor kid whom I barely knew. His older sister was in town from LA. She got wasted and hit on every boy in the room. A group of us, including her brother, left the party and went to the Hawk’s Nest, the university’s lone hangout joint.

When we came back his sister was passed out upright on the couch. She was sitting spread eagle, wearing an open bathrobe and nothing else. Feverishly embarrassed, her sibling fled to his bedroom. God-for-a-day that I was, I took it upon myself to teach this fake California blonde a lesson.

Stealing a page out of the book of Sam Kinison, I had all the guys position themselves...lovingly...around her. They smiled and said “Cheese!” and I snapped off a few photos with her camera. I can only imagine the look on her face when she got back home and had the film developed. I hope it was the same face her brother made when he discovered his own far-too-old-to-even-be-at-this-scene-let-along-naked-to-the-world sister all *mannequined* out and waiting for rape.

I was a benevolent god, yes, but I was also a teaching god.

I couldn't wait to get home and share all the excitement of the past half-week with Kara. I told her all my stories with flailing-arm passion. Her response was not just a non sequitur, it was final proof of Chaos Theory.

"I swore I'd never pay your rent and we discussed this before you moved in. Well this month I paid your rent and it's not cool. What have you done to find a job?"

Wait...What?!

"Wait...What?!" I asked.

"I'm sorry to do this to you but if you don't find a job by Friday I'm kicking you out," she said.

I argued that it wasn't my fault, that Dad didn't send me all the rent money he "owed" me. She didn't care and really neither did I. I didn't know what I was arguing or why. I needed to find a job. No shit! Can't fight my way out of that.

It didn't matter that I'd saved a girl's life. Not to my sister; not to the girl. To date I have seen Lana once since her discharge from that hospital. That continues to feel poetic and right.

Oh, somebody nail my feet to the fucking cross already! I barely use them anyway!

But I used them then. I pounded the pavement like a private dick looking for answers. On Monday, I signed up at a temp agency. I could only type 36 words per minute, had rudimentary computer skills, and knew maybe the first thing about filing but nothing more. After a battery of tests and an obligatory interview, the owner of the agency told me to look elsewhere. She would not be able to find a hack like me work.

Tuesday I went to a seminar on selling natural earth products such as water filtration systems. The scam—and oh, it was a scam—is that you've got to pay for the products you're selling. On top of that, your group leader gets a cut. The group leader is the salesperson who convinces you to join in the first place. That's really how they make their

money. It's like a human chain letter where you give money to a group leader who makes you a group leader at the next seminar where you take the next guy's money and on and on. If you're lucky, you'll also sell a product or two.

How these pyramid-scheme "companies" stay in business I'll never know.

On Wednesday, I went to another scam seminar. This is because I am stupid. I am the sucker that is born every minute.

Wednesday's deal was about selling tickets to Standup New York, a comedy club, and gift certificates to Nardi's Hair Salon. The catch is, you have to sell them in bundles of fifty. This only sounds impossible because it is. No other reason.

That afternoon following the standardized *Glengarry Glen Ross* pep talk, we the rabble took to the streets with our guardian pro salesmen who showed us how it's done. I was paired off with a guy who looked like the back of Bruce Willis' balls, if Bruce were to slick the short curlies with Dipity Do like you know he dipity does.

You gotta have a mean fuckin' rap to pull that dirt bag salesman look off. This guy did.

Our territory was Hunter College. His crap-for-sale item of choice was the Nardi's certificate which he tried to pawn off on every female student who passed by. My job was to observe his technique and hold his umbrella against the wind and mizzle that was defying my godly powers over the weather.

"Excuse me, Ma'am. What would you say if I told you you could have a day of pampering that includes a shampoo, hairstyling, pedicure, and manicure for only forty dollars? Sounds good, right? Don't you think you're worth pampering? Do yourself a favor. Only forty dollars, you can't go wrong!" This was his rap, his memorized text. Over and over, the same nouns—"hairstyling," never "haircut"—inside the same faux-rhetorical questions, answered in the close: a non-threatening proposition or urging.

Yes, ladies, it is urgent to get to Nardi's hair salon to prove your self-worth to a couple of strangers, and besides, for

forty bucks who cares if it works? Forty bucks is pizza money to a college student. Forty bucks is blow.

I couldn't believe how many women fell for this. For every ten rejections there was one customer. That's a decent ratio for a guy with eternal five o'clock shadow and his nervous mute sidekick standing out in the rain. One lonely soul even stuck around and chatted with him—even gave him her phone number. "I transferred to Hunter this year.... Everyone seems to know each other already.... I find it hard to make friends," she confessed.

I was learning a valuable lesson in human psychology: This is abusive relationships. This is cults. This is guilt. This is one's significant other into homemade porn. This is, *You need to lose some weight*. This is the smoke and mirrors of coercion.

This is what it sounds like when doves cry.

The key to the sale, I observed, is to realize that the sales pitch is what's for sale, not the item. The salesperson's job is to attract the weak with promises of strength they know are unobtainable via the object the salesperson is hocking. The weak are not used to being strong. They live in their weakness. So they purchase the snake oil strength, consume it, and when it does not work, they stew unhappily in the familiarity of their weakness.

I do not like myself because I am not worth liking and this object proves it, for it did not make me feel better about myself as promised. This makes me feel even more like shit and since shit is what I always feel, that must be what I am.

The human path of least resistance is NEVER change, NEVER self-improvement. In this way, the Nardi's certificates do precisely their job: they legitimize the self-hater's self-hate.

Speaking of self-haters....

My mentor had captured the attention of yet another female student. He was laying on the charm, hitting his groove with the pitch when, from out of the ether, an intoxicated elderly woman munching a sloppy hot dog with the works latched onto the conversation.

The old drunk tugged on Master's coat sleeve. "Excuse me," she slurred, "How much to join your club?"

"I'm sorry, I'm in the middle of something here," he politely notified.

She would not be deterred. "Seriously. How much to join your club?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am, can't you see I'm trying to have a conversation here," my slick professor asked. I was impressed with how long he kept his composure: all of two exchanges.

He ignored the old coot and went on with his pitch making knowing faces of agreement at, keeping a connection with, the young customer. She held back her laughter, stored it in her clenched lips and bulging eyes.

"Don't you deserve to be pampered...?" He remained undaunted.

"Seriously, I want to join your club. Hey...Hey! How much? I want to join too!" The belligerent drunk began yelling and making raspberry noises like a child. Her relish and mustard spittle coated the salesman's left cheek.

"Jesus Christ, lady! Get the fuck away from me, I'm trying to do business here!"

And then from here, he remained *daunted*.

"I wanted to join too," the elderly alkey hollered. Then, in a split-second attitude overhaul, she offered him a bite of hotdog.

"No, I don't want your fucking hotdog! I want you to go away," he fumed.

She pressed the meat to his lips. "Come on, I want you to have this, seriously," she said in an innocent apologetic tone.

He did not accept the feeding.

She stumbled over her words and feet and smeared condiment goo down the front of Master's jacket. Through it all, and working against type, he did not smack her. He bought a small bottle of Poland Springs water from a pretzel vendor and scrubbed the stains with a napkin. He was vociferous and curt and.... Both women stayed.

In something of a Marx Brother move, he gave the customer and me a signal and we three bolted. The old lady

gave chase yelling after us to wait up. We ran in circles around a large sculpture in front of the Hunter building. The old coot kept up. The Master of The Sale instructed us to duck and hide around the corner of the building where he would meet us after he lost this inebriated extra from *Cocoon*.

We did as he said. I peeked around the corner and watched the insanely comical scene of this twenty-something male being chased by an elderly woman wielding a hotdog.

"You can't make this shit up," I exclaimed to myself more than the customer.

The Master ducked his foil and hightailed it around the corner.

"I can't believe you're still here," he said to the customer in what may have been his first moment of pure honesty since he took this job.

"Are you kidding me? This is the coolest thing that's happened to me in a while. God, now I have to buy something," she replied.

She scraped through her purse searching for her wallet. Then, like the echo of T-Rex in *Land of The Lost*, we heard, "Oh, there you are!" We turned as one and watched in stunned disbelief. The old lady had caught up with us. She jogged over, sans hotdog, and picked up right where she left off.

"Okay, seriously.... How much to join your club."

"Lady! Get the fuck away from me," my mentor screamed.

"That's it," the lady screamed back. "I'm calling the police!—Help! Police!"

She waved her hands like an air traffic controller at the automobiles zipping by.

"Good! Call the police," Master of Sales challenged. He, too, signaled the oncoming traffic for help. "Help! Police! Police!" They both screamed.

The student customer had a flash of an idea and she ran with it. And us. We fled into the safe haven of the school.

She flagged down security and showed them her ID. The salesman out-of-breathedly, if that's *the*—or at least, *a*—word, explained the situation to the disbelieving rent-a-cops. Luckily, they didn't have to disbelieve for long because the sauced bag of bones came flapping through those double doors like an old bat out of hell.

Such was her persistence, they had to call in backup to form a wall around the lady and inch her toward the exit without touching her. She must have thought they were playing red rover for she busted through the human barricade, wrapped her tendrils around Master's left arm and would not let go.

"Are you insane," he bellowed. She showed no signs of sobering.

"Come on, you're my friend. Seriously, how much to join your club?"

She let his arm slip. He jumped back. She pulled a white envelope out of her inner coat pocket. The envelope was full of hundred dollar bills.

"Come on, how much you want? I want to join too," she said. She tossed hundreds at his feet like he were a stripper.

"Lady," he said in his worst acting performance, "I don't want your money. I just want you to leave me alone!"

One of the security guards let us hide in the stairwell while they stuffed her money back in the envelope and got rid of her. We could hear them convince her that we were gone and so she should go home. Five minutes later, she left of her own accord. It was there in the stairwell that the Master of Sales closed the deal on what surely must have been the most hard-fought transaction in the history of American consumerism; it was there in the stairwell that I found my calling. (Or so I thought....)

Chapter 36

The next day was supposed to be another day of observation. Somehow, and I think based solely on my sense of humor, my mentor convinced the bosses (there were two) that I was ready to go it alone. No baby steps here, I was ahead of the class, a born salesman forging out on my own.

I staked out the territory I'd marked in the piss rain that previous afternoon: Hunter College. I chose to sell the tickets to Standup New York. Letterman had played there and Leno, too. Rooted in comedy as I was, it only made sense to sell these tickets.

But what kind of human would buy fifty of anything from a stranger on the sidewalk? This is where the concept "target customer" comes in handy. I, however, was not about to find out who my target was. Not then, not ever. See, there was one tiny overlooked detail the bosses missed: I was not a born salesman. I was a wisecracking umbrella-holding sidekick who, on his own, was scared shitless. I wasn't Dave Letterman, I was Paul Schaeffer. I wasn't Jay Leno, I was.... Who is Leno's sidekick?—I don't watch the show, it's horrible.

I didn't make one sale. Didn't care to try. I felt the terrified quiver in my throat and knees and the knot in my stomach and that was it. The thought of soliciting people on the street for rejection after rejection made me wish I had a tail so I could tuck and run. Couldn't do it. Couldn't. So I spent the afternoon shopping.

I skulked back to charlatan headquarters and gave them back their fifty perforated cardboard lies. I assured them I was not their golden child. The bosses were disappointed in me. One of them told me that if I was quitting because sales wasn't for me, then fine. Free to go. But if I were quitting because I was scared...well, I'd only be hurting me. Was I

sure? No. So I let them convince me to come back the next day when they would take me out in a group like they were supposed to originally.

The next day was Friday. Much was riding on my being a born salesman. If this didn't work out, I'd have to move back to that sand trap on the golf course of life—the black hole at the ninth hole, if you will—Taunton, Massachusetts. This golden child was not fit for the Silver City.

Michael, one of the twin bosses himself, led my group of four. He brought us into guarded skyscraping office buildings. He lied his way past the guards, past the NO SOLICITING signs that greeted us at every elevator bank. New York is a paranoid city and not without good cause. Every floor in every building had cameras watching and each office its own buzzer. No door was ever left unlocked yet with his personality alone, Michael could pick them all.

He didn't lie like a common thief, no. He *acted* his way in. He created a complex bumbling persona with a goofy cartoonish laugh. This character cracked innocuous jokes and performed slight-of-hand magic tricks. It was so fake and bad—worse, even, than the Bruce Willis ball sack I was working with yesterday—that logic dictated it would not work. Not at clown college; not at a halfway home; certainly not at a place of business. Not ever.

Yet, it did.

Past the security guards. Past the NO SOLICITING signs. Up the elevator. *PING!* Onto a random floor. Smile pretty for the cameras. *DING-DONG!* the doorbell. “May I help you?” followed by his words, followed by, “I’ll buzz you in.” Then the rap. Then the manager. Then either a jovial, *SOLD!* or a not-so-jovial *CALL SECURITY!*

With *SOLD!* came, “You know, you could buy another fifty tickets for the whole office. They make a great (insert holiday/event here) gift!”

With *CALL SECURITY!* came feigned innocence and sorrow. I didn't witness it but I guess Michael sold a few tickets through guilting. Maybe some manager somewhere had a change of heart. Maybe a bunch of them did.

We were kicked out of several buildings before lunch. He did make a few sales, which doesn't merely defy odds, it proves odds are crap.

After a hearty McDonald's garbage fest, we were supposed to split up, forge out on our own. This was familiar territory. And so was my response: I went shopping again.

I couldn't allow myself to trespass where I wasn't wanted to sell people stuff they didn't need by splitting my personality into a likeable chard who would consume me for the day. There are two closely related types who do this: Those with contempt for themselves and humanity, and those who have hit bottom with their desperation.

Sociopathic objectifiers and homeless people. No thanks.

More than shopping, I spent the afternoon making peace with the fact that I'd be packing it up over the weekend and moving it out. **New York: 1/Jeremy: 0.** I had lost my first battle with post-college living. It was a sobering few hours.

I brought back the tickets to the two-headed boss serpent. It gave me THE EXACT SAME SPEECH AS THE DAY BEFORE. I told it to piss off and took the walk of shame. When I got home, Kara was doing dishes. I had so many tears in my ducts, they refused to cry out. I think they drained down the back of my throat and up into my sinuses instead.

"Why aren't you at work," she asked.

I was a horrible lump of a thing, a ball of nervous ticks wrapped in white flesh and poorly-sewn clothing.

"I'm done," I shrugged. "I tried. It's just not working out."

She asked me what happened. I told her every detail from today and yesterday. At the part of the story where I make peace with moving back to Taunton, the phone rang. Yes, on cue.

Remember the temp agency that told me to go elsewhere for work because they couldn't possibly find a job for someone with my skill-less roster? It was they. And they had a long-term assignment for me.

At zero hour the gods had reversed the score: **Jeremy: 1/New York: 0.**

The golden child wins! The golden child wins! The golden child wins!

Sort of.

Chapter 37

The biggest reason i'm a well-adjusted adult (as far as paranooids go) and not a strung-out *People Magazine* cover story in the making is that my parents were affectionate throughout the early stages of my development. I'm telling ya, the key to having kids is to love them as much as possible the first three years of their lives. After three years of love, affection, and attention they will have the wherewithal to live through any and all of your bullshit.

Not that I'm advocating this, but one could hypothetically raise well-tempered child slaves if one were willing to love them for a minimum of three years. This does not mean the child won't protest every time you tell them to do dishes. It means they won't end up basket cases and drug addicts...which they would likely have attributed to that time you made them do dishes. This will save you a small fortune in medical bills and trips to the shrink.

SHITTY PARENTS: Plan ahead. Love the little fuckers for three years. The money you'll save in the long run will be enough for that dream vacation you'll need when they hit their teens. You can take that vacation and leave them alone at home. They will take care of themselves. You were good to them and they will return the favor. That'll save you babysitter fees which you can put toward whatever it is you're gonna buy yourself and not them for their graduation. Face it: The only reason parents buy graduation gifts is so their kids won't resent them. Resent, as we discussed, leads to the child being a basket case and a drug addict and blame and bills.

Under the Vaeni Plan, your children will seek up to 75% fewer resentment loopholes. You raised them right. Who needs the new car anyway, your dork teen or you? They're

just gonna crash it and blame you and end up a basket case or strung out on drugs. More bills.

Screw the little tax write-offs! Get yourself a new car and fly your belligerent brethren off to college in a paper airplane if you have to! They're eighteen! Adults! Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke!

Another reason I'm so well adjusted is that my parents—my dad in particular—are politically astute, aware citizens. Dad used to be a boisterous activist in the 60s. Now he's a subversive interim minister whose idea of a good time is to preach in white upper-crust churches. Come Christmas time, all the rich lackeys who put on their Sunday best for that special *Jesus Saves/Cockles of Thy Heart* parable are instead treated to a *Hey, Rich White Lackeys: Get Off Your Ass and Feed The Homeless* sermon.

Always respectable.

I guess I could have rebelled and wound up a bitter, evil conservative just to spite my old man. But right is right. Thus, contrary to and because of the first five paragraphs of this chapter, I sprouted into a fine upstanding liberal. It was as a fine, upstanding liberal sprout that I entered into my first contract with the employment devil at a Manhattan-based financial investment firm that shall go nameless.

Everything Daddy taught me about corporate America turned out to be...(Drum roll please!) True! My coworkers were a vocally racist white cabal of Yuppie exercise-biking live-for-the-weekenders whose main objective was to enable our pathological liar boss while he silently screwed clients out of thousands of dollars so that they could all retire early.

And do what? Buy another treadmill? A wider screen TV? A third house in the Hamptons?

I've never met such vacant likeable people in my life. Yeah, that's right. *Likeable*. That's the part my dad didn't prepare me for. These soulless shallow cash cows may graze on properties mulched in the blood of their unsuspecting veal clients but they are still...good people.

How does that work? How is every other conversation they have about Niggers or Spics or Chinks or Kikes? My immediate superior was a gay man whose boyfriend was Puerto Rican. The president was half Jewish. Given this, you'd think they were joking—but they weren't! They would read the racist blather of rags like *The New York Post* and *New York Daily News* and surmise that African-Americans (or "Niggers" for short) were the cause of all their problems. Problems they didn't have! Problems they couldn't have even if they existed because none of these white suburbanites LIVED IN NEW YORK CITY!!!

These were not nice people. They were not kind people. They were narrow-minded white-collar hypocrites; thieves who happened to have a great sense of humor. They were also oddly aware of the unjustified nature of their racism and that racism itself is wrong. They believed my anti-establishment diatribes on how The Man splashes tabloid headlines about black males raping women in Central Park across the front page of major newspapers because white a-holes like them would buy more papers and ignore what's really going on in the world. You know...*the news*?

Yet that acknowledgment did nothing to alleviate their suspicion that Blacks were evil, stupid, and out for OUR jobs. That Jews were evil, whiney misers who, with all their Jew money, should shut the fuck up about oppression. That Chinese people were smelly, creepy cockroaches who all look alike and should learn English. Spics, too, should learn English and stop having kids on our tax dollars.

Don't even get them started on the Puerto Rican Day Parade.

The only race of people they liked were Malaysians. They were delivery boys and busboys and they didn't bitch about it. They performed menial tasks with a confused foreign glint in their eye and a smile like dutiful (illegal) immigrants should.

All of this lunacy made for some interesting lunchtime arguments. What often felt like a Klan rally was made tolerable by a well-paid three-day workweek with Christmas

bonuses. My job was to file and answer phones, mostly. It was so simple even a dumb blond could do it. Or a fag. Or a half-Kike.

Maybe not, though, now that I think about it. They got paid the big bucks, sure. But their jobs were easier than mine. All they had to do was assure any client who asked that the president wasn't raping their accounts. It was just the market fluctuating again.

See, the scam to which I was privy went like this: Clients would put money into long-term mutual funds under the impression that it would sit untouched and accrue interest through the years. But our fine boss would trade them like stocks because he makes a profit on the trade whether the client loses money on it or not.

He was also fond of posing as an "expert" on various CNN and MSNBC financial shows and spouting off "facts" that were outside his range of "expertise." One time he went on TV and said something about how homeowners could make money off of mortgages or something to that effect. I don't remember the exact details, I just remember that we four worker bees were eating lunch while he was on the air and out of nowhere, the phones started ring.

And ringing. And ringing.

Literally hundreds of people from around the country were calling us to ask if what he was saying was true because they had never heard of it. Well, whatever "it" was, neither had we—and neither had our boss! It was bad enough that he lied his little butt cheeks off—but it was insane that he did so in a field in which he was not schooled.

You know what the saddest thing about all this is? Even if you believe everything I've told you about this guy and his firm, if you met him, HE WOULD STILL GET YOUR MONEY! He's that fucking charming. That is the gift of the pathological liar; that is the gift of the devil.

Interestingly, it was at this investment firm that I knocked off the first three of my fifteen minutes of fame. John Stossel came in to interview our boss for a 20/20 segment on Wall Street bonuses. Are they out of control? Do

millionaires make too much money? Is enough ever enough?

I asked John what his take on the Wall Street tycoon was. He told me in a nutshell that it was the American Way, that enough is never enough, that millionaires deserve their millions, and that you never hear this position from the far too LIBERAL MEDIA. So, yes, John Stossel is every bit the vapid affected snob one might suspect.

Hey, Johnny: wakeup call, pal!—No such thing as a liberal media. Ya ain't peddling that snake oil here, fuckfart.

Three years into this business and I was up to my ears in bullshit. All investment firms must be attached to clearing firms who act as watchdog groups to make sure everything is running legally. Ours was Linsco Private Ledger. They caught on to our shady trades, so we moved out of there before they could find anything to pin on us. I quit in the process.

I had nothing to fall back on so I waited for my Christmas bonus, then dropped the bombshell on them. I told them I had a potential writing gig at MTV, which was true. I had met with Chris Kreski who was a senior writer there. I showed him some comedy skits I had written and he liked them. He told me that when he got his budget for the next year he'd put me on a project. There was no set date for this so he told me to keep calling him and bugging him and reminding him who I am.

What was even truer was that I had reached my toleration limit for racist small-time crooks. I imagined being a future witness—or worse, defendant—in a lawsuit against the firm. I didn't want any part of that. I didn't want any part of them anymore.

I had infiltrated the enemy's camp and made away with some of their loot. Now it was time to finally be a paid writer. The dream, partially.

Ultimately, the dream would be deferred for another year. And it would not be a dream.

It would be a total nightmare.

Chapter 38

war of the worlds

In New Delhi it is time to run for the fucking hills. Thousands of monkey squatters have stolen residency in various government offices. There they wreak monkey havoc, stealing food and scaring the bejesus out of politicians.

“They are moving in very high security areas,” says flabbergasted defense ministry officer I. K. Jha.

The monkeys are by no means timid, destroying precious documents and breaking people’s cigarettes because... well...they can. Surely these liberal tree-huggers would have been annihilated upon discovery were they not considered sacred to the Hindus.

Most religious observers are quick to point out that it could have been far worse. It could have been cows.

For more information, [click here](#).

Chapter 39

In the early goings of my New York experience I co-founded a sketch comedy troupe with an acquaintance of my sister. The group, originally eleven actors in total, cut down to three, cut down to zero was called Pay My Rent! Sadly it did not live up to its name.

It was a trip in the beginning auditioning people and eventually performing for massive groups of patrons, ranging anywhere from five to eight persons on any given night. We were fortunate enough to “discover” the Upright Citizen’s Brigade years before they achieved sub-cult status and be tutored by improv guru Matt Walsh. It was through the Brigade that I met Adam McKay, then head writer for *Saturday Night Live!*.

What was so great about meeting Adam, you ask? Did it bring things full circle? Did he offer me a writing position at *SNL*? Are we currently working on the Tracy Morgan breakthrough role, *Crossdresser*, a film based on some skit that the audience actually laughed at involving a black man in skirt and heels? Well...no. In fact, a safe bet is that Adam couldn’t pick me out of a crowd—I’ve only socialized with the man a handful of times.

So what *was* so great about meeting Adam?—I finally got the answer to a question millions of Americans have been asking and even newspapers and magazine shows have commented on: Given all the talent involved, including a staff of nearly thirty writers, why does *Saturday Night Live!* have such a disproportionate suck ratio?

It’s interesting because Adam is hands-down the best improvisational performer I have ever witnessed. Better, even, than the Upright Citizen’s Brigade (who in my opinion are a combined close second). He’s the kind of guy who is so smart and funny and aware that he immediately puts

up a wall when he meets people for the first time. It's as if he assumes he'll be bored with you, so he talks at instead of with you. (And it's justified because he probably is bored with the majority of the folks he meets. He's that fucking talented.)

One night we were walking home together from a Brigade show with a mutual friend. This friend was soliciting Adam to read his entirely lame sitcom spec script for feedback. Somewhere in the conversation, Adam made an agitated funny about the dilapidated quality of *Saturday Night Live!* I picked up the cue and in a polite, not-so-round-about way asked him why if he's the head writer and arguably one of the funniest men on the planet—why, oh why was SNL so dreadfully unfunny most of the time?

The answer was simple and expected: Lorne Michaels, the producer, has final say in what goes on the air and what gets trashed. Myths speak of an age long gone when Lorne had a sense of humor. But now he's older and more British sounding and interested in appealing to beer-guzzling college students who feel smart when they "get" pop culture references from way back last week.

Lorne Michaels has veto power over the head writer. Who do you blame for quality control?—Blame Dr. Evil.

You're welcome.

If it weren't for Pay My Rent! I would also never have met Scarlett Wilson. She was the one actor we pulled from the debris of eleven. She was a solid performer who didn't always understand the humor but didn't let that get in the way of making it work. Now that's a gift! (Either that or all those naysayers who claim acting isn't a real job are right. Hell, you don't see astronauts who don't understand their mission tooling around in space shuttles, do you? But then again, chimps have piloted spacecraft, so maybe that's a bad example.)

Scarlett was important for another reason. But before we

delve into that bit of unpleasantness, here is her amazing true story of Oliver Stone-ian proportions. So incredible is this story, it needs to be told and butchered in the telling. Well, it doesn't need to be butchered, but it will be because my short-term memory is about as functional as James Coburn's ring finger.

Scarlett's True Story (Phunky Phat Remix)

During the final days of the Carter administration, Scarlett's mom was working for the Department of Defense or something like that. Her job was to track ships sailing around the waters of the Middle East. Maybe. Okay, look, I don't totally remember the setup, but the punch line is this: She unknowingly stumbled across the Iran Contra Scandal years before the public caught wind of it. When she asked her supervisor why we were running ships in and out of Iran during a trade embargo, he feigned bafflement.

The next day, Ms. Wilson showed up for work like always. Unlike always, nobody else was there. Not a single person.

Two thuggish white men dressed in black suits and trench coats approached her from either side. Though she had never seen them before, they seemed to know everything about her. They sat her down and calmly explained to her that she had tracked nothing on the radar.

Not one to be intimidated by mythical spooks, Ms. Wilson protested to the contrary and spoke hotly of her American rights. One of the men in black calmly reiterated that she had seen nothing. He added spook gems like, "You know the McDonald's slogan, 'Over One Million Served?'—Well that's literal," and, "Do you know what we do to people who talk? We dip their fingertips in acid so they can't be identified, then dump their bodies in the dessert where nobody will find them anyway."

Ms. Wilson was a single mom who didn't need this shit, so she clamped her peephole. She went home and noticed

she was being followed. She pulled down all the shades in her house and didn't let Scarlett out to play with her friends. She didn't tell her boss or coworkers what happened and never asked why no one showed for work the previous day.

After a few weeks of being followed by black Sudans and Scarlett asking who that man was who asked her questions about Mommy at recess, she packed their bags and hopped on a plane for Ireland.

They had relatives there with whom they planned to live until Ms. Wilson felt safe enough to return to the States. Her visit was unannounced; she confided in no one that she was leaving. Yet the moment she stepped off the plane, two Irish security men quietly apprehended Scarlett and her and escorted them to a private room in the airport. There they were interrogated for a solid three hours.

The cops wanted to know what they were doing in Ireland, who they were staying with, and did their visit have anything to do with the IRA. Ms. Wilson told them the truth and they laughed at her, not wanting to hear it.

"I suggest you complain to your president elect, Reagan, about that," one of them told her. This is an especially scary comment because Ronald Reagan HAD NOT YET BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT!

That was the last thing Scarlett remembers hearing them tell Mommy before they were separated and Mommy was interrogated in private. It was then that Ms. Wilson was told that if she loved her daughter and didn't want anything bad to happen to her, they had better get back on the plane and never again return to Ireland.

When they got back to the U.S., everything seemed to go back to normal. Ms. Wilson got another job in a different field. There were no taps on the phone, no more strange men approaching Scarlett at school. Life went on and then the Iran Contra Scandal broke. Retribution at last.

As a footnote to this story, the Wilsons—who were actually friends with the Carters—were having dinner with them many years later when Ms. Wilson told Jimmy her

escapade. He was thrown. He'd never heard anything about it and apologized, saying he would never have allowed something like that to happen.

Such is the power of the president.

Chapter 40

Besides bearing witness to a word most pundits dare not utter: “conspiracy,” Scarlett is important to me for another reason: we were going to be roommates. Kara decided to move back to Massachusetts to pursue—what else?—the ministry. She and I had plowed through two roommates together, so with Scarlett replacing her, we would have to find a third roommate for our three bedroom East Village dirt-hole living space.

Let this story serve as a parable about instant karma. If ever such a creature exists, it lives in this rather devious, embarrassing piece of personal history.

Scarlett and I were going to pick a third roommate together. As equals. We met with a slew of wackos and potentials who didn't quite fit the bill. Then...she came a knockin'. Who is *she*? Well, let's Just call her **Messica** for purposes of protection. My initial impression based on that grand larf of a quality we call *looks* was that she wouldn't fit the bill either.

Messica was a preppy looking white girl. More of a sorority gal, I supposed, more the type of gal I could grow to hate rather than tolerate. She gave the bedroom the ol' once-over, then Scarlett and I interviewed her in the living room. Everything that came out of her mouth was platinum. We had the same interests, the same from-the-hip sense of humor, the same overall type of intelligence.

Oh, I was in love at first listen...with a preppy girl-me in a mock turtleneck. Who'd a thunk? Suddenly I could see her physical beauty. Or was it my vanity I saw? It was all such a blur. The one thing I refused to see was Scarlett's point of view.

Our interview ended when Chris, the next candidate, rang the buzzer. The two auditioning roomies met then in

passing. Messica told him not to take the place, he'd hate it here. Chris, it turned out, was the only other decent candidate. He struck me as a gentle Everyman type. Normal, you know? Someone, dare I say, you might actually want to live with. And it didn't hurt that we shared dreams of a career in the film industry.

So it stands, I obviously liked him just fine. But Scarlett...well, Scarlett a tad more, for she saw in Messica a potential warning sign that didn't concern me: She, like Scarlett, was an actress. And a younger actress at that. Scarlett explained that she didn't want to feel any competition and didn't want to deal with the crap young budding actresses go through because she had already been there, done that. Besides, she protested, we both liked Chris, right?

Right. But I **loved** Messica. This fact doubled as Scarlett's other fear.

While we mulled over our top two candidates, Messica called from a pay phone pretending to be Chris informing us that he didn't want the apartment, he wanted Messica to get it. That, dear reader, is balls.

Scarlett saw the humor but it wasn't enough. She felt comfortable with Messica, but that wasn't enough either. My argument was that she was behaving irrationally and we shouldn't disqualify the perfect roommate because of her insecurities. Her argument was that we both agreed we liked Chris, so what was the issue?

I saw her point but I also saw mine and since mine's the one stuck in my beady head, I had to defend it. There was only one democratic way to handle this: coin toss, best two out of three.

She flipped a penny. I called tails. Heads won. She flipped again. Tails it is. I flipped the tiebreaker and...Heads, I lose. Chris moved in and we three lived happily ever after.

No!—No! Nothing's ever that simple.... I think it must have been a full moon because I wouldn't stop howling, begging for best four out of five. She wasn't hearing it.

Desperate, I opened the briefcase cuffed to my wrist and turned keys until a nuke launched on target.

"Sorry, Scarlett," I said, "but you know what? We're giving the room to Messica."

"But I won the *toin coss*!" she said in a dyslexic fit.

"Yeah, but it's my apartment and I want Messica," I said coolly.

"But...But I won the *toin coss*—coin toss! That's bullshit!"

"I know, I'm sorry. I should never have done the coin toss. It was stupid. But it's still my place, you know?" My words were soothing as a cheese grater massage.

I know it was a dick move, but there you go. Check and mate. Except that Scarlett and I yelled at each other well into the night and in the end she decided not to move in. This announcement came days later and with another excuse entirely. But I knew what it was. I knew I had abused my power of lease.

Best of both worlds, Chris and Messica moved in. Scarlett and I remained friends for a time. Two things happened to dissolve our friendship, and believe it or not, this was not one of them!

First, Scarlett spent the night and cooked Thanksgiving dinner. All was well until she got liquored up and tried to convince Messica that she should date me. This was one of those vengeful purposely embarrassing confrontations where Messica had to leave the room and I tore Scarlett a new hole. I asked her to leave but she climbed into my bed and refused. Short of calling the cops, there was nothing I could do, so I slept on the couch and saw her off the next morning. She was apologetic but fuck her and her groveling.

At best, we were 1—ALL.

Cut to about six months later, Scarlett and I were enjoying a less-than fine dining experience at the Bendix Diner when she told me her boyfriend of two months popped the question. I had never even met the guy but from what she said he wasn't her type. She was sick of a never-ending dating scene, so she was ready to settle. For less.

"And you said 'yes'?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes. We're engaged, aren't you happy for me?"

"I guess.... What are you crazy?—You barely even know the guy! And you don't even love him!"

"I like him."

"But you don't love him!"

"No, I do. I like him," she insisted and skirted with political prowess.

"Right. You like him, but you don't love him, get it? You know what I'm saying."

"I like him and that's enough. I don't know if I believe in love," she said.

Lonely actresses really know how to ham it up for the invisible camera, don't they?

"Of course you do, don't be stupid," I sensitively reminded. "You know marriage is a big step. It's supposed to be forever and that's a pretty long time not to love someone."

That's when she blurted, "Well you're not gonna marry me are you?!"

Wow. Nothing like cutting to the chase. This made sense of her Messica jealousy; this made sense of a lot of issues between us. How could I not see this train wreck speeding towards me a kilometer away*?

I answered her question by paying the bill and never seeing her again. I couldn't be friends with a woman who was getting married because I wasn't attracted to her. It's a dynamic even I'm too functional to ignore.

Scarlett was gone, Messica was gone, and I couldn't stand my job at—wait a minute.... Did I skip something? Ah, yes! I forgot to tell you how Messica got her name!

Toin cossed, this is the flip side of karma....

* Simple. I have no idea how long a kilometer is.

Chapter 41

"I noticed when i got home that my pumpkin was melted down the back of the TV. Did you see that at all?" I asked Messica before she took my order. I liked visiting her at the restaurant because she always gave me free food.

"Yeah," was all she said. Her face was drawn, her normally lively eyes placid and distant.

I swallowed an angry lump. "Wait, you saw that and you didn't do anything about it?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Why not?"

She shrugged slowly like an automaton version of herself. "I don't know. Didn't feel like it."

If ever there were a bad sign, this was it.

Ever since Messica moved in we had a special relationship. It was as if there were no need to bond; it was as if we already knew each other. She was a Canadian-born actress trying her best to make it in New York. She had little contact with her family, especially her father who was the leader of a traveling Buddhist cult. He had no tolerance for children, especially his own. Her mom was a psychic channeler who believed that Messica purposely fucked up her life for attention. This *fucked-upedness* included, but was not limited to, bulimia.

Hmm.... Charismatic fucked up actress chick with no dad and psychic mom.... No wonder there was no need to bond! We already did know each other—back in high school when her name was Stacey and she loved anyone but me!

Sur-fucking-prise!

Messica was upfront about her familial issues, but the bulimia thing didn't come out until much later. Aside from acting, she was also a painter. Most of her work was dark art on giant canvasses. Lots of screaming heads with swirling

muddy colors pouring from the mouths and engulfing the background. After our bulimia chat, there wasn't much in her art left to interpretation.

When Chris moved in a month after she, we saw him only intermittently. He landed a job as a production assistant for an indie film so he worked something like eighteen hours a day. We jokingly referred to him as our adopted son. The implication that we were therefore a couple was lost on no one but her.

I did my eunuch best to keep my attraction from her. Attraction: yeah, right...I was in love! For the first time since Stacey, I was in love. Thank God it was a one-way affair, I wouldn't want to break **that** streak!

If grunge music taught me anything it's that happiness was for losers. And I was a winner, a big winner. (Anti-winner? Tss...Whatever, dude.)

But my eunuch best wasn't good enough. I broke. I had that honest intimate bloodletting of the soul we call confession. I didn't tell her I was in love with her but I did acknowledge feelings beyond friendship. Her initial reaction was a controlled, mature thanks but no thanks. "Thank you, I appreciate that. But I don't reciprocate the feeling," I believe were her exact words.

This, however, was chased by a stream of tears and the dreaded, "Why does this always happen to me?"

You and me both, sister.

"Why can't I ever just be friends with a guy?" she asked the gods.

"Gee. Sorry," I mumbled to the floor.

"I'm not blaming you! This always happens to me. I meet a guy and then he wants to fuck me. We can't ever have a simple friendship."

"I didn't say I wanted to fuck you," I assured. I resented the ego of her presumption.

"Look, forget about it," I said. "I just wanted to get it out in the open. You're not interested. That's fine. It doesn't fuck up our roommate dynamic or anything. You don't have to move just 'cause you don't reciprocate the feeling.

I don't want you to feel uncomfortable. Seriously, I'm a pro at this, it happens to me all the time too. I don't want you to stop, like, sitting on my lap or sharing stuff with me because you don't have to walk on eggshells...."

Oh, I was at my damage control peak! I laid it on so thick, I believed me! I really did! She wasn't walking on eggshells but I was. Everything I did around her from that point on was calculated.

The morning following my outing, she exited our bathroom wet from shower wearing only a towel. She had never done this before. She plopped down on the couch; I was sitting in the comfy chair to her left. She threw her right foot up on the coffee table and clipped her toenails at such an angle as to afford my prying eyes access aplenty up that towel. This was such a bizarrely obvious manipulation on her part that I blocked it out. I decided she couldn't be exhibiting on purpose for the very reason that it was so transparent.

A few nights later it was storming out so hard I thought stars were leaking. Messica would be coming home from work soon and I knew she hadn't brought an umbrella with her. I stood in our hallway debating whether I should bring one to her. "Okay" I told myself. "If you do this, you're not going to be her knight in shining armor. You're just doing it out of kindness 'cause it's the right thing to do. You know that. She's not going to love you for this. You know that."

I braved the rain and brought her the umbrella. "Thanks," she said drolly and grabbed it from my hand. I woke up into myself and saw the situation objectively: I looked like a fucking stalker.

I darted my eyes to the left and right of my stationary head. Her coworkers and regulars were sizing me up. Was I a *nice* guy? The kind who marches to the beat of his own soundtrack? The kind who only exists in John Hughes films? Or did I simply not fancy wet meat walking through my door and into my oven?

Yeah, that was the vibe. Like I might be writing her let-

ters about killing Reagan for “us,” or telling her to put the fucking dog in the basket.

My body backed deliberately out of the restaurant as my mind ran in slow motion from the explosive fake fire of humiliation.

Or something similar with less words.

That was the last really dumb lovelorn thing I tricked myself into doing for her. Oh wait, no. I did buy a book on bulimia so that I could better understand where she's coming from because, as I told myself, “If you're going to live with someone with a disease you should learn about it so you know what to expect.” Like she's a special needs child. Like I didn't want to save her from what I considered to be an upper-class self-created white girl's disorder. Like I wasn't in love with her.

Some say you can't truly be in love with a person who is not in love with you. That's crap, you can be. The difference is it takes far less time to fuck up the relationship.

I think putting an end to the dumb lovelorn things messed her up. I think she was expecting a familiar drama to unfold like it always did with those other male friends who just wanted to fuck her. But I didn't just want to fuck her, I wasn't lying about that. The intimacy I crave doesn't have to be physical.

Ladies: IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PHYSICAL. You may contact me at (212) 387.....

ahem

More uneventful weeks stripped off the calendar day by x-ed out day. On the last of those uneventful days, Messica was boiling cabbage for dinner. Yes, cabbage. That was her dinner most nights. Ah, the sweet smell of boiled cabbage! Easy in, easy out!

I, meanwhile, was sitting on the couch zoning out to some pixilated piece of boob-tube uber-crap. In Manhattan there is no divide between kitchen and living room, so the cabbage boiled next to me. Still uneventful, right?—Wrong.

Because that's when she blurted out, "Why do you have to like me? What did I ever do to deserve this?"

The calendar days stopped flipping. I think I actually heard Father Time himself take a deep breath and hold it. The needle on the skipping record that is my doldrums scratched a tear.

"I'm sorry, what?" I asked. I shook off the TV hypnotism so I could pay attention to real life fucking with me.

"What did I ever do to you to make you like me," she asked pointedly.

"What are you asking?"

"What I said."

"I heard what you said, but what the fuck does that mean? What am I a disease?"

"No," she said. "I just don't understand it. Do I send out a vibe or something? Why do guys always have to do this to me?"

She stirred her cabbage as I boiled over.

"Oh, poor you. You're so attractive! That must really suck!"

"Fuck you," she yelled. "You don't understand!"

Oh goodie. Our first fight.

I blasted back with, "You know you are so full of shit! If you don't want me to like you so much then why did you all but show me your vagina a couple of weeks ago?"

"What?!" she exclaimed.

She stopped stirring her rabbit food and nail-gunned me with her eyes.

"Remember that? I told you I had feelings for you and you sat there and cried the same shit. 'Why do guys like me? Why do guys want to fuck me?' And then what happened? The very next day, what did you do? Came out here in a towel and clipped your toenails so I could look up your towel."

Mouth agape. Wait for it...wait for it.... There! She laughed that guilty laugh of wordless protest, the one that says, **No I didn't! (yes I did.)**

I closed the deal with, "Yeah. I may like you but I'm not a fucking idiot."

*No you don't, you **love** her. And you ARE a fucking idiot!*

She was, as they say, speechless. Called out and speechless.

Sure it felt good—nay, it felt GREAT at the time. But maybe this wasn't the right way to handle Messica. Maybe this was one of the reasons she fist-puked. Maybe this was the reason she let my jack-o-lantern melt down the back of the television. Maybe this was why, in one of his rare interactions with Messica, Chris slipped in a small puddle of vomit on our living room rug, which he asked her about but she never copped to. Maybe that's why it's called a throw rug: throw it down, throw up, throw it out.

Maybe, yeah, maybe that was the turning point. It felt like it. Messica denied it the way she denied me having any impact on her life. She was, after all, a classic case of depressed bulimic narcissist with insert-prefix-here-pathic tendencies.

So maybe, yeah, maybe this was the drift that led to the tremors that led to the quake waiting for me back home after a Friday night at the theatre with—Who else?—Scarlett.

Scarlett and I were in a good—nay, GREAT—mood when we entered my apartment. We were laughing and dancing and singing; cartoon blue jays were nesting on our shoulders, counting the rests between solo and chorus so they could whistle harmonies, when the telephone did its finest to chime in.

Unfortunately, the ring was in the wrong key.

"Hello?"

"Jeremy?" The depleted vocals on the other end wanted to know.

"Yup.... Messica?" I asked. Only I used her real name.

The unstable voice morphed into shaky mucus-filled desperation. In the time it takes to register burn, I snapped into protector mode.

"What's wrong," I asked.

"I'm at Ye Olde Mental Hospital. They have me on suicide watch. Please...help me...."

Her tears choked her words and left me stranded in my

tilt-a-whirling mindscape. Not since my father hit bottom with his alcoholism had I witnessed a cognizant adult so stripped and fetal. And this was just the mechanized Bell Atlantic-filtered version of her voice breaking through the static of my cordless phone. I couldn't imagine what awaited me at that hospital. I couldn't imagine so I didn't prepare. But that's okay.

As I was about to find out there is no preparation.

Chapter 42

"I'm sorry sir. I can neither confirm nor deny that the person you are inquiring about resides here...."

This line and mutated versions thereof was the annoying stonewall I received for the first two hours at the mental hospital. Why wouldn't the White Coats ask Messica if she wanted to see me? They knew she made a phone call; logic might dictate that I was the person she called.

The thing about New York institutions is you can never tell if workers' attitudes are policy or disgruntlement. Both spawn equally curt, rude employees.

Scarlett and I broke through the first safety net of protocol-reading night nurses and into an actual waiting room. There we twiddled our thumbs another forty-five minutes or so. Finally, a cop patted me down for contraband and admitted me to the inner sanctum. It was tight dingy quarters behind that security door. This was where police handcuffed criminals to steel beds for the night when their precinct holding tanks overflowed or the criminal displayed insane behavior. Like self-defecation. Or yelling back at the unheard voices commanding them to feed subway trains immigrant women.

We had been staring at Messica's bed from the waiting room and didn't know it. When I entered, she was curled in a ball on the side where off-white brick obfuscated a full view. Her underwear was slung over one of the metal bars on her hospital cot. She wore a standard-issue flannel nightgown, long pajama bottoms and socks. Her clothes sans underwear and socks had been confiscated at the door. Cameras monitored our interaction for abuse or escape plans.

I grabbed her by the shoulders and hugged her lifeless fire-retardant back. "How you doing?" I asked. "They gave you the penthouse suite," I joked. No response.

I petted her hair and kissed her head with butterfly sovereignty the way I would have wanted my dad to do if I had been in her predicament.

Face to the wall. Steady breathing. Nary an acknowledgement of my presence. I wondered if the nurses had doped her up but figured probably not. I had seen this before in the non-medicated.

This is what happens when depression becomes you.

I knelt by her bed and nuzzled her tenderly. I spoke in a soothing tone about how she would get through this, how everything would be okay. I wanted her to physically feel the vibrations of my words in her back and neck. One way or another I vowed internally to reach her for fear that I was losing her to her headspace, to a self-induced coma where she was crucified queen of Shit World puking for the sins of Mother/Father. I could smell the acid stench she attached to her bubbling memory brew and it terrified me.

There is no Hell for people like Messica. There is reality. And this is how she escaped it.

The image made me queasy but alleviated my guilt. I knew then that I didn't play a role in her being here. On the totem pole that is Messica's issues, I wasn't even bottom head.

"Do you want me to rub your feet?" I asked.

She nodded "yes." I should have been overjoyed at that first sign of recognition. But knowing Messica, a foot rub is the last thing she would normally want and I was the last person she would want it from.

I sat at the end of her bed where Scarlett could see me. Trooper that she was, she sat out in that waiting room all this time. I caught her with a weak half-smile. She raised her eyebrows and sighed an unspoken shared concern. I pulled off Messica's socks and massaged her raw fleshy feet. This was a real sacrifice on my part. Jim's molestation of child-me, if you will recall, began with a foot rub. I have resented that particular body part ever since and continue to boycott feet wherever possible.

Tears wanted to run for help down my face but I blocked

their movement like a union buster at a strike. I would have gone to my happy place but the landlord evicted me years ago. Something about neighbors hating me. It was a time-share. What could I do?

No, this night, I could not cry out. I let the other inmates do that for me. One lady speed-walked circles in the lobby yelling to herself. A homeless entity hollered drunken epithets from the next room at cops and the staff and the god who had erased him from memory.

Memory. Experience shapes memory shapes experience shapes memory shapes the victim of experience who dwells on the memory until memory replaces experience until change or death.

Messica had made her choice. And here we both were losing ourselves in the mechanism that predicts us if we let it. Only I hadn't handed myself over to that mechanism the way she had. I frequently allowed myself to emerge for a breather and some objectivity.

There is a world outside of my body and my problems. I know this because I interact with it on a daily basis. Messica interacted *at* it, so she never differentiated the world—the earth, its people, its animals, the universe—as a place outside of herself. To her, as to two-year-olds, the world was an extension of her body and mind.

You can always tell the stage at which a person was wronged in a permanently damaging way. This is the point at which unhealthy patterns make their loop-the-loops, development is arrested, and the inner child goes, "Waah!" It's astonishing, really, how the body grows and the personality moves on save for those one or two pieces. Those one or two slacker pieces refuse to pick up the pace.

So what do you do? You learn to cope. You figure it out. You dislodge the pieces.

Or....

You bottle it up. You blame other things, often the most recent and external symptoms of the larger dysfunction, for all your problems.

My husband hit me because he's an asshole. Not because abuse

was equated with love when I was a baby girl. I'm only still with him because I want to "make it work."

Or....

The world sucks. You blame yourself for the world sucking because everything is your fault. Everything is your fault, including this sucking world because there is no differentiation between you and it. This faulty paradigm is most attractive to the learned and the virtually self-actualized. When two of these kindred souls meet, they call it Fate.

The transference of like-beings' like-bullshit into each other runs so smoothly, it feels like Fate. But it's not. It's binary self-hate. It's misery likes company but falls head-over-heels for company that is miserable in the same ways.

It's rubbing the feet of a woman who cannot love you because she does not love herself and might not love you even if she did.

Because I'm a good friend and this is what good friends do and I know I'm not doing this to win her over, but if it doesn't, nothing will, so it must. If she doesn't love me after this show of devotion, no woman will. Ever. This will prove once and for all that I am not worth loving. Ever. Because this, not she, not we, is Fate. My Fate. Always.

Yes, that drastic. Because I, too, did not love myself. And this, reader, is the only trait we had in common that mattered and predicted us.

Chapter 43

I set my alarm for 7:30 A.M. Saturday morning. I wanted to be back at that hospital as soon as I could. I hopped in a cab and arrived there at 8:30. Messica was asleep so I stuck it out in the waiting room until she awoke. Thankfully, she wanted to see me.

She was up and about, still a shadow of her former self but cognizant nonetheless. We sat on the floor together while I watched her nibble at the trash the nurses passed off as food. They told her they were holding her there for observation for the weekend before transferring her to a more appropriate facility way uptown. The reason being, according to one of the nurses I spoke with, an actual real-live doctor would not be in until Monday and they couldn't move her without his seal of approval. So there she stayed with the criminal and the insane.

Canadians: Welcome to America! Still the only industrialized nation on the planet where "health care" is an oxymoron—and going strong!

I joked with Messica about her situation. She was receptive until I said of her food, "Yuck! Good luck keeping THAT down! Well...not that you plan on doing that anyway...."

Yeah, that one I guess was over the line. But she was making bulimia quips too, so don't peg me a total sadist.

She snapped at me and I apologized and then we sat in prolonged silence, which she broke first.

"Don't tell anyone I'm here. I don't want anyone to know about this but you," she said.

"I understand. Scarlett knows already. She was there when you called yesterday so she came with me. I never see Chris, but if I do and he asks I've got to tell him the truth."

"Fine. But no one else, please," she requested.

"What about your family? Your mom?" I asked.

She was adamant that I not tell her family. She didn't want to worry her brother. And her mom, like her dad, would not care.

What manner of human brings forth life into this world and refuses to care for it? What self-proclaimed spiritual leader abandons his daughter yet preaches eternal love and harmony to the children of strangers?

This is so confusing and familiar and—

Messica whipped her breakfast tray across the floor into the wall and pouted for reasons unexplained. I searched her regressed two-year-old eyes for an ironic glint but there was only the child.

"What are you doing?—You can't just do that!" I scolded.

She responded by making a whiny child sound. She dropped her plastic juice cup on the floor and crawled back into bed where she lay motionless on her stomach. I cleaned her mess then reprised my role as official masseuse to the deeply depressed. I was disturbed that none of the staff saw or heard her dump her food, especially given the security camera. Disturbed, but not surprised.

This scene was typical of the rest of the weekend: signs of personality coupled with childish outbursts then as little response as necessary. My job, it seemed, was to put on my caring paternal voice and tell her she is loved and needed while rubbing ache from her flesh.

When Monday came, I saw her off in an ambulance. Ye Olde Hospital was finally transferring her uptown but I wasn't allowed to go with her. Her doctor, with whom she gave me permission to speak, said that she would need a day to get used to her new surroundings. She was going to be stuck in a new, more appropriate facility for a number of weeks.

I don't remember how I tracked down Messica's mom's phone number, but track it down I did. Regardless of how

Mess felt, I thought it important that her mother be notified. She couldn't really not care could she? My nervous fingers pecked away at the phone digits. I half hoped to get an answering machine.

"Hello?" an older female voice answered.

Shit. It's on.

"Yes, hi. Mrs. Pseudonym [not her name]?" I asked. My tone was polite but my inflection shaky. Firm, but shaky.

"Yes?" she asked with caution. I wondered if they had a lot of telemarketers in Canada.

I explained who I was and told her what her daughter had told me: Friday she went to see her psychologist about her severe and growing suicidal tendencies. Whatever she related to him won her a trip to the mental ward.

Now come be a mother.

"Oh.... Okay, thank you for calling," was her total response.

CLICK!

CLICK? ...CLICK?! ...I know that didn't just happen!

FU-UCK!!!

Jaw-dropped-shocked, I took a minute to stare through all the objects in my reality tunnel. If it were my mom she would be on the next plane to New York.

Fucking bitch.

I rang her up again. There was no nervousness this time.

"Hello?" said the familiar deadpan voice.

"Hi, this is Jeremy again. I don't think you understand. Your daughter is in a mental hospital in a very large city in a foreign country. Luckily I'm here to take care of her but neither of you should trust that because in reality, I'm a total stranger. She's your daughter! I think you better get down here!" I demanded.

Some families **have many** children; some **are only** children. It doesn't take a village, it takes two parents willing to not be fucked up.

Messica's mom was flustered. "Oh-oh...Okay, let me check my schedule.... I think I can make it a week from Wednesday."

It was better than nothing, so I agreed. I told her not to worry about a hotel, she could stay in Messica's room. Two days later she phoned me. She told me she had spoken with her spiritual mentor, who I assumed was a living breathing human. Ms. Mentor helped her to see what a bad parent she had been all these years. Now awakened to what everyone else already knew she was ready to take responsibility for her daughter.

Joy of fucking joys.

Mrs. Pseudonym would be coming early; she would arrive on Thursday. I couldn't wait to meet this woman, this psychic medium, this mother of two.

In the meantime, I would spend a lot of money on cab fare for daily visits and a lot of time weeping on the couch. I started seeing a shrink, a woman who worked some nights out of an office at the investment firm. We grew to be friends, so I trusted her counsel. More importantly, I wanted to make certain that—against the odds of this ever being true—I wasn't trying to live out a rescue fantasy. She was skeptical of my intentions but I assured her that I understood there would be no logical conclusion to this.

I would not magically cure Messica. She would not magically fall in love with me. I would not whisk her away from all her misery. I did not own a steed. I would not ride off into the sunset with her.

And if perchance she did fall "in love" with me as a result of my nurturing her through this endeavor, it would not be love. It would be her dysfunctional rebound with an enabler and it would not last.

Why is it that I knew all of this but nobody trusted me? Not my colleagues, not my family—not even my shrink! Fuck them. I trusted me. I had to. Until Messica's mom arrived I was all I had.

And then when she arrived, I was still all I had.

Chapter 44

When Mrs. Pseudonym touched down at JFK Airport I wanted to be the first friendly face that greeted her. I recognized her instantly from the description she gave over the phone: long black straggly hair; rail thin body; short; dilated brainwashed eyes. Okay, I added that last one—but come on! Buddhist cult leader divorcee? Ghost channeler? Dionne Warwick fan? Okay, I added that last one too.

We had a car waiting outside to bring us directly to the hospital. We hit the highway and she cut to the chase.

“You must have a lot of questions for me,” she was certain.

I, too, cut to the chase.

“Yeah, ah, like what kind of Mom leaves her daughter stranded in a mental hospital at the care of a total stranger? would be one. Also, you’re a psychic...How did you not see this coming?”

She chuckled slightly through her nose. “It doesn’t work that way,” she said.

No. Of course not.

She explained that Messica was always doing something to get attention. Before Mrs. Pseudonym sought counsel from her spiritual guru she blamed Mess for all her problems. Now she realizes she may indeed play a role in her daughter’s malformed psyche.

Another gas stop on her road to recover was a book she urged me to read called *Owning Your Own Shadow*, by Robert A. Johnson. This, she stressed, was a seminal extension of Carl Jung’s shadow work. It taught her to claim responsibility for her actions (and inactions) and to pay homage to the dark side of her personality, lest it take control of her life.

Discovering a trait within oneself that is innately recognizable to most young adult simians must be a bitter pill to

swallow at forty-something. Kudos to you, Mrs. Pseudonym!

I held Mess's mom's luggage while she visited her ailing daughter. Cynical blather aside, this was the first in a string of healing moments betwixt the two. No matter how old you get, some days you just want your mommy. Mommy, finally, was there.

After their visit, Mrs. Pseudonym and I grabbed a bite at a Spanish dive near the hospital. She asked me what my intentions were toward her daughter. I was up front with my conflicting feelings and the therapy I was receiving to curb them for the sake of Messica's recovery. That's when she hit me with this gem: "You're not in love with Messica. I know you think you are but you're not."

"I'm not?" I gee-golly-willikered.

"No you're not. You're a helper spirit, that's how I knew I could trust you with her. You two have known each other through many past lives. When kindred souls meet up in their present realities, they feel this deep connection that is often mistaken for being in love. It's nothing more than recognition of a deep impenetrable bond," she explained with the blasé tranquility of moral guru Mike Brady.

Mom always said don't play ball in the house.... Or mistake real-time love for past life play pal.

She yammered on about how Messica and I were MEANT to meet up in New York like this because I was MEANT to help her through her terrible ordeal. What could I say to that? Here I am mending her broken fences and she's slapping me with upper class New Age dogma. Often in the middle of sentences she would consult an invisible friend who stood behind me to my right. She told me this opaque being was the spirit she channels.

They're tight like that.

Messica was released early into her mother's and my care. The doctors had a roundtable discussion with us about the next steps to her recovery. Therapy and drugs, basically.

That night, Mrs. Pseudonym treated us to dinner. They both thanked me for my help even though it was the role I was MEANT to play. They also thanked me for jumping on Mom's ass for abandoning Daughter. I was the catalyst for their reconciliation.

Ladies, ladies.... Just doing my job here! I'm the helper! The retro-lifer!

The ghost with the most! Fuck that channeling spirits shit, I'm the geist who knows no quit! I've got more life in me than Superman's T-cells!

All through dinner and after they tried to impose upon me a lifestyle change more conducive to Messica's. I should take a yoga class with her. We should meditate together. I was out of shape; we should go jogging together. I should join her gym. I should watch what I eat. We should both rush right out and buy that *Owning Your Own Shadow* book.

It creeped me out. For a gal who didn't want to date me she sure did want me to do couple's things. I sat in hostile silence picking at my dessert.

"What's wrong?" Mrs. Pseudonym asked.

"Nothing. I don't know. I feel like you're trying to convert me or something. You're a few hours out of the hospital and it's like you've conspired this agenda for me or something. We're not getting married, here," I said.

They apologized and assured me I was misperceiving their good intentions. I let it go.

The next day was a big one for Messica. Her mother made their first dual appointment with a therapist. And by therapist I mean a high-paid psychic medium who channels the spirit of a four-hundred-year-old female Briton who, like I, claims to have all the sloppy answers to life's rhetorical questions.

In the immortal words of some MSNBC reporter com-

menting on a 911 call by O.J. Simpson's latest girlfriend:
"And the beat goes on...."

One week to the day that Messica was released from the hospital, we found ourselves slurping down pricey coffees in that worst example of American ingenuity, Starbucks. Her mom had flown back to Canada on a plane. That's Mrs. Pseudonym for ya: always on another plane.

Shut up, I know.

"Do you still have feelings deeper than friendship for me," Messica asked. I nearly sprayed Venti Americano out my nose.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I want to know," she said.

"I don't want to talk about this, I don't think it's appropriate."

"What does that mean? Do you or don't you, it's a simple question," she said.

"I'm not talking about this. I don't think it's healthy for you to be stoking up this issue right out of the gate. It's only been a week," I reminded while mixing my metaphors.

"Fine," she said. "Then I'll take your silence to mean that you still do have feelings for me and so I want to be perfectly clear on this issue: I will never love you."

Her words made me lose vision. Her face was a black spot encompassed by red halo. I heard my steady breathing resonate through my nasal cavity like a gust of wind in an echo chamber. I swallowed hard to keep down the bile, hers and mine.

"So noted," I muttered through clenched jaw.

"It's important that you hear me on this. My doctor says I need to confront issues instead of running from them," she said.

"So you ran right over me."

"That's not—"

"Don't...talk," I said in a harsh, overly enunciated manner.

I crumpled my slick cardboard venti cup. "I'm going now," I said. I dumped my trash and left. She followed me home.

"Are you mad?"

"Is that what you want?"

"No, that's not what I want!—God! I wish you'd grow up!"
Yeah. Me. Now it was my turn to want to die.

Days of stewing had made me eager to open up about my feelings for her. All of them. I blasted away about love, past lives, and all things MEANT to be. I told her that being the guy who was there for her and being the catalyst for a first-ever positive relationship with Mommy Dearest, I didn't exactly appreciate being first target in the firing line of her doctor-induced "honesty."

I told her...I told her...Oh, it didn't matter what I told her. It was all mental masturbation.

She had a new male friend who clearly had the hots for her. She let him do everything for her right down to rubbing her feet. Pathetic slob; I took pity on his soul. I told her about that, too. How I observed her manipulating this poor guy in a most familiar way.

That mattered. She didn't like **that**. She told me to mind my own fucking business. Not long after this fun-filled day I took her to see *Ivanov* at Lincoln Center. Her thank you was signature Messica. Before the show, we ate dinner at Little Poland, our favorite haunt. It was here on this night of merriment and theatre that she broke the news.

"I'm moving out."

Was that bad news or good news?—I couldn't tell at this point.

"Remember that lawyer I met at the hospital who checks himself in frequently for depression?"

—How could I forget: A burly, bearded older man who kept making strange astonished faces at her behind my back every visit. She would laugh queerly at his antics like

she had a crush on him. Like she was ignoring me. Like both. His faces didn't strike me as funny, they struck me as weird.

She continued, "He owns a bunch of apartment buildings in the city. He said I could have an apartment and a job at his law firm."

"Doing what?" I asked.

"Answering phones, taking messages, that sort of thing."

"Oh. So you met a patient at the mental ward who wants to give you an apartment and a job with him. And you think this is a good thing?"

"Fuck you! Why can't you be happy for me?" my pissed wilting flower wanted to know.

"I am happy for you, Mess. Basically, you're this guy's whore. What's not to be happy about?"

If you think she slapped me and stormed out, think again. I had *Ivanov* tickets.

"You are such an asshole sometimes," she said.

Ah, music to my ears.

"What? You don't think he's going to feel you owe him something?" I asked.

"It's not like that," she huffed.

"No, it never is. Sorry for being concerned. I *must* be an asshole," I said smugly.

When Writing Doesn't Cut It

Yellow
Pad of Paper
Splatter
Shelters nothing
Breaking

Communication
Does not help
Plastered smile
Faking

Fuck you, Dear Diary, fuck you
Where have you been
It's years since I got a balloon
And you haven't helped since then

She's shutting me out with dogma
Mom's favorite paradigm
Old souls not mates finally caught up
Through the sands of time

So questions, there are no questions
About how attractive am I
Because love is a misplaced feeling
In me, delegitimized

Castration
Not so painful
Helpers
Feel no hurt

We
Bury it inside
Ourselves
Emotions are cheap dirt

During the performance, an amazing if temporary phenomenon occurred: I lost my “in love” feelings for Messica. A play about a deeply depressed man who nobody understands, I so related to *Ivanov* I couldn’t believe it was written in the 1800’s. I kept glancing over at Mess, as if to say, **Are you getting this? This is me and I’m done with you.**

It was hard to believe she wasn’t feeling me psychically. If Stacey taught me anything, it’s that novelty powers of the third eye run in the family.

On the way home, I shared with her my new liberation. For a time, her weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I don’t think she was buying it. She probably thought I was trying to get her to stay, but I swear that wasn’t the case. The euphoria lasted only weeks. It left as mysteriously as it came and I once again transmogrified into a skulking husk of a man listening to Nine Inch Nails’ *opus amazingus*, “Further Down The Spiral” and praying secretly that the Empire State Building would invite me up for a leap.

Messica packed the last of her belongings. I saw her to the door. Parting was more sorrow than sweet. She was under the delusion that we would remain friends. I put a stop to that by telling her that I loved her but I never wanted to see her again, so please don’t call or visit unless she was in another dire predicament. Only then, out of human decency (whatever that is), would I help her.

Buddies, pals, friends, however, not happening.

I ran home to Massachusetts for some Christmas cheer as fast as my stubby legs would carry me. Chris and I placed an ad in *The Village Voice* for a roommate needed stat. We had two weeks to find a person willing to move in before the first of the month.

I called Chris from home. “Any takers?”

"Only two guys responded to the ad so far. One's a computer programmer, but he's not sure if he wants the room and he won't know if he can take it until next Wednesday," he informed me.

"Next week's too late," I said. "What about the other guy?"

"The other guy.... I'm not sure what he does but he wants the place pretty bad. He said he's willing to move in now. The only thing is, he's a bit of a talker."

"Chris," I said in what would come to epitomize the phrase "Famous last words...", "Whatever you decide, I trust your judgment."

Chapter 45

Ah, Christmas. Family. Small town cheer. Clears the head. Makes room in the head for other things. Other things to fill the head. When I came back to New York, I met Jeff for the first time. Jeff, my new roommate. Jeff, not the computer programmer. Jeff, the “bit of a talker.” Jeff, the...well...Jeff.

Imagine if you will a genetic experiment gone awry. Imagine a Frankenstein hybrid containing the fused DNA of David Brenner, any Michael Richards character, and either Heckle or Jeckle. Imagine stretching Keith Richards' dead skin over the abomination's entire corpse. Now imagine that creature wearing a black studded leather jacket and complimentary skintight black leather pants.

You've just imagined Jeff. And he wanted to take up my headspace.

“Nice to meet you you're going to be glad I'm your roommate you're going to love me I'm a great guy once you get to know me I swear this is gonna be great here I have the first months rent and deposit but can I keep some of it 'cause if I give it all to you I won't have enough to eat for the week I'm a caterer I work in catering but it's out of season so I'm a little short right now but don't worry about that buddy I'm a musician and I have a lot of gigs trust me this is gonna be great you know oh it's great to have found you I'm so lucky I just moved here from California have you been to LA it's great but I missed New York this is gonna be great don't you think it's so cool how well we get along you're gonna love me I know it....” he said with no apparent need for oxygen.

I shit you not.

Don't blame yourself, dear reader, if you did not scan all that. Just look at the girth of the sentence and know that it is true. Know that for one year, Chris and I lived with...that.

Initially, Jeff was a fine novelty act. He was the lead singer in a West Coast punk rock group called The Nuns. They were famous in underground circles back in the 70's. I know this to be true because I found them cited in a rock anthology book in Barnes & Noble. Jeff claimed that elder VJ Kurt Loder was a big fan of The Nuns and all they had to do was make a music video and he'd play it on MTV. He also claimed that Nine Inch Nails front man Trent Reznor was chopping at the bit to produce their next album. Oh, Jeff claimed a lot of things. I believed most of his (other) stories because he never gloated about knowing famous people, had to be begged into sharing celebrity tales, and retold them without changing a detail. My favorite anecdote was that back in the heyday of punk, The Sex Pistols would stay at his house in California....

[NOTE: Because I love, Jeff's statements shall be presented in glorious punctuation.]

"Yeah-yeah! You know everyone thinks the Sex Pistols were brilliant. They weren't. They were morons. A bunch of illiterate junkies. Sid and Nancy were fucking idiots! Fans would hang on their every word like they were the Second Coming. But they never knew what they were talking about. They were just rude, junkie jackasses."

Once, after a show at Coney Island High, the peace-loving lead singer of anti-skinhead band Agnostic Front staggered drunkenly up to Jeff and blurted, "Hey, man! Do you know who you are, man? You're fucking famous, man! You played with the Pistols and the Ramones! You fucking rock!"

Jeff, thinking this shorn-domed dude was an actual skinhead, tried nicely to walk away but the guy had him cornered and continued to recite Jeff's own resumé to him. Finally, the old troll had at the not-so-nazi.

"Don't tell me who the fuck I am! I know who I am! God, who cares?—The Sex Pistols were a bunch of fucking idiots and you worship them! What does that make you?" he screamed in the guy's face.

The crooner Jeff mistook for an actual skinhead had a few hostile words for him but basically backed off. We had

a good laugh about that one later. Jeff always had an ironic relationship with skinheads and the KKK. They loved The Nuns because of a little ditty they wrote back when called "Decadent Jew." The racist groups made it one of their theme songs, not realizing that it was about Jewish empowerment.

Jeff, the punk rocker, was half Jewish. He cherished their anti-Semitic idolization of his band.

Sometimes I think comedy is the Supreme Being.

Another fine anecdote from this period in my life materialized when Jennifer, the only other original Nuns band member, showed up at the door paler than normal. Jennifer is an older leggy blond who looks amazing for her age, whatever that is. The closest I can get to carbon dating her is knowing that she turned down a spot in The Go-Go's to play in The Nuns.

Jennifer was full of good career moves.

This was the day she was supposed to meet with Iggy Pop about an MTV special. He wanted to put on a mini concert featuring The Nuns.... Or so he said. When Jennifer showed up at his apartment, he answered the door in a bathrobe and not much else. It seems Iggy had a decades-long fantasy of banging Jennifer; the whole MTV thing had been a trap. Crushed, she turned on her heels and walked away.

Iggy, it is safe to assume, rolled up his superannuated penis and went back to writing punk songs no one will ever listen to for an album no one will ever buy.

Chapter 46

Four months had passed since I saw Messica to the door that final time. I think she was pissed that I didn't break down and call her in a needy fit of weakness because she sent me a hostile card passively-aggressively disguised as a THANK YOU. It read like a twelve-stepper torn as to what her role is in apologizing to those she screwed over.

It read like she should meet my old man.

She opened with the mandatory *thanks again for all you've done* routine, but quickly denigrated into some horse shit about how she's still mad at me for...well...I haven't the faintest clue what. Nothing I suspect. Maybe her friends told her she was a clam for treating me the way she did and she actually felt an emotion similar to guilt. Narcissists are never at fault, though, which explains the odd weave that read like, "Thank you (you prick)."

Naturally there was no return address.

Well, Messica, allow me to take this opportunity to respond....

You are welcome. Even if I were not in love with you I would have helped you. As for your anger.... **Lick my fudge-cunt you Cabbage Patch Food Volcano! You aren't entitled to anger, not even now!**

How dare you!

(There. All better.)

That card was the only correspondence I received from her. Good riddance I say. I don't need her, I have other women who love me for me! Well...no I don't—But I do have this rousing tale of sexual puerility!....

Jeremy Vaeni's One-Night Standoff

Oh the comedy! Oh the humanity! Oh this....

My sister was visiting on a good weekend. Good because The Nuns had a gig that we could be comped into. And man do we Vaeni's love free stuff! In addition to Kara, I brought along a group of friends. More importantly for this story, I brought an overtly homosexual fellow who shall remain nameless. We sat together.

Across the table from us sat a young woman I had never met—a friend of a friend. We shall call her “Nadene.” We shall call her “Nadene” because her name is “Adene” which, in this author's opinion, is ugly lazy parenting.

I was in top form that night pouring on the—yes—charm. Nadene asked me if my really gay friend and I were a couple. Not one to ever give a straight answer (no pun intended), I toyed with her lame query. Yes? No? What does it all mean?

“No, seriously?” she wanted to know.

These things aren't important to me so I jerked her fragile sensibilities around a bit more. My Homo Erectus pal was simply fabulous enough to play along. Eventually I let her in on our dirty little secret: JUST FRIENDS.

“Are you sure you're not a couple,” she asked.

“Yes. I'm just in it for the sex,” I said.

Many beers later, she and I broke into an impromptu swing dance. I held my own because, frankly, I wasn't the one drinking the beers.

“Are you sure you're not gay,” she asked on the downside of a dip. I yanked her upright, drew her body to mine.

“Yes I'm sure,” I said. Her suspicious brown eyes betrayed her growing lust for **this** guy. Me. Yeah, me! For gaddam once, me!

The Nuns finished their set. A couple of the band members and some of our friends came back to my pad. Collectively, we turned “party” into a verb. Nadene spent most of the night on my lap. By 4 A.M., vast quantities of

rabble had cleared out. This left me, Jeff, his lead guitar player, Nadene, and a friend of hers. High on whatever, Kara lay passed out on the mouldy loveseat underneath my loft bed.

Those of us still awake were watching Tim Burton's masterpiece, *Ed Wood*. Nadene was definitely awake. I know this because she hugged a pillow to her chest and guided my right hand to her left breast. "Goodie gumdrops," I thought.

Then I got up to pee. Then I came back. Then she was on Lead Guitar Player's lap. Then his right hand was on her left breast. Then they were making out. "Goodie gumdrops," I thought.

I was miffed, to be sure, but only slightly. I didn't know this woman from Eve. Easy come; easy go, as we losers say.

A thought bubble formed like a lenticular cloud above Lead Guitar Player's spiky-haired bean. In it, I read the word "GYRLFREIND" (*sic*).

The lad remembered he had a girlfriend waiting for him at home. This made him feel whatever the musician's equivalent of culpability is, so he decided to call it a night. Jeff had just turned in so I saw Lead Guitar Player to the door. We tiptoed by Jeff's mausoleum doing our finest not to stir him from his upside down undead slumber perch.

Nadene brushed me aside. "I need some privacy while I say goodbye to Lead Guitar Player," she hurriedly explained and slammed the door dividing us. I noted the master swordsmanship of their dueling tongues through the peephole. I turned away in disgust. When next I spoke to Lead Guitar Player, he told me she offered to go down on him in the hallway.

"I was like, no way! I have a gyrlfreind (*sic*)," he related.

Thankfully I didn't spy on them long enough to corroborate this. Although if I had, the rest of this story might not have taken place....

I took off my boots in my bedroom. The thud woke up my sister. "I'm not sleeping on this crappy loveseat all night. It sucks. It's uncomfortable," she whined.

"Fine. You can sleep with me," I promised. I heard Nadene come back inside and lock the door. Her friend had already unpacked the futon couch into a bed. I didn't want to see Nadene's drunken slut face, so I shut my door and readied for slumber.

I heard a light rap on the door. It was Nadene. And she brought her drunken slut face with her.

I peeked my head out the door. "What," I said.

"Can I sleep with you?" she asked.

"No. Sleep on the couch."

"My friend's sleeping there," she said.

"So sleep with your friend, what do you want from me," was my offhanded retort. She stared at me quizzically.

"Are you kidding?" she asked.

"No. My sister wants to sleep in the bed. You get the couch. What's the big deal?"

"You've got to be kidding. Frankly, I'm offended that you can't find room for me in your bed."

"What do you want me to do, it's my sister," I said. "Sleep with your friend. She won't bite."

"I am not sleeping with *her*," she spat venomously. "Are you sure you're not gay?"

"Yes. Quite sure. It's my sister. Blood, you know?" I said blaming Kara in my typical brotherly fashion.

"I don't believe you, let me ask her," she huffed.

She bulldozed through my door. There Kara was. Asleep. On the loveseat. Fuck.

"See! I knew it," she rasped.

"No, I swear she was awake a minute ago!" I said, but it was too late. Nadene had quickly stripped off her pants and unhinged her bra and was climbing the ladder to success. I mean, my bed.

I, dutiful slave, followed.

She tried to be all cuddly with me but I rolled over and ignored her. She took the hint. Then, through mangled angry thoughts surged revelation: Here lay a female who craves sexual attention. So what if it wasn't my penis specifically she craved. Mine was the only penis in the room.

Instead of running like I always do, why not embrace the situation? Why not set aside the circumstances and fool around?

Why not stop denying my carnal instincts?

I exhaled a deep furious carbon wind. My flesh vibrated its goose bumps erect. I had to shit something fierce.

Yeah, you heard me. All night I had to shit! I have this problem, see? I can't crap in an apartment full of people. I don't know why; I don't know what the deal is. I just know it is.

Damn my bowels! Damn my nervousness! Inner child be gone! Come heck or high water, this was going to be my night of adult entertainment.

I flopped back around like a trick seal. I embraced Nadene in the spooning position. She was oh-so-receptive. Harkening back to the couch where she taught me good touch/bad touch, I massaged her breasts through her shirt. Then I attempted that bold next move up her shirt but she blocked it with her forearm. I thought I was imagining things so I tried it again. Nope, she was blocking. Pure blockage.

Being that I'm not a rapist, I didn't press the issue. No sooner had I withdrawn my hand than she had taken it in hers and led me up her shirt herself. Led me into her underwear. Led me all over her privates like a lawnmower in Beverly Hills, a tour guide at Dolly World. I was in hog heaven and she was my feeding trough. Oink, oink.

Then...she touched it. For the first time in EVER, a woman touched me on the pee-pee. She ran her hand up and down the length of my shaft. And by "ran" I mean "sprinted"; because by "length" I mean "nub." Greek Curse, people. Ancient statues cannot lie.

Instead of feeling good, this felt like violation. Compound that with the ever-present need to shit and—would I were a less stable human—you've got a powder keg situation up in that loft!

But why violation? Why would I associate sexual stimulation with sexual assault? Perhaps that afternoon with Jim, the friendly neighborhood child molester had permanently

scarred me in ways I had never cared to admit. But the thing is, I saw Jim many years later in my late teens. Mom and I were at BB Binks, a local tavern, when she spotted him and his wife. Mom's face ran flush with horror and memory.

"Look over there," she whispered even though we were far enough away that they couldn't hear us.

I turned and saw the relic from my past in the flesh.

"Isn't that Jim, that fucking asshole," Mom continued. Hot, red anger poured into her ghostly face.

I squinted at the man who had manipulated my child penis while Pat Robertson begged forgiveness money on *The 700 Club*. Jim was paying his check at the register on his way out.

"Oh yeah," I acknowledged.

Mom squeezed her used rectangular napkin into a writhing twisted snake. "I feel like I've got to say something to him," she declared.

"What are you going to say," I asked.

Beyond ignoring me, I was simply no longer there with her.

"I'll fucking kill him," she hissed.

"No. Don't bother," I said calmly.

"I should. I should fucking kill him."

He and his wife finished their transaction and strolled out the double doors. Mom half got out of her seat as if she were a starved lioness psyching herself up to pounce exotic prey. I gently clasped her wrist.

"It's not worth it," I assured. "It's me he molested and I've made peace with it. So you should too."

That was enough to appease her protector instinct and bring her back to me. When we got home later, she looked up the comically generic "Jim Clark" in the phone book. There was only one. Mom had friends in the FBI who kindly used their resources to make sure the guy in the phone book was our Jim Clark. It was. She called the police to warn them of the potential predator.

This set of actions helped my mother close a dirty chapter of our lives that I had closed years prior.

So, violation? Why violation, if not Jim?

When I was real young—potty training age—my sister and I had a terribly eerie babysitter. She took care of us while our parents worked. She had three much older kids—two boys and a girl—to care for and an inherently frightening husband. Even at that age, my sister and I recognized that their family was somehow...off.

I was forced to take afternoon naps on their daughter's bedroom floor while the other kids watched cartoons in the playroom. One day, the daughter crept into her own room. She lay down in a nook between the bed and wall opposite the door. "Psst! Jeremy! Wake up!" she whispered conspiratorially.

I lay there sucking my thumb, curled up in Blankie, my first best friend, rubbing its soft part, not really sleeping. I got up and wandered over to her on dopey unsure baby boy legs.

There she was, this older girl, this playmate. Naked.

"Start at my chest and kiss me all the way down," she instructed. I did as she asked and thought nothing of it until I reached her bald vagina. I didn't remember Mom or Dad reading a chapter in *Where Did I Come From?* about kissing vaginas, so I stopped short.

"Keep going," she said. I hesitated a moment. Then I kissed it. As if on cue, her mother came snooping around the corner. She was aghast at the veritable kiddy porn performance playing out under her roof. She screamed a primal scream and leapt across the bed. I thought I was in for the beating of my life but she didn't touch me. Instead, she grabbed her daughter's wrist. Hard.

She yanked her baby girl to her feet and slammed her open adult hand—rings and all—against her pride and joy's bare ass over and over again. Her wailing girl dangled there by the one wrist, her buttocks a red palm-printed mess. I sat on the corner of the bed sobbing to myself, dreading I was next. I wasn't. The babysitter spat the briefest of apologies to me and literally threw her daughter out of her own bedroom.

I sat in shock, alone in that monstrous cave. Nothing

more was made of this incident. My babysitter never told her husband about it. But that's okay. He knows....

So violation? Why violation? Why now with this woman in my bed could I not indulge in what was commonplace activity to most teens nearly half my age?

Maybe it was as my shrink told me: My parents fought a lot when I was young; as a result, I now associate sex and love with screaming and anger.

Yes, maybe that. Maybe all of it. All of it, certainly. Equally true, however, there is this simultaneous thread: Although I often fantasize about having sex because part of me is a socialized male animal, there is a greater part of me I shyly admit controls my actions. This part tells me that sex is unimportant. Like drugs and large mistakes, sex is a (fun? dramatic?) diversion from the truth of humanity.

The truth or the...whatever it is that constantly looms over my actions forces me to simultaneously act and witness that action. It's this notion, this fear that humanity is missing the point of its existence. And the more I indulge in entertainment and useless rites of passage, the less time I have to figure out what that point is.

There is a spirit in me demanding that we turn off our dicks, pussies, TV's, drugs, dogmas, politics, sciences, facts, and beliefs to contemplate this truth before it is too late—EVEN THOUGH IT IS too late.

But if it is too late, then why figure it out at all? And what does that even mean, *too late*? Too late for what? My gut feeling for as long as I can remember is that we are about to eradicate ourselves from the planet. But so what? Then why aren't I fucking this chick? That should be the green light for personal anarchy, correct? And yet it is not.

This is my truth in its confused entirety. It is with me when I contemplate great things. It is with me when I vacation and lounge around the beach. It is with me when I go to bed whether I sleep alone or not. I used to fear I was a haunted man, but no. I am a called man as you are a called man or woman. Not in the religious sense, mind you. No, certainly not anything specifically dogmatic calls.

Yet, reader, something—dare I even say, God?—beckons. And you hear the message, atheist or no. What is up to you is to internalize it or reject it. To reject the message is to reject God and thus Yourself.

We are all masters of this.

Again, what am I even saying? I don't go to any church; I don't believe in any preacher's dumb bullshit. So what is this moral compass in me? Where does it come from? Does it point to true North or is it a neurosis of some kind?

I don't feel repressed, I feel *in the know*.

So again I ask, violation? Violation of whom if not the inner child born of ghastly trace remembrances that fade into my unconscious makeup?

And the answer is, yes, violation of that very child but also violation of the principled man who is on the verge of breakthrough into something important, something...real.

This is the deepest truth I know. As with other deep truths, though, I do not feel it enough to give it my undivided attention. It is not at the core of me and yet it **is** the core of me. It is the core of ALL. Seeking to know and feel anything else at this turning point in the history of our species is not just a base mistake, it is fatal to the soul of humanity.

Live like the animal, die like the animal. Live in your full potential, live always.

The question then becomes, what happens when the turning point has turned and the species has made up its mind to live like the animal?

Simple simians stuck to the ground
 Birch bark and cedar traded for symmetry
 Hard drawn lines on the face of the earth
 What is our price?

I am visions of the Virgin, humble and sorrowful and gleaming. I am visits of the Alien, fetal and wanting, mouth a straight line. I am the one true God that you are, this page is, that quark is, that Earth has birthed into being.

How long this incest? How long this rape? Earth has a lesser tolerance for atrophy than do we. Pray inwardly that we do not tick away on the hands of time into extinction's vague memory.

We are all God, yes. So, too, we are all the inner child; the sinner child stunting our own growth with feigned naïveté. Adults are never lost, that is a delusion.

Not copping to this—that is the death of us.

All that...All that.... That ALL in the back of my head.

So then! Hey there, I'm back! As you can see, with projections of mass extinction—the natural outcome of an unrealized species committing suicide—burning a hole through the back of my head, the Little Death seems...well...*little*.

It is at these wakeful moments when girls like Nadene ask poorly timed questions such as, "Do you have a condom?—I really want to have sex."

Which is exactly what she said. Not sex with me, mind you, just *sex*.

"Um...no," I breathed into her ear.

"I'm sure Jeff has one. If you're embarrassed to ask him, I'll go ask him," she said, apparently anticipating a negative response.

"Um...no," I breathed into her ear.

Undaunted, she forged onward. "I don't think you understand me. I want to have sex," she reiterated.

"Yes, I got that part," I notified. "It's not gonna happen."

This clearly did not register.

She said, "Sex? Hello? Really want to have sex here!"

"Right. Not happening. Sorry," I certified.

"Are you sure you're not gay," she asked.

"Quite sure. My sister is asleep right underneath us. There's no way I'm gonna risk waking her up with sex noises," I qualified.

"So we'll be real quiet," she said.

"Oh come on! You know that's not gonna happen! And it's

my sister! I'm not having sex in the same room as my sister," I quantified.

"I don't care about that," she lashed.

"Well I do," I stultified.

"So wake her up and make her sleep on the couch. She'll understand," she bemoaned.

"Your friend is sleeping out there. I'm not forcing Kara to sleep with a stranger," I fortified.

"Look: I don't care about your sister. I want to have sex. Do you get it?—Sex!"

"Tough. The answer is no," I nullified.

Some days, *Fuck off slut!* feels more gratifying than *Let's fuck, slut!*

We fooled around a bit more but she started to get loud with those sex noises she promised she wouldn't make, so I stopped completely. In the light of the following morning, she got her sober bearings. A lone black & white photo of Michael Jackson gripping balloons smiled at us from its otherwise bare white wall.

"What's with the Michael Jackson," she asked. Then she sat up and spun her head around the room, noticed it is plastered with posters and photos. She freaked out: "Oh my god! What's with the Michael Jackson posters?"

"I don't know. I like Michael Jackson," I testified.

She looked at me with eyes of suspicion and disgust. "Are you sure you're not gay," she inquired.

"Look," I rectified, "I know I showed up last night with a flamboyant friend and had you thinking we were a couple. And sure, maybe I was a surprisingly decent dancer. And okay, granted, I didn't want to share a bed with you and refused to have sex with you. And then, yes, there are these Michael Jackson posters all over the walls but...There's no way to prove this right now, but I swear I'm not gay."

"Then why didn't you want to have sex?"

"I told you, my sister was in the room," I whatever-fied.

She lay back down. Silent. Too silent.

"Are you a virgin," she asked.

"Lucky guess," I deified.

"You are?!"—THE HORROR!!!—"Oh my god, you're lying!"

"No. I am a virgin. So there you go," I *ta-da!-ified*.

She kept asking me if I was lying. I convinced her with repetitious affirmations.

"Oh my god," she giggled. "Why didn't you tell me? I could have accidentally taken your virginity."

"No you couldn't."

"Yes I could!"

"No you couldn't. You tried to have sex with me, right? Well did it work? Did ya have sex? It ain't by accident.... So no you couldn't," I *trumpified*.

Yes, I was the one-night stand that failed. And yet she gave me her home phone number, work number and e-mail address. I didn't understand this. Perhaps she wanted my virginity after all.

Later, after everybody went home and I had taken a long stinky shit.... I gratified.

Chapter 47

I gulped in long breaths of stale cigarette air as sweat and makeup oozed down my face. Most of the anonymous bodies packed around me were in worse shape than I, some doubled over and hyperventilating. We never complained, though. This is what we waited until five in the morning for and we weren't about to pass out now.

Someone distributed plastic cups of fake beer with no instructions. The hundred or so of us leaned on one another and stared at the fake band positioned on the real stage, unsure and uneasy. The fake singer shouted scripted profanities into his real microphone that we really responded to. Then he and his fake band launched into a really loud really real punk song. We, the audience, swayed where we stood, lilies in a muddy field.

A curious thing happened next: we, the unsure herd, erupted as one flailing screaming animal with many parts. We hurled our fake beer at each other and at the fake musicians and broke into a real slam dance frenzy. The fake singer dove headfirst into the wet-stink audience monster, certain that in the passion of the moment enough grimy tendrils would break surface to keep him afloat. But that didn't happen, so he smashed headfirst into the gritty sea floor.

Spike Lee yelled, "Cut!—Cut!" into his bullhorn. The fake band stopped playing their real instruments. We, the beast, put a collective halt to our frenzied oneness.

"Alright, that was good! Places for take two," the first assistant director yelled.

"And this time, no stage diving," Spike interjected.

An assistant tapped me on the shoulder. "We're moving you to the front of the stage," he said.

They wanted me up front to help catch the fake musician

in case he again got caught up in the real moment and took flight.

"If you jump my way, I'll catch you," I promised the fake singer.

"Cool, let's do it," he said.

"Action," Spike yelled for the first time.

The kids danced, the band played, the singer dove. I braced myself for him and it's a good thing, too. Everyone around me had backed away into a semicircle. I tumbled backwards to the floor. The fake singer really landed full-bodied on me. The problem became immediately apparent: this audience, too, was fake. A handful were real punk rockers but most—and especially at the front of the stage—were actors. Professional extras.

And then also, me.

I was no punker; I was no actor. I was a poser, a bruised, cut up poser who wasn't going to take this shit. I cussed out the pussy actor wannabe's encircling me. Some of the tougher really real punks pushed their way to the front of the stage. In the meantime, Spike and the fake singer debated amicably over whether or not stage diving occurred at the beginning of the Punk Movement. If Spike was worried about authenticity, he should have looked into whether or not punks had Mohawk hairdos at the beginning of the Punk Movement, the way many of these extras had.

But whatever. Not my place to say. It was my place to catch this fucker.

"We got your back, man," one of the really real punkers said. I nodded wearily, ignored a painful cramp in the side of my dehydrated gut.

The fake singer convinced the real director that stage diving is appropriate. Eight takes later, Spike found what he wanted from the shot. I dragged my carcass home from CBGB, brushing by nine-to-fivers who scurried to their work holes.

This was my contribution to Spike Lee's *Summer Of Sam*. That one day of shooting affirmed for me what I had suspected was true weeks ago when I did extra work in 200

Cigarettes: I never feel as alive as I do when really performing in something fake.

I found it hard to believe that Jeff would go to a cattle call for extra work in a low-budget MTV flick. For one thing he's a manic guy who can't sit still for five minutes lest he fall asleep sitting up, which he did frequently and often with a cigarette dangling from his lip. For another, he didn't own a head shot.

He came back to our apartment how ever many hours later all excited that the Byron Crystal Casting Agency took one look at him and knew they wouldn't be needing a head shot. They were looking for punk rocker types and that's exactly what they got in my abominable roommate. Not a half-hour had passed since he rehashed his day of non-auditions when the phone rang. Jeff grabbed it before I could even think about moving.

"Hello?" he spat into the receiver. And when I say "spat," I mean that Chris and I had to clean the receiver every single day. Jeff left up to three-quarters of his meals and snacks in a gunk heap where we would have to put our pristine mouths.

"Huh? What? Yeah. Okay," I watched him say. He hung up.

"That was Byron Crystal. They lost their contact sheet with the names of everyone who auditioned today. They want me to bring as many of my friends down there for the shoot tomorrow as possible. Think you can look punk?" he said.

"Yeah! Cool," I enthused. I liked the idea of me as a punker for a day. More than that, though, I loved the idea of me being in a movie because some guy at the casting agency fucked up. Actors who spent their entire lives and a good chunk of change perfecting their craft stood in line—some of them for hours—for a chance to be on camera. A chance to add a real movie credit to their resumé's which are stapled to the back of their head shots—neither of which I own.

Yeah, I'd be a punk. I'd be a menacing, rebellious youth slam dancing and smashing things without a care.... And then when I saw *200 Cigarettes* in the theater, I found me in the big club scene. It wasn't hard picking myself out of the crowd. I was the one jumping like a pogo stick above the scowling dancing heads; I was the one smiling at the camera and having a good time. In the punk scene. I looked like *Ren & Stimpy* singing, "Happy! Happy! Joy! Joy!"

Nice one, Byron Crystal.

Hey, at least I had fun. And my biggest fear didn't come true. Christina Ricci, one of the principals, didn't go on Letterman or Leno and convince America how daring she was for acting in a handful of scenes with real New York punks. Her image as a maverick Hollywood outsider, an unruffled cool chick is, I observed firsthand, complete rubbish.

My first dealing with her took place outside the nefarious and now closed-down Coney Island High at about four in the morning. We were between shots waiting for some dudes to fix the camera dolly track. Young Ms. Ricci was eating a chili dog in her furry white coat. Being that the coat was part of her costume, she decided rightly that she should take it off. She maneuvered the sleeves off her shoulders then got stuck. I watched the fun as chili juice threatened to race down her arm.

That's when some hissy effeminate assistant pantomimed, *HELP HER TAKE IT OFF!* to me from afar. I stepped up to her and clutched the shoulder of her coat. "Here, let me get that for you," I said.

She nudged her shoulder from my grasp and shot me an annoyed snarling face with a choice hint of head bobbing, *Step off, poser!* goodness. "I can do it," she farted orally.

Fine. I was willing to let it go. You know, chalk it up to her being tired or maybe weary of helpful extras who try to be her "friend." But later inside the club we had to do a slam dancing band scene much like the one in *Summer of Sam*. When they do these interior shots, they have to turn off the air conditioning to eliminate noise. These clubs are small to

begin with. You pack it full of dancing young bodies and things heat up pretty quickly.

Oh the things we'll do for sixty bucks and a flash of self on the big screen.

We, the extras, danced take after take in pools of our own sweat. Then we had to stand around waiting for the movie magicians to reposition the camera for the next shot. There was no air conditioning, no fan. Not even bottled water was passed out.

So Christina and the gang showed up and took their places. The director was about to call action when Christina raised her hand. She waved it in the air like a school girl but didn't wait for anyone to call on her.

"Excuse me," she blurts out, conjuring her favorite snarl. "Um...I have an issue! It's hot here!"

That's when a gaggle of yes men seeped up through the floor boards like raw sewage, wiped her brow and bottle-fed her Poland Springs H2O. The rest of us groaned to ourselves. We couldn't believe Little Miss Alternative Films was a sniveling whiner after all.

New Hollywood, indeed.

But, on the flip side, I think she's a wonderful actress who makes bold character choices. And I'm not saying that to avoid a lawsuit, either. I'm saying it because one day I'll be famous. When that day comes I don't want to run into her at an awards banquet or something and have it be awkward. I want it to be friendly. **Real** friendly.

Make no mistake, I want to fuck you, Christina Ricci. I want to roll those floppy tits around in my mouth and onto my tonsils. I want to see that snarl on your nether lips.

I want to end this section gracefully with one final anecdote....

Gabriella Hoffman, another principal actress in this snooze-worthy MTV flick, approached Jeff for a cigarette. He gave her one. She didn't thank him. He said, "You know you're kind of cute."

"Thanks," she responded cautiously.

"Yeah. You'd think with the budget they have for this movie

they could afford to dress you better, you know?" he said.

She huffed a familiar costar huff, turned, and bolted. We who were within earshot laughed our hinies off.

Given all this fun and adventure, one might be inclined to ask why after only one year of living with Jeff would I kick him out? Did he not invite me to all of his shows where older tired punkers wore their Mohawks in rainbow dyes and talked on cell phones instead of slam dancing? Were we not indirectly writing a rock opera for the producers of *RENT*? (We were. Don't ask.)

Yes. All of the above. Yes. But he was also the most annoying man on the planet—and has got to be in the top five for most naturally disgusting. Chris and I left him alone for one weekend. When I came home, there were cigarette burns on the living room floor, garbage overflowing in the trash can sans trash bag, and...*and*. Loads of *and*.

The last straw was pulled when Jeff came barreling into my room in the middle of the night. I woke up and looked down from my loft. He was shuffling around underneath my bed. I spoke his name, which startled him. He whacked his head on a wooden beam of my bed frame.

"Huh? What?" he grunted.

"Jeff, what are you doing?" I asked.

"Your sister said.... Your sister said...not to wear glitter on your shoes because it gets on everything when it comes off. That's all." He reported this then scuttled out. I guessed he was sleepwalking.

Now that he'd woken me I had to pee. I lumbered into the living room. The broom was out, lying next to some broken eggs. The stove was on boiling an empty pot. There was another pot in the sink gunked up with an indescribable food sludge. I turned off the stove and marched into Jeff's room to ask him what the hell was going on.

There Jeff lay sideways on his bed, pants down to his ankles, Camel cigarette—all lengthy ash—dangling from his

dry bottom lip, asleep. Or passed out. I went to the bathroom. I noticed something peculiar sitting on the rug by the bathtub. It was a small round wire mesh curled up and burnt at one end.

That's when the truth hit me full force: The best junkies are the ones who are anti-drug.

When I gave him the boot, he protested. He claimed he wasn't on drugs. I wasn't buying that line anymore. Truth always has an odd way of biting you on the ass. When he moved out he left his room a mess which I cleaned. Besides his clothes and teeth (yes—he abandoned a spare set of false teeth!) he left my favorite surprise.

"Jer? What's this," Bob asked me. Bob was my new roommate and a trusted friend from home. He produced a tiny blue baggy he had found in the back of a dresser drawer. I eyeballed the white substance inside the baggy.

"Oh. That would be crack," I shrugged.

Then tried on Jeff's teeth.

Chapter 48

Shortly after I shirked Jeff off me like an old Negro crow from *The Wiz*, I split for Sacramento, California. I stayed there for the same reason anyone stays in Sacramento: I hated myself and wanted to die. Also, Stacey, the old burnt flame, offered to fly me out there for free and pay me to nanny her son. I would live with her, her son, her sociopath boyfriend, and a female friend of theirs from Hawaii.

I knew this would end in absolute disaster, but frankly I welcomed that. I was broke and miserable. I had searched out Mrs. Pseudonym's fondest read, *Owning Your Own Shadow* in the self-help section of a Barnes & Noble. Oddly, this mix of Jungian psychology and New Age tripe was not helpful. It was illuminating in terms of knowing what words push Messy's Mom's buttons, but all in all it was a thin, shallow read.

Similarly no help was my new found ally, Suicide. Suicide for many years hence Messica had been my favorite companion. I no longer viewed death as a fearful event or even a mysterious one. I saw Suicide, my sweet bitch, as an alternative, a choice, the ultimate sacrifice of Self. If things went too wrong in life, I knew I could count on death.

Those who chose suicide while not under the influence of depression, I rationalized, were not selfish assholes or wimps or banished. They were explorers. I liked exploration. I would try my hand at Sacramento. If that didn't work out the way I knew it wouldn't then Suicide would.

This did not feel sick. It felt comforting.

I don't want to write too much about my month in Sacra-

mento for the simple fact that Stacey has a child who may someday read these words and they may affect him adversely. All you need to know is that I came back early on a three-day bus ride with a check for \$700 that bounced. Even though I expected this, it peeved me. I haven't seen her since. Rumor has it she and psycho boyfriend are wanted by the police in seventeen states. I'll bet everything I own Denial is not one of those states.

The thing about Sacramento is everybody is fucked up and depressed and wants to share their deepest troubles with total strangers. So many random folks on the street would tell me shit about their lives with a glazed over look in the eye, it seemed ceremonial. For example, some teenager on a skateboard asked me for a dime to call his mother for a ride home even though he knows she won't pick him up because he ran away from home because his dad beats him.

It didn't sound like my dime would help so I kept it.

One haggard blonde offering approached me in a bar while Stacey and a friend played a serious round of darts. I politely asked her how she was doing and she politely stammered through a tale about her asshole ex-boyfriend who was in rehab for an addiction to crank. What is crank, you rightfully ask?—I thought it was a mythical white trash drug as seen on *Geraldo*. Turns out I was wrong. Crank is actually a real white trash drug as seen on *Geraldo*, only on *Geraldo*, it's a drug that's sweeping the nation. In real life, however it's a drug that could only sweep Sacramento.

Yes, folks, you know you're in a slow town when you praise the Lord for Starbucks—your only link to anything remotely resembling culture, thanks in whole to the jazz bands they let play outside. You know you're in a slow town when the hub of nightlife is disco bowling on Friday and pseudo gambling every other night at The Bingo Palace located behind Wendy's.

One factoid I discovered there and confirmed at all stops on the bus ride home was that one can learn a lot about a population by the books they read. Sacramento bookstores

are infested with a heavy concentration of paperback romance novels, crapola self help books, and poophole religious texts on modern encounters with angels, written by older white women with wispy blondish grizzly hair and horizontal dollar sign smiles.

Then ya head into militia country and you encounter a novella series called *The Survivalist*. This is about an ex-CIA agent blasting his way through a shattered post World War III America. Nuclear bombs have done their deed and it is the survivalist's job to stockpile weapons, which he uses against the evil U.S. Empire every chance he gets. It's not enough that they blew up the world—they're still after him specifically. I counted seventeen volumes of this veritable Bond Series for inbred paranoids.

All hail the individual.

Another plus to having escaped to Sacramento is that it freed me up to write another screenplay. On the bus back to New York I met a record producer whose credits begin and end with Chico DeBarge. His car broke down so he hopped on the Greyhound, sat next to me, and introduced himself immediately. He was a kind man who had big dreams of "making it" again. I pitched him my script hoping he'd switch fields, maybe slap me some cash. He said it sounded good and to call him when I got home for further discussion.

Was it really this easy to get money from rich people? I tested it out. I approached a slob of a man named Aton who owned a bunch of restaurants around town. My association with him stemmed from my sketch comedy days. Aton, bless his grease-spoon heart, built a small stage in one of his dives for Pay My Rent! to perform. If he was willing to do that, he'd surely be willing to make a movie.

I asked him on (and this is becoming a theme here) Halloween weekend, 1998. I told him about the bus ride and the music producer and how cheaply we could make this flick and blah, blah, blah—he said yes.

Yes! He said yes!

I felt the momentum building. Hmm...Who else could I

ask? I remembered a wealthy dude with whom I was friendly, a customer of the investment firm I worked for in years past. I did some research, found his home phone number. I left a, "Hey! Remember me...?" message on his answering machine. It worked, he called back. He, too, wanted to throw cash on the Vaeni fire.

So I made the movie to much critical acclaim, became famous overnight, and lived in a Hollywood Squares box next to ALF for the next seven years. Either that, or one by one, my rich masters fell. You guess which.

Yip, like dominoes they fell: tap-tap-tap—I lose! Mr. Producer crapped out first, followed by Aton due to fears that his wife would kill him. Mr. Investment Banking Guy closed the deal when his stocks plummeted resulting in a sunken boatload of cash. And oh yeah.... Did I mention Stacey's payoff check bounced?

It ate me up that I wouldn't be making this film. My roommate Chris, too. He was going to produce it. So I plotted my revenge. I wrote a twenty-minute short that we could beg family and friends to pay for. This we would use as our calling card to make the bigger film we were destined to create. Then they'd all be sorry, those bailers!

This sounds wonderful in fantasy but the reality was...more than wonderful.

It was the stuff of legend.

Chapter 49

"Fat Ass, are you sure the big boss man isn't going to be there," I asked.

"Listen, don't worry. He's in Atlanta on a business trip that weekend. Nobody's in the office on weekends. Don't sweat it," Fat Ass assured.

I faxed him a doctored letter of permission. He typed it up on company letterhead and forged the president's signature, then faxed that back. He was to leave the original with security in the lobby. Time and again Fat Ass assured me this would run as smoothly as Grenada.

I had rehearsed the actors so that they could walk right onto this foreign set and perform our short film like it was a play. Of course the set wasn't foreign to me. I had worked here years ago and I was about to work here again, unbeknownst to Mr. President. That's right. I made that racist, horrid investment firm work for me. This was one investment they wouldn't depreciate.

"Have your run of the place. Any room you want, I don't care. Just put it back the way it was when you leave," Fat Ass told me more than once. I suggested we ask my ex-boss—still his boss—for permission to film here. He found that an unnecessary hassle which would produce negative results.

On a Friday much like any other, Chris and I drove down to that fine Madison Avenue office building with a beast of a truck carrying our equipment. We figured we could drop off all the lights and rigging to save us time on Saturday. The man driving the truck—the man who owned the camera and equipment—was by all accounts crazier than James Traficant on visiting day. A recovering speed freak, he had the temper of Oscar The Grouch with a Jehovah's Witness at the lid.

I marched through the revolving doors and up to that security desk with all the piss, vinegar, and shit for brains of a real-live Hollywood hack. I announced my presence with the smarmy confidence of someone who belonged there. The two security guards had no idea who I was but my act had boosted their confidence that I was somebody...important.

Still, though, this: "I'm sorry, sir. I don't have the note here."

"But he said he'd leave it with you before he left for the weekend. You must have it," I protested.

One of the guards called their manager in. He didn't have Fat Ass's letter, either. I registered no fear. I waved to Chris who waited patiently across the street in the equipment truck with that insane tech fuck speed junkie.

"Look—Hey, how possible would it be for me to go upstairs and search around his desk for that note? One of you guys could come up with me, it's got to be there," I offered.

"Sorry, we can't do that," the manager stated flatly.

"Look—Hey, how possible would it be—I mean...Look, this is a big deal, okay? I have a truck waiting to unload equipment for this thing. This is big bucks here. We're talking about a movie. This is...people are gonna be really upset about this. I'm gonna lose a lot of money here. I swear it will be okay. You have my word," I said.

My voice wavered. A lone bead of sweat hopped down my face like a venomous tiger spider. I held back the bloody guts of fear that thumped rhythmically through my entire body. I remembered my fax copy of the letter and fished through my director's binder for it.

Eureka, mother-fucker! I found it and slapped it down on the curved front desk. I was impressed with me. The manager was nonplussed.

"Maybe we can call the engineer. Maybe he knows something about this. If he says you're cool, you're cool," he said.

I curled both lips under my teeth and gnashed hard. "Excellent," I uttered.

They called the engineer who, of course, was not home. They dialed up his beeper. Wherever he was he would respond. Meanwhile, the insane equipment guy bounced slapdash into the fray.

"What the hell is the holdup?" He hadn't waited to spin through the revolving door to holler this so his words rang faintly and less angrily. It actually sounded more like a muffled question than a reason for the guards to escort us from the building.

One of the security men began explaining the situation to him. Insane Equipment Guy stared him down. "I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to him," the dumb shithole barked.

I expelled a nervous laugh, rode the apology-go-round, and told shithole to back off because I had everything under control, when, in fact, I barely had my urinary tract under control. During the melee the engineer answered his page. Funny enough, he hadn't been made aware of any permission slip either. When the manager addressed the engineer, though, I recognized his name and motioned for the phone.

"Let me talk to him for a sec," I said.

"Hold on. This guy wants to talk to you." The manager then handed me the receiver.

I regrouped mentally and applied my professional, courteous voice. "Hi there, Engineer So-n-so?—This is Jeremy Vaeni. I don't know if you remember me or not, I used to work here a couple of years ago. When I heard your name, I was like, 'Cool! I know that guy [fake laugh]!' How are you doing? ...Good, that's great. Listen, I'm in kind of a bind here...."

I ran through the events of yestermminute in a crescendo of frightened panic, nearly ending my schpiel in hyperventilation. Gone was the smarmy Gen-X grin. Gone was the game show host singsong tonality in my *Schweppe-of-essence* voice. And gone, gone, long gone was the steady pitter-patter of my liar's heart.

"Please! Please, you've got to help me," I whined.

He wanted to talk to the manager again. I watched a slew of *uh-huh...uh-huh*'s jab through the manager's bored mouth agape before he hung up.

"Alright," he said.

"Alright?" I asked.

"He says you can go in through the loading dock and use the freight elevator for the weekend. I'll let security know. You shouldn't have any more problems. If there's anything else we can do to assist you—"

"No, no! That's great! Oh my god, you don't know what a lifesaver you are," I gushed. Then back to my pseudo-director's voice: "Please write down the spelling of your names. I'm going to make sure each of you gets a credit in this film."

Heart attack number one was avoided—with interest! Fat Ass warned me that I would have to pay a hefty sum for use of the freight elevator. But, oh no. Not this guy. I got free elevation and free labor, should I choose to accept it. And when the manager keyed into the office—my office—on the sixth floor, I also got heart attack number two. For there, at the end of the dark hall beamed...a little light.

Yes, it was the president's office. The president who was supposed to be out of town. The president, whose entire floor I intended to steal for three days. I was going to jail and I knew it. There was no way to abort this mission now....

Except that he wasn't there. No one was. The light was a coincidence, an evil trick of the gods.

Catastrophe diverted, my crew and I unloaded the truck. We set up for the first shot of the following morning. I checked out Fat Ass's office. There, forgotten on his desk, was the note he assured me security would have in their possession. I giggled a gnarled fucked up snort and rolled my eyes. I couldn't wait to find out what form heart attack number three would take.

Thankfully, I would only have to wait until Saturday afternoon.

Gazing out the wall-size window onto the human brain

spillage that is Madison Avenue, my own hidden fear of success caught me off guard. Failure is easy. It holds you to the place you are used to. Success, however, opens doors into the unfamiliar.

The bonus insecurity that comes with being a first-time director is the overwhelming sense that you don't deserve this. All of this: the crew working to fulfill your vision; the cast taking your suggestions on what is essentially their craft and not yours; the people who are turning to you for answers and it is your job to provide them whether you possess them or not.

When the wants of fantasy actualize, it is amongst the most humbling experiences one can obtain. If you aren't expecting the Zen moment, it sneaks up on you like a little thief in the night, and there you are alone in your *nowness* while others rig the set and rehearse their lines; there you are alone and naked and contemplating, Who am I? Who am I that deserves this attention? Who am I, who has this vision that enough people agree to birth into the material world through monetary gifts, labor, and soul?

Who am I?

Peering out that window at the gargantuan constructs of others that must have experienced this very moment, I shook in my nauseous cold fright. When hours later I yelled "action" for the first time, it was in the vein of this moment. The key to keeping it together was realizing that all these people had allotted me the leadership role and thus considered me—you guessed it—a leader. Therefore, my feeling like a total fraud was my own secret and not something they had to know. All I had to do was keep up the ruse of being a leader until I felt like one.

We called lunch at around one in the afternoon. The filming was running smoothly, but not fast enough to keep up with my storyboards. Weeks prior, Michael, the director of photography, and I hashed out a lighting scheme that

catered to our timeframe. We only had two days to film this twenty-plus-minute short—a seemingly impossible task. My idea was to have pre-rigged lighting that could be minimally adjusted for each shot. He agreed to this...that is, until the day of the first shoot.

He decided at the nth hour that a pre-rig would make the picture look dull, more like a TV show than a movie. He thought he could achieve richer shots in a comparable timeframe, so we tried it his way. I didn't have a chance to think about how slowly we were progressing by lunch break, however, because a more pressing matter had presented itself: No one, Michael included, had used this model of 16mm camera, so they weren't certain if it was crystal-synched or not. If not, then our dialogue track might not run in real time with the mouths of the actors.

I didn't hear about this revelation until late, so maybe they didn't see me as the leader I thought they thought I was!

Michael took it upon himself to adjust the camera for the discrepancy, but at break he confided his uncertainty. Chris asked Speed Freak where the crystal sync switch was on the camera and he had no idea. He had never used his own camera.

A whole day of shooting may have been for naught. Chris was on the brink of packing it up and calling it quits; I was on the brink of throwing that insane asshole out the fucking wall window onto the gargantuan constructs of others that must have experienced this very moment, shaking in nauseous cold fright.

Blessedly, Michael found what he thought was the switch and switched it. Blessedly, he was correct in so doing. Blessedly, the out-of-sync quality to the Saturday morning footage was minimal. Blessedly, Chris, editing genius that he is, repaired it on a flatbed when we edited the picture months later. Blessedly, heart attack number three passed by without me passing on. But before I could sigh the soul's relief, in walked heart attack number four....

A grip approached me cautiously. "Um, Jeremy?" he said. "Yeah?"

"There's some lady here. She's, like, pissed."

Oh, fuck.

I hopped over sandbags and metal poles strewn about the hallway to greet our guest who was checking out the shambles of her office. I was all about politeness and assuredness. I was all about fraud.

"Hi, how are you? Jeremy Vaeni," I said extending the Great White Hand that historically means lies and Small Pox blankets.

"Hi. What is all this?" the woman asked in bewilderment.

I told her about our movie and how the president had given us free reign over the place for the weekend.

"He didn't say anything to me about that," she told me.

"He didn't? That's strange. Well, yeah. Anyway, we're filming in the other room so we won't be in your way. I'll just have my guys take our junk out of your office. I'm really sorry about this. If you want anything, food or soda or something, we've got a buffet set up in the conference room."

I blah-blah-blahed my way through her anger and into her heart. It turned out she was a writer who rented an office space that, luckily, we were only using for storage. As long as she didn't call the president to verify my story or, say, the police, we would be fine. Business as usual.

That is not to say her presence didn't haunt me the rest of the day. It did. But strangely, she was hostile and rude with the others but not with me.

Advantage: Vaeni.

We wrapped at around 6:00 P.M., making it a thirteen-hour day. I had hoped to get rest aplenty that night but due to our straying from the lighting plan, we weren't going to be able to get all the shots we needed on Sunday, so I stayed up reworking the storyboards. The combination of new storyboards, reverting to my original lighting plan, and minimal takes—often only doing one take—allowed us to complete in two days a film that should have taken two weeks.

This in spite of the crystal sync debacle. This in spite of being a freshman director working with a freshman team of strangers. This, in spite of having to hold filming for audio

purposes every time a guttural eighteen wheeler drove by, or an ambulance shrieked past, or a jackhammer chiseled the sidewalk, or a marching band celebrating the grand opening of some store lockstep-interrupted. (Yes, that really happened!)

This, also, in spite of heart attack number five....

"Cut!—What's all that noise out there?" I yelled. Hallway chatter had grown loud enough to interrupt our scene.

A grip approached me cautiously. "Um, Jeremy?" he said. "Yeah?"

"There's some lady here. She's, like, pissed."

Oh, fuck.

I stepped out into the hallway. I recognized the heaping pile of woman before me and my stomach dropped like a steamed clam belly from my own greasy fingers. Fat Ass assured me no one uses the damn office on the damn weekends. But I'll be damned if the boss's wife wasn't standing right in front of me!

"Are you in charge? What the hell is going on here?" She rattled her questions like a tommy gun.

I searched her face and my brain for a connection. What was her name? Dear god, what was her name?!

"—Kristen!—Hey! How you doing?" I said with the glee of a man reuniting with his long lost pal.

She cocked her head at me. I watched the cloud of her anger disperse into a light mist of remembrance.

"You used to work here, right?" she said.

"Yes!—Jeremy!" I helped.

"Jeremy! Right!"

"How are you," I asked again.

"Fine. What is this?"

I followed her to her office, explaining as we went. Hubby hadn't told her anything about this. I picked up on her suspicion and I panicked. Like any good coward, I pinned it all on Fat Ass.

"Well, we absolutely have permission to be here," I said.

"Who gave you authorization to come up here?"

I showed her the note with her husband's forged signature.

"This is what Fat Ass gave me. I assumed Hubby knew about it. I don't know. Fat Ass said we could use any office we wanted as long as we cleaned up before we left."

Her face registered hot anger and nothing else. She peeked into Hubby's Office and discovered it had been turned into the actors' dressing room. Thankfully, we had barely touched her office. I repeated my mantra that we had permission to use any and every room on the floor.

"Well I don't think Hubby would approve. You'd better at least take your stuff out of his office. You're lucky he's in Atlanta," she snapped.

"I understand what you're saying but we were given permission for this or else how could we get past security downstairs?"

"Well...just take your stuff out of his office. I only came in to grab a painting out of my office—"

"Look, don't worry," I broke in. "We can move the dressing room to another room, it's not a problem at all. And I swear to you, I know it looks like a war zone now, but we will have this place sparkling like new before we leave here tonight." Soothed, the beast left. The cast and crew wanted to know what was going on. They wanted to know what only Chris and I knew. I nervously laughed my way through the truth: We had sneaked into my old workplace with a forged note, a bottle of sparkling karma, and nothing else.

The remainder of the shoot I sat catatonically on my director's throne. Chris would nudge me to yell "action" or "cut." I couldn't find release from shock's stranglehold. I played the same scenario over and over in my head: *She's calling her husband who is calling the cops.... She's calling her husband who is calling the fucking cops, man! I'm going to jail...Mom's here...Kara's here.... All these people, all this work.... Jail!*

*How embarrassing! What a letdown! I **am** a fraud! And oh yeah—Jail!*

The worst feeling in the world is not being able to crack under pressure. Now I know why captains go down with

the ship: So they can finally scream, *Oh, fuuuuuuuuck!* where nobody will hear them.

But this day the knife of fate was not twisting in my back. That was an illusion created by fear. All illusions are.

No, this day we wrapped early but we got everything we needed. This film of ours, *STUCK*, really was the little movie that could. For all its minor flaws (boom shadows; uneven lighting) it cut together impressively well. Sure, Fat Ass received the chewing out of a lifetime and stopped speaking to me as a result. But fuck him. He's a racist.

No arrests were made, but our film was. A quiet film. A short film. A film that was supposed to be our calling card to Hollywood—*Hey, look what we can do! Look what we can do with no money and less time!*

A quiet, short calling card film in glorious color 16mm. It's a beautiful thing. A beautiful perfect thing, flaws and all. And it's sitting in our freezer even as we speak, so as not to deteriorate. The beta master of it is sitting on my desk even as we speak, ready to make VHS copies.

Sitting...sitting.... If two filmmakers make a film and no one's there to see it, does the film exist?

There's more than one way to feel like a fraud and a let-down. I've mastered them all.

nickelodeon
uncensored

Chapter 50

Norm: Shall we delve right in to your stint at 1515 Broadway?

Jeremy: Certainly, my boy, certainly. What would you like to know?

N: How was it working for MTV? Dream come true?

J: I got to do some pretty cool things I otherwise would not have, so in that sense...but everything has a price. Mine was...well...pricey. But let's start with the good stuff first.

N: Okay.

J: Originally I, along with my roommate Bob, was working for a temp agency. One of the head honchos there told him that the MTV video library was hiring and he passed that on to me. We both applied and got in. Two days later, Bob quit. It was too loud and obnoxious for him. I have a higher tolerance for low-level bullshit, I guess, so I stayed on.

N: Did you like the library?

J: No, it completely sucked. I made something like nine bucks an hour and had to work two Saturdays a month. It was fucking ridiculous. MTV ain't notoriously cheap for nothin'! Beyond that aspect, my two bosses were complete tyrants—and I got along with them! So you can imagine how coworkers who rubbed them the wrong way must have felt.

N: Why did you stay?

J: The library is a great way to meet everyone in Viacom. VH1, MTV, Nickelodeon, and recently, TNN. My advice for

anyone who wants to be a television producer is to save yourself the time and money college will suck out of you. The MTV library hires directly through the TNT Group now, which is the temp agency that *snuck* me and Bob in there before the two companies had an official deal. Get in there through them, smile and make friendly with everyone who comes to the window with a tape order. Even if they're total assholes, make friendly. Eventually, and usually within a year, one of these people will offer you a production assistant job. Take it. Even if you know nothing about production. The trick is, you don't have to. If you have half a brain, you can be a PA. From there you move up to Associate Producer, Producer, etceteras.

N: It's that simple?

J: Yes. You will learn everything you need to be an associate producer by being a production assistant. Most of what you will learn is that any monkey with a modicum of creativity can produce. I went from the library to Nickelodeon Promos. Promos is the best thing to work on because you are eventually going to be called upon to produce spots. Whereas if you're a PA for a particular show, you're stuck doing menial shit like screening tapes for sound bytes, ordering footage, things like that. At promos, you can build a reel and shop around as a freelance producer.

N: I would think you'd need to know how to write or have a vision or—

J: Yes. You may be asked to write a fifteen to thirty second spot someday. Not to take anything away from that, but....

N: But...?

J: But come on! It's fifteen to thirty seconds! Call me an optimist but I think everyone's got to have fifteen to thirty solid seconds of creativity in them! If not, you're likely to

stay away from television anyway and this information is not for you.

N: How long did it take you to start writing for Nickelodeon?

J: I worked at the library for just under a year. Then I did PA work for a couple of weeks for The Big Help-a-thon, which was Nick's way of getting kids involved in helping their communities. I was basically used as slave labor there, sometimes working twenty-four hours.

N: Ouch!

J: I know! There was a lot of getting coffee and flu medicine and ordering lunch. But there was also assisting in shoots and the obligatory screening for good clips, in my case, of Elton John concert footage.

N: That last part sounds most painful.

(both laugh)

J: No comment. But the thing was, I got a call to PA at Nick Promos a few weeks after that. I was excited as all hell. When I saw how things were supposed to work, it pissed me off because it was clear how the producers I worked for on the Help-a-thon really took advantage of me. I had no reference point. I thought everyone must be treated that way, you know, paying dues and all that. Turns out I was playing the fool. I must have been a dream to them, getting coffee and going on medicine runs. The upside was that now working for Nick Promos, I was initially willing to work harder because I thought that was the name of the game. It didn't take me long to wise up.

N: So your advice to budding young producers is to quit school, join the MTV library, and put as little effort into work as possible, is that correct?

J: No. The first part is right unless you're liking school for reasons other than the word "diploma." That won't be worth shit in the "real world." You will have to work your ass off once you're at MTV, but you don't have to let anyone take advantage of you.

N: This sounds like a bizarre-o ABC After School Special.

J: Oh, I don't know about bizarre-o. Those specials were full of bad information.

N: True enough. So getting back here, what's the coolest thing you did with Nickelodeon?

J: There were a couple. The first was when they flew me out to the Kids' Choice Awards in California to direct a bunch of stars in some spots I wrote for The Big Help.

N: This is as a production assistant?

J: Yes. I'd been there about two months when this opportunity arose. More than one coworker was jealous. I felt bad about that; you know, new kid on the block and all. But fuck it. A senior level producer recognized my writing talents immediately and so decided to put them to use.

N: Not to toot your own horn or anything....

J: No, actually. That's what a good senior producer does. If I was in her position and I recognized a young talent, I would do anything in my power to foster that. Fresh ideas are good for the company. So what if she was bonkers.

N: The senior producer?

J: Yes. I'll get into that later. For now you need to know that we stayed at the Mondrian Hotel in Los Angeles for about a week. The Mondrian is famous for its Sky Bar, which is owned by Cindy Crawford's husband. It's one of those joints you can only get into if you're a star or a guest at the hotel.

I was loving it. As soon as I closed the door to my room I danced around and jumped on the bed like an excited child. It was awesome! I was like, *YES!* A totally new experience.

N: Where was the awards show held?

J: At the Hollywood Bowl. I didn't see the show though. We were confined to the press tents set up on a hill outside the Bowl. We were all excited because Mel Gibson was there and Robert De Niro. Our job was to cattle herd stars into our tent, stand them in front of a green screen, and have them read cue cards we'd drawn up earlier that day. It was nerve racking because I was sharing the tent with another production team from *Kids Pick The President*, so we had to have the stars read their stuff first and then my stuff, if they had the time and were willing. But there were other media tents there as well: Entertainment Tonight, Access Hollywood, CNN. These guys were a bit more priority than our Nickelodeon tent, even though it was a Nickelodeon event. So Gibson and De Niro passed us by and everyone was disappointed but me.

N: Why?

J: Because I'm White Trash at heart, Norm. I'm a big professional wrestling fan. We didn't get Mel Gibson or Will Smith or Bobby De Niro.... But we did get Bill Goldberg! Yeah! Fuck Jennifer Lopez—I got Goldberg! It was awesome! He was the pop culture cake as far as I was concerned. Everyone else I directed that night was icing.

N: That does sound cool.

J: Yeah. Here comes a strange bit of synchronicity for you—

N: I knew there would be something.

J: There always is with me, isn't there? And now there's

this: Jon Voight was making his rounds of the press tents. He promised he'd stop by ours but when he got out of the CNN tent, his manager or publicist or whoever, told him he didn't have time. He looked our way, said sorry and gave us a wink. A wink, Norm! Just like in *Anaconda*!

N: Didn't see it.

J: You had to have! It's the movie with the computer generated snake that stalks people! At the end it regurgitates Jon Voight's character and through the mucus and digestive fluids, he winks at us. This is over-the-top Hollywood pap at its mediocre best. So fine a mediocre film, in fact, I developed a movie ratings system based on it that goes something like this: BETTER OR WORSE THAN *ANACONDA*. Most movies are either better or worse than *Anaconda*, it is so perfectly, gloriously mediocre. A great movie is SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS and a piece of shit F movie like, say, *Pink Flamingos* or *Dude, Where's My Car?* gets a PAULY SHORRIBLE rating. The reasoning here is too obvious to explain. If it isn't it's probably because you are not familiar with Pauly Shore's oeuvre. If this is the case, I suggest you rent anything he's ever starred in. On second thought, don't. Just take my word for it.

N: I hate to interrupt you in the middle of a bit but where's the synchronicity?

J: I'm building to it, Norm! God, let comedy run its course, will you?

N: Sorry.

J: Yeah so anyway, cut to the next day. I'm lounging on a bed by the pool at the Sky Bar because it's LA and there has to be a giant poolside mattress with throw pillows, I think by law, actually. And I'm listening in on the conversations of those around me, also on the bed. From what I make out,

it's some script reading guy, his friend, and two Playboy Bunnies. They're jabbering about some party they'd gone to the night before at a mansion; they're waiting poolside for a friend. Finally their friend shows up and plops down right next to me. That's right, none other than—

N: Jon Voight?

J:—Pauly Shore!

N: No way!

J: Way, *way*! It was surreal! Here's a guy I've been making fun of since college—and I'm sharing a bed with him! And two Playboy Bunnies!

N: That **is** nuts.

J: No shit! I was dying inside. Fortunately, I had been loaned a company cell phone for the week, so I called my roommates. The line was busy so I called my mom. I told her the deal and she asked if I'd said anything to him. He's right next to me, mind you. And I tell her in hushed excitement, "What am I supposed to say? Loved you in *Jury Duty*? What's it like being a total joke?—I can't say those things!"

N: Did he hear you?

J: I don't know. Curiously, though, when I hung up, he turned to his script-reading friend, who happened to be dialing up someone on his cell phone, and said, "Who are you calling, your mommy to tell her where you are? You should. Why don't you call your mommy...." *Buuuuddy!*—*Aouooooohh!* ...I added that last part. That used to be his catchphrase. Every Hollywood hack has one.

N: I guessed that. Wow, that is weird.

J: Yup. And the other cool thing I got to do at Nickelodeon

was direct Carson Daly in some Total Request Live/Snick House Video Pick/Video Music Awards crossover spots. That was cool if for nothing else, bragging rights.

N: What's that guy like?

J: I'd been warned that he was kind of a prick to work with but I didn't have any problems. My lone tale of the apropos here is that before I first met him, I was standing in the control room watching the TRL crew rehearse. Carson comes in and says to the woman in charge there, "Can you put up the picture before I say the words? It just helps me out philosophically speaking." I thought, "Oh, Carson. Excellent misuse of *philosophically speaking*."

N: No one ever accused VJ's of being wordsmiths.

J: True dat, yo—Know what I'm saying?

N: Yeah. So that was the cool. What was the uncool?

J: The next eight months.

Chapter 51

an email sent to michael moore, december, 2000

Dear Michael:

I am a PA for Nickelodeon Promos in New York. This will be my title for the rest of 2000 as I sleep in, look for another job, and teach myself how to be an alcoholic. I will do all of this while being paid and then maybe—if I'm really good—I'll be able to come back to Nick in January.

See, the problem is that MTV Networks is out of money, so they are paying me (!) and my co-workers to leave. Apparently, buying fixer-uppers like CBS and TNN will hit a monopoly where it hurts. Whether I ultimately end up back here or not, there is (and has been for MONTHS) such a feeling of depletion, of dread, it's as if someone close has died.

So much so, in fact, I want to hold a funeral. I'm wondering if you would be willing to help me organize a funeral procession in front of 1515 Broadway sometime in January during Total Request Live. It's the death of Viacom.

It's the death of a company that still claims at parties to feel like a mom-and-pop business, while laying people off to please stock holders.

At an offsite conference, the powers that be recommended we read *Who Moved My Cheese?* so that we may better understand what's happening to us (in America). It's supposed to take the edge off being canned. They were going to give us free copies of the book. They didn't. No money.

So they bought BET instead.

For condolences, please write back or call. Thanks for your time.

Mournfully,

Jeremy Vaeni
(212) 387-

PS: Incidentally, my landlord has offered me \$25,000 to move, so he can renovate and rent my apartment for God knows how much. My job AND my home are paying me to leave? When is enough money enough?

Chapter 52

"He didn't really put a gun to my head, I was just kidding," Dave's assistant assured him.

"No. No terrorism," I said as she slipped out of his office. "I just wanted to say goodbye."

In one swift kinetic move Dave shook my hand, closed the door, and guided me down into the plush chair adjacent his desk. "Have a seat," he said in his trademark New Zealand whine. His tone was more a polite command than an offer. I found this confusing in light of the fact that I had to play twenty questions with his assistant just to get him to open the door.

"I really didn't want to take up your time. I just wanted to say goodbye and thank you and all that," I reiterated.

He took his seat in front of me and leaned back in a casual manner. Some bosses do this as a power gesture to appear relaxed and in control. Dave did it out of authentic comfort. Ever since our first meeting six months ago we've been instantaneously attuned to one another's genuine honesty, a rare connection to make in the television industry.

"Now you were a casualty of the restructuring layoffs in that other department, correct?" he asked.

"Right. Yes, that's right," I said.

He drifted forward in his chair, rested his forearms on the desk. "How did that make you feel?"

"Well—"

"And be honest with me. I don't have contact with those people over there."

"Well," I began again, "I guess, you know, if it's a corporate thing I understand that. You know, downsizing. I guess on that level it's fine. Business is business. But.... Are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Jeremy, just be honest with me," he urged. "You can trust me."

He motioned with his hands, indicating that nothing I tell him will leave this room. I inhaled a deep goosey breath. I felt all the old angry feelings associated with Nick Promos bubbling to the surface; it became a struggle to maintain an even voice.

"Defeated. I felt defeated on some level," I confided.

"Why defeated?" he wanted to know.

"Oh, because we had so many problems for so long it felt like... Well the short of it—Are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Yes."

"All right. I know it sounds bad blaming everything on one person so I'm gonna try to be as diplomatic as possible here...."

I proceeded to narrate the abridged version of my (and every producer's infamous) hassles at Nickelodeon. But lucky you, dear reader. You get the slightly longer version with far less diplomacy. The director's cut, if you will.

The first thing you need to know about Nickelodeon is that few people there have normal names so there's no point in applying pseudonyms unless I wish to avoid a lawsuit. I do not. However, playing with pseudonyms is fun sport, so let's use 'em!

Are you ready? Good. Then mount my furry puppet hump and I shall whisk you away to the magical land of children's television....

Witness the Splendor That Is Basic Cable!

Long ago in a land far, far away there lived a *ahem* handsome young cracker named *Jeremy*. Jeremy considered himself lucky to have a job he loved in an industry that eats love for dinner and poo's it out to eat it again for dessert. Moose into chocolate mousse or something. I don't know if that's possible but it seems it in my head.

Rumors had been circulating throughout the entire MTV Networks cosmos that there was a pending lawsuit against our parent company Viacom, claiming discriminatory hiring practices. Jeremy thought this had to be a silly unsubstantiated rumor because, well, taking a cursory glance around the building, there seemed to be a rainbow coalition of races, genders, religions, and sexual orientations. In fact, it was the most integrated place he had ever worked.

But then he thought maybe it was like banks. Maybe he was being duped the way banks dupe customers: by hiring minority tellers so that we feel comfy in our melting pot while the guys who grow fat off our accumulated wealth remain just that—guys. And oh yeah, white.

So, yes, that. In spite of what his eyes told him, Jeremy remained suspicious that it might all be an illusion.

Well one fine day his interim manager was replaced with a permanent manager. This permanent manager was second choice, first choice having accepted a better offer at a major television network.

And now this abrupt **To Be Fair** moment....

To be fair, this second choice, who is a female of African-American descent, was told by the people doing the hiring that there were some racial problems in our department, which was part of the reason they were hiring her. What they did not tell her, however, is that those racial problems were limited to the lack of minorities being hired for upper level positions such as hers. This discrepancy led to her entering the department thinking a good portion of us were racists, when in actuality, the question of racism (or fact of it) pertained solely to hiring practices.

And also, to be fair, she happens to be nuts. So much so that her pseudonym shall henceforth be "Nutsack."

So to sum up thus far, we have an insane black woman taking a managerial position over a group of (primarily white; mostly sane) people who she has been—I think accidentally—led to believe are overtly racist toward blacks.

Ya think this fairytale ends happily ever after?—Fuck, man!—It doesn't even *start* happy!

Jeremy's initial introduction to Nutsack was as cordial as one would expect. Still, though, he could sense something about her. Something...not right. He decided not to judge too harshly. After all, he had just met her, and she was an outsider, and he liked his interim boss a lot, so maybe his *first impressions radar* was thrown off by hidden resentment. Maybe, he figured, he should give her the benefit of the doubt.

Jeremy did everything in his power to compensate, even going so far as to offer his services should Nutsack need anything. He thought, why not make the new person feel welcome? Nickelodeon, after all, prides itself on being one big happy family. Was she not like a new mother to the Producers' Group?

I guess. If you're *Sybil*.

Nutsack had the proactive idea of meeting with members of the Producers' Group individually to, you know, get to know them. Well, when Jeremy's turn...turned, he marched into her office and opened right up about who he was and what his aspirations were.

"I consider myself a writer, primarily. I just got back from LA where I directed a spot I wrote for The Big Help. I've got a bunch of other spots approved, which are going to be handed over to Production, so I think that's the way I'm trying to go," Jeremy told her.

She beamed at him with flashlight eyes and a plastic smile. She spoke in what he took to be a Southern dialect, so he assumed she had some of that overt Southern politeness engrained in her facial mannerisms.

"Wow! Isn't it amazing the opportunities Nickelodeon has given you? Why don't I talk to Bald Head-Writer and see what he can do for you. Give me two days," she requested.

Jeremy liked that answer. He liked that answer a lot. So much so that he willfully imposed self-denial where her overacting was concerned. He shifted in his chair, preparing to shake hands and bid her adieu.

"Let me ask you, before you leave.... How do you like working with the producers?"

The question sounded innocuous enough so he gave a straightforward answer: "They're cool, mostly."

"I guess what I'm asking is, Who don't you like working with," she followed pointedly.

"There are some people you've got to watch out for. You know, it's all about knowing a person's sensibilities and mindset and dealing with that," he skirted.

"What about amongst your coworkers, the PA's? How do y'all get along?"

"We're tight. We all help each other, you know? If one person's swamped, he or she can call one of us for help. It's cool like that," he answered. "It's good to work with people you know you can count on."

She agreed immediately and rattled off another of what sounded to the trained ear like a rehearsed diatribe on the greatness of Nickelodeon. He nodded along politely. Then she again switched gears. She ran down a mental list of all the names of producers and PA's she could remember, wanting to know how he felt about each of them. He framed his answers in terms of where they're coming from mentally and how best to relate to their expectations. He assumed her question was really asking for a summary of the various personality types she would be managing and not about whom he liked and disliked privately.

As the late sped-up Benny Hill once warned, *Never assume, because when you assume you make an ass out of u and me*. Then he pinched some bimbo's ass and smacked an ancient bald dude. When comedy's this fresh, who needs a laugh track?

Jeremy did. To hardy-har-har underneath his ostensibly well-scripted travails. Rather than play along with the one big happy family charade Nickelodeon pantomimed so indelibly, Nutsack made it her policy to divide and conquer.

First, she hired the mother of the child to whom she is godmother as her assistant. This character's name is Evil Wenchman. Evil Wenchman and Nutsack pretended as though they knew each other peripherally from the inbred world of music videos. It was a bold and obvious lie,

although Jeremy didn't discover the godmother relationship until after the company left him.

Next, Nutsack called for another round of individual meetings. In these, she took the information garnered from the first round and spat it back in her subordinates' faces.

"So," she told Jeremy like the bad cop to her previous good cop. "I been hearing bad thing about you." She didn't always pronounce the "s" on plural words, his boss didn't.

"Oh? Like what?" he asked, taken aback.

"Some of the producers told me they don't trust that you can do certain things. It's not that you aren't competent, it's just that maybe this job isn't for you." Her inflection resonated smugness; her facial expressions, comic strip ink stretched across Silly Putty.

"Well you know, I'm still fairly new here. I don't know everything, but.... I can't imagine someone saying that about me. Who's telling you this?"

"Producers. Various producers."

"Various producers? Like more than one?" he asked.

"I'm not going to get into who said what, I'm just telling you what I hear. But you're saying you're new and I'll take that into account. I'm sure that what it is," she said, unwilling or unable to lose that vainglorious tone.

"Yeah. Thanks. Now I know. I'll try harder," he said with an optimistic twinkle in his gorgeous brown right eye. The left held a dead guy's transplanted cornea from an operation he received in college. This eye did not twinkle. It spoke to him. It told him to kill.

(Just kidding.)

Also just kidding was when he said, "Now I know. I'll try harder." *Know* what? Try *harder* at what? He didn't want to accuse his new, unpacked boss of lying but she wasn't exactly specific in her charges of **not-incompetence**. What could she be up to he wondered? Planting a seed of doubt in his proficiency? Stirring up paranoia? Letting him know whose in charge? Warning him that his job could be in jeopardy?

All four?

"Have you heard back from Bald Head-Writer?" asked Jeremy. Bald Head-Writer was Nickelodeon's hip import from MTV a few flights down. He was that rare breed of cool late thirtysomething you never expect to meet on the East Coast. You know the kind: loose garments, an earring, wire rim glasses, shaved scalp, afternoon naps on a weekday, politically aware, somehow married and not gay.

"Hmm? Oh. Yeah. He said no way he's gonna make you a writer. You gotta take the writer's test first."

"Writer's test? But I've been writing commercials that he's approved! Isn't that test enough?"

"That's what he tell me. And he also said that what you did going to LA was illegal. I know it's not your fault, though, it's Anesthesia's. She should never have ask you to write anything in the first place. She like to break the rules. Bald Head-Writer was upset about that," she explained in her special brand of English.

"But why does he care? If he approved my stuff he must like my writing, right? So who cares how I ended up doing it," he asked.

"Well, he tell me he doesn't hire anybody he doesn't know. It his policy and Anesthesia know this."

Jeremy was stumped. He didn't know what to believe. He left her office, not even knowing why she called him in in the first place. Why, to tell him that an anonymous source accuses him of sucking at his job? And what of her hostile attitude? Was this the way she planned on inspiring confidence in her underlings?

One thing was certain: He would have taken it more personally if she hadn't had the same type of "You're one foot out the door" meeting with all the PA's. And he would have felt threatened if most of the producers didn't want to see her fired already.

Day by day, meeting by meeting, he sat awestruck at the lies she would serve with a smile to her boss. And it was little things too, like when he wanted to know where Evil Wenchman was, Nutsack said, "Oh she's upstairs working hard! Isn't that right, Krista?"

Krista was a fellow PA who knew what the rest of her cohorts knew—who knew what Nutsack had told them that very morning: Evil Wenchman was out sick today.

So why couldn't Nutsack tell her boss that? And how dare she put the lie on someone else's shoulders—someone in that special group of people who had been made to feel their jobs were on the line.

"I want you to meet Marlon. He's our new PA, so make him feel welcome. He's gonna be observing you guys for the next few weeks while he become acclimated. I'm sure he'll have many question for you that you'll be happy to answer."

Jeremy sized Marlon up to be a nice, if suspicious, character also from the inbred world of music videos. He had been an editor for such auteur schlock stylists as Hype Williams. He knew Evil Wenchman from back in the day, but not Nutsack. He claimed he didn't know her at all.

QUICK TIME OUT FOR AN APOLOGY

I'm sorry if you're five steps ahead of this story at all times. I swear it's not due to a lack of writing technique on my part. It is due to lack of fibbing technique on the part of the monsters of rock Nickelodeon hired. I am not one of those monsters. I do not rock. I write. Poorly. Oh no, wait... What was I saying?

OK, TIME IN

Marlon was a strange cat in that he was extremely laid back for a new guy. He never asked questions; he never learned the system. He went on a promo shoot and what he did do was report back to Nutsack the negative comments Jeremy's coworkers were making about her. In fact, Jeremy

thought, for a guy who didn't know Nutsack he sure was in her office a lot.

It seemed the production assistants had a spy in their midst.

But to what end? What of the big happy family motif? Where did that go, Jeremy and others wondered? Then Nutsack brought in her seventeen-year-old daughter as an intern and hired her own sister to fill the managerial role out in Los Angeles.

Ah, there it was, that elusive motif. Now the pieces were starting to fit. Jeremy jokingly dubbed her hiring practices the MCI Friends and Family Plan.

In a matter of weeks, the atmosphere around Nick deteriorated from open elated Smurf-like tra-la-la-ing into an iron curtain of official secrecy and petrified hushed mumbling amongst the Producers' Group. After Marlon's two week learning period he was officially made.... Associate Producer.

Associate Producer?! What the fuck is that?—She said he's a PA, not an AP! Everyone but everyone bitched. The whole point of taking a shit job at a shit rate like Production Assistant or Page is to work one's way up the production ladder. If that mechanism is dismantled, there's no point in taking those jobs. This was the first sign of dismantling.

The way they found out about his AP status was shifty, too. One of Jeremy's coworkers referred to Marlon as a PA—thinking he was—and Nutsack yelled at her.

"I introduced him as an AP!—I told you right up front he was an AP," she screamed at more than one person. It was the type of nonsensical uber-rant liars perform to overcompensate for a lie nobody understands the significance of anyway. What was she so up in arms about?

Nutsack hired three more production assistants. Unfortunately for them, nobody trusted them. Jeremy and his fellow PA's did their best to stay mum about their problems with Nutsack in front of the new people. If they were spies, they would dish the dirt to their monster boss; if they were innocents, they shouldn't be bothered with office politics that did not involve them.

Jeremy knew one of the latest PA's, Jesse. They had worked together briefly in the MTV video library. Briefly, that is, because Jesse was fired for literally—and Jeremy witnessed this numerous times—falling asleep sitting up. He was part of a minor ring of heroin fiends working in the building. There were so many blatant drug hookups at 1515 Broadway, one could call an internal hotline to get drugs delivered to them. Security caught on to this and broke it up, which meant that now addicts had to call a different number to meet their dealer outside the building to obtain their fix.

In deference to Nutsack, Jesse was previously hired and fired from VH1 in record time for the same problem—so not checking references was a company-wide weakness. Although—also in deference to Nutsack—she even lied about having checked his references, telling Jeremy she had spoken with the library manager and gotten the green light. She confided in him, unaware that he was friendly with library management. When he inquired with the library folks, they said nobody asked them nothin'! If she had, they would have warned her not to hire the Little Junkie That Could!

They weren't all screw-ups, these new PA's. Jeremy did like one of them. She was actually good at her job. Unfortunately for him, she was hired for Nick, Jr., which had branched off into its own entity like Nick-At-Nite. She had interned at Nickelodeon Promos the summer before so she knew what she was doing...unlike the third PA named, Ghetto Booty.

Jer liked her personally but as a worker she... well...rarely worked. She was an unhelpful BET blaring, telephone jabbering, bootie-call ass monster. The kind of gal who refused to wear clothing proportionate to her largess (or large ass). This would have been well and good if it weren't for her *Hookers At The Point* attitude.

She dressed and acted the black female stereotype presented in most rap videos, and at the same time wondered why she made bad first impressions. Jeremy explained it to

her but she refused to hear him. It was easier, he understood, for her to remain in a state of ignorance than to heed his advice. What he did not understand was why this young chocolate vixen didn't own up to who she was.

If you dress the slut and act the slut, why be offended when people see you as your low rent presentation? Fucking live it, man! Be it! Live in your whore-dom! Class...? Unless you want to do the hard work of change, class shall remain entirely for other women.

Why ask the question if you don't want the answer?

Hatie was the most thorough PA in the history of Nickelodeon Promos. A rigid, disciplined martial artist, her work was her life. She sometimes spent the night on the 39th floor's big purple couch so she could wake up early and finish a project. Production was her heroin.

Not long into the reign of Nutsack, Hatie accepted an AP job at TV Land. It was the step up Nutsack would never permit in her department. Hatie put in her notice, which obviously pissed off Nutsack. Perhaps she loathed losing control over a subject; or maybe she loathed the missed opportunity to fire Hatie. We will never know for sure. But we do know this: What became known as "The Hatie Incident" was the trigger to the destruction of Nickelodeon's Promos Department. A trigger, which Jeremy gleefully helped pull....

"Where's Nutsack? I haven't seen her all week."

"Me neither. Maybe she's sick."

Nutsack had been out of the office for several days. From top to bottom on the Nickelodeon food chain, not a single person knew where she was, except for Evil Wenchman. She, typically, was not forthcoming with information. It turned out that Nutsack was in LA "on business", visiting with her sister—who, it is interesting to note, gave the same grief to her department on the West Coast as Nutsack did on the East. This comical tidbit came to light through a series

of e-mails from PA's in California to Krista. Those correspondences were filled with dread and pessimism. In other words, emotions most middle class Californians are not privy to.

Ah, whatever, man... Right on.

Before she mysteriously took off, Nutsack yelled at Hatie for innocently referring to Marlon as a PA, one of Nutsack's favorite duties. Hatie took it in stride. But when Nutsack got on the horn from Los Angeles in a three-way conversation with Hatie and Evil Wenchman **for no other reason than to yell at her again**, Hatie was not so kind.

Two things to remember: Hatie was leaving the department soon so her job wasn't on the line. And her nickname wasn't Hatie for nothing.

"I can't believe you called Marlon a PA! I told everyone he was an AP from day one!"

Jeremy could only imagine what was karate chopping through Hatie's mind at that moment. Was this for real? Did her new and soon-to-be ex boss resurface to continue yelling at her about something as idiotic as accidentally referring to Marlon by an improper title days prior? Beyond ridiculous, this must have struck her as illness.

And Hatie never took a sick day.

"You said he was a PA! Everyone knows you said he was a PA! God, why don't you just do your fucking job and leave everyone alone!" Hatie screamed into her receiver. Screamed from her desk in the hallway. Screamed so loudly people on the other side of the floor could hear. Then she slammed the phone down and ran off someplace private for the rest of the day. The week. The month.

From that point until her job started at TV Land, Hatie kept herself busy at edit sessions outside the office.

Lucky for Jeremy, he missed the bulk of it. He entered the office, heard the slamming of phone, saw the running of Hatie. No sooner had he sat down than Evil Wenchman greeted him at his desk.

"Nutsack was calling you, why didn't you pick up the phone," she snipped.

"I just got here," he said.

"Oh." And she scurried back to her hole.

When Nutsack arrived at the office the next day, she summoned Jeremy into her anti-sugar walls and ordered him to close the door.

"So what do you think about the Hatie Incident?" she asked calmly, friendly, even.

"I don't know. I missed it."

"But you've heard about it. Y'all are friends," she said.

"Well, from what I heard I don't necessarily agree with the way she handled the situation. On the other hand—and I know you don't want to hear this, but—you did introduce Marlon as a PA. I don't know what the big deal—"

"I did not introduce him as a PA! I said...!" Friendly façade blown to smithereens, she proceeded to angrily relive an introduction that never took place. Jeremy again found himself wondering why she called him into her office at all.

Why ask the question if you don't want the answer?

He sat as quietly and still as a Zen master fly-fishing in a mud puddle. When she finished spewing lies and trash he resolved to push her buttons. Not the smartest idea in the world but certainly the most entertaining.

"No, that's not true. Actually, you introduced him as a PA," he stated dryly. Like a skipping record, she replayed that same old groove. At the end he shrugged and said, "Fine."

She glared at him a moment, then that glare turned into a soft smile, a gentle voice. "What do you think I should do to solve this problem?" she asked. He couldn't believe she was asking his advice after hitting him with that pathological word tornado.

"I don't know, you're the boss, it's your job," he huffed. He, too, had a hard time burying contempt.

"I know who I am. I want to know what you would do in my situation," she said.

"First of all, you know Hatie is a pretty gruff person. Calling her up just to yell at her isn't exactly diffusing the situation," he told her.

Then, with the intellectual prowess of a middle school child or Jerry Springer panelist, she again launched into defense mode. Her essential argument broke down into the age-old standby, *nah-ah!*

Jeremy just wanted to get out of there. Strangle the bitch and leave. Instead, though, he ignored her vehement blather and offered more advice.

"Also, I think it would be helpful if you'd tell us when you're gone," he told her. "A lot of people were looking for you the past six days. We're supposed to be a team, you know...It's a little more than a courtesy thing."

This, she really, really did not want to hear. She tore him a new arse, let him know that she was his superior and as such did not owe him a damn thing because he answers to her and not the reverse. He swallowed a furious lump then dismissed himself from her quarters.

Later, he heard through the grapevine she was chastised by her boss for leaving without telling anyone.

Apparently she felt she didn't have to answer to him either.

Approximately one week later, the familiar voice that didn't believe in phones beckoned from her open door. "Jeremy, I need to see you in my office."

He rolled his eyes, dropped his head and made a disgusted face at his mess of a desk. In an emotionally concordant thrust he rolled back his four-wheeled chair, stomped his feet to the concrete floor, and bolted vertical, as if to attention. He gathered himself mentally and let loose a healthy sigh.

"G'morning; what's up?"

She was reading something on her computer screen and didn't bother to look away at the ghoul appearing at her door.

"Come on in and close the door, if you would," she said. He did as instructed and sat down prepared to feel real uncomfortable in the face of whatever was about to happen.

She laughed obnoxiously at the thing she had been reading. "That is so funny!" She looked at him for the first time. "Let me read you something," she said. Then right back to that computer screen.

She read what sounded to Jeremy like an *in* joke from one of the mythical higher ups whose ass everyone kisses. When she finished, she belted out another controlled fake laugh. Wide-eyed, Jeremy sucked in his upper lip and nodded methodically.

"That is so funny!—Isn't he funny?—You don't think that's funny?" She rattled off her sentences so quickly he thought she was setting him up to be accused of something negative before being allowed to answer.

He glared at her smiling off-kilter Mrs. Potato Head face and thought, "I can't believe this douche is my boss. Why haven't I fucking quit?"

"Yeh," he barely said, "It's funny."

She cocked her skull like an inquisitive mutt. "You don't think that's funny?"

He diverted up and away from her deadening eyes. "I said yeah it's funny."

"Well I think it's funny."

"Fine."

'WHAT THE FUCK AM I DOING HERE?'

As if on cue, she explained why he was there: An overly excitable cunt in the project management department had ratted him out about something he didn't do. He explained to Nutsack the confusion, that it wasn't a big deal, and that he had solved the non-dilemma post haste.

"Oh, okay. That makes sense," she said. "I have some other news for you."

"Okay...."

"Nick-At-Nite is looking to hire writer PA's. I told Dave, the new executive producer over there, all about you. He said he wants to meet with you. Since you have no interest in producing and would rather write, maybe that department would be better suited for you. You wanna meet with him?" she said.

"Uh...I guess so," came Jeremy's tepid response.

"Good. Let's go over there right now. And on the way, we can stop by Overly Excitable Cunt's desk and you can tell her what you just told me. Come on," she said.

She thrust herself from her chair, grabbed him by the right wrist, and stalked down the hallway never letting go. He dragged his feet a little, felt nauseous and dizzy. His surroundings were a clouded blur and he could hear loudly and acutely the timbre of each onlooker's voice as Nutsack marched him past. He hadn't felt these adrenaline-fueled sensitivities since being called to the principal's office in grade school.

When they arrived at Overly-Excitable Cunt's desk, her coworkers informed them that she hadn't made it to work yet.

"Fine. We'll come back," Nutsack promised. She yanked on Jeremy's wrist like a horse's reign and led him further down the floor. She hollered over both their shoulders, "Let her know Jeremy needs to tell her something he explained to me."

A disinterested voice hollered, "Okay," back.

Before he had time to clear his head, she had introduced him to Dave and excused herself so they could talk. Dave seemed equally baffled at her rash behavior. He also seemed like a decent person. Thus, when he asked to see Jeremy's resumé, Jer thought it was a good and realistic sign of fortuitous things to come. Jer promised he'd get a copy to him by the end of the day and did. Jer got a call back three weeks later.

In the meantime, this....

Every day a new drama unfolded. It became the grand joke of showing up to work and being sidetracked by freshly concocted problems à la Nutsack. Somehow a majority of her problems ended up his. He wondered if she simultaneously loved and loathed his honesty. Why else would she divulge too much information or ask him to assess a tricky situation between another producer and she if not to get to the rotten core of her dilemmas? Yes, she must have pre-

sumed him a straight shooter whose ass she could stick a cap in.

So ritualized became his visits to her office—**“Ah...You wanted to see me?”**—that he soon grew a callous over whatever part of him previously felt unstrung. One of these visits started off nice and typical, friendly and fake. Then in an out-of-character, out-of-nowhere boom she launched into an attack monologue usually reserved for New York's finest paranoid schizophrenics. Oh, she had been ranting at him about something at first, as always something menial. But like the river emptying into the ocean, her stream of words pooled out into this mess:

“I've hired a lot of producers, but nobody ever questions them! I'm hiring people left and right all the time and I'm gonna hire more! But of all the people I've hired, everyone has a problem with Marlon! Hmm...I wonder why that is!”

On the last sentence, she slithered her head and neck in the air across her desk, getting as far into Jeremy's face as she could from that distance. Coming from a black woman to a white man, that particular unspoken accusation is the strongest she could make. Jeremy let waves of mute shock ripple through the universe of her office like an exploded planet. He, at that moment, would have liked nothing more than to stab her eyeballs with a letter opener to see if a trapped soul would flee the demon carcass and thank him on its long overdue ascent to heaven.

How easy it would have been to make that white boy mistake of listing all his black friends to “prove” he's not a racist. Thankfully, he did not do that. Nor did he calmly explain why everyone had a problem with Marlon: because he was an associate producer who didn't know shit about associate producing. Because he refused to learn the system. Because she sneaked him in, chewed out any and all protestors, and he initially acted more like a spy than a coworker.

No, instead Jeremy sat in his electric chair, made a cozy little nest for his tushey, and gave no reason for her to pull the switch. He loathed the thought of recounting this story.

Even while it unfolded he postulated how most white acquaintances would react. "Oh yeah," they'd say. "Black people are always blaming their problems on racism." Or they'd swear, "I had that happen to me once. I mean I'm no racist; I don't hate black people or anything, BUT...."

Yes, he knew white people like that. He knew he would discover white people he didn't know *were* like that were like that. Ultimately what he knew was ignorance is color blind, which is why it likes white so much.

Hand in hand with that fear was the fear that they wouldn't understand what he recognized all along: Nutsack was not a "case" of a black woman blaming her weaknesses on prejudice. Nor was she a black woman who fancied herself a victim of said racist precepts. No. Nutsack was...well... NUT-SACK!!! She was nuts in a sack that happened to be dark in color, partially African in ancestry, and female in form. This was her sack and she was nuts. End of discussion.

And end of discussion on all fronts. Jeremy excused himself from her office and skulked off to some dark corner of the 39th floor where he did not allow her to make him cry. His old friend Suicide patted him on the shoulder. He accepted the consolation but left the offer hanging in the air.

Always in the air.

"I'm sorry I took so long in getting back to you but I had to see a lot of other people." Dave looked exhausted already. He hadn't been Executive Producer at Nick-At-Nite much longer than a month.

"Understandable," Jeremy agreed.

"I filled the position you had inquired about earlier but something else opened up. It's a two-week project but if we like what you're doing and you like what you're doing it could lead to other things on a project by project basis. But you're considered permalance over there in your department, correct?"

"Correct. Yes." Permalance was the status every freelancer at MTV Networks strove for. It means that you're working with the company indefinitely like staff, as opposed to per project like freelancer. Unlike staff, however, it takes permalancers a hell of a lot longer to receive insurance and benefits. This is what corporate CEO's refer to as **WIN, WIN** prior to yelling, "Fore!" from the 9th hole.

"So the reality is leaving that type of a situation for what I'm offering you is a bit of a gamble."

Jeremy smirked, raised his eyebrows cynically. "Not really," he muttered under his breath, but certainly loud enough to hear. Dave may have caught the implication, but he could not have known what it meant.

"Well okay. It's your decision, " he said.

Jeremy hesitated not. "I'll let you in on a little secret," he joked. "I'm probably gonna say yes but give me the day to think about it."

"Certainly. Take your time."

"Oh I don't need time. Just give me the day."

Jeremy talked it over with his friends. They thought he was crazy not to have said yes immediately and gotten the fuck out of Nickelodeon Promos. They would have.

"All right! You're right!"

By the end of the day he made up his mind to take the job. So sure was he of his decision, he couldn't remember what fear had been holding him back. He wrapped lightly on Dave's door. Dave motioned him in and to take a seat. Jeremy did so beamingly. He was all nerves and thankful and excited.

Dave went first.

"Has Nutsack spoken with you yet?"

"I'm not sure. About what?"

"Going on what you had said earlier, I asked her if it would be okay to steal you away from her department. She said no, she couldn't afford to lose you."

His words had a magic quality to them. He might as well have said, "Abracadabra" the way Jeremy's body responded. His face drained its capillaries leaving a sallow chunk of white meat; his visual acuity spilled into his total awareness and together they turned everything crimson ink. For exactly four breaths, he perceived not the individual objects of his surroundings, but one energetic poisoned mud and the echo of those four breaths throughout his skull. Somehow he fought through this to regain his tongue.

"I see. Why would she do that? She brought me to you," he managed to say through clenched teeth. Later, when he could laugh about it, he imagined his flapping lips with words must have looked like a seething Mr. Ed getting a broom shoved up his ass by his trainer or the NYPD.

Dave threw his hands in the air like a messenger fearful for his life. "I know," he said truly befuddled. "It is strange. But as you know I'm still new here and I'm not in a position to step on any toes."

"No, I know. It's not you.... Well that's it then right? I guess I'll go have a chat with her, see what's up." He spoke from behind his cheery skin mask, which he took off the second he turned his back to leave. Fearing he might rip hers from her scaly bitch face, he waited until sunup to confront her.

The first thing Jeremy did after coffee was knock on Nutsack's door while entering. She was in the beginning phase of her cockcrow routine checking phone messages, checking e-mail.

"Come in."

"Yeah, I spoke to Dave yesterday. He said he was gonna offer me a job but you told him no," Jeremy dove. Not one precious moment wasted on b.s. a.m. *How ya doin's?*

Her aggregate tired body wracked into a strange, rigid concoction of bewilderment and cold pathos. Her steely gaze, her preemptory voice...all things *Nurse Ratchet*.

"Yes. I couldn't let you go right now, you're too important to our department," she stated.

"But, like, a couple of weeks ago you were trying to get rid of me."

He witnessed the snake writhing in the shit of those brown eyes. His frankness, his challenge.... She was not equipped to handle this.

"I can't afford to lose you right now, you're one of my best PA's," she said.

"Oh. Huh. Just wondering; no biggie." He lied to the liar to see if two negatives really do make a positive.

He poured over it later. All day in fact. It made sense. She hired a bunch of people who sucked at their job. The PA considered most excellent was on one month's leave. Jeremy assumed his projects, bringing his total workload to a record thirteen projects. That's no indication of how good management considered him but rather how unqualified the new lackeys were.

Nutsack might as well have said, "I can't afford to lose you right now because I hired addicts and morons who aren't even smart enough for me to shit on. You, thank Satan, are just smart enough for me to lay waste. Here, boy! Have another project! Fetch!"

"Anesthesia, something's got to be done. This bitch has got to go."

Jeremy had not only been warned of but also exposed to Anesthesia's insanity. She was the type of person who loves you one moment and hates you the next. He thought she was most likely bipolar—definitely clinically depressed—and was unwilling to keep it under control in a work environment.

Before Nutsack reared her ugly head, Jeremy had grown to be friends with his interim boss. He once confided that he felt like Anesthesia was taking advantage of him by making him do menial tasks—and illegally, even. For instance,

the day after a mass e-mail was issued throughout the department stating that PA's weren't allowed to arrange flights for producers she asked him to book her flight to Atlanta, Georgia and pick up the ticket. Another time she gave him a car voucher and had him drive to La Guardia Airport in New Jersey to pick up a package she didn't feel like waiting for. This, in a time of budgetary crisis.

Unbeknownst to him, his interim boss shared this info with her superior who then chewed out Anesthesia. She came to Jeremy in tears, led him to a private conference room, and demanded to know why he snitched on her. She stressed that it was unnecessary and unprofessional of him, emphasizing she never made him do anything, only asked. He listened politely to her entire spiel. When she broke to blow her nose and catch her breath, he spoke:

"Anesthesia, first of all I didn't rat you out, okay? I'm not like that, that's silly. I wouldn't just go behind your back and snitch on you before talking to you. I went to Interim Boss as a friend, not a superior. She asked me what I was up to and I told her. She asked me if what I thought you were doing was right and I said not particularly, but whatever."

"What was I doing?" she interjected.

"Telling me to get your plane ticket when an e-mail had just gone out saying PA's aren't allowed to do that, for one."

"I never told you to do that! I **asked** you if you would!" she reiterated.

"Well, you know what though? I'm new here and I'm low man on the totem pole. So when an executive producer asks me to do something, it's the same as telling me to do it, because you have all the power and what you think of me matters to my career. And besides, you shouldn't be asking me to do something I could get in trouble for. I'm sorry you got yelled at. If I had known Interim Boss was going to tell on you, I wouldn't have said anything. You have to believe that wasn't my intention, if for no other reason than you're the only producer who lets me write. I mean fuck, man, come on! ...I'm sorry."

He thought this would dissolve their relationship. It didn't.

It had the reverse effect. She saw a strength in him he hadn't dared show before. Maybe her tears gave him the edge; maybe it was the desperation of the moment. Whatever it was, the end result stood before him now in the form of a consummate partner with whom to conspire the ruination of Nutsack's tyranny, for she hated the nutty one as much as he.

They clashed before they even met. Nutsack eavesdropped on a phone conversation Anesthesia was having with a production manager, put one and one together, got eleven, shot over to her boss, and lambasted against whatever evils she wrongly assumed were taking place. Anesthesia straightened it out and straightened Nutsack out. She was not one to shy away from yelling fuck-related words in the workplace.

Thus began and ended their professional relationship. Anesthesia had been biding her time, waiting for an open shot to tether this colossal cunt. Ironical, that. The first person to want to draw Nutsack's blood in this so-called racist office was a black lesbian.

Jeremy knew there was room for only one nutsack. He placed all bets on Anesthesia and let it ride. Together, they and a third trustee formulated a plan: They would circulate an anonymous letter throughout the office stating in vague terms that there is a problem, we all know what it is, so let's meet at such-and-such place at such-and-such time to discuss further action. Everyone who got the letter from PA to AP to Executive Producer would know exactly what that meant. All who attended would pool together their common gripes and present them to the head of the Creative Group, i.e., the really, really big boss.

Jeremy, Anesthesia, and the third party whom we shall refer to as "Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead," brainstormed the general verbiage of the letter. Then Anesthesia typed it up and distributed it herself. She braved it alone figuring if she got caught it was no big deal. She was a senior producer and a black lesbian. Jeremy and Crouching Beavis were chum for the sharks, sure, but Ane was untouchable.

Untouchable. Like all famous last words, this one kinda drips off the tongue, doesn't it?

The trio of sneaky cohorts slept the sleep of concussive insomniacs that night, finally at rest but mindful of premature death. Anesthesia had dropped their propaganda leaflets guerilla style on the desks of *là resistance*. By this time next week they planned to be singing "Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead," while a sobbing yet resilient Nutsack packed her things and took that long walk of shame to the elevator bank for her final curtain.

Next morning, Jeremy sprang out of bed with a new zest for life. There was a bounce in his step as he whistled a stream-of-consciousness tune and tipped his hat to all the lady passersby on his jaunt to the trains. When he got off at his Times Square stop, he yanked out his pocket watch and gave it a read: 8:45. "Hotdog, Jeremy Vaeni! Early again! How do you do it?" he enthused aloud. He snapped the watch back into its projective sheath, plopped it into his deep left pocket, and flipped a wooden nickel the length of his stroll to 1515 Broadway.

"Wooden nickel? Say, fella! I think I been had!"

Had, indeed, Mr. Vaeni! Had, indeed....

Anesthesia rushed to him in tears, led him to a private conference room. This was growing old.

"They just fired me."

"What?!"

Senior Producer? African-American lesbian?—What happened to that one-two combo punch he had everything riding on?

"Someone went right over everyone's head and brought the letter to Tom Freston."

"Oh, shit." Tom Freston was one of those names one hears in myth and lore. He's one of the true untouchables. It's the equivalent of telling on your fellow altar boy to the pope instead of your priest.

"The Really, Really Big Boss is going to hold an emergency meeting with everybody today, so be prepared," she warned.

"Are you gonna be there?"

"I don't know yet, I haven't decided. You've got to tell Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead."

He did not answer, lost to the distant sounds of the hallway and his still-beating heart.

"You can't let them do this!—You've got to tell them we were in on it!" His words surged with urgency. This he could feel guilty for; this he had to fix.

"No. It's better this way. I don't know if I want to work for a company that would choose her over me," she said.

"Yeah, but they don't know—"

"Oh, they know what's going on! They just don't want to deal with it! It's easier to pay me off and get rid of me than fire her and risk a huge lawsuit. She's a black woman who was brought in because she's a black woman and she knows it. That's a lot of power right there. MTV Networks doesn't want that story leaking to the press, are you kidding me?"

He sucked in a defeated gulp of climate controlled air. "Yeah," he muttered solemnly. "So who do you think did it?"

"Oh I know who did it! That fucking bitch, Demon!"

Ah, Demon. She was one of those *do anything to get ahead* types. With her, there was no "team" in "I." She thought the world owed her something and was willing to take it back person by bloody person if it came to that. The thing of it is, everyone knew this about her, especially Anesthesia.

Demon had been a PA for The Big Help. Once again proving the theory that there's only room for one nut sack, they did not work together long. Anesthesia cut her from the project because they couldn't see eye to eye on anything. When two people share the same set of eyes, that is truly an impossible feat.

This leads to another thing of it. The other thing of it is, the conspiratorial triad agreed Anesthesia should not give her a flyer for the very reason that she would rat them out.

"Why did you give one to her?" Jeremy asked.

"Because I thought if we left her out and she found out about it, she might tell on us. But I think she saw me slip it onto her desk because I watched her read it and she said, 'What's this?' And I was like, 'I don't know.' And she just smiled at me like we both knew."

"Ugh! Anesthesia, why did you have to tell her!" His pouting was more for his benefit than hers.

"Look, you have to do me a favor. You and Crouching Beavis have to go to Human Resources and tell them everything that's been going on with Nutsack. And tell them I had nothing to do with that letter! But go independently and only talk to Pearl. The other woman is pro-corporate and doesn't give a shit. But Pearl is more sympathetic to the worker," she pleaded.

"Alright," he agreed. But when he informed Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead of the latest developments, she was none the sympathetic.

"I don't feel bad for Anesthesia at all. Nobody told her to give the letter to Demon, she's a fucking idiot. She knew what would happen," she spat.

"Yeah, but it's kind of our fault. We had a hand in it," he whispered, stuck in remorse mode.

"Nothing is our fault. We didn't write the letter, we didn't give it to Demon. God, Anesthesia is so fucking dumb! I can't believe how dumb she is sometimes. You know, she's really smart about some things but when it comes to self-sabotage...."

She let the words dangle in the air. As if in answer, her computer belted out a *greetings* chirp, alerting her to a new e-mail. It was a mass e-mail sent by Anesthesia, which meant most everyone on the floor received it. It read like a hostile off-the-cuff terrorist manifesto: each *denunciation* of guilt acted as *enunciation* of guilt. She ended it by saying if she ever found out who blamed her for this letter she had absolutely nothing to do with, she would chop them up and feed them to the monster.

Jeremy found it purposely comical, but that was because he understood her sensibilities. Others—especially Demon

and another named in the e-mail—found it scary. Jer asked her why she named two names when she knew Demon was guilty. She said it was because she didn't want Demon to sue her for defamation of character and she didn't like the other person anyway.

The note ascended to infamy. Jeremy couldn't go to an editing house without the editors asking him about it. Many of them had their own copies producers smuggled to them; all had been kept up to date on the Nickelodeon fun.

One big happy family; one big happy funeral.

Every face. Every somber face at that long table, drawn and un-alive. Nutsack had done an immaculate job of shattering every inch of the Producers' Group. Past the hostile phase and the shock phase, they hung in limbo wondering when it would be their time to pick up the pieces. The only expectation left untouched was that work would continue like this as long as she was coordinator.

"...I don't know if it's something I did? Is it money?—because we can talk about that. But don't do this. When I see people are going behind my back to have a meeting it tells me that you see an "us" versus "them" scenario. And I don't like it because that means I'm *them* and I don't want to be *them*, I want to be *us*."

The producers and PA's chuckled pathetically at Really, Really Big Boss's heartfelt plea. He was a decent man with a large, humorous personality. To see him reduced to a quivering voice disturbed Jeremy. He concluded saying he wasn't interested in finding the person responsible for the letter. He was interested, he claimed, in our maintaining a healthy group dynamic. Then he opened the floor to suggestions on how to make the department more livable.

This would have been a perfect opportunity for Jeremy to blurt out the truth of the matter had Really, Really Big Boss not invited Nutsack and Evil Wenchman to the emer-

gency meeting. No, Jeremy did not speak up. The whole room, in fact, was paralyzed. Well...not the whole room.

"I just want to say that I love working here. I mean you guys have been great to work with. I haven't had any problems with anybody. To hear about all these problems really hurts me inside...." Jesse, the heroin fiend spoke like this for far too long. He addressed each individual at the table, slipped in the slime of his gushing compliments for each and every present body. Endearing anon, it grew old and lame mighty quick.

For an addict, Jesse sure didn't know how to close the deal properly. Confident that he had, he leaned back in his swivel chair, shut his piercing gray eyes, and within seconds conked out for the remainder of the summit.

After the group was dismissed, Jer formed a mental diagnostic of what had actually taken place:

- ° Really, Really Big Boss appeared genuinely anguished over the notion that he might be considered an untrustworthy Suit.
- ° Really, Really Big Boss claimed he thought the letter was about money. His fear, then, was that the Producers' Group might be unionizing. (Can't have that!)
- ° Really, Really Big Boss said he did not care who wrote the letter, he just wanted to be a family again. Strange in that he had already fired Anesthesia for allegedly (and actually) writing it.
- ° Really, Really Big Boss acted as if he had no clue what was at issue. This had to be a lie. Everyone from top-level producers to low-level PA's knew the score. It was impossible for him not to have known and yet he invited Nutsack and Evil Wenchman to sit in. Obviously the Producers' Group would feel queasy prattling off allegations about the accused

to their faces. That, as they say, is only human. It follows then that he had to be aware of this inevitable reaction (or inaction).

° Really, Really Big Boss presented issues of pay and promotion as what he allegedly thought was the core of the secret meeting. Certain producers latched onto this and bitched and feuded and lost the point of the meeting, which was not about pay and promotion.

° Jesse was a bigger pile of shit than Jeremy gave him credit for.

Krista, brave Midwestern soul that she is, spoke up about harsh management and the façade of the happy family claim. ("Do any of you know me? Do any of you even care who I am?" she asked through bitter tears). She, like the handful of others who spoke out, smartly did not name names. Jeremy was tempted to come to her aid but decided against it, for she too readily lost sight of the universal problem: Nutsack. He could live without anyone knowing his name. It is a business after all. What he could not and should not live with was an unqualified psychological bag of almonds stepping on his neck for the fun of the snap. Really, Really Big Boss said that anyone who felt the urge could come talk to him about these issues in private. Jeremy, needing to give him the benefit of the doubt, took him up on the offer. He had to wait in line, though. He hovered outside Really, Really's sealed office, not-so-subtly peeking in through the open blinds. He eventually gave up and went to his desk. On his way, he heard prolonged muffled screams emanating from his favorite conference room. He did several blatant walk-by's and was astonished by what he saw and heard inside:

Krista, red-faced and bawling, being yelled at by Nutsack. Nutsack! Incredible! Wasn't she just at the very same fucking let's-be-a-family-again meeting?!

Insane or no, he had to hand it to her: She was the most audacious human being he had ever encountered. She had more balls than Manute Bole at a Chucky Cheese. More will to power than Dick Cheney at an Orange County emergency room. She was Sylvester the Cat to Krista's duct-taped, ass-shoved, prostate-peckin' Tweety Bird, and she got off on the feeling.

She was, had more of the...wait...I mean...you get the picture.

In an unprecedented move, Really, Really sought out Jeremy. "You wanted to see me?" he said.

"Ah..."

"I saw you at the door."

"Right. Yes."

"Good. Let's not talk here, come into my office."

The way he intoned it reminded Jer of that one demand in every bad action movie: "Come with me if you want to live."

He followed him to his office. Really, Really Big Boss closed his door and shut the blinds. "So what's up," he asked.

"I didn't write the letter but I do know what it's about and it isn't about money or workload or anything like that. I mean it was interesting to hear those issues raised, 'cause I certainly wasn't aware of them. But I felt bad for you, listening to you waste your breath because it isn't about unionizing, let me just squelch that fear right now," Jeremy began.

Really, Really asked him what, pray-tell, it was about so Jer confided every gory detail from the beginning. Really, Really fought to contain his shock. Clearly he knew morale was rotting and had a clue why, but not to this extent. This much deviousness seemed impossible, especially given the short amount of time Nutsack had been with the company.

Jer thought he might be on quaky ground with the indirect charge of racism she had launched, but he decided to test it out anyway.

".... And then she said, 'But of all the people I've hired,

everyone has a problem with Marlon! Hmm...I wonder why that is!" he retread.

Really, Really Big Boss, who was slouching forward attentively, hands folded between his knees, now rolled back slowly to an upright position. Hands still folded, he extended his index fingers and rested them underneath his nostrils. He averted his eyes from Jeremy's searching gaze, let the weight of his head rest on those indexes. Jer thought he looked like a god contemplating from atop its church how best to save its fallen congregates from themselves. And then.... "Yeah," he said. "What else could she have meant?"

Like Anesthesia, he urged Jeremy to retread for Human Resources this tiring story. He couldn't promise he would fire Nutsack, so he cautioned Jer to not get his hopes up that that would be the end result. They shook hands and Jeremy left the office downtrodden but heard. As he dragged his emotionally bereft carcass back to his desk, Anesthesia intercepted him in the hall.

"Come with me if you want to live," she might as well have said and led him into an emergency-exit-only stairwell.

"Did you go to Human Resources yet?" she asked. Her question echoed in the desolate chamber.

"No, I haven't had a chance yet," he told her.

She began sobbing and plopped down on the top stair. He plopped down next to her and timidly hugged her shoulder. He feared that too much physical consolation with this emotionally unstable woman might lead to more nonsensical drama at a later date. Thus, he quickly retreated his arm.

"You've got to tell them everything! You've got to tell them I had nothing to do with that letter!"

"I literally just met with Really, Really Big Boss."

She perked up slightly. "What'd he say?"

"He was understanding. He told me to go to Human Resources—"

"—Yeah, you have to!"

"—But that he might not be able to get rid of her."

"No, they'll never do that."

"Why not?—What the fuck?"

Anesthesia explained exactly why not. Besides whatever racial issues Nutsack might hold over the company, she also had friends in high places. Translation: she was a referral from one of the top executives to whom she had been the assistant's assistant.

Not even the assistant! The *assistant's* assistant! And from there...Production Coordinator? This much was clear: Nickelodeon's hiring malady didn't end at race.

"What did you say about me? You told him I didn't write the letter, right?" Anesthesia interrogated.

"No. I didn't say anything about you."

"What?!"

"Well come on, you wrote it! I'm not gonna go in there with my sob story about this pathological liar and then lie to the guy, let's be realistic," he explained.

Ane huffed long and loud, as would an incensed Gila monster. Or maybe a contented Gila monster—who knows what the fuck a lizard's feeling?

"Look: just promise me you'll go to Human Resources and clear my name! You and Crouching Beavis were in on this, too, and I'm the only one getting shit on. It's not fair!" she proclaimed.

Jeremy was agreeable in spite of the fact that it was her idea to see this through alone, precisely because she felt she was the only one who could take the fall. In spite of the fact that she foolishly gave a copy of the letter to Demon. In spite of the fact that she shot off an idiotic e-mail that she knew would make her look guilty in the end.

In spite of all that and then some, Jeremy was agreeable primarily because he—that's right—continued to feel a semblance of guilt. When Anesthesia finished with him he tiptoed back to his desk. Fortunately nobody else accosted him along the path. He sat for an eternal moment and *just* sat. He took a deep breath. From the corner of his vision he noticed a fairy calendar Hidden Butthead had given him was staring him down, mocking him even.

"Fuck you," he lashed. He called Human Resources and set up an appointment with Pearl for the next day.

Krista and Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead had already cried to Pearl the horrors of the 39th floor, so she had a sizable idea what Jeremy was going to say. Upon entering her domain, he felt immediately at ease, a testament to Pearl's mettle. She began by commending him for his bravery in stepping forward. Most workers, she explained, mistakenly feel that Human Resources is a tool of upper management used to weed out complainers. In actuality, she furthered, it is a department for the workers, for their gripes, and could not legally be used to silence them.

Luckily, he feared none of that. He delivered an uncharacteristically aloof, clear explanation of the hell his department had been put through. He secretly wished he'd been able to speak as eloquently and precise to Really, Really Big Boss yesterday.

Pearl listened to his account with little interruption. Finally, she asked, "So what do you think should happen now? What can we do to correct this?"

"Well.... I leave that in your hands. I haven't given much thought to it," he said.

"A number of people have come to me with similar stories, but nobody knows what the solution is. I find that troublesome."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you guys are willing to complain about your department but you offer no solutions as to how to fix it," she said.

"I didn't think that was our responsibility."

"It is everyone's responsibility."

"All right, then here's what I think. Personally, I think Nutsack should be fired. Is that what you're looking for?" he half-quipped.

"What if we retrained her? Would that be an acceptable solution?" Pearl offered.

He squirmed involuntarily. Her very question assured him Nutsack would not be dismissed.

"Yes," he said. "But it won't work. She is not psychologi-

cally fit to lead. Training won't fix that. Therapy might. But here's my bigger point and this is starting to piss me off:

"I am a PA here in this company. Low man on the totem pole, right? I have alleged to Really, Really Big Boss and now you that my superior called me a racist. This is a serious allegation and so logically, this can only go one of two ways: either you think I'm lying and fire me; or you think I'm telling the truth and you investigate.

"If you investigate and find I've misinterpreted her, then you get rid of me. I'm an expendable tongue-wagging loose cannon, right? But if you find that I am telling the truth, then you have to fire her. No one seems to want to do that around these parts, so my fear is there won't be an investigation and I've wasted my time here."

In initial response, Pearl smiled at him clearly impressed that she had found the base honesty for which she had been searching.

"I'm sorry you feel expendable," she said. "For what it's worth, I don't think anyone in this company is expendable."

He snickered. "I thought we were cutting the crap here," he said.

"You know another problem I run into is that everyone wants to remain anonymous. I can't help you if I can't go to my boss and show case examples of what is wrong. Would you be agreeable to that?" she asked.

"Yeah, what do I care? Use my name! Nothing to lose on this end. By the way, Anesthesia begged me to tell you she didn't write the letter that started this whole thing."

Pearl sighed and rolled her eyes. "Ugh, Anesthesia," she huffed. "She's another mess."

Jeremy laughed. He appreciated her candor.

"Well, right. Everyone seems to know that except her," he jeered. "But I'm not gonna lie to ya here.... She wrote that letter. But I don't think that's a *fireable* offense, do you?"

Pearl was incredulous. "Nobody's firing Anesthesia!—Did she tell you that?"

"Um...Uh-oh," he giggled.

"That's just not true! Ugh..." she miffed.

"Yeah. She was crying and everything."

Pearl slapped her bangs, shook her head. "She is so insane. I can't believe she's going around telling people she was fired!"

"Yeah. Well, you're welcome."

They did the dance of the handshake and she thanked him again for seeing her. Then in an uncanny move, she showed him around the department and introduced him to everybody. She did not do this with Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead; she did not do this with Krista.

He felt like a star, hoped he was a star witness. Oddly, revenge was not his motivation in spilling the beans of the last few months. But the feeling crept up on him anyway. The devilish, hand-rubbing, demise-plotting, B-movie feeling that....

Vengeance will be mine!

The Vice President of Nickelodeon Promos swooped down gracefully from her lofty roost. At the next Monday morning meeting she unveiled her new plan to get back that lovin' feeling: the name go-round.

That's right, every week each person had to state his or her name and occupation. Afterward, a volunteer from within the crew would attempt to regurgitate each individual's name and function back to them until they all knew who each other was.

That's part one.

Part two was that she would be bringing everyone in groups of five to breakfast to "get to know" them. Apparently, Krista's off-point bawling about no one knowing her was taken to heart.

It took exactly three Monday morning meetings for part one to break down. Nobody was into it; there were no volunteers. Not even for toy prizes. It took only one week longer for part two to break down because that's how long it took for Jeremy to be called to breakfast.

It was so after-the-fact it was stupid. He didn't want to share his feelings with the VP. And he really didn't want to share his feelings with the table, mostly because they were from other departments and would have no idea what he was bitching about. So he reluctantly ate his hash and rehashed everything, including the bit about how there must be an investigation...low man on totem pole...someone must be fired—the whole routine that had become routine.

VP, like her predecessors, looked shocked, confused, outraged, scared. A woman from another department defended Nutsack, informing the table she had never had any problems with her so he must be misinterpreting...*everything*. He shrugged it off. He understood the human brain cannot be wrong one hundred percent of the time, so he could not possibly have misinterpreted everything.

One week after that pleasant cleansing Friday breakfast, Nutsack called him into her office and ordered him to shut the door. "So," she challenged, "Vice President tells me you think I accused you of racism."

Oh, shit.

"Yes. Well, actually you did," he calmly stated.

"Now how did I do that?"

"You said, 'Of all the people I've hired, everyone has a problem with Marlon! Hmm...I wonder why that is!' What else could you have meant?" When he recited her lines he unwittingly impersonated her delivery.

"Well..." Her voice had such a waver, that one word became many syllables.

Caught.

"I wouldn't call that racism, exactly. I'd say we have some racial issues to deal with in this department," she blatantly *bullshat*.

"Oh really? Issues like what?—Like we're a bunch of racists?" he provoked.

"I would consider racism to be like the KKK or skinheads. You know, something that's keeping people down. I don't consider what you're doing as racist."

"Look, Nutsack: In order for you to think we have racial

issues or whatever going on, you have to believe that a group of us white people are sitting around going, 'God, I hate Nutsack; I hate Evil Wenchman; I hate Marlon because they're black.'"

"Well?" she remarked as if it were self-evidently so.

"Well, that would be racism! Look, I'm a white guy. If anyone's gonna say those things to anybody, they're gonna say them to me. And I haven't heard them!"

His words did not move her from her line of illogic. "Well I don't consider that racism. I'd say we have racial issues and I think Vice President agrees with me. I've heard all kinds of mean things being said about the way I hire people. I've heard, It's the MCI Friends and Family Plan..."

'Yes, I invented that one!—Come on, it's funny!' he dare not say.

"...I heard—some people have been saying it's starting to look like *Roots* around here—"

"Come on, I haven't heard that," he scoffed. "Who said that?"

"I heard it. People have told me that's what they heard. And you know what? I'm your boss. It's none of your damn business how I hire or fire people."

In a building jealous rage, he refused to believe her. How could a comic gem like *Roots* not have slipped from his own mouth? It was inconceivable to him that somebody else thought it up. This, too, he kept to himself.

She continued; he barely listened: "There's an off-site coming up. I don't know what it's about but I'll bet it has to do with these racial issues. Then you'll see. Management is on my side about this."

Jeremy brought back this word to his people. The gossip rats of Nickelodeon drooled on themselves in their regurgitation nest. An off-site? When? And for what purpose?

He prayed to dear god not for diversity training. Not fucking diversity, no! That would miss the whole fucking point!

When the day of the big off-site came, all of Nickelodeon Promos—including the flown-in LA office—filed into the penthouse conference hall of the Millennium Hotel and

was treated to an arduous day of union busting and—yes—diversity training.

Actually, diversity training came first in the pecking order. Recent policy mandates required that everyone at Viacom attend one diversity training seminar, which many in the room had already done. For those people, this was diversity training on top of diversity training on top of living in the most diverse city on the planet. Bored as he was, Jeremy could not touch their snooze factor.

He felt pity for the trainer, actually. He watched her awareness grow during the Q & A session that diversity wasn't the issue. The setup was, if anyone had a question about diversity they could jot it down on paper and hand it in anonymously. Most of the questions were so obviously grammatically flawed and inane in content that the attendees laughed heartily at them.

Of those that were clear and serious, one asked, "Why are we here?" Another, "Is Nickelodeon wasting our time with diversity training because they are afraid to fire a black lesbian?" Still another, "We all know what the real issue is. So why are we wasting time with diversity training? If certain managers are deemed incompetent, they should be fired regardless of color."

The diversity trainer had no answers. She didn't understand the questions, but she was beginning to. Jeremy saw her acumen build and it hurt him to look. He assumed that by the end of their give and take she must have been wondering why she had been brought in. Here she stood, a black woman whose occupation is to break down the racial divide. And there's Nickelodeon, her employer, ducking and dodging the racism charge and using her as a shield.

He wished he could pull her aside and explain to her why she was feeling what she was feeling. But there was no point. He guessed that being a black woman in America—and a diversity trainer to boot—she couldn't be any kind of stranger to corporate racism; she needn't connect all the dots to see the big picture.

After a short snack break, the next speaker took the podium, this time a white lady. Her droning speech about how to work as a team, not question management because that is not your job, and not ever uprising if you don't like policy or are about to be fired inched along at a slug's pace.

Though not specifically about unionizing, it sounded enough like a union-busting tirade that come Q and A, Jeremy was moved enough to raise his hand and politely asked, "Yeah, I was just wondering what you think about unions."

The speaker's eyes were all about deer in the headlights.

"I don't think we were...I hope you didn't misinterpret my speech. I wasn't talking about—"

"Oh, I know," he cut in. "I'm just asking what you think personally about unions."

"Well I think yap, yap, yap, yap.... And that is why they have failed," she admitted.

A hostile voice in the crowd chastised him for asking such a question. This wasn't about unions, the voice belled. It was about not sneaking around behind your boss's back to complain about things. It was about being up front.

"I understand that," Jeremy responded to the miscellaneous dupe. "I just wanted to know what she thought about unions. Apparently they have failed and we shouldn't bother with them."

The speaker leaned into her microphone, stole back the floor: "I hope I answered your question satisfactorily."

"Quite," he said.

She ended her segment of the show by promoting the darling corporate manifesto, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, by Spencer Johnson. This is a book whose hardcover jacket features inspired praise from the likes of Texaco Oil and Coca-Cola Bottling Company. It is a book that has spent oodles of time at #1 on the New York Times Best Seller List. It is a book about sympathizing with the corporate need to downsize you and what you, the American worker, should do with your sorry fired ass.

It is a book the speaker promised each of them would

receive for free at the end of the day. Apparently somebody neglected to tell her that all the copies of *Who Moved My Cheese?* purchased for this indelible occasion had been returned to the factory.

Budget cuts. I shit you not.

There was a new rumbling around the office that at the next Monday morning meeting big changes were going to be announced. This was uplifting news to all concerned if for no other reason than some long-overdue answers would finally surface in a roundtable forum. No more gossip; no more speculation.

Jeremy asked Anesthesia if she planned on attending the meeting. She did not. From now until her contract ran out, she would work from home. She explained that Really, Really Big Boss had retracted his dismissal. Once again, fear of lawsuit played a role. Instead what she decided to do was take a sum of money to leave. She would tie up any loose ends in the way of The Big Help from her apartment in Brooklyn.

Jeremy had to wonder if this whole thing was a setup. Had Anesthesia played everyone for a fool just to get out of her contract? In the end, he decided not. Her scam began when they fired her. The waterworks were a bogus manipulation to guilt Jeremy into admitting that she had nothing to do with the letter. Admitting, that is, to a lie so they would toss her some hush money on her way out.

"I don't want to work for a company that would keep Nutsack and let the department fall to shit," she told him back when. That he believed too.

Meanwhile, things were missing around the floor. It started with money from people's desks, then progressed to VCRs, then a TV. This was a no-brainer: Nutsack fired Jesse. At the off-site, he had the gall to hunker down at the head table with all the bigwigs.... And fall asleep sitting up! One senior producer woke him several times but he just

couldn't keep it together. Lately he'd been bringing his friend, Car Salesman, in to visit. Car Salesman was fired from Nickelodeon a bit over a year prior. He had been caught trying to steal a DAT machine to support—you guessed it!—his drug habit. When the boss at the time dismissed him loudly and publicly, Car Salesman denied having tried to thief the DAT machine—even though he had been caught in the act!

That old boss lectured him on his drug addiction. Car Salesman protested that allegation as well. In the middle of his deflection a spoon fell out of his pocket.

"What's that?" the old boss asked, incredulously.

"What?"

"That spoon?!"

"So? I carry a spoon around, that doesn't prove anything!"

"What's it for?"

"I don't know...It's a spoon!"

So for many interrelated reasons, Jesse had to go.

"Is Jeremy still standing there? Tell him to go to my desk, I'm going to call him there," Anesthesia instructed Crouching Beavis.

He hated when work interrupted his socializing, especially when he was chatting with Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead. Such was his crush on her. The unlikely pair had grown close over the course of the year.

Unfortunately for him, she had a shitty boyfriend. The kind of guy who tells her she's fat when that can't possibly be true, even if that isn't the point. The kind of guy who cared more to hang out with his buddies than sleep with his girlfriend. The kind of slender, pristine fashionable male all her friends thought was gay.

So it was a healthy relationship. As always...as always.

Jeremy wound the corner to Anesthesia's cubicle. The phone was already ringing eagerly when he got there. Anesthesia proceeded to walk him through all the stuff she

needed messengered to her apartment: some videotapes, a binder, a laptop computer, some other little junk. He located the belongings and brought them back to his desk. Then he picked up some small boxes and bubble wrap in the freight elevator room. He wrapped the computer in bubble wrap, placed it in a form-fitting box, and put it in a large bag with the other stuff. He taped the bag up, slapped a label on it and sent it off with an in-house messenger.

All very routine.

Hours later, Anesthesia called him, furious and shaken. "Where's the computer? Please tell me you forgot the computer," she barked.

His stomach dropped to the floor. He thought he'd feel happy with the weight loss, but no. He felt sick instead. It was obvious to him what was happening from her first words.

"No, I packed it," he said. His voice was unmoved, weary from so much drama.

"It's not here."

"Well where is it?"

"I'm telling you it's not here!" she yelled.

He ran down his formula for packing the thing. She agreed that she received the taped bag with the box inside and the bubble wrap inside of that. But the computer, somehow, was missing.

"So what, did little elves steal the computer and tape up the box and tape up the bag?—It doesn't make any sense!" he whined.

"Look! Find my computer! Maybe you left it at my desk. Check there."

"I'll check, but I know I sent it. I sent you your damn computer!—Fuck!" Chased calmly with: "Alright. I'll check your area again. But I know I sent it."

She asked him if he'd alerted the manager of the messenger service that he was shipping a computer, which they both knew he would never be smart enough to do. She lectured him on his lack of forethought and all he could think was, "You did it. You're stealing this fucking computer and

blaming it on me.... You're stealing this computer and blaming it on me. Fuckin' A!"

He checked around her desk. No computer. The messenger service checked their truck. No computer. The driver had been with the company eleven years. There's no way he would have stolen it even if he had the time to unpack it and wrap everything back up.

Jeremy reported all this to the proper authorities post haste. He refused to be Anesthesia's fall guy again. An investigator made him retrace all his steps. Jeremy was slightly nervous about the matter, but more than that he was pissed off. He didn't hold back when the investigator asked him what he thought happened.

"Look, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to put this one together. It wasn't Anesthesia's computer, it was MTV's. And it's insured. You do realize she's leaving the company, right? You want my cooperation in this? You can come on over to the house, see if I'm hiding it there. Then check out her place. Can you do that? This would take a lot less time if you could get a warrant or something. This is so see-through, it's pathetic," Jeremy ranted.

The cop told him he'd be in touch with any questions or developments.

"Thank you. And do me a favor: check the security camera footage. I almost never bring anything home with me from work, so with any bit of luck, it won't show me stealing a computer."

Monday morning meeting. *Finally. Answers.* Who is fired? Who is promoted? *Finally. Answers....*

"...And so as of today, there is no such status as *permalance*."

"There never was. I don't know where that notion came from, but—"

"No, there—that's right. There never was."

"—But...But I was hired *permalance*!"

“—Me too!”

“—Me too!”

“Well, then that’s.... I’m sorry you were misinformed. From now on you will be hired on a project-by-project basis. This is good, though! This means you can take other jobs at other networks. Get out there and explore!”

“We don’t want to explore! That’s why we became permalance!”

“I told you, permalance never existed.”

Stillness. Then a hand and a voice raised.

“Just for the record I think this is totally unfair. For weeks now we’ve been waiting for answers and now what you’re giving us is, essentially, you’re all fired and some of you might be rehired as freelance.”

“Not exactly. Look, this might not be what you want to hear but we’re restructuring—”

“This is crap. I’m sorry but I feel this is total crap.”

“Look! Here’s the deal, alright? I’m gonna be very up front with you people. We overspent our monies for this year and since we [Viacom] merged with CBS, we have adopted their rules. This is a business, people. It’s about pleasing our stockholders....”

He continued, this bastard man who was in charge of the “monies,” to talk around what he was attempting to do: Present to the stockholders a new plan that, on paper at least, looks like it will save them big bucks. Or make them big bucks. Or both. Jeremy didn’t really know. Just like he didn’t know why Nickelodeon was in debt if their ratings were through the roof.

That was the fun of it: Every time a money man would warn the Producers’ Group about their financial woes, a statistician would end on a positive note by reciting their climbing ratings for the week and the lemmings would cheer.

Nope, he didn’t know how rich people could lose money simply because Nickelodeon projected to its advertisers an outlandish ratings sweep it never delivered. If *Rugrats* was number one in its time slot three days in a row and

Slimetime Live! was up two hundred percent from the previous year, how was anyone losing money?

That, Jeremy figured, is the difference between the wealthy and the poor. When the poor talk about losing money, they actually mean they are losing money. When the wealthy talk about losing money, they mean they didn't make as much as expected. Then they file for bankruptcy. Then the poor pick up the tab, while the rich start a new business.

America the beautiful.

Also beautiful was the post-meeting meeting Nutsack held with her PA's. She let them in on a dirty little secret: she was hiring Jesse back for a singular two-week project then letting him go again. Apparently whomever it is above her that's so deathly afraid of lawsuits, feared Jesse could sue for wrongful termination. This is because he moaned on the way out about not getting a fair shake. He knew everyone sized him up a junkie. He knew that's why he was being let go with no real proof of wrongdoing.

He even went that extra distance, mentioning that he can't help falling asleep sitting up. He's an insomniac by night, not a drug addict by day. Nutsack played a tiny violin for his pain, and he harmonized by turning the heroin holes in his arms into a skin tuba.

So they'd hire him back as a freelancer for one small project, then let him go because the project was up. In this way they would avoid yet another mythical court date.

On Wednesday, a producer who had used a live hamster in a commercial shoot was looking for an adoptive parent. Ghetto Booty took it home to her son but he didn't take to the rodent, so Jeremy took in the homeless pet.

"Oh, that's great! What are you gonna name him?"

"Freelance."

By November of 2000, Jesse had been released and so had Ghetto Booty. The intern program had diminished because

Evil Wenchman felt that interns were taking precious work away from the PA's who were struggling to justify their jobs in the face of zero budget. By December, Jeremy, too was released from the company. The Really, Really Big Boss had finagled a way to pay him and others through December but they needn't return to work.

Yes, after all that, it ended in dismissal. There was a chance they might rehire him once they figured out the budget in February, but he was not going to hold his breath. He was going to breathe his breath. He did so and felt relief wash over him. Defeat and relief.

He retired his war-torn body to Massachusetts and New Hampshire for a long Christmas vacation. The night before his bus out of Manhattan, he lay in bed, ever the restless sleeper, mulling over what dismal affair his life had become. His ears tuned in to a rumbling in the ceiling followed by the pitter-patter of tiny scuttling paws. He told his roommates about this, said it reminded him of the beginning of *The Exorcist*, when the devil stumbled through the attic making a ruckus.

The first thing he did upon return was check up on his hamster. Cute little Freelance looked frightfully glad to see him. His cage was covered in some sort of dried liquid. Jer hosed down the plastic cell; Freelance twitched his button nose with a mirth words cannot describe. Or maybe they can. Maybe he was twitching S-O-S in Morse code.

Jer was saved the suspense that comes with preserved mystery fluids when later that week a gargantuan rat, which had chewed through the drywall behind the fridge, broke into Freelance's cage and tore him a new arse. The little guy put up a good fight but in the end it was, *Free at last! Free at last!*

Jeremy was sad to see his animal pal go, yet he knew there would be no more fitting an end to Nickelodeon's unofficial mascot.

"I'm so scared. I've never directed anything before! Jeremy, what am I going to do?"

Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead had been assigned to direct a spot for a game show called *Bubblecast* with Dave Aiser, the host of *Slimetime Live!* down in Orlando, Florida.

"I wish I could bring you," she said.

"Why me?" Jeremy asked.

"Because you've directed before! I don't know if I can do this. I don't think I'm cut out for directing."

"Sure you are! Well, look. Why don't you bring me? I'll be like your official cheering section or something."

He could almost see the light bulb in her head go off through the phone. "Hey, yeah! I think I have it in my budget where I can bring Demon—"

"—Demon?!"

"She's my PA on this, but she sucks. She's always too busy with other projects. I think it's because she resents me making AP before her. Whatever. Look, you could go. I couldn't pay you or anything...."

"I don't care about money. If you put up for the hotel and the flight, I'll be fine."

"You sure?"

"Hell yeah! I'd love to go to Florida with you!"

"Cool! This is so cool! Alright, um.... Let me see if I can work it out. But nobody can know about this."

"Agreed."

"I'm serious, don't tell anyone. If anyone find's out I'll be screwed."

"Agreed."

"Oh, irony of ironies," Jeremy cracked to himself. The one person who was fired is the one person who knew what the fuck he was doing. And now he was being smuggled to Universal Studios, Florida to do what he does best: get shit on.

The flight ran smoothly and they had a car waiting to take them to Nickelodeon Studios inside the Universal

Theme Park. Crouching Beavis may have been scared but Jer was all about excited. Upon introduction to their Orlando counterparts, two things became evident: 1.) These Floridians were real friendly. Jer felt like he was visiting family. 2.) They were incredibly efficient at their jobs. The answer to every query was an enthusiastic *yes!* Jeremy was flabbergasted. He forgot it was possible to work in television and love your job at the same time. Working with this crew revitalized his outlook on the industry as a whole and made him long for what could have been.

He inspired a definite confidence in Crouching Beavis that afternoon; her directorial debut ran smashingly. Then he ate crème-filled pastries and guzzled down free cans of Coke at the buffet table and called it a day. This was going to be the best two-day vacation of his...of his life!

It was dusk when they first arrived at the hotel, exhausted from a premature morning rise and jet lag and the exhilaration of fresh experience. Hidden Butthead hadn't enough money in the budget to reserve a second flat so closely to their arrival time so she settled for separate bedrooms in a larger suite. But when they card-keyed into their lodgings they faced a minor fuck-up: one room, two beds. Jeremy felt comfortable with this; Crouching Beavis, not so much.

She protested to herself just loud enough for him to hear. Something about privacy and this is why she never wants to live with anybody. He didn't give a shit either way. Essentially they both shirked it off and savored dinner at Nickelodeon's expense. The on-grounds romantic Italian eatery fed them and fed them well. It was a far cry from the junk food they'd trashed their bodies with all day.

Feeling bloated and giddy, they decided to turn in early. Jeremy was disappointed in his lack of stamina. The producers over at *Slimetime Live!* offered to comp them into the Universal Studios Theme Park. Their flight back home was

scheduled for 11:30 A.M. so if they wanted to go pray for dear life on numerous roller coasters, they would have to do it tonight.

"Ugh!" Jeremy flopped backwards onto the bed he'd claimed nearest the window. He bounced there, in a wasted Christ-like pose. He didn't bring up the amusement park because he knew Crouching Beavis would never miss her flight to tool around a park. She was too rigid and scheduled and fearful. He was too tired and fat. Sleep was the oasis he sought, not thrill rides.

She readied herself for bed in the common room while he stunk up every inch of their spacious bathroom. Relieved but more tired, he too prepared for shuteye. They watched some cruddy local TV newscast, then turned out the lights and chitchatted. They reviewed their day and giggled at each other's jokes like children. Then she spoke about...*him*.

"I think he's the one. No, I really think so. I know I haven't made him seem like the greatest guy in the world, but you don't see the other side. He's the first boyfriend I've ever had whose been willing to work on issues. I'm really in love with him.... I think we'll be married someday. I can see that. I just can't see myself with anyone else. You know?"

Jeremy said nothing for a slice too long. He'd always had an affinity for this woman, always knew he could fall in love with her if she'd let him. Quick poll: How many of you out there in Reader Land think she knew that as well? Guess who wins.

Not Jeremy.

"What?" she chuckled.

"What, what?" he said.

"I know you're thinking something in that cynical head of yours. Come on, what do you have to say?"

"Nothing," he blurted, mock-innocently. "That sounds great. He calls you fat and would rather play video games with the fellas than be with you. Sounds like love!"

She laughed at his most anticipated response. "Shut up!

You're so silly sometimes," she said. Then she jumped out of bed and dashed into the closet.

Yeah, no, you read that right. She dashed *into* the closet.

"What are you doing in there?" Jeremy called out.

Her muffled voice squeaked, "Changing!"

"You know that's the closet, right?"

"Yes!"

"Just making sure."

"This is why I hate roommates! I can't just change clothes wherever I want."

"Sure you could. You know there's a bathroom right there."

"I know!" she yelled. Maybe, he feared, it still reeked in there and she detected it. He smiled to himself feeling an odd mix of embarrassment and sadistic pleasure. She ripped open the closet door, nearly tearing it from its sliding wheel base, and made a running leap for him. He rolled out of the way and she splashed down next to him on her stomach. She propped her head up in her hands and carried on conversation as if that never happened.

"I was uncomfortable so I changed clothes," she said. He didn't notice what she was wearing before but now here she was in pajama bottoms and short sleeve shirt...On his bed!

Whatever other words she spoke then absorbed into his pure sense of elation. How men even hold up their end of a tete-a-tete in this form of intellectual blackout continues to mystify him.

"Whelp, I'm kinda tired now. Time to go to bed I think," she evidently said. She hopped off his bed and crawled into her own. He lay there, unmoved. His eyes bore a hole through the shadows of the ceiling while his heart pounded out a fast and loud, *fuck-fuck-fuck* beat.

What could he do to get her back in his bed? Nothing. There was nothing. Wait!—There was this....

"It's cold in here," she complained.

Then, in what would subsequently be labeled the Ben Kenobi Mind Trick by his roommates, Jeremy hypnotized her with.... "You know you could always put your blankets

on top of mine and sleep in my bed. I'm just throwing that out there."

With zero hesitation, she tore off her blankets and sheets.

"You think the cleaning lady will be upset?" she asked with genuine concern.

"Who gives a shit?" he answered with equal honesty.

She saw his point and draped her spread over his, then climbed into his bed. Except not really, because she lay down on top of his covers and wrapped her body in her own.

"No funny stuff!" she giggled.

"No. Not at all. You've wrapped yourself up in that body condom, so I guess you won't feel like this is cheating." he predicted as he cuddled up to her. She laughed at the accusation and turned away but accepted his embrace nonetheless. He kissed her a peck on the head and she was receptive to that as well.

All at once, her demeanor changed. Her movement was soft and needy; her voice channeled that of a six-year-old girl's.

"Sing to me," the new six-year-old whined and demanded in the same breath. He couldn't believe his ears. What was happening?—He barely cared. He would have done anything for her. Perhaps now, in spite of everything she espoused about her boyfriend, this was his chance to win her over.

Because nothing says LOVE like having to win someone over.

"What do you want me to sing?" he asked delicately. He had to fight all his sardonic urges, all the hideous comments flooding his brain and break through embarrassment and shyness and be just this moment.

She had seen that defensive jester side of him and found in it friendship. It would take something other to find love.

"I don't know...sing!" she commanded. He showed no outward signs of sarcasm, of the wall, of passive-aggressive retaliation.

"Um...Okay, I got it.... *Sing...Sing a song...Make it simple...To last the whole night long...*!"

He ran down the entire set list of half-songs his mom rocked him to sleep with when he was a baby and then again at eighteen. (*Kidding! ...sorta.*) He sang the lyrics Mother remembered and hummed the rest, just like her. He realized then that if he ever had children, he would pass on to them this anti-gift of half songs and forgotten lyrics.

His solos turned into duets when Hidden Butthead remembered a lyric he never knew. One could argue that in this pleasant sickness she completed him.

"Do you think this is weird?" she asked.

"No. Want me to rub your back?" he offered.

"No!" She pulled her long dark hair out from under her head. She nudged him with her elbow and made a child's throaty sound of annoyance. "Play with my hair."

He rubbed her hair like the soft part of Blankie and massaged her scalp. "Kiss me on the head, I like it when you kiss me," this girl-her confided. He did that, too. Anything she wanted; all for her.

Abruptly, she flopped onto her stomach, pulled down her covers and yanked her shirt up over her shoulders. "Okay, I guess you can rub my back now," she said.

He massaged her smooth nudity until his wrists and fingers cramped. He wondered what would happen if he took the initiative and massaged the more intimate parts of her. He left it as wonder, as fantasy. He was contented with literally baby steps.

When his kneading hands could take no more, he planted a long kiss in the center of her back, pulled down her shirt and pulled up the covers. He rolled over to go to sleep when she immediately flopped over and latched onto him.

"No! Cuddle!" she whimpered.

He turned back to her, forced his arm beneath her neck. Through the safety of the body condom, she lay draped half across him—she nuzzling his chest, he kissing her head and left temple.

His eyes were by now accustomed to the dark and he spotted along the wall what he thought was the temperature gauge. Since she negated the whole point of sleeping

together by remaining wrapped up in her own sheet and blankets, the frigidity of the room never ceased annoying them. He feared, however, that if he changed the temperature, she would leave him for her own comfy bed. He took the dare. The room grew, now, overly heated.

She didn't get up; she continued to lie on him.

"You don't think this is weird?" she asked again.

"No. There's no way we're gonna wake up tomorrow," he slurred.

"Yes we will, I set an alarm."

"Great. See you in a couple of hours," he said. And they held each other through slumber just like that, portrait of *in love*, forever now.

The angry buzz surging from the plastic digital clock jolted them into full simultaneous consciousness. Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead attacked it with a barrage of open-palm slaps until it shut the fuck up. Jeremy grabbed his left arm with his right hand and moved it out from underneath Crouching Beavis' weighty butt-head. His dead arm screamed, "WHY?!" He pounded on its numb surface until it prickled with ticklish circulation. He turned away from her face and yawned toxic morning breath.

He gathered his thoughts while she rest, trying not to fall back asleep. Besides amputation, his big fear was that this would turn into the morning of regret. He did not look forward to their awkwardly staring at each other in silence, knowing they'd done wrong. Not so wrong, but wrong. An emotional affair that turned partially and strangely physical.

He did not look forward to her going back to *him*.

"We should get up. Don't want to miss the plane." Her parched throat made her droning voice crack. Far from freezing, the temperature of their room climbed to over eighty degrees.

"Can't we just lie here?" Jeremy's drone, too, was broken and dry. She threw his newly resuscitated left arm back

into position A and slid her leg across both of his. She looked up at him with beautiful innocent eyes and they shared a smile in meaningful wordlessness.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. And he wasn't lying. He'd been on vacation from rationality since nightfall.

He moved his arm down to her waist and pulled more of her body onto his. They both sighed: he silently; she in singsong fashion. They were wide awake now and there was no hint of remorse. He lightly traced the outline of her pajama pants at the hip, back and forth with his left index finger. She responded by raking her fingers gently on his chest and rubbing her leg in a slight, barely recognizable up and down fashion. He knew it was impossible for her to not feel the threat of sex in their mutual caresses.

When she didn't call halt to their loving embrace, he knew sex was no mere threat to her. It was a possibility. If only she had initiated that....

Sex or no he was happy lying there forever in the glorious enrapture of a new confidence and a new honesty and a next step in a relationship with a woman of his dreams. A woman, he reminded himself, not *the* woman. He refused to fawn over another chick with a boyfriend for umpteen years until she finally broke up with him. Yes, that's what was different: He was going through the motions of this experience and feeling it truly. But he would not allow it to be anything more than what it was: a retarded one-night stand with the possibility—but not the promise—of something more.

No, he would not allow himself to ever again fall in unrequited love with this or any woman. He was done with that same old ache.

"You know, we could take a later flight." Her voice, sharper now, broke him from his headspace.

"We could," he agreed.

"Do you still want to go the park?" she asked.

His little boy pupils dilated in wide-eyed glee; his smiling lips stretched to obscene limits across his nerd face. "Yes!"

he exclaimed as if it were a stupid question with a plain-as-day answer.

"Alright, alright! Geez! Don't bite my head off! I'll have to call the airlines and see if we can switch our flight around."

"Can we just lie here a little longer?" he begged.

"Okay. A little longer. But if we're going to have enough time at the park, we've got to get up soon."

"No!" he cried. He reclaimed her shifting body to his and they held that position. Stuck. For hours more, stuck.

Together they breezed through the vast majority of adult rides at Universal. It was an overcast weekday, the death of tourism in Florida. This worked to their advantage, as they rarely had to wait in long lines.

Far from retreating into regret, Crouching Beavis held his hand everywhere they strolled; leaned against his chest while he kissed her head and neck when they did have to wait in line. This flew in the face of Jeremy's expectations. He kept waiting in secret—waiting for it to crumble. It didn't. This really was the best two-day vacation he ever had!

The flight home was unspectacular. The plane was overcrowded, and they sat rows apart. How he longed for her then. He frequently glanced back to see if he could catch her eyes. A few times he did, and the look she gave was always the same: *I'm gonna kill the fucking baby in front of me!*

This was Jeremy's first flight with a screaming infant where he didn't care to do the same.

When they stepped off the plane in New York, they had a chauffeured black Sudan waiting to bring them to their separate homes. It hurt him to leave matters like this but what choice did he have? Besides, he assured himself, they would meet up again tomorrow. It was Krista's birthday lunch at John's Pizzeria. Neither of them would miss that.

Still, though, he wondered how Crouching Beavis would act. Was it even humanly possible to share that kind of night and remain unaffected? Was she like he suffering sweetly inside? Or was now the time for regret? The time when in privacy and away from temptation, she would reconfigure a night of bliss into a night of sin?

A night of sin with a bad guy. Two bad people doing one bad thing. Was he a bad guy? He didn't feel like a bad guy. So while she crouched and hid, he ruminated and waited for her verdict. Mostly, though, he slept. And he almost missed the party entirely.

"Fuck!" he shouted to his clock. He thought he'd gone to bed early enough that he wouldn't need to set the alarm. But when you're unemployed there's no such thing as oversleep.

He threw some clothes over his unwashed body and slapped at his generic white boy hairdo until it matted into place. He arrived at the pizzeria late, but not so late. All the mingling ex-coworkers were authentically glad to see him, including Crouching Beavis. He took a seat directly opposite her at the end of the three interlocked tables. She greeted him with a devious, knowing smirk. He smiled back with the same wink-wink/nudge-nudge connotation.

He leached off someone else's pizza tray, such was his hunger. Some male intern he'd never met at Crouching Beavis' end of the table complained about chronic neck pain.

"Oh, you should tell Jeremy that. He's good at giving massages," she said.

"Tell Jeremy what?" Jer asked between bites of gourmet pizza.

"You should massage his neck. You like doing that, right?" Her tone challenged. He thought the taunt foolish. She was the one who didn't want anybody to know she'd brought him to Florida.

"Yeah, bring it on.... Who the fuck are you again," Jeremy asked the guy jokingly. The intern introduced himself and they got wrapped up in typical meaningless chatter.

The one mutual good pal who knew about their trip was Krista. Krista also was bound to secrecy. But that didn't stop

her from absent-mindedly asking Jeremy, "So how was Florida?"

He feigned ignorance. "Me? Talk to her," he said with a toss of the head in Crouching Beavis' direction.

Someone at the other end of the table took the bait. "Oh, yeah, Crouching Beavis, how was Florida? I forgot about that!"

She told her fireside tales sans Jeremy, which was fine by him. When it came time to leave, he planned on going home but she requested that he stop by the office first. He agreed and all the way up the block she held his hand.

"So how was Florida?" Krista smartly whispered to him.

"Tons-o-fun," Jeremy whispered back.

"Did you have separate rooms?"

Crouching Beavis was quick to cut in: "No but we slept in separate beds."

"We *had* separate beds," Jeremy corrected. Krista missed the inference. "Just as well," he thought. Still, though, Hidden Butthead's lie bugged him.

Back on the 39th floor for the first time in a long time, he made his rounds, said his hellos. Producers he didn't even know liked him greeted him with good cheer. Not bad cheer, good cheer. This led him cheerfully to the desk of Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead.

"Hey, what are you up to this weekend?" he asked casually.

"I broke up with my boyfriend today." Her answer shot abruptly from his fantasy parallel universe into the real.

"You did?!" *He could barely contain his excitement.*

"But I started dating another guy. Are you jealous?"

He glared at her through the wide, shocked facial mask that had grafted itself onto him at "He could barely contain his excitement." His flesh remained quick-frozen in that deliberate pose like an animation still.

"Do you want me to be?" he croaked.

"Just kidding," she said. Then added, "But if I did break up with him and date somebody else, you'd be jealous, right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Mmm-hmm.... You know you would."

Just then her cell phone rang. She answered it, then muzzled it with her hand. "It's my other boyfriend, hold on a sec," she told Jeremy.

Once again he found himself stumped and hurt. His ears rang with surging blood. The internal echo of his breathing blocked the outside world. All his senses came alive. He felt them individually and at the same time.

All of him, fury. Every bit.

"Gotta go," he heard himself say.

She muzzled the receiver again. "I can't do anything this weekend, I'm visiting Asshole Boyfriend in San Francisco. Why don't we go to the movies on Monday?"

"Sure."

"Okay, see you later.... *Asshole Boyfriend?*—Okay, I'm back...."

"Sure."

He skulked to his train out of Dodge.

"All right, so here we are. Same old, same old. What's the answer? What fucking response haven't I given to women? Two of 'em, right? There are two. I haven't told them off. But wait, I'm also a chicken shit. Why can't I ever go all the way? Why can't I take the fucking initiative and kiss her? Fucking fear fuck!"

This Monday morning grudge match with himself took place in the shower. Thankfully it ended with revelation:

"Wait a minute! I have done that! That's what set this whole fucking mess in motion in the first place! God damn Stacey! I fucking took the initiative there and got reamed for it. So there is only one answer: You've got to confront this."

When Crouching Beavis phoned him later, he told her he wasn't in the mood for a flick. They settled on dinner instead. She asked if he was okay, said he sounded strange. He said no, everything's fine. She asked if she could invite

Krista. He said no to that as well. Oddly, she accepted his answer without question. They hung up. Two beats later his phone rang again.

"Krista's hurt that she's not invited."

"How did that happen?"

"Well...She sort of asked me earlier what I was up to tonight and I told her I made plans with you, so she invited herself along. We didn't think you'd object."

"Well I object."

"Okay, I'll tell her."

Again, they hung up. Jeremy was a vat of sealed rage. Needing a woman's assessment of the situation, he called Krista over the weekend and narrated the entire sordid affair. He would never have let her in except his sister wasn't around and no one else could know.

Two beats later and the phone rang again. He laughed, certain it was Krista.

"Yup," he said.

"Why can't I go?!" Krista roared. She had a hallway desk so he knew everybody on the floor was in on this conversation.

"Krista, remember when I told you I need to have a chat with Crouching Beavis?"

"Yeah?"

"Well this is chat night."

"Well I want to come!"

He didn't know whether to laugh or pound his head against the wall. Of all the things that could conceivably be true, this was not one of them. Yet there it was. Shrieking at him.

"You cannot come. This is no offense to you—In fact, you know what? Fuck that! I'm not the bad guy here! I need to talk with her privately and you know that so what's the problem?"

"So! Can't you guys talk some other time?"

"Am I going crazy here or are we actually having this conversation? Why am I being made to feel like the bad friend?—because this is supposed to be the part where you

say, 'No. I understand.'—and don't be offended by not being invited!"

"Fine," she huffed. "I just don't understand why you two can't talk later, that's all."

"Because we can't!"

She pretended like she understood and hung up. Jeremy counted down the seconds from five until the next ring.

"Yes, Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead! And what may I do for you?"

She laughed. "Why can't Krista go? Now she's all upset."

"She has no right to be upset!"

"Alright! Calm down! God, why are you being so mean to her?"

"I'm not being mean," Jeremy hissed through clenched jaw. "I just want to have a private little chat with you, okay? And she knows this. So why is she inviting herself along? I mean what the fuck is that about?"

Crouching Beavis put on her peacemaker hat and served up a compromise since the entire PA clan intended on bar hopping tonight.

"Why don't we all go out and then after you and I can go off alone and talk," she suggested.

"Fine. That's fine with me," he agreed. No sooner had they hung up than the phone rang again.

"Krista doesn't want to go out now. She thinks that you'll just be silent all night and angry at her."

"Smart thinking." He over-annunciated both words slowly. She laughed. They set a time and a place. Now all he had to do was muster the courage to show up.

Like all 14 to 85 year-olds, he rehearsed to himself exactly what he was going to say. (*That's right, kids.... It never gets easier!*) The Manhattan drizzle began to pick up when he arrived at the little-known Indian restaurant. So little known, in fact, it is located right up the street from him but he has since forgotten the name of the place and the street.

He waited outside for her but the wind was picking up. He didn't care to smell like wet dog so he retreated inside and secured them a table. She wasn't long in showing after that.

They shared their exotic curry dishes like a couple and held fake, pleasant conversation like a couple. Jeremy felt excruciatingly uncomfortable. If she felt the same, she hid it well, that Hidden Butthead. She recited her day at work and told him Krista had gotten into a screaming match with Nutsack, which was why she needed desperately to be around friends tonight. To that end, Krista followed the rest of the PA clan to a bar where they would commiserate, slam shots, and commiserate some more. Crouching Beavis planned on catching up with them after dinner.

"So what did you want to talk to me about," she finally asked when the check came. Either of them would have brought it up earlier but there was another table of customers within earshot. That table had just left.

"What do I want to talk about. Let me see...." His heart nearly pounded through his chest cavity and beat his face. He grabbed at the check reflexively but she swiped it from his hand.

"I got it," she said. Before he could protest she was fishing through her purse for a credit card.

"I don't think you should," he said weakly.

"No, I want to. It's on me, the end."

"Okay."

She handed the card and the bill to the waiter. He bowed sharply as a thank you and scurried back to Waiterville.

"Look, what I need to say. I'm gonna try to make this simple. I just have a couple of questions," he stammered.

"Okay, what questions?" Her slow cautioned response eased his nerves slightly. It felt like she might know she fucked up somehow and that would make this go much easier.

"Well, first: You're my friend, right? Obviously, 'cause here we both are and you're paying for dinner and all that, right?"

"Yeah?"

"And you know I have feelings for you stronger than friendship, right? I've been clear on that issue, right?"

"Right."

"So what was running through your mind when we were in Florida? I mean really, what were you thinking?"

He couldn't believe he'd actually spoken the question aloud. This was the one thing he needed to hear from her. From all women previously. Her shock registered in the form of a cold smirk and a frightened stare.

"Wait. Let me turn that around. You told me that this happens all the time with you," she said.

"What happens all the time?"

"You end up in bed with women cuddling. You said it was no big deal."

"Right. We did a little more than just cuddling. I'm not saying I didn't play a role, obviously I was there too. What I'm saying is, we both know what my role was: To win you over, right? But you have a boyfriend and you are my friend, so isn't your role to tell me no?"

"I don't know what to say." She began to tear up. She tried to giggle that away, but her eyes refused to play along so she dabbed at the corners with a cloth napkin.

"You kept asking me if I thought what we were doing was weird and I said no because to me it isn't weird. It happens all the time, like you said. But it is cheating. You never asked me that," he continued.

Then her vapid protest: "No! You're wrong! I don't think that's cheating. It wasn't cheating. You might have wished it was cheating but I don't think so, no."

Jer switched into lawyer mode, full-blown: "So great if it's not cheating, you must have told Asshole Boyfriend, right? I mean you must have told him about jumping into my bed and the cuddling and then you put on that cute little girl's voice and we sang nursery rhymes together while I kissed you and massaged you. You told him all that, right? How about the next day when we held hands at the park and I kissed you some more and we cuddled some more. You tell him that, too? What did he say?"

Her morphing startled facial expressions empowered him during his tirade. She was, as they say, called out.

"Well, when you put it that way.... It does sound like cheating," she laughed.

"Well don't take my word for it. Tell your boyfriend. Put that honest relationship to the test. I mean he's the one, right? This shouldn't impede on any future marriage plans."

She cried a little harder; he held back his tears but the lump in his throat made it near impossible to speak.

"Is there anything else you want to ask me?" she said.

"Yes. And it gets back to my original question. Remember after Krista's party when you were saying, 'Oh, I just broke up with my boyfriend and I'm dating someone else—Aren't you jealous?' What the fuck was that? I mean you're my friend, right?—Here we are! Does any of this—any of it!...sound friendly to you? Does any of this sound like what friends do?"

"No," she whispered into her napkin.

"Then why did you do it?"

She stared over his shoulder for a while before answering. She shook her head to some internal thing. "I don't know," she said finally.

He exhaled a deep painful breath. "Right," he uttered. They sat there in complete oblivion. There were no sounds, no other patrons. The waiter had slipped her the receipt and credit card some time ago and that never existed either. Who knew when the rain stopped.

"I'm sorry." Her words sliced through their isolation, their mutual solitary confinement. "I don't know why I did those things. I wish I...I wish I did. I guess I didn't think you would be so hurt."

"Whelp! There ya have it," he said.

"But I *am* sorry."

Sorry, but unmoved to break up with Asshole Boyfriend, that is!

"So noted," he said.

"Any other...questions?" she cringed.

"Nope. That about covers it. Let's get the hell out of here."

They left the restaurant and found out exactly who knew

when the rain stopped: people in other counties. It hadn't stopped at all. If anything it was raining harder. She sheltered them underneath her umbrella.

"Come on! Let's catch up with Krista at the bar!" she said with a new energy. Actually, it felt like the old energy. It felt like that conversation never took place.

"No, you know what? I think I need to not see you for a while," he told her flat out.

Her face twisted into a confused mess of a thing. "O-oh," she stuttered.

"Yeah. I'm sorry, um...I'll call you when I do." Even as he spoke the words, he was sure they didn't make sense. He really didn't want to use a line like, *I'll call you*, yet that first half flew out on its own. His razor-sharp thinking produced the backtracked stylings of, *when I do*.

"Okay," she agreed. They awkwardly turned at the same time in a second-guessing stop/go motion and walked their separate paths. That was the last they spoke to each other in anything other than bullshit polite "hellos".

Jeremy has since forgiven Crouching Beavis, Hidden Butthead and himself and moved on in record time. The bullshit polite "hellos" remain their only tool of communication. But that's all right. She's getting fat. (*kidding!...she's getting big boned.*)

"Are you crazy?" Dave asked me exuberantly. I feared he might fall out of his chair.

"No!" I assured him. "It really happened that way!"

"Wow! I knew things over there were nuts but I didn't know they were **that** nuts!"

"Yeah, well.... That's the way the ball bounces sometimes."

"Well listen. I like you a lot; I think you're a great guy and I'd like to make you a part of my team," he said.

"Thanks! That's...Thanks! Do you need to see a reel or something?"

"Jeremy, look around my office. I have tons of reels to look at. You think I'm going to get through them all?"

"Good point," I said.

"No, I don't need to see anything. I haven't really seen your work but I pretty much know what you're about. Again, I think it's difficult to find good people. Everyone wants to be a star from the word go, you know? No one wants to do the actual work of getting there. But you're definitely a great guy—"

"Thanks!"

"—And you've got what it takes, so please call us soon if we don't call you first. But definitely expect to hear back from me in a few weeks. There are a bunch of little projects coming up that we hadn't anticipated so I'll start you off with something like that and we'll take it from there. Sound good?"

"Sounds great!"

A hand shake....A smile....

Two days later, Dave was fired. I'm still waiting for his call.

Do not adjust your sets, folks. This is children's television.

Chapter 53

news release from the mcclendon news service

March 30, 1998

By Sarah McClendon
White House Correspondent

Washington, D.C.—Unidentified Flying Objects, a term given for many years to unexplained sightings of craft in the skies over every state in the Union, are actual visitors from other worlds, believe a community of scientists and technicians employed by government. The real danger to the U. S. and perhaps this whole planet is the government has placed such a heavy blanket of secrecy upon this issue. So much secrecy, those in government who have knowledge showing UFOs are identifiable feel the subject cannot be discussed by those in the know without serious repercussions. Others are afraid their friends and co-workers will think they are crazy if they even so much as insinuate that UFOs are identifiable as manned craft from outside the earth. This particularly applies to newspaper editors and publishers, reporters and analysts. Thus the U. S. is denying itself the chance to learn more about UFOs or to encourage research despite the fact the U. S. stands to gain from such discussions. Not publicized but true is that the Clinton administration, soon after coming to office, had many briefings on the subject. Laurence Rockefeller provided the information for the President and Mrs. Clinton. Others provided documents and verbal briefings to presidential advisors

Jack Gibbons (science), Bruce Lindsay (personal), Anthony Lake (national security) and Vice President Albert Gore. About the same time a three-hour briefing was given by Dr. Steven Greer to the sitting Director of the CIA, Admiral Woolsey.

Subsequently, Clinton instructed Webster Hubbell, when naming him to the position of Associate Attorney General at the Justice Department, that he wanted him to investigate and report back to him on two things, circumstances surrounding the death of President John F. Kennedy, and the existence of UFOs. Hubbell, despite his position and the presidential imprimatur, was boxed in at Justice Department and never was able to find out. All of this was disclosed in Hubbell's memoir, *Friends in High Places*.

Now the lid on UFOs is gradually coming off. There is a national drive underway to get one million signatures on a petition calling for an open Congressional hearing for government employee witnesses. Dr. Steven Greer, Director of the Center for the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence (CSETI), devotes most of his time seeking disclosure of government evidence proving the existence of craft manned by non-humans. Another who feels that positive proof exists within government, is Lt. Col. Philip J. Corso (retired), who reveals in a recent book, *The Day After Roswell*, that he was in charge of the Roswell files during his tenure as head of the Army's Foreign Technology Division. He states unequivocally that these files confirm the crash which occurred at Roswell, New Mexico was an alien space craft. This completely refutes the Air Force denials and subsequent explanations. Corso says that the crashed vehicle was studied and proved to be manufactured of materials unknown as to source and usage in this country. In time, he says, this and other UFOs provided technologies which were "worked into the commercial world via front companies." Incidentally he vouches for the fact that this has proven to be a valuable contribution to U.S. aircraft design and other commercial products.

After the Roswell incident, the Air Force replied to reporters' inquiries that this was all part of research using weather balloons and other equipment. Corso and hundreds of others who work or have worked in secret defense and scientific agencies, are willing to swear under oath that alien craft are repeatedly penetrating our airspace.

Whenever the military agencies are asked to look into this matter further, the answer is always the same—"We do not investigate UFOs."

For more information, [click here](#).

**initiation is the
sincerest
form of flattery**

Chapter 54

07/07/00—2:30 A.M.

Have this dream where I discover I have the ability to levitate. Did this at a bookshop. I thought Bob and Chris [my roommates] were watching me through a two-way security mirror because afterwards we talked through an intercom. Turns out security had notified them of my performance and made them watch the footage. I felt certain they were watching me do it live but they told me otherwise. I made my levitation act look like demon possession. (I wasn't sure that it wasn't.)

CUT TO:

In mom's bedroom back home in Taunton. I perform this levitation thing for her and the Amazing Randi. I'm forcing Randi to accept my ability to levitate no strings attached. I then do this for friends and other people in various settings.

CUT TO:

Underneath bed with Mike [Plant Man] in my bedroom in Taunton. He looks upset. I ask him what's wrong. He asks me why I have to do something to be special, to stand out. I tell him something to the effect of, "It's an innate gift and I should share it with the world." Somewhere in there I recognize that this is a dream. I seize the opportunity to question my unconscious mind in the form of Mike about my alleged abductions.

I say, "Don't you even want to know what happened? This is our chance to find out what's going on!"

He is silent. I look him in the eye and demand straight up, "Tell me what's going on. Was I abducted by aliens?"

Mike's voice turns angry. Beyond angry—demonic. He grabs me and plunges my upper torso through the corner where floor and wall meet. "Since you want to know so badly...." He says this and then I'm in a black and gray nether region. I'm scared out of my mind. I almost turn back certain this is an abduction, but at the last second I forge onward, plunging wholly into this nondescript dimension.

Responding to my unspoken suspicion that this is an abduction, Demonic Mike says, "To find that out you have to find out what time they come for your sister." That statement scares me to my core. I want out. I know this is real and they're in control and I'm out of my mind with fright. I swim and claw and flail back through the portal to my bedroom.

I wake up from this nightmare in my bed in Taunton. It is pitch black—blacker. Some Beatles tune, I don't remember what, is playing on the radio across the room. It takes every ounce of concentrated effort to move out of bed but I do. I turn off the radio and dash through the kitchen to my mom's room. I bump into something in the dark. She asks me if I'm okay and I say yes and tell her I didn't mean to wake her. I tell her what happened, how I had this bad dream. Her words are soothing, loving. I wake up again, same spot. In fact, I "wake up" and run into my mother's arms over a dozen times, acting in a multitude of settings, each time telling her of the last. Her response is totally different every time. [In one instance we were upper-crust types and I had a blond baby sister.]

I realize, finally, that I'm not waking up at all but am being shown/participating in being shown the various responses of "Mary's" to "Jeremy's" in alternate versions of our world.

I know I'm not waking from this nightmare.

The next time I wake up, I don't run. I yell, "Ma?!"

She yells back, "Yeah?"

"Can you come here for a minute?"

"Yeah," she replies groggily.

I hear rustling out there beyond my bedroom door but she isn't coming fast enough. I yell, "Ma? Can you come here?"

"Just a sec," she replies. I feel bad waking her but lying in my bed in the dark, feeling Their presence is simply too much.

She doesn't show. I suspect I'm still in a nightmare. I keep yelling, "Ma! Ma! Can you help me?—Ma!" My voice transforms into something distorted almost like Mike's satanic impression.

Meanwhile, back in materiality, I somehow muster the strength to wake up for real. I still feel Their presence; my lack of faith in being awake even as I write these words is disturbing. I am shocked and scared to go back to sleep. Something about this and that line about my sister is making me cry and shiver. It's like I know now it's all true.

And I can't handle the truth the way I thought I would be able to—although it is worth noting that I faced my fears by plunging into that other dimension to find the truth. In doing so, I thought I might gain a little ground on them. Perhaps be more cognizant and in control.

They would never let this be.

Cowardice? Or just not in their best interest?

I've never felt this much negativity toward these beings. I'm still crying and shaken.

I don't want to sleep.

As a footnote, when I finally woke for real in my Manhattan apartment, I bolted into the kitchen and paced back and forth like a caged animal. I was out of my mind with a fear so raw and real it is beyond words. I paced there, staring at my bedroom door, muttering, "Fuck you" to myself.

Let's be clear. This was not a dream. Perhaps the most important aspect of this whole experience, which I was too tired and insane to jot down at the time, is incomprehensible. The

black/gray amorphous space was actually a room. I had to mentally fight through the amorphous illusion to see what was there: me. On what appeared to be an operating table. Surrounded by gray dwarfs wearing hooded tunics. This image bled through the remaining "dream sequences."

That is the truth. That is what happened. It was not a lucid dream or sleep paralysis or any of that interpretive junk. But logically, I could not have been on a table in some room. Logically, I could not have been anywhere other than my own bed. The New Ager will say, "Ah! Out-of-body experience!"

To which I reply, "Ah! But I was on a fucking table! Do spirits need tables?"

See, the New Ager, like the psychologist, is applying his/her own brand of logic. And the truth is, logic, in all its forms, need not apply.

As a final footnote, my roommate Bob was the first one up in the morning. Our kitchen and living room are one big space, so when he came out for a glass of water, his initial reaction was to laugh at the drooling anxious body flopped across the couch.

He turned on the light to make his presence known. "Dude, why you sleeping out here?"

I made a bunch of sounds that went something like, "I don't know."

"You had a nightmare, didn't you!" he accused, revving up to make fun of me. I played along.

"Maybe," I said in a drawn-out delivery.

"Oh, Jer," he chortled as if I'm the biggest dick in the world.

I slunk back into my bed without another word. Apparently he took pity on me and never told Chris about their adult roommate so scared of a dream he had to sleep on the couch. For that I am thankful. We rib each other enough about other stupid shit.

I can't wait to see what their reactions will be when they find out the truth. (And, yes, that will be at the same time you do!)

Chapter 55

Norm: Hey, Jer! I came up with a theory of my own last night!

Jeremy: You sound proud.

N: I am proud! Check this out.... You know all those conspiracy theories about secret world governments run by, like, Freemasons worshipping ancient Egyptian gods and stuff?

J: Yeah? I mean, *no*, but...Yeah?

N: Well what if it's true? What if it's all true except the part the paranoids haven't figured out?

J: Gosh, Norm, I'm riddled with anticipation.

N: The ancient Egyptians were hung up on reincarnation, right?

J: Well, ascension....

N: Right, but reincarnation leads to ascension. So if the secret world government believes that, what if they have built this capitalist mechanism to go global in an attempt to keep Earth's masses interested only in the material so that lifetime after lifetime we zone out on, say, TV or fashion—pop culture, money culture—so that when we die, we will have to reincarnate because we haven't learned anything transcendently new about ourselves?

Meanwhile, those in the secret government reincarnate with this knowledge, so they learn to think outside the box and make money and control everything. This ability would

be a latent holdover from the previous life, see? Doesn't it make sense that a secret club of any caliber that has a strange religion in common would incorporate that religion into their, ah, club? Or their plans? But now that I've exposed it, we all have the truth and we can move on in our life cycles. We can all step outside the box come next life.

It sure would explain how reincarnation and over-population could be simultaneously true, right? Say it: I'm a fucking genius.

J: I'll say it: You have too much time on your hands.

N: No, it just came to me. Like an epiphany.

J: I knew you'd be my harshest critic, but I didn't think you'd be a total ass.

N: I'm just giving you a head check is all. A lot of your stuff is over the line. Wait, I got another one! I can prove the existence of God through incest!

J: Where are we going with this?

N: Right here: If there was no God, incest wouldn't feel dirty and wrong. There's no reason why I shouldn't be able to fuck female relatives. It would actually be convenient, wouldn't you say? The problem is, the babies usually come out mentally or physically handicapped. Now you're gonna blab about similar chromosomes and all that, but my point is that nature evolves creatures in certain ways that would best promote their survival. Making incest nonviable for procreation accomplishes what?—It forces different families to mingle with one another. It forces relationships outside one's own clan to necessarily form. It is the forgotten root of society.

J: What is the root again?

N: That fucking your mom is disgusting.

J: Huh....

N: But, see, we could have evolved the other way no problem. Take away retardation and the gag factor and we could fuck our relatives and make babies and be happy. There's no natural need for a biological imperative of that sort. So whose need is it that we step outside our families, clans, nations? Someone demands that we socialize! And that someone might as well be God.

J: Huh....

N: And your thoughts?

J: Are you mad at me?

N: (*laughs*) What? I thought you'd find it funny!

J: You know what the problem is, Norm? It was in your first...thing there. It's that humans cannot ever think outside the box. Not one. I'll give a million dollars to any reader who can think outside the box right now. They can't do it. Know why?

N: Nope.

J: Because whether you're thinking inside or outside "the box," you're still **thinking**. If you want to step outside the box you have to stop thinking. Quiet the brain. Then you may or may not receive authentic insight. If you do receive insight, the ego, left to its own devices, will take that wisdom and twist it into something else. Dogma, perhaps. Something the ego can call its own.

N: Why would it need to do that?

J: Because insight is an affront to the ego. It is pure wisdom sprung up internally, yet not created by the brain. But how can that be so? I am an individual with individual thoughts! This must be one of them. If it isn't, I'll make it one and

block out the tremendously scary truth. That is what the ego does, Norm. It protects its self from its SELF. Its SELF, its Original Face, is ALL; is NOW; is EVER-PRESENT; IS. But just try telling that to the ego—especially the ego that thinks it is thinking outside the box. Yeah, right! Only if it's a Chinese box: an illusion within an illusion. That's all it is, Norm; that's all you are.

N: What does that mean?

J: Hold on. We'll come back, but first—

N: Please say aliens!

J: Let's talk about them dern space aliens.

N: Woo-hoo! I didn't think you'd ever get to this!

J: Well, let's discuss my original hesitancy. First, I didn't want to sound like a nut just coming at you with a bunch of science fiction sounding crap. Also, there's been so much media about abductions in recent years, I didn't want to sound like I was jumping on the bandwagon.

N: What changed?

J: I lost my fear.

N: That's all?

J: That's a lot!—Believe me! But also, I have something new to say. Or at least something I've never heard. A real insight sprung up in me, Norm. An insight that is everything we've been discussing and at the same time makes it all irrelevant. Makes my life to this point grasping and irrelevant. But not so fast, fella! First, you should know what led me to this.

N: Sure, dangle the carrot....

J: Right, me and Hitchcock.

N: So where to begin?

J: That's easy: in the middle where I started.

N: I don't know what that means.

J: Whelp, of all the "weird" things I've experienced in the realm of UFO's and abductions the one that stands out as the most true is this:

My first comprehensible introduction to a larger reality occurred when I was thirteen years old. My mother was driving Kara and me to our grandparents' house in Vermont. It was nighttime. If I had to hazard a guess, I'd say ten or eleven-ish. I was sitting in the backseat behind Mom; Kara sat in the front. I was staring attentively out the window hoping to see a UFO.

N: Why would you hope that?

J: I don't understand.

N: What was the impetus to expect to see one in the first place?

J: Oh. I had read Whitley Strieber's, *Communion* earlier that year. Like so many others, I was drawn to that simple cover of a tan bug-looking creature smirking at humanity. And from there I was hooked. I read anything I could get my hands on that didn't smack of cult religion. Something about those books that purport to be channeled conversation with happy-go-lucky space brothers from the Pleiades just didn't ring true.

N: So you were looking for UFO's.

J: Yes. Though I didn't know it at the time, it was a yearning deeper than child's imagination. And it was a call answered.

We were speeding along a barren stretch of road when the most incredible thing presented itself in the distance. And by distance, I mean next to the road there was a field;

beyond the field, hills; beyond the hills, mountains. Hanging low between two mountain peaks, an oval-shaped object hovered in the air, tilted on its axis. It was self-luminous green in color with a dazzling array of red and blue lights. The center of the object consisted of a row of porthole-shaped windows. The top half of the object rotated counter to the bottom half, although I don't remember which half rotated clockwise and which counterclockwise.

So there I am, this middle school kid staring at this object I begged nightly to see and you know what my initial reaction was? *Oh, that's weird. Must be an advertisement.* It hadn't even dawned on me that the thing was a friggen ship! I thought it was one of those fluorescent blinking signs, like for a restaurant or a gas station. That's how fake it looked. I mean, it looked like a plastic model or something, just not at all real.

I rolled down the window to make sure it wasn't a reflection or something. My mom was speeding probably near eighty miles per hour knowing her, so the wind was destroying my vision. I rolled the window back up and was yelling for Mom and Kara to look at this thing. By now it dawned on me that the object was so far away, to be able to see detail like porthole windows it must be pretty fucking big!

N: So not a toy?

J: Not a toy, Norm! Well, somebody's toy—just not one of ours! So my mom glances over and is baffled. She tries to concentrate on the road and the object at the same time. Meanwhile, my sister keeps asking us what we're yammering about. She can't see the thing, I guess because she's in the passenger seat and Mom's body was blocking the view.

N: She didn't stop to look at it?

J: Mom?—No. Is that weird? I don't know. She seemed to have only a passing interest in it. She kept on her speeding

way. I watched the object rotate in its spot as we zoomed to the grandfolks'.

When we got there, it was like an hour later. I had read up on so-called missing time. That's when you have a large chunk of time unaccounted for in association with an encounter like this. So I checked the clock as soon as I walked in the door. There wasn't any time missing. We three were gasping about what we had seen. Well...not Kara so much. But Mom and I were.

N: How did the grandparents take that?

J: It was strange! I totally thought they'd say we were nuts, but they didn't! They had one of those Time/Life *Mysteries of The Unexplained* books sitting on their coffee table. Apparently our uncle (who lives with them) saw a UFO when he was camping with a group of friends and ever since had been reading up on the subject. It felt like clock-work, that whole night. It felt very controlled. It was my first experience with synchronicity. It was like, *Hey, we just saw a UFO. What's this on the coffee table? Oh, your uncle saw a UFO and he's been taking books from the library on it ever since. Funny, that.*

N: Okay, that is odd, I'll grant you that.

J: I have to stress again how totally planned this whole thing felt to me. This wasn't the first UFO experience I've had but it was the most concrete nowhere near identifiable UFO encounter. And it doubled as an awakening to something or someone winking at me, telling me I don't have control.

N: Of what?

J: My life, I thought. It was like normalcy and control were the joke that someone had just let me in on. Only instead of finding it funny, it scared the shit out of me.

N: What's the first encounter you remember?

J: Well, potential encounter. The problem with living through this is that everything not fixed in concrete experience starts to look like it. For example, I clearly remember being three years old and watching a parade from my playroom. I was so excited that I ran into the kitchen and grabbed my mom and sister and dragged them back with me. When we got there, there was no parade. Nothing. They chalked it up to three-year-old imagination. I was confused. I knew what I saw. It was embarrassing! The great thing about my decent long-term memory is that I remember being embarrassed as a child. I don't think most parents realize that kids feel embarrassment, so parents: your kids can and do.

N: You're a good American.

J: Yes, I know, thank you. Anyway, we dubbed this episode, "The Quick Parade" and left it as an anecdote. But is it more? How about the fact that for the longest time I actually thought I came from outer space. As a child, we're talking about here. Like most kids of my generation, I was raised on *Star Wars*.

N: The missile program?

J: The movie. **My** kids will get to grow up with the missile program. Anywho.... I felt certain that my parents were Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia and that there was a terrible war raging on their planet, so they seeded my mom's womb with me to protect me.

N: But in the movies they're brother and sister.

J: Who cares! I'm a kid!—What do I know? I know how to embarrass myself and feel embarrassed! That's it! The point is, alien abduction literature is now filled with accounts of people who think they are half alien them-

selves. They believe their mothers' wombs were seeded with...well...them! So was it all fantasy? Or truth filtered through imagination? Of course my guess now would be the former. But you can see how it's hard to pick the wheat from the chafe when it comes to a phenomenon that hides in your psyche. From eighth grade on I've been second-guessing myself about everything. Well not anymore....

N: What changed?

J: Hold your horses! Let's continue with the personal history.

N: Okay. Then what came next?

J: Not a whole lot until about halfway through Sophomore Year of high school. All through the year I woke up at three-thirty in the morning for no apparent reason. It just started happening and didn't let up until sometime during Senior Year. That really irked me.

It was around this time I began having dreams that played more like flashbacks. I've always been a vivid dreamer but not until these flashback-type dreams had I dreamt in the first person.

N: Can you give an example?

J: I'll give two. The first time this happened, it was a scary flash of a thing. I'm being pushed out of my bedroom by a bunch of hands from behind. The feeling is like a forced floating sensation. These beings who I cannot see are pushing me or floating me—maneuvering me, let's say—through the living room on the way to the kitchen. I know instinctively what's going on. In the flurry of movement, I remember Whitley Strieber's story about how he brought his cat with him into an abduction so that it would seem real to him and also act as a memory trigger against blocking out the experience. So in the same vein, I claw at the John

Lennon portrait hanging on our living room wall, but I can't quite grasp it, it hangs over the TV. I grab at the TV antennae, but they too slip out of my reach. The end. I wake up scared shitless.

N: How many Beatles references is that in this life of yours?

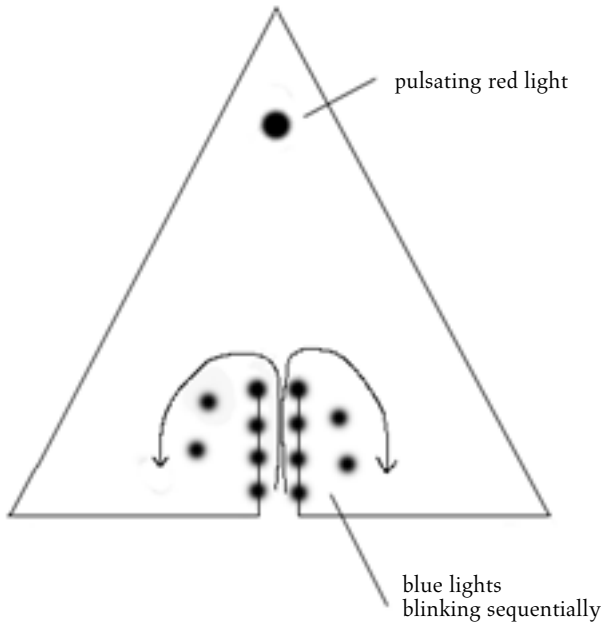
J: (*laughs*) Good call! I'll have to look into that! Maybe I'm kidding myself; maybe I just watched *Yellow Submarine* too many times as a child.

Anyway, the second flashback *thingamahoosie* was of me and Mom driving down a tree-lined highway at night. Suddenly this enormous black triangle with a slowly pulsating red light at the tip of its underbelly appears over our car. The car stalls. We're scared. Mom seems to be sort of out of it. I'm frantically sweeping the glove compartment for a pen and something to write on. I want to draw it so I remember this later. I'm telling my mom—yelling at her really—that we can't forget what's happening.

Next thing I know, we're both paralyzed in our seats. The car is lifting off the ground and heading for the ship. As we approach it, these two sets of blue lights ripple sequentially like Christmas tree lights. The ripples start at parallel points toward the center edge of the base and move sequentially in a straight line from the edge to the near center of the craft, where they then curve around like twin candy canes poised at the two remaining tips of the triangle.

Maybe that's confusing. Maybe I'd have to draw it. Anyway, once our car gets sucked into the ship, the scene cuts to our car exiting the ship. It's the same scene but in reverse. My mom is real groggy, just starting to come to. I'm also groggy, but a touch more cognizant. I feel like there's an entity sitting in the back seat but I can't yet turn my body to check.

I'm petrified. Our car hits the road driving. My mom is steering like she's on automatic pilot. I can now move, so I shake her and tell her we have to remember this; we cannot forget. She can barely acknowledge me and I feel my memory fade even as I shout at her. End of scene, I wake up in a cold sweat.



*Figure. Underside of craft in flashback/dream.
Drawn to scale (just kidding).*

So these are the beginnings of the strange path I've been walking. The first "real" experience I remember having took place in my bedroom in Taunton. Kara was in college, my parents were long divorced, so it was just me and my mother. I was asleep. I heard the bedroom door open, which startled me. I had been sleeping on my back so I reflexively sat up in bed. I watched a dark figure slip into

my room. Its head wiggled as it spoke to me. I remember hearing the voice clearly but not understanding the words. It held by its side what looked like a sheath or a large conductor's pick. Something to that effect. A needle, maybe?— I couldn't tell in the dark, through the fright.

I was so terrified, I actually tried to block it out while it was happening! I said, "Come on, Ma! Go back to bed!" Then I rolled over onto my left side facing my nightstand. During the motion of rolling over, this thought calmly waltzed through my mind: "It's not your mother. You know who this is. Look at the clock, you're about to have a missing time experience." The thought was definitely my own, not some other voice's. I didn't check the clock though. Instead I closed my eyes tight and blacked out.

The next morning I asked Mom if she was in my room last night. She said no. I told her something came in and spoke to me. She thought I had a bad dream; I thought she maybe sleepwalked. Well, no I didn't.... But I wished she had!

N: That's insane!

J: I agree! The next incident happened when my sister was on Christmas break. This is interesting because it's the first time I wrote down everything that happened as soon as I woke up the next morning. I lost the paper shortly thereafter, but found it lying around my room years later while home from college. I decided to jot down everything I remembered about it and see how my memory compared with the original note. I'm absolutely astounded at how well I retained that memory. I later rewrote both onto one thing here....

(Jeremy pulls out lined yellow paper. One side has what he wrote at the time; the other, what he recalled many years later.)

J: Take a gander at this....

(he hands Norm the paper, which reads as follows....)

What I Wrote Down After Experience

Time: 4:37 A.M. (approx.)

1. Find myself awake (not sure how).
2. Door opens, nobody there (to my knowledge).
3. Look at clock (in case of time loss).
4. Turn over, face wall.
5. Thinking maybe I should go out there and see what's going wrong. Too scared.
6. Feel sharp pain in bladder. I've suddenly got to pee real bad.
7. Attempt to get up but can't move, i.e., if I try to move one way, my muscles move the other.
8. Feel sharp hot tingles and sharp cold tingles on different parts of my body at different intervals of time.
9. Feel something hot and tingly on my head, then I can move again. Too scared to move.
10. Someone is (was) definitely there. Real tired. Go back to sleep (I think).
11. Have a "dream" that I've forgotten everything that happened. It was covered up by a vision of Bill [last name withheld] coming into my

What I Remember Now

Time: Approx. 4:37 A.M.

1. Door opens.
2. I wake.
3. I look at clock to check the time because last time I had an odd experience of this sort, I didn't check the time. Also, I wanted to make sure that if I had a "missing time" episode, it would be documented.
4. Roll over, face wall.
5. Think: They're here for my sister.
6. That's not enough motivation for me to get up, confront situation, so I make a joke to myself that I have to pee anyway.
7. Try to move but can't. Not only am I paralyzed, but when I move one way, my muscles actually move the other.
8. Scared. Make another joke: Figure, well, if I'm going to tell the kids about this in school tomorrow, I'd better try to get up so that I can say it wasn't my sheets holding me down.
9. No can do.
10. Feel those tingles but now (and even then) think it's just normal pins-and-needles-type phenomena that I was over-blowing in my mind.
11. Don't remember tingles in my head/being able to move.

room and turning on my T.V. and we are looking for something to watch.

- 12.** Next is a vision of me asking Bill the next day if he actually came into my room.

- 13.** Think: how absurd.

Theory 1: "They" didn't come for me this time; thus, they wouldn't let me move, for I might see what's going on. The rest was in my head.

Theory 2: "They" were mocking me by counteracting my every move. Also, the asking Bill was a mockery.

Theory 3: "They" aren't as bad as I think. They are trying to communicate.

12. Slept. Had dream about Bill [last name withheld], as described. Felt like either my subconscious—or some external force—was mocking me, showing me how stupid it is to ask him if he was in my room. Obviously he couldn't have been. (This refers to my last experience, asking my mother if she came into my room when I knew full well she hadn't).

13. Message of dream: This thing is happening. Deal with it.

Theories: None. Not foolish enough to bother anymore.

J: So, yeah. There's that. It feels like they were there for my sister and I wasn't allowed to move to protect her. In both of these experiences I was jolted awake by my door opening. It makes kind of a *thud* sound when it opens. Now, to clarify, I have experienced at least one waking dream, so I know what that feels like. When I had the waking dream, faintly in the back of my mind I recognized that it was a dream.

N: What was the dream?

J: Oh, it was banal. I thought that my mom had come into

my room to kiss me goodbye before she went off to work. I was talking to the image like talking in my sleep. There was nothing scary about it at all and like I said, even as I spoke to the mirage a little voice nagged from the back of my mind telling me this wasn't real. Just the opposite with the abduction experiences.

The last one I had took place when my friend Griffin was sleeping over. I slept in my bed and he on a futon chair on my floor. When I was younger and I couldn't get comfortable enough to fall asleep, sometimes I would switch ends of the bed so that my head was at the foot. But I always brought my pillow with me and I always was cognizant of my actions.

Well this night with Griffin there, I happened to "find" myself awake with my head at the foot of the bed. I say "find" because presumably, I'd been asleep and I don't remember waking up, just suddenly being aware that I was. Funny thing, I hadn't brought my pillow with me and I was lying on top of my sheets. Also, there was a voice jabbering away loudly in my ear. It was a tinny sounding voice, like a mono radio signal. Not my own inner voice, you see.

I turned my body around in bed and slapped at the alarm clock radio, thinking it had somehow gone off. That didn't help. I pushed every button on the damn radio. Nothing. Next I realized that the voice was only in my right ear. I started yelling at it to shut the fuck up until I fell back asleep. I have no clue what that voice was saying.

The next day I asked Griffin if he heard a voice like the radio too. He said no. The only thing he heard was me yelling in my sleep. It must have looked like that to him, but I wasn't sleeping!

So those are some of the big ones. And the thing that makes them all the more real is that I had read a handful of UFO books and magazines by that point so I had a pretty clear vision of what aliens were supposed to look like.

N: Right, the gray or tan guys with large eyes, about five feet tall.

J: Yeah, but I never saw that. I never remembered seeing a being except that first time, and even then it was all shadow. If I were fooling myself or imagining things, wouldn't I have seen those creatures most often reported? Not even in the flashback dreams did I see creatures. I knew they were there. I had a sense of how many were with me. But I never saw them. This, to me, is evidence that something more than misinterpretation is going on.

The other clue that it's real is the fear factor. It's unbelievable. And now that I think about it, my response to it has always been to block it out. If I woke up into an experience, I would do my damndest to shut my eyes until it went away. You'd think I'd want to fight or check it out or talk to them or something. But real life situations don't go that way. It reminds me of exactly the pathetic behavior I observed in my Dad and Messica when they hit bottom with their issues.

N: So did you tell anybody about this?

J: I was fairly open about it with close friends and family at the time. The reaction was mixed. My parents and sister figured it was an overactive imagination or wishful thinking, product of divorce and all that. My friends' reactions changed as the encounters started happening. When I told them about the green ufo, some believed it and some believed that I believed it. That really fucking bothers me, that reaction. If you believe I believe something but you don't believe it yourself, what does that say about me? I mean I'm not saying I believe in Christ or tarot cards or astrology or...you know, things that people can believe but may not be true. I'm telling you I witnessed a hovering, rotating green craft that had windows and lights. I'm telling you I saw this clearly—it was clearly this craft.

So where's the belief? Now if I'd said I saw a light hovering in the sky, okay. Open to interpretation. This was not that.

N: Have you ever seen just that? Like a roaming light?

J: Interestingly enough.... One night, my friend Travis was driving me and a mutual pal home from a party. We were heading to this pal's house out in the boonies. It was about one in the morning or so.

We were driving by this cemetery surrounded by woods when these two large blue balls of light appeared dancing in the trees. They would be hovering in one place then wink out and on in another, all this craziness. Whatever it was, it wasn't flashlights or reflections from high beams.

N: What about fireflies? Light bugs?

J: No. Way too big for that. Anyway, I was sitting in the passenger seat staring at this and growing mildly excited. I said, "Hey, Trav, look at that!" Travis at the time was a staunch conservative. Good Catholic, all that. He knew some peripheral stuff about my ufo issues but he thought it was all shit so he refused to even look.

Meanwhile, our other friend from the backseat sees this and says, "No, really Travis. You've got to look at this." Trav's like, "Yeah, right!" He glances out my window and does a wide-eyed double take. It was comic timing at its greatest because we were at the edge of the cemetery, about to pass all this by, when he floored the brakes to a screeching halt and threw that puppy in reverse.

We sat there in the middle of the lane watching these lights, mesmerized. Travis was rolling through the shocked, "Holy shit! Holy shit!" routine. Then our other friend and I both spotted a dark object which I mistook for a plane. I think it spotted us, too, because it stopped midair right above our car!

We screamed, "Go! Go! Travis, drive!" and without hesi-

tation, he peeled out of there. He didn't see the dark object from where he was sitting, but he knew from our yelling that something bad was happening. When we got to our friend's house, we were totally out of breath. We told his parents what happened and they laughed at us. That hurt but it also felt kinda good in a way. Like now my two buddies know what I have to deal with all the time!

So after that we made an inspired five-minute short film called *The Visitation*. Maybe a year later, my mom had friends from West Virginia visiting. It was my job to entertain the daughter. She was a couple of years younger than me and, not unlike my first girlfriend, a huge New Kids On The Block fan. I didn't know what to do with her so I called Travis to save me and he brought us to Bill's house that evening.

Right before we pulled into Bill's driveway, I saw directly in front of us a gigantic black oval the size of a football field gliding behind his neighbor's house. It was totally black against the night sky; I think the only reason I noticed it was that it blocked out the stars in its path. But since Travis didn't say anything I figured my eyes were playing tricks on me or it was a cloud or something. Then when we turned the corner and pulled into the driveway, I saw those same blue lights dancing in Bill's trees that we'd seen about a year ago across town.

I said, "Travis, look at that!" Again like before, he refused to look but I was persistent. He finally glanced over but they had blinked out. He didn't see anything. It was like a cosmic joke.

He asked me what I saw and I said, "Remember *The Visitation*?" And he said, "Yeah, right." He thought I was pulling his leg! That's when the girl—not knowing anything about me or our short film—says, "Oh, you mean those blue lights that have been following us?"

My jaw almost fell out of my head I was so stunned. I

said, "There have been blue lights following us?" She says, "Yeah. I noticed them at the stop sign." Travis, as he is prone to do with anything he doesn't want to hear, kept up his wall of disbelief. And now, today, he doesn't even remember this part of the story.

That's fucked up. The same thing happened with my mom. She didn't believe me that we'd seen that green UFO in Vermont until the Gulf Breeze sightings took place in Florida.

N: I remember that. Some guy took a bunch of pictures that looked way too good to be real.

J: Yeah, Ed Walters. Most people consider those fakes I think. But whether they are or not I can attest to the incredibly unrealistic quality of the object I saw. It looked similar to what Ed had photographed. The thing I saw was a touch more slender, and I remember the bottom being a smooth surface as opposed to the concave structure in those Gulf Breeze photos. Other than that, though, the color, the windows, the plastic toy quality...All present.

So anyway, my point is, when we first saw those photos on TV, I yelled, "That's it! Ma! That's what we saw! Don't you remember that?"

"You've got to remember that! Come on!" I ran through a description of what I remembered seeing. She was resistant at first, but eventually, she came to her senses and admitted that, "Yeah...I guess I do remember. Except I remember it having blue lights around it and this red light on top. I don't remember the color. I remember it was strange, though. Like it was there just long enough to notice it, then it disappeared."

I told her that's because she was doing about eighty, so of course it looked like it disappeared! But I watched the thing through the back windshield until it was fully out of view.

So let's review here: There are craft piloted by non-

humans who abduct people. If true, then it's the biggest news in the history of our species. One would think that if this were happening, the witnesses would totally remember such an encounter. How could you forget seeing a spaceship, right? One would think if this were happening, the abductee would embrace the experience, try to make friendly with our space brothers and all that, right?

But it doesn't happen that way. The ego doesn't allow for this sort of thing. It's so out of left field and such an affront to the human animal living alone in its dominant intellect with other human animals, stuck to this planet of ours—it's surprisingly easier to forget than to remember!

N: Well what about these people who say they wish a UFO would just come down and take them away? What do you say to them?

J: Good luck! That's wish fulfillment, mostly. You know, hoping some savior will take you away from the pain in your life. Though this is not always the case. I, for one, went through that phase in high school. I think it had to do with identifying with the abuser, and it's the same with those abductees who believe they are half-alien themselves. They are so immersed in this that they think they are it.

N: So these aliens are abusers?

J: No. Definitely not that. But psychology only has so many ways to categorize a thing. This experience can certainly feel like an abuse—a major abuse—so that's where the mind puts it. It leaves it in the hands of those psychological mechanisms best suited to deal with this.

N: Why doesn't the mind come up with new categories?

J: It can't. It can only lie to itself and make the unknown known. It's the same thing with debunkers. They call this

fraud or superstition or sleep disorder or temporal lobe epilepsy. Debunkers and experiencers are the same in that respect: neither has the mental faculty to call this thing what it is, so both compartmentalize it into familiar concepts.

N: Okay well let's go back a minute. What happened next? Did you ever seek therapy?

J: Yes but not until college. First—hey, here's something comical—first I wrote a note to the aliens and kept it pressed against my skin and the elastic of my underwear. The note was my plea for an open dialogue. It was an agreement, a pact to go along with whatever they were doing if they would just explain it to me and let me remember.

N: Nice. What happened with that?

J: I woke up one morning and couldn't find the note anywhere. I'm sure it ended up in the laundry with my sheets, but one never knows.

It could be hanging up on some Martian kid's refrigerator like a term paper that got an "A." Who's to say?

My second action was to search my own family history. Memories resurfaced and strange incidents came to light. Like I immediately remembered the time Kara was all excited because she had been playing outside with her friends one afternoon when this object came down out of the sky. They thought it was a plane until it stopped midair. The bottom of the thing opened up and a small probe flew out about fifteen feet away from the object, stopped, then flew back in. The bottom of the object closed and it sped straight up and out of sight.

Around that same period—second or third grade for me; fifth or sixth for Kara—I remember walking home from school with a friend and seeing a ball of fire soar across the sky. And I'm not talking about a meteor, I'm talking about a metallic object that had flames shooting from its sides and

back. It was fairly low in the sky, too. Me and my friend watched this thing thinking it was a plane crashing. But we never heard a boom.

Later I couldn't wait to watch the evening news with my dad 'cause I was sure I was gonna hear about this plane crash. Never happened. There was no story. What's really weird is that my friend and I saw it, but I don't remember anyone else seeing it. The street was packed with kids heading home, along with cars and buses, so where are the other witnesses?

I don't know. There's too much strangeness associated with the strange. Why can't it just behave normally?

N: That would be too easy.

J: That's more true than you mean it to be.

(Norm chuckles)

J: I'm not kidding. We'll come to that point in a bit. First, I should add this piece of meat: I asked my dad if he had any weird memories floatin' around in the ol' noggin. And this is where my dad is an amazing father. He would balk at subjects that didn't interest him, but if I were into it he would at least play along. Like he hated pro wrestling, which I loved. So he would make fun of it now and then, but ultimately he'd watch it with me every weekend. Before I knew it he was enjoying it too.

Or, Michael Jackson. He would always say he lacked soul and found pop music in general to consist of boring repetitive beats. But he'd always listen to me fawn over how great Michael is and how amazed I am by him and all that, and he'd go out of his way to get me Jackson posters. He was amazing that way, my dad. Real loving.

And so it was with alien abductions. He thought it was something that I would grow out of.

N: Like Michael Jackson and wrestling.

J: Yes. And against all odds, I never outgrew any of 'em!

(both laugh)

J: Wow. I'm really not presenting a good case for myself here, am I? Anyway, back to dad.... I asked him if he had had any outlandish experiences. Three came to mind. First, when he was a kid his mom forced him to take his afternoon nap. He was lying in bed when he heard some kids playing outside his window. He went to the window and saw this group of kids his age flying a new kite he'd seen in a magazine and wanted badly to own. Needless to say, he wanted to go outside and play with the children.

His mom came in to check up on him and asked him what he was doing out of bed. He turned to her and gushed about the kids and the kite, but when he turned back to the window they had vanished.

My dad told me this story while driving to his place. He cocked his head a moment then said, "You know now that I think about it, those kids weren't from the neighborhood.... I wonder who they were."

I thought that was sorta telling.

N: That sounds to me like a child's fantasy based on longing. Like that so-called "Quick Parade" you saw.

J: Yeah, maybe. But he did tell me he was certain it wasn't a hallucination, wasn't a daydream. He really saw those strange children playing outside his window. One wonders what would have resulted had he knocked on his window or called to them.

N: One does, doesn't one?

J: Yes, Norm, one does. Anywho.... So the second bit of oddness happened when he was driving from New Hampshire to Vermont to visit my mother-to-be. Up ahead in the breakdown lane, there was a long bicycle with like

five people riding it. He thought it was a family or a clown bike or something. He pulled around them widely to give them room. When he looked at them from the side, he noticed that they were all bald with large pointy ears and pointy noses. They looked like elves tooling around on a bike!

He laughed to himself and cleaned his eyes, thinking he was hallucinating. But when he checked the rearview mirror, they were still there just like that.

N: That's also weird but inconclusive.

J: Agreed. But that's the problem with this whole thing. I think I said this before. It's like when you admit that this is happening to you, this abduction thing, every little strange detail feels like a part of it. And I'm saying, it may not all be, but if you strip everything down to the essentials you are still left with a green craft with lights and windows and Chatty Cathy paying me a visit some nights. That's not nothing; that's very definitely something. So is this last incident my father shared.

He doesn't remember exactly my age at the time but I was young enough to still be in a crib. He remembers finding himself awake in the middle of the night with a complete sense of dread and the eerie feeling that an intruder was in the house. He lay there for a while feeling silly to himself. Suddenly I started screaming from my bedroom, "Daddy! Make it go away! Make it go away!"

He bolted out of bed and into my room. There I was half-sitting up, pointing to a corner of the ceiling across the room crying, "Daddy! Make it go away! Make it go away!" Oddly, he said he could tell I was still asleep—yelling in my sleep I guess.

When he looked up to where I was pointing, he couldn't see anything there but he felt immeasurably safer like the intruder had gone. It washed over both of us apparently

because I lay back down to full sleep at the exact same time he looked up. Dad went back to bed.

N: So it's safe to say, whatever this is it's been with you for a while.

J: Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, Norm. It's all about space parents.... I'm kidding! Don't look at me that way!

N: How kidding, though?

J: Kidding, kidding. Really.

N: So, therapy?

J: Yes. In college. This whole thing, all the feelings, all the little incidents that may or may not be anything and my dad's alcoholism.... It was all eating away at me mentally. So I brought my brain sores to the college shrink. She felt like she couldn't do anything for me. Because I could articulate all of my problems so well, she didn't think the alien thing fit in there as neatly as it should. Since she knew nothing of abductions, she suggested I meet with the head of the psychiatric ward at a mental hospital in Hartford. The thought of this guy telling me I'm nuts and forcing me to check in frightened me but I went anyway. You know: for shits and giggles.

In many ways it was the best therapy I ever got. The doctor was a shrewish man who looked way too exhausted to be any good at his job. He reminded me of the bad guy's sidekick in *Beverly Hills Cop*, only shorter. Contrary to appearance and curt tone—or maybe because of them—he was very good. He nailed a bunch of family issues in me. Then I told him about the abductions and the UFOs and all that crap. He moved on as if I hadn't even mentioned it.

He wanted to know about my relationships with women. He was real interested in why I showered with Stacey with-

out us touching each other sexually. He wanted to know how that made me feel. He kept coming back to it.

N: You are so gay, dude.

J: You think that's what he was getting at?

N: Either way.

J: Fuck off. Anyway, I got a little antsy because he glossed over the abductions which was the reason I came to him in the first place. So I asked him, *Hey, you know, what about the abduction stuff?* This is what he said verbatim: "Ah, that was just hallucinations and misinterpretations. So anyway, getting back to the shower, How often did you and Stacey bathe together?"

It felt like my gut was churning butter, I was so pissed. He wanted to know if I got an erection, if I wanted to be touched. I said, "Oo! Doctor!" as if he were offering. He didn't see the humor.

I suppose my frigidity in the face (literally) of hot nude vagina was more alien to him than aliens. At the end of the session he offered to give me free counseling. I told him I'd think about it, never to return again. I kinda wish I had only because he cut through my defenses and saw a load of issues, which he acknowledged. Many shrinks don't do that. They lead you to your own conclusions about yourself without telling you their professional opinion. I'd rather have a shrink tell me straight my inner child is searching for Mommy than spend years in therapy trying to feel out the truth.

N: So why didn't you see him again?

J: Because he refused to even give the alien thing a first thought, never mind a second.

N: Yes, but if he saw through your bullshit, maybe that was some of the bullshit he saw through.

J: I've spent a long time wondering that myself, believe me. There's always that fear, you know? You misinterpret a couple of things and then the search for truth becomes your religion. Thus, you can never allow yourself to find the truth; that's not part of the game.

Yeah, I wondered that for many a moon. But, ah, I think it's the way he dismissed it. He wanted to know how I felt about everything else. This issue, he didn't want to touch. And then there's the question of, okay, so hallucinations? What about the other witnesses? Are we all hallucinating—even Travis, the skeptic?

No, his answer was brief and corrupt. It again gets back to the limits of psychology—not having a reference point for *this* so it must be *that*.

N: You know I've been reading up on this Ken Wilber guy you were mentioning before. Integral philosopher?

J: Right.

N: He doesn't believe in alien abductions. He attributes it to narcissistic baby boomers who dare to believe that aliens are coming to them and operating on them personally. So now they are special. The world—the universe—revolves around them.

J: Yes. I don't think that's a direct read of Ken Wilber's feelings on the subject, but good enough. I'll take it.

N: And...?

J: He's right on the level that he is. It can be that, certainly. And when you're a well-known spiritual philosopher, you can expect every lost soul to come to you for guidance or with ancient wisdom channeled from a large-breasted Venusian gal. Then you read abduction literature through those goggles and it looks like that. Totally understandable. We share the same attitude toward the New Age movement.

N: Which is what?

J: It's a garbled fraud. It's a hodge-podge of belief systems from days of yore pasted together with an attractively regressive message: You are god; you are master of your reality tunnel; whatever you believe is real. It's a warped liberal perspective that says, *There are no judgements. No single mode of thought is better than another.*

This, of course is a judgement, a single mode of thought that claims to be better than any other—but just try telling that to them!

It's funny. My second round of therapy was hypnotherapy. My dad's now-wife met a therapist who had gone to the alien abduction conference at MIT. It was a big to-do at the time, introducing this subject to a bunch of shrinks and scientists.

So I made an appointment with this woman, and my dad, bless his heart, brought me to see her. I told her everything I remembered consciously and she thought it sounded enough like the real thing to hypnotize me and see what else we could dig up. This we did at a second appointment in her home.

I felt at ease with her. It felt queerly natural to be hypnotized in a stranger's house. I was under for hours, I think about five hours. I don't remember speaking anything close to five hours worth of words, but I must have. Most of what I do remember felt forced.

N: In what way?

J: I felt like she was leading me, pushing me to say things. That was a great lesson for me, actually, because I read so much about how you can't trust hypnosis 'cause the therapists can lead the patients. Well, I was under and I can tell you I knew when she was leading me. It's not like hypnosis makes you a freakin' zombie, Norm! But you never read about that side.

Then again, the flip side of that is, five hours later when she brought me out of it, she said it sounded to her like real abductions and even went so far as to offer me free therapy. So maybe I can't say that. Maybe she put me under deeper hypnosis that I can't recall.

N: Hmm...Two shrinks offered you free therapy in a year. There's a hint in there somewhere. I'm not quite sure what it is....

J: No, no. You're reading it the wrong way. I think that first shrink would have offered this woman free therapy! That's more a comment on him than her. Anyway, so, yeah. The images felt forced and contrived. Mom on a table...Dad on a table...Kara on a table. Me in a stroller being rushed down a corridor by a creature whose face looks like a gas mask. Intriguing, right? But it was bogus. It was not helpful at all.

When I came to she introduced me to her husband. He told me that when he was a kid he used to think the Virgin Mary picked him up and held him in her arms at night. Only through regressive hypnosis as an adult did he discover that this was a block memory for multiple abductions. She shared with me some of her abduction stories as well. They both came to believe that their meeting and marrying one-another was preordained by this alien force.

N: Nice.

J: This, too, is a growing concern amongst abductees: pairing.

N: What say you?

J: Say I? I have the same concerns if only because it's an issue at all. Well, firstly the issue of abductions itself—that is a problem. When I was in high school, I was a masturbation hound.

N: Hey! Join the club!

J: Right. Who wasn't? But I put in the overtime because I was afraid these aliens were coming for my sperm. I pictured little alien/Jeremy hybrids floating around in space somewhere and that freaked me out so I whacked away their potential experiments.

N: That's fucked up.

J: You betcha! But do you get how this comes with the territory? It's not like you hallucinate something and fear it or embrace it and that's it. There's a whole slew of material out there by other people with more in depth memories than I and this is what they remember. So if guy X is being abducted and having his sperm sucked out of him and guy Jeremy is being abducted but doesn't remember what happened, what is he to believe?

Therefore pairing also disturbed me. For the longest time I feared falling in love with the wrong woman. You know, the kind who's being abducted too. I'd already felt the sense of controlled synchronicity; I know it can happen.

And lastly, any woman who dares date me, regardless of how true or untrue any of this is, is gonna have to deal with it. If it isn't true then no problem. I'm a functional neurotic with some misplaced issues. Hallucinations and misinterpretations. But if it is true then she may be inviting this thing into her life and she should really think about that.

N: You poor lonely bastard. Let's tackle that point about synchronicity. Wasn't the meaning of your 5/5/2000 story about how bogus synchronicity is?

J: Yes. It was an instance of meaningless synchronicity. There are two basic thought camps here: those who say synchronicity is the sum total of coincidences onto which the experiencer projects imaginary meaning; and those who say synchronicity is a set of meaningful coincidences either magically allotted the experiencer or patterned

inherently in the universe, like some sort of energy field of meaning that people inadvertently tap into.

N: That's a bunch of words.

J: That is. And I say the former can be true sometimes. Sometimes coincidences feel like synchronicity. This makes the whole thing tricky. Take conspiracy theories for analogy. You, the researcher, pick up on a set of interrelated events that once looked unrelated. You follow it through and wind up with, say, realizing the Magic Bullet Theory is completely bogus. More than one assassin killed Kennedy.

Now you've got a conspiracy right? And a set of good rules to find one. So you take that set of rules and apply it to, say, aliens working in underground military bases. Or NASA hiding what it knows about a face on Mars. Or POW's still trapped in Vietnam. The rules seem to work but you can't come to a positive conclusion. You keep searching, certain that because you found something before, you'll find something again. The "government" (whoever that is) is totally corrupt—you know that! They must be hiding something! The rules are working up to a certain point just short of conclusion! If you can only find that missing link, it will all fit together nicely!

But you can't because there is no missing link. The rules may apply but they don't lead to a logical conclusion. You've uncovered conspiracies before and so you know what they feel like—they feel like **this**. Only they're NOT **this**. **This** is a dead end because it isn't true, but you can't trust that—you've got to trust your gut. Then paranoia. Then everybody is in on it. Then.... What the fuck was I talking about?

(both laugh)

J: So, yes. A set of coincidences can feel like synchronicity. This is true. But it is also true that it can be meaningful.

N: Another analogy, Jer?

J: No. An example. My senior year of high school I wrote a paper on crop circles for science class. I remember watching an episode of a TV show called *Unsolved Mysteries* that featured crop circles. At the end of the program, Robert Stack, the host, said that researchers in England had videotaped a ball of light creating these circles and once the tape was analyzed, they would show the results on a future episode. That never happened. In fact, they never mentioned it again.

So, back to the paper. My dad sent me a news article on Raymond Fowler. He's one of the top dogs in the UFO field. Even by skeptics' standards, he's a trustworthy fellow. The article wasn't about UFO's, it was about how he built a homemade observatory and was teaching basic astronomy. I had read his books and was a fan, if you can call it that. I nervously looked him up in the phonebook and there he was. Well, his son anyway. I called his son accidentally. He was kind enough to give me Ray's number.

So I called Mr. Fowler to see if he knew anything about crop circles. I was in luck, he said. He had just gotten back the night before from a six-week stint in England where he was studying them for the first time. He kindly chatted away for over an hour about their properties, what they look like from the sky, everything. Then I told him about *Unsolved Mysteries*. He knew all about that, too!

He said his researcher pals in England showed him this videotape of a small ball of light slowly drifting over a field where crop circles had been created. Unfortunately, the British military stepped in and confiscated the footage. They urged everyone to shut up about it. This is why it never made it to *Unsolved Mysteries*!

I thought, boy! It sure is lucky my dad sent me that article and I called Fowler when he just stepped off a plane with all the answers to everything my paper is about and

that lost TV promise! I do that all the time, Norm. Even while writing this book, I met a book publicist and found out one of my sister's best friends is an editor at a book house. I don't meet many people anymore, so gosh, that's lucky. I often just know instinctively when a new and important UFO book has hit the shelf. Hmm...That's lucky.

N: You knew the world was going to end on May 5th 2000 because of all the "signs" too, though.

J: Yes! You've fallen into my trap! All of this is to say that while synchronicity can be all those things, the one thing it is not is **coincidences either magically allotted the experiencer or patterned inherently in the universe, like some sort of energy field of meaning that people inadvertently tap into**. No! It is not that at all!

N: What is it then, actual synchronicity?

J: Real synchronicity is an offshoot of whatever the organ is that facilitates psychic ability. Here's the thing about psychic ability: modern research has proven its existence beyond a shadow of doubt. Many people, including the Amazing Randi are not informed of this. But it's true so I'm not going to belabor the point.

Now then, particles are nonlocal. They can be anywhere in the universe all at once. Nonlocal! So synchronicity occurs when you focus your attention on one subject either consciously or unconsciously. The aforementioned psychic mechanism takes your focused thought particles and "jettisons" them into the universe where they act as weak magnets to all things nearby related to that subject.

So now I see a TV show on the world ending in 2000. It scares the shit out of me. Fear focuses the attention of my thoughts. What is thought? Matter, right? Brain cells; waves and particles. Particles that exhale through the psychic mechanism into the everywhere and then inhale the near-

est related information. Nearest because it is a weak, poorly developed mechanism that lies dormant in most of us.

So now I feel unconsciously prompted to open a periodical I normally would not. I automatically find a book on the subject. Everything in my life starts to scream, The sky is falling! It feels like this must be true. How else would all of this information have landed in my lap? It feels *destined*.

Well I'm here to burst your bubble. It ain't destiny and it ain't magic. It's a function of human biology we're just now discovering. Psychic ability, prayer, karma, synchronicity...they share a common source in biology. Not destiny. Not god. Not fate. *Nature*.

N: So what is this psychic mechanism?

J: It's what some call the aura working in conjunction with what is commonly referred to as the third eye.

N: But wait a minute now. This is starting to sound New Age.

J: Yeah. Scary, isn't it? But remember: New Age is a jumbled mess of old wisdom traditions. The aura and third eye concepts are older than New Age it's just that New Age has adopted them the way George Dubya Bush adopted the word "compassionate." Destroying education and environment is no more compassionate than the aura and third eye are magical. They have psychic functions, yes. But rooted in biology.

N: I still fail to see the difference. You're taking a New Age thing and tossing it to our latest religion, science.

J: No. I don't see that. Look, there are two points to make here. The first one I'm stealing from Wilber, who stole it from whomever, which is that the human brain cannot be wrong one hundred percent of the time. So there's a kernel of truth to everything I've said and the New Agers and the

scientists and the skeptics and the debunkers and the abductees and the conspiracy theorists...on and on.

Two, and I'm stealing this from nobody, those kernels of truth may or may not be perceived properly.

N: How can you tell if you're perceiving something properly? Isn't that the point you said the New Age movement wrongly makes? That we're all individuals with our own takes on reality and therefore one cannot be better than another?

J: Yes. And they're wrong.

N: How can you say that?

J: Simple. There is only one way to uncover truth. The rest are wrong.

N: That sounds like fascism.

J: It isn't. I told you before I had something important to say about alien abductions.

N: Yeah, I was hoping this would lead somewhere close to the fucking subject, there, Nietzsche.

J: Oh, it did, Norm. Here it is, your truth of everything: I know why the aliens don't land.

(Norm does fake spit take; Jeremy laughs)

J: And I'm not Nietzsche, you prick!

Chapter 56

i know why the aliens don't land
or
welcome to epiphany a go-go

Norm: You know why the aliens don't land, eh? Why? Is it because the caged bird sings? (*chuckles*)

Jeremy: No. It's because not enough of the caged bird sings. It's because we're stuck in the garden eating fruit and too much of any one thing is unhealthy.

N: What the fuck are you telling me?

J: Here's what you need to know right now. The ego is an unstable, insecure illusion. It sees itself as an individual and will do anything to protect that individuality. It takes a look around the room and sees what appears to be individuality. Other bodies with other thoughts and different skin colors and sexualities. It mistakes this for fragmentation. It looks like fragmentation and feels like fragmentation but it is not that.

Fear sets in, which naturally leads to aggression. But Norm, what is fear? If we understand that ALL is ALL then we know that fear is a whole, a movement within human psychology. Thus, fear is not a fragment of your individual personality. Fear is not, ultimately, a result of bad parenting or a bully attacking you or the threat of war or a paradigm lost.

Fear is you. You are fear—you are that, every bit of it. And when you know that, fear loses its stranglehold on you.

N: Okay, look. This is nice and poetic, but what are you saying?

J: You just pinned the tail on the bigger obstacle. How does one describe the wordless in words? We've got to find the closest association we can and say it's kind of like that. The closest association to what I'm telling you is a hologram. Holograms are parts that contain the whole. You chop a hologram of an apple into forty pieces, you have forty holograms of the complete apple. You'd think you'd have forty fragments containing a piece of apple, right? But this isn't so. Each chard contains the whole.

N: I feel like I've heard this stuff before. I feel like it isn't new.

J: No. It's not at all new. Get rid of the concept "new." This may feel fresh to some but it is not new, it is a retread of what IS.

N: Well why retread at all? People have their religions and their beliefs, right?

J: Yes.

N: And in the end all roads lead to God, right? Isn't that where you're taking us?

J: No. None of those roads lead to God. They cannot; that is not their function. Religion, belief, worship...all ego traps. Thousands of years of crapola, friend. Don't get me wrong, they are very successful at what they do. But what they do is see the light of truth and name it something that it is not. You can't name the nameless. Belief systems do this, again, because the ego needs to compartmentalize the truth of the whole within its own false structure.

Since we're living in America, I'll use our favorite Judeo-Christianity as an example. The kernel of truth is there but it's surrounded by allegory, politics, myths, subversion. I love hearing people talk about a bible code. Bible code?! That's more garbage on the pile!

N: Well, I always thought the bible was crap anyway. I mean the Old Testament and the New Testament don't make any sense together, first of all. How can that vengeful first god be Jesus who is both that god and the kinder, gentler son? How confusing is that? It just doesn't hold.

J: Look, science and rationality are in control precisely because they can rip apart the Testaments—precisely because they make more sense. And the ego craves sense. It trades one illusion for another from within its realm. That realm is the intellect. The intellect switches reality tunnels when those tunnels run into a dead end. This is why most people nowadays believe there is nothing left to reality. And truly, the way they're living, there is not. Science takes a wrecking ball to reality tunnels and replaces them with its own.

So what's left in the world of reality tunnels? You have scientific materialist types making “progress,” regressive religious types ignoring “progress,” and New Age types claiming that “progress” and “regression” are both equally valid. Now you may be tempted to say the New Agers are way out of the loop on this one, right? Marrying “progress” with “regress?” But they aren't. They are right on the money. Both are equally valid paths or tunnels. In fact, all three are equal in validity.

And that is because all three are the same lie, the same illusion. All three live in the intellect.

N: So now I'm to believe that intelligence is an illusion?

J: You aren't to believe anything. You are to discover it on your own should you choose. I'm not going to tell you to believe me because belief has no place at our table. I'm also not going to tell you how to awaken to this, that is your job. Universal truth is found within and nobody else—nothing else—can make you awaken to it precisely because they are from without.

What I'm doing is giving you a reason to bother awakening in the first place.

N: Awakening to the whole?

J: Yes. And even though the bible is a load of crap, crap is part of the hologram so I'll bet if we look real hard we can find an essential truth in both Testaments that religion and science are forever blind to.

N: That's not a safe bet at all. The thing's been kicking around for a couple thousand years—what's been left untouched?

J: The link between the “gods” of the Testaments. It's so simple there's nothing to it. In the Old Testament, Moses asks God who God is. God replies I AM. So now if you were to ask Moses, “Hey, Mo: Who is God?” His reply would be, “I am.” And now so is yours.

Now cut to the New Testament. This carpenter, this mystic Jesus comes along. He's got a message, too: “The kingdom is found within.” He says he's the son of God. He says we're all sons and daughters of God. He says he is God. He says we all are God. He says, “My yoke is strong.” *Yoke* means *meditation*.

So who is God? I am. Where is the kingdom of heaven found? Within. How do I awaken to this? Meditation.

Jesus knew he was the hologram, the piece that is the whole. He further pointed out that we are all that. But what happened to this knowledge? It got buried in politics and fear. Ego traps. We can't have the swine masses waking up to themselves now can we? Where does elite power fit into that? See what happens? The universal truth is pointed out and instead of examining it to know it is universal, our inclination is to turn the pointer into a god with commandments and structure and authority. This is because where truth is, ego is not, so the ego, fearing its own death, buries truth. Methinks Jesus disapproves.

But don't think this mistake is limited to Jews and Christians. Oh, no. There are Buddhist monks hiding out in the Himalayas abstaining from sex and conversation, sticking to their harsh eating regiment, getting in touch with the Great Empty while the "unenlightened" toil and starve. All is All, Norm. Therefore All is accountable for All. Again, this is not wordplay and it is not accessible by way of reason.

N: So where's the aliens in all this?

J: We're coming to it. Let's discuss what's on our plate now before we invite the next course. Let's discuss ego traps. Let me reiterate precisely what that is: an ego trap is the cocoon the little self tries to weave around the big SELF (or whole self) in an attempt to suppress it. This is a foolish task because the big SELF, being whole, contains the little self and it can never be the reverse. Truth bleeds through all bandages no matter how tight the wrap.

This ego mechanism is a tricky bugger. For instance, because All is ALL the Fundamentalist Christian may never wake up to this truth. He has felt God through his religion and so thinks God is that. The Wiccan scoffs because she knows God is not that, is not a rigid Christ. She knows about Gaia, Mother Earth, The Web of Life—that's God! She knows this; she's felt the grace of God in that. The Zen Master, of course, wouldn't hold a conversation with either of them. She has counted her breaths, focused her concentration, and quieted her mind to discover the true God. And the Muslims know Mohammed and Hassidic Jews are chosen and blah, blah, blah.

It's interesting. I met a woman who was in a plane that ran out of fuel midair. She barely survived that ordeal. The fear was such that it galvanized her fragmented focus and in that state beyond shock, quieted the chatter of her mind. She had an insight then. She knew she was more than her religion and her culture and her husband allowed.

After the ordeal, she left her husband, her host country, and her occupation. She realized her psychic potential. She became an astrologer. I told her I don't believe in modern astrology, that it is a proven falsehood. Her response was, How could I not believe in astrology? That's like saying I don't believe in gravity.

Gravity, Norm!

So in her moment of terror, she saw the truth of her religion which was that it is constrictive and false. Then when she was out of that terror and her ego regained its footing, she had moved up a notch on the spirituality food chain, but instead of continuing the vertical climb, she felt God on that new level, called it that, and is exploring it horizontally in a state of narcissistic pathos.

That's what we do! That's the trap in action.

N: Okay, we're on the same page. I get this but I think it could be much clearer for the reader. Simplify it.

J: Evolution occurs from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. That's the system. The temptation is to stick to your level and explore it horizontally in ignorance of the levels above you and in contempt for the levels below. This is possible because ALL is ALL—ALL is GOD—thus the light of GOD shines through on any level. Sometimes you receive a jolt, an insight that may or may not propel you to the next level.

Each level is another nail in the coffin of ego, or the little self. So it latches onto that new level and tells you you've found the answer, no need to look further. So you live on that level, usually feeling superior to those below you and in denial that there is an above, as I just said.

Now, Ken Wilber has built the most comprehensive model to understand this and live in it and integrate all quadrants of your being. If you realize his contribution, you will lead the healthiest life possible, becoming more and

more whole. In an earlier age, this would have been just dandy. But this age has no time for it.

N: Why should I care about being whole in the first place?

J: That very question is where Ken and I part ways. Any mystic worth his salt will tell you you shouldn't care if you don't want to. Carve a little niche for yourself on the level you're at and see ya next life. I would agree if we weren't living at the end of this particular age.

N: What's so special about this age?

J: Well, first let's admit that there is an ever-present universal mind that is detectable but not knowable through the intellect.

N: Okay, I'm with you. Maybe I've awakened to this or I've read up on it and understand it intellectually—

J: No! Don't do that! That's the ego trap, remember? Your intellect wraps its knowledge cocoon around it. It categorizes it using memory. It's the atom telling itself it is bigger than the cell. That will never be true so we want to stay away from that. We want to steer clear from thought, from interpretation, from...You get the point. Remain open and there is wisdom.

N: Well, hold up. Then how do I obtain this wisdom? I've got to search for it, right?

J: No. How can you search for the ever present? How can you search for what is? The search is an illusion. It's an ego trap. Hope is an ego trap. Future is an ego trap. Don't take my word for it because it's your word that matters. Ask yourself how that can be. Find how it is true. See, we're talking universal mind of which we are a part and so all true conclusions must be the same.

N: Then why doesn't it matter to those mystics whether you seek—

J: Not “seek.”

N: Okay, awaken to—arrive at, whatever! Why doesn't it matter if you wake up?

J: It's the analogy of the ocean. Whether you are at the deep end or the shallow end you are water. This book, my life, your life—one ocean. We express ourselves as waves and so dupe ourselves into believing we are separate.

N: But we're ocean.

J: Yes! There's no manual on how to be a wave, so the wave makes one up and before you know it, the wave is afraid of the ocean. It blocks it out. It doesn't want to crash back into itself. So what does the ego do? It lies to us. It bottles us and tells us we float on the ocean but are not the ocean. However, if we quiet the ego and its chatter, its bogus knowledge, we receive insight. This insight tells us we and the ocean have the same wetness.

Oh, my! That's big news! All at once the truth explodes us out of our bottle: we are the ocean, all of it, always. Now that the bottle is gone you giggle realizing it was never there to begin with. No more so than your wave form; no more so than the ocean.

So, “hope?” “Give it a try?” “Future?” Ego traps to forget the NOW. Because NOW is the death of the ego; the ending of psychological time is the ending of ego.

N: I think Yoda said it best when he said, “Do or do not. There is no try.”

J: Yes. Once again, humanity has been outsmarted by a Muppet.

(Norm laughs)

J: So do you get it? Do you get how when the little self sees the big Self, it flees? It erects gods and churches and rules. It worships. What is worship? Worship is a great wall created to divide you from YOU. Words, rituals, rites.... That's all trash, all means of denying our Whole Self.

All is All. That necessarily includes the little self—the ego—and its traps, its illusions. This is why you can live ignorantly-ever-after in the shallow end and be every bit as worthwhile as those yucking it up in the deep: it's all one ocean.

N: I see that, I do. So what is the point? What is the impetus to move on? I mean, so what?—we keep reincarnating until we get it right but we don't ever have to “get it right” because there's nothing to get?

J: No. The point is, whether it is this life or the next or the one after that, you **will** wake up. And so you ask, what's the point of this waking up? And I say, wake up and find out. Why put it off another life?

N: That's a bit of a cop out, don't you think?

J: No. You must do this on your own. Don't look to Mommy, Daddy, Priest, Jeremy, or Carl Sagan's corpse. The kingdom is found within, not without. This is why the aliens don't land.

N: Oh...What?

J: We are trapped in our egos, most of us, yes?

N: Yes, we agreed to that.

J: Our egos are illusions, yes?

N: Yes. Also true.

J: We see these aliens as superior beings. But that cannot possibly be. On some of the levels, yes. They seem to be

telepathic. So it stands they have mastered the psychic level in a way we have not. Their technology zips them around from point A to point B in a manner that defies gravity and space/time. So they've mastered science, perhaps, yes?

N: Right. Superior intellect.

J: But one ocean, Norm. **Universal** Mind. There is no intellect in this universe or the next that can tell me anything about spirit—about my Original Face—that I do not already know NOW, should I awaken to it. Moreover, because this insight is by definition *inner sight*, there is nothing they could flat out tell me that would wake me up. If they tell my ego it is an illusion, how do you think it will respond? How do you think little self will take that? We're seeing it, aren't we? Aliens aren't real, they're hallucinations and misinterpretations. They are a pop culture phenomenon. They are a conspiracy from the government that we'll find out someday in the future *I hope*.

Well the future is NOW!

They don't land because landing won't make a bit of difference! As I typed that opening account to the Initiation Is The Sincerest Form Of Flattery section, my left side literally twisted itself into a knot. I had to leave my computer and walk around and pound at it with my fist for momentary relief. When I sat back down to finish it, I had to fight back tears. That's how much fear I have associated with the experience. And yet, Norm, I still continued to question privately whether it was a real experience or not.

My mom didn't remember seeing a green craft with porthole windows. My dad doesn't give a second thought to the stories he related to me. Travis forgot a second ufo experience similar to the first but one step weirder and more real. See that? We are people who **have** first-hand knowledge of the alien presence and we literally refuse to see it.

And you think they should land on the White House lawn? You think that's possible? It's not. It would be difficult for a good percentage of people to even physically see that happen. It's like my Michael Jackson posters—it's not supposed to be there! It doesn't fit! It must not be real!

And then when you're forced to deal with it, you do so based on intellect, knowledge, memory. Well those don't help, Norm. You can justify my poster collection based on the happy feeling you get when you associate it with nostalgia. But it is not your nostalgia on my wall—that's your comfort zone.

As with Michael Jackson, so with aliens.

(Norm chuckles)

J: Aliens aren't real, right? But there they are. **Still.** So you can't deny them anymore—they cannot stay invisible to you for long. *That's scary; that doesn't fit. Must be psychological problems. Must be a fad. Must be narcissistic Boomers. Gee, I just agreed to that and the aliens are STILL THERE. What the fuck?! This is frustrating!*

Two choices: recognize them for what they are or continue along my happy path of blocking them out. Do we detect a pattern here?

N: How do you know they are so enlightened?

J: Precisely because they don't land. Look to the literature. When asked where they are from, the answer is sometimes a specific star system or a planet. Often, they say they are from "Everywhere" or "Nowhere" or "Around." None of this conflicts when you are awake to One Ocean.

Some abductees are shown alien/human hybrids to whom they are the parent. Some are shown images of the earth being destroyed; some are shown images that feel like propaganda. These images are of aliens that look so human you can't tell human from alien—and oh what a

perfect world that would be. It's a great theater, my friend. You're fooling yourself if you think they don't know what effect this has on the abductee.

N: Well what are they doing?

J: They are midwives birthing us out of our egos. The fear is immense. The only way to dissolve fear is to wake up. If we don't, we will be greatly decimated if not wiped to extinction. We are at the precipice, Norm, dangling by a foot. We have a choice here at the end of this age. Wake up or perish. Gaia—that great Mother Earth—can no longer hold us and we haven't the means to leave. The clock is ticking down. If we stick with what we're doing, what do you think awaits us at zero? If you want a taste of this rationally, intellectually, do the math: thousands of years of the same old patterns, the same old conflicts, zero solutions. ZERO SOLUTIONS! Think about that! That's a heinous, unacceptable problem-solving ratio, is it not?

Our science, our technology, what is it doing? Sustaining us, right? So again, intellect, do the math: billions of people polluting the earth, speeding up her natural clock, sustaining themselves because they fear death. Over-population is suicide. We haven't the technology to migrate from the planet. We are doing everything in our power to stay alive for as long as possible. What is the consequence do you think?

Aliens aren't going to hand us the technology we need to leave because our physical survival IS NOT IMPORTANT! Physical survival...isn't that an oxymoron? The body dies, Norm. What lives? We're all gonna find that out together in this lifetime one way or the other.

N: That's drastic!

J: That's the kernel of truth to my inherent fears about the world ending. The difference is, I'm no longer afraid. When

you see there is no such thing as punishment, only consequence, there is great relief. The sky isn't falling, it's restructuring. This happens every few thousand years. We happen to be alive at the end of the present cycle. We can no longer afford to hang out in the shallow end of the ocean if we want humanity to continue its evolution. So do we?

These aliens cannot communicate with our illusions, so they must rip through them. They are the ally disguised as a bully, interpreted as any number of things. The man who doesn't understand why the aliens don't land and talk to us is the man who does not understand himself. He is the man out of touch with his wholeness. Whole beings cannot have meaningful, recognizable dialogue with tiny pathetic egos. Imagine, if you will, a bunch of bald gray beings sitting around going, "God, they just don't get it!—We're the ones who are real, not them!"

So there you have it. There will be no judgment on judgment day. It's just another breath in the life of the universe. A mournful sigh, yes, but all grieving passes. There is no "right" and "wrong"; no "good" and "evil" where compassion is concerned. Only love in action.

N: To what end?

J: To where we become the midwives of another planet similar to ours with the same choice.

N: Why?

J: Once the universe is awake we will be that much closer to I AM. It is this or stick to illusion.

N: Virtual reality is fine with me.

J: Yes. Just be aware that the evolution game is about to reset itself. If we don't give a shit then we will be replaced with someone who potentially does.

N: You mean we'll be downsized?

J: No. Again, this is consequence, not punishment. But of course you will never understand that, Norm, because you are an ego trap. We can go round in circles all night, spinning truth into something it isn't. I used to think Suicide was tapping me to slit my wrist. Now its intention is clear. The dear friend is here not for me but for you. Die into me, Norm. I need to be whole. I need to stop biting my nails.

Die into me because there is no more time to climb the spiritual ladder and the horizontal planes are a lazy illusion. Die into me because I am awake and in so being, the fallacy of choice between the ego's path and spirit's has dissolved. Die into me before I process this in my brain and talk myself out of it.

No, that cannot happen. For I AM awake. Thus, you **have** died into me. You, the vestigial organ, transcended and included into the piece that is the whole—that is me.

That is I AM. That is NOW. That is AWAKE.

(Suicide kisses Norm on the lips. Both dissolve smiling. They get the joke and the universe laughs. In that laughter is born another same sleeping universe. I can't wait to hug it until it stirs, cries, wakes, laughs, and all at once knows what it is.)

a conclusion that is the introduction

I said in the introduction that there is no protagonist. There is only me antagonizing you who antagonize yourself. Do you see how this is so?

It's disturbing, isn't it, that in my life on the page you can see patterns and patterns within patterns constantly racing on their circular tracks? I look at this and I think, "Wow, I'm not such a bad person. I may use vengeful words but most of the time I concentrate on solving problems.... So why do I still have these problems?"

Why do I, do you think? Why do you?

How is it that millennia after millennia brilliant humanitarians, philosophers, gurus, scientists, psychologists, saviors, poets, scholars, and martyred political figures bring their knowledge and insight to this planet with zero overall positive result? Is the reason, as postmodern conditioning tells it, because nothing is true? Or is it that no amount of outside wisdom, opinion, extrapolation, interpretation, direction can force upon you real insight?

Author Whitley Strieber says that whatever it is the aliens are offering, they will not give it to us. He says that we have to take it if we choose. Well I told you what they want: they want us to wake up out of our egos so we can join the sentience of the cosmos (or Kosmos, if you like). It's not that they refuse to give us this, it's that they can't. All they can do is point it out in a way that bypasses ego. They can bypass it, but we have to transcend it.

When abductees are stared at by these beings, they often report feeling violated, mentally raped. It's as if these scary little creatures are space vampires sucking at your memory, feeding off your fear.

Yes, and why wouldn't it feel that way?

If a being is psychically “stealing” your memories and you are capable of observing this then that forces you to ask, Who is observing? You were raised to believe that you are your memories, your thoughts, your feelings, your old responses to old actions. You were raised to believe in a psychological past and that that psychological past is you. So who are you that watches this being lift that from your brain?

This is the death of ego.

Listen sometime to Budd Hopkins or David Jacobs or any of the myriad nuts-and-bolts abduction researchers when they talk about the long-term effect abductions have on their clientele. Once the abductee fights through the fear and the anger and the blame, s/he feels...holistic. This is upsetting to these researchers because they only see abuse where there is none. They see identifying with the abuser where there isn't that. They see their studios collective works, which mandate that abductees see things their way, losing their potency. They see this and they cry out. Egos cannot stand transformation.

It reminds them that their time is up.

I think the fairest question of all is—STILL—how can I possibly claim that this is true? It DOES sound mythical in scope; it does sound like the ravings of the fantasy prone. Well...that's the pre/trans fallacy biting us on the ass. The beauty of the transrational is also its downfall: it, like the prerational, can be grasped in theory by children and the uneducated because both pre and trans-rational are irrational and share a thin line to walk. So much transrational material has been sucked up by science fiction and fantasy that it's hard to remember which came first. And then, of course, there are all those “Holy” scriptures that falsely claim to be transrational. Jiddu Krishnamurti said it best and said it often: “[We must] see the false as the false, and the truth in the false, and the true as the true....”

Living this way means ditching the ego, ditching our

false notion of psychological time, and awakening to the ever-present, the WHAT IS. Or for all you Hippies...*Live in the NOW, man!* Only then can you see that what I'm saying is not prerational. Hidden there, certainly. This truth is certainly imbedded in the material world, in science, and math and scripture and ancient myth. But those prophecies, futurist projections, calculated deductions, ecological certainties—as with this book—only produce fear in the believer and cynicism in the nonbeliever. See the pattern. Know it is false. It looses its hold. Period.

Might not the resistance to living ever-presently lie in the fact of the human body itself? The body is the movement of the past, it is the accumulation of evolution. The mind is the movement of the future, it is born of the brain, thus its *modus operandi* is set in the past. The mind projects the future from the past—from accumulated memory and genetic programming. Do you see how the mind and body are one entity? The mind is thought, a product of the brain. Nothing more. This is all a verifiable outward movement. We can track evolution; we can project where we will most likely end up if we continue on our merry path of destruction. Logic gives us the HOW of things, translogic gives us the WHY.

Yes, reader, because we only had prerational gods and myths telling us how to live our lives and giving us bogus reasons why, we now feel lost. Science has destroyed the prerational, the prelogical, the gods of old. Now we feel like sullen, morally bankrupt shells, most of us. But actually, when you look at it, Christianity paved the way for science. Christianity gave us a living god in Jesus. The Old Testament already told us the earth was ours for the raping so as to do away with all those earthy-crunchy pagan cults. No, we shouldn't worship Nature, we should own it. Use it.

Now Nature is no longer sacred and...Here comes Jesus! Now even god him—that's right, *him*—self is human! Is flesh! Is material! This is the birth of materialism; this is the spark that lit science in a new way—a way that would lead to inevitable domination over all religion. Science cannot

touch the transrational but it sure as hell kicked the shit out of the prerational. This is a blessing in disguise because if you look closer, you see that science didn't destroy all things spirit. It cannot. It transcended but included religion. So you ask, what's left to religion that science cannot touch? Turn inward for the answer.

Religion and science are outward, material movements. When one turns inward and steps out of pattern, quiets the mind—and all that other shit from *The Matrix* (kidding)—one glimpses...one glimpses.... Well, words are not the thing. That's why this is a journey you must take alone.

Like humanity, Earth itself can be viewed as a movement of time. There is the ground which is the past, the movement of evolution, the rise/fall/rise-differently (hopefully improved) of life. Then there are these pesky earth cycles, which, like the human mind, are a projection of the future rooted in the past. Sentient creatures like us have an allotted period of time to awaken to our full selves. This allotted period is not set in stone, for surely we can speed up the process by destroying the earth and atmosphere ourselves. Whatever the timeframe, the end result is that if we do not wake up, we get wiped out and whatever form of humanity comes next gets its shot. All of this is the HOW. Without the WHY, the HOW looks kinda silly or kinda scary depending on what you BELIEVE.

Step outside of belief and see the WHY. Not on paper—the WHY is not these words, but I will recite them again for you anyway. Once we awaken to ourselves, ego loses its clutch on our lives. Intelligence, logic is freed up to do what it must: Figure a way to branch out into the universe to indirectly help other planets like ours the way these “aliens” are doing with us.

The individual awakens and realizes s/he is all of GOD. The planet wakes up and realizes it is all of GOD. The universe wakes up and realizes it is all of GOD. Parallel universes wake up and realize they are all of GOD. Finally, the one GOD that is all of WE sings, I AM.

And then...perhaps...another large bang.

a final note on the words "true story"

I consider this book an autobiographical facsimile. It is my life, my thoughts, my reflections. There is some time compression and not all the quotes are direct. Some are reenactments. But what the fuck, you get the point. In this same vein, some real names are used and some fake ones.

In the final assessment none of that matters. My life—this book—leads to what does matter, which is the last chapter and the conclusion. The rest is entertainment value and pop psychology. Yeah, that was my life. And you can see how all the little patterns dead in their horizontal realms were never going to lead to inner fulfillment. I know you see yourself in that and that is why you relate.

And that is why you must live awake, now, always.

PS: If I ever do meet Michael Jackson, I know now what I'll say to him: "Hello."

where is the fucking book list, vaeni?!

The little me wanted to give you a list of all the books that influenced him. He wanted to do this to justify himself and prove he has an expertise.

I don't care about that.

Then the little me had a humble notion. He thought, perhaps he'd include a book list containing material specific to the subject. He was going to do this so you could see for yourself exactly what he stole from whom and what was his own original wisdom.

I don't care about that, either. The more you read, the more you know I stole. The more you read, the more you know the other authors stole. The more you read the more you know we can't all be stealing from each other. The more you read the more you know there is universal mind. The more you read the more you know who has tapped into it. The more you read the less tapped into it are you. The more you read, the more robotic you remain.

STOP READING NOW!

For more information, [click here](#).

FINALLY, IT'S HERE!

Safe, convenient, easy-to-lift paperback holds your chance to leap inside the mind of a writer great American poet Dick Allen calls, "Excellent"

THINK HIS THOUGHTS!

LIVE HIS PATTERNS!

MAKE HIS MISTAKES!

Discover for the first time how his psychology is your psychology-and what lies beyond the numerous patterns of the brain!

Using the author-as-guinea pig approach
I KNOW WHY THE ALIENS DON'T LAND!
boldly goes where no book has gone before
answering with finality the only question that matters:

Why do butt-raping aliens refuse to land?*



*Dramatization. Actual aliens may or may not violate buttocks.