

# The Fortune Cookie Writer

Robert W. Williams



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# The Fortune Cookie Writer

The first book in The Peter Durant Series.

Written by Robert W. Williams

A.k.a. Elliot Roothes

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# The Fortune Cookie Writer

By Robert W. Williams

## Chapter One

Peter Durant was a failed painter and clockmaker in a digital era in which people despised both of his art forms. Well, not his art forms, per se, but rather those products directly resulting from his personal efforts with regard to artistry. Those they despised.

Hung on the walls of his office, as they were, and although frequently seen by many, no one ever commented. His paintings left a lot to be desired.

Time and again Peter would try his hand at selling them, but no one ever paid his work a second glance.

His paintings were always of clocks. That is to say, he did portraits of clocks both old and new.

But Peter Durant also went a bit further, purchasing older clocks, antiques in many cases, which he would refinish. No one ever purchased any of those either.

There was also a period of time in which Peter would go so far as to create his own clocks, or at least construct the wooden shells that housed their inner workings, but no one ever wanted any of those.

“Why are you making clocks?” His wife would say to him during the unhappy years before she left. “No one buys clocks anymore. Who needs a clock when everything in the house comes with one built right in? Hell, from right where I am standing I can tell the time on the stove, the microwave, the Keurig, on my laptop and on my phone. Time is everywhere, Peter. You’re

obsessed with this stuff. You're... Ugh! And who, please tell me, wants to buy a painting of a clock to hang on their friggin' wall? That's lunacy, Peter, lunacy! You're wasting your time."

Shrugging off her comments, Peter would then return to his lair beneath the basement stairs of their modest home and tinker away the hours until long after she'd taken her Ambien.

*"What I know for certain is that one day I will find the secret,"* cocksure, he would say to himself, most often out loud, *"and I will devise a clock of such unfathomable beauty, with such delicate simplicity of style, that every other household will desire one."*

Lost in his own form of brokenness, Mr. Durant fostered a sense of quiet misery that only the dankness of a musty basement and desperate longing can conjure.

But he wasn't always quiet.

At work he would chastise everyone loudly and on social media forums he would often grandstand as champion of one rubbing against the grain.

“Keep this up and your children are all going to grow up to be fucktards! While you are laughing about your four year old taking ghetto, ducky faced selfies and developing a proficient knack for slang, her brain is slowly congealing into an irreparable worm ball of unemployable goo!”

Everyone would laugh at him, in secret, behind his back. Some thought he was nuts, while others found his antics most humorous. “Out of touch,” was the phrase many often applied, and he was, in myriad ways.

One could say he’d spent way too much time alone down there in the basement, breathing in paint fumes while dreaming of clocks.

Peter Durant wanted to be famous more than anything else he could think of, rich and famous, and he desperately wished that he could quit his job.

Peter loathed his job.

“Working for this company is like meeting your perfect mate only to discover that he or she has a very polite and well behaved child with an extra head growing out of its neck that isn’t polite and well behaved and constantly taunts you and asks for stuff. And you have to buy it ice cream. Both heads. So that’s two cones, every time.”

And two presents on their birthday.

And the extra head always wants to sit next to you.

During his frequent daydreams, Peter would imagine that one day he would get so famous that he would have to quit his job so that he might grace the covers of art magazines, dare he dream, even to one day to see a caricature of himself on the coveted cover of the fabled New Yorker, to be hailed as the incomparable master of clocks and all things clocklike, borne of canvas, acrylics and wood.

He wanted respect and admiration.

Due to a lack of sex on the home front, he craved a form of societal intimacy, but often shivered at the implausible thought that not only would his work, which was quite obviously way ahead of its time, not sell during his lifetime, but that no living soul would ever truly know his genius. His work, he feared, might go, as two friends had told him, unappreciated until long after he was dead.

Almost daily, he would take out these frustrations on Facebook:

“You are all ignorant fucktards! Have you not seen my posts and the photos of my work?”

“Edith Potstern got forty-seven likes for a picture of her cat playing with a crumpled piece of aluminum foil and not a single one for me?”

“None of you show any appreciation for the finer things in life! You trample one another in storefronts in a mad race to purchase video games, yet offer dull respect for my masterpieces?”

“You’re swine, all of you! I hope you get psoriasis of the genitals!”

“You are no better than some twisted bacterium with an over inflated perception of self-worth generating disaccharides on the bottom of a pond!”

“Dullards! Do you not understand good art when you see it?”

“Curfew breakers, all of you!”

No one could understand a fucking word he ever said.





## Chapter Two

Peter's wife, Cheryl, never understood a word he said either, and during the years of their marriage, paid little attention as he prattled on. She grew to care even less.

Eventually, she left him for three very large black men who collectively owned own a bakery. She then found herself living happily for the very first time in many years.

Beginning shortly thereafter, Peter would stalk her on Facebook using a fakebook profile he'd generated so he could slyly peer into the open windows of her newfound bliss, as well into the

lives of many others. He loved it. It was like a game to him... at times, a slight perversion.

Comparing his mastery of solicitous disguise to the inner workings of a very fine clock, he would relish in his peeping.

Tick tick tick... he would read her posts and everyone else's while secretly envying the generous dispensations of *likes*, *pokes* and *comments* each had received.

Yet, despite all his angered silliness, trickery, tomfoolery and awkward dabbling, Peter had a very concise plan. His plan was to compile all the information he could gather from each of their pages and ultimately use it against them. In his mind, he was akin to a spy.

He was James Bond down there in the basement. And he'd tell you so, too.

But here's the strangest thing of all; what no one else knew, what only Peter knew, was that one day, before the end, he would stand triumphant

before crowds of art lovers and reap the benefits that only a master may render.

How did he know this? The future told him so.

And yet, as the facts stood, he'd never sold a single painting.

There was his painting of the grey clock, the one he'd titled *Le Fordesman*. There was the red clock, the tarnished copper clock, the pink Cadillac, the bumper car classic, the grandfather Earle, the grandfather Slight, and his favorite of all; *Le Imperiale*, among all the many others.

He was a pistol in his dimly lit lair. He was also the life of the micey-mice party as well as all parties decorated with spiders and dust, yet deep inside he always knew that if given the chance, he could outwit the slinksters and outshine the many glossy, one-hit-wonders with all their laser sheen. Practicing his jokes on his old tool chest, he would exercise the art of keeping cool under pressure whilst imagining that everyone else was laughing right along.

Peter was an odd one, indeed.

However deeply wrapped within his convoluted feelings over people stuff and what it is that people do and how happy it makes them, he did manage to hit one nail right smack on the head, just one time.

It happened at a Christmas party at work.

That evening, someone was talking about a young girl who had recently hanged herself in her closet after suffering years of bullying.

Everyone was both saddened and perplexed.

Ho ho ho.

Upon hearing this terrible news, Peter had at first presumed the teen had been practicing autoerotic asphyxiation, as many purported suicides are often cover stories for embarrassingly fatal accidents. Then he changed his mind and uttered these most prophetic words, “It happened because the young lady and her classmates know no suffering.”

After saying this, he casually paused to sip from his drink. He could hardly abide the clear little holiday cup from which he was drinking, a brand often typified by splitting down the sides when squeezed.

“What?” Vera from accounting spoke first, feeling quite disgusted by his proclamation.

Edward from the mailroom was second to be roused, “She didn’t know suffering? How dare you? I think we can all say that she, her entire family, and all of her friends must have and are suffering plenty, respectfully, especially since it happened during the holidays. Just think of her young friends. How could you say such a thing?” Edward wanted to punch Peter right in his cotton-picking nose.

However, Edward had most dreadfully misconstrued Peter’s statement, a typical effect of drinking alcohol while being a twit.

Thankfully enough, the alcohol was having the opposite effect on Peter, a somewhat calming effect, so he merely sipped away while enjoying

the frustrations he'd unintentionally generated in the others, and then he took his time in replying to the mustachioed twit from the mailroom and his dimwitted accomplice.

Peter wondered if the two were secretly involved.

Then, acting somewhat astonished, but still in control, Peter spouted, "God forbid, Edward! That's not at all what I meant. What I am saying is, that children, and I have to include many parents in this statement as well, as most are no more than older and fatter children parading about with a misplaced sense of authority as a direct result of having someone small to boss about, know no suffering. It's as simple as that."

Once again, no one knew where the hell he was going with it.

He continued unabated, finding himself less than distracted by the expressions worn by each of his present counterparts, "Instant gratification is the culprit in this case. Children are given everything these days, and so, like houseplants

that are overly fed and watered and kept under residential lighting, they have no sturdy roots.”

“What the hell are you saying Peter? Please, spit it out in English.” Molly was ready to spit upon, then strike, stab and strangle the wretched fellow.

“Please” and he stopped once more to sip from his waning cocktail. He felt the ice cubes they were serving were unacceptably stale. “All I am saying is this: Kids these days have no chores and no responsibilities. This culture, this culture of *wrong*, which is led by the inept and the feeble, serves only to promote and to proliferate giggling and silliness, an endless profusion of smiling and other profitless and witless meanderings, as if life is some sort of jolly good play land and childhood a super sensitive period of time that no one should risk scratching or blemishing with work and responsibility.” He abruptly harrumphed.

Then, to his dismay, but not to his surprise, he saw that they could not follow, or would not, by choice.



Peter punctuated the reflection of his many perturbations with, “We’re making weak kids.”

Still, they could not understand.

“Can’t you see it? Nothing is real to them.” Peter felt his task was a hopeless one.

Internally, and ever so quietly so as not to arouse any suspicion, Peter began to entertain himself by pretending that everyone in attendance was actually a tourist from the future, each having paid a handsome price to spend a few precious hours in the far distant past in order to lavish in his presence. He smirked, once again wondering what naked women in the future would look like.

Then, as all stood dumbfounded and no one seemed capable of mustering up a rebuttal, Peter added, “Chop wood, carry water, people. Isn’t that what the Buddhists say is one of the many secrets to happiness, health and longevity? Well, if they never chop, chop, chop that wood or bucket up the proverbial or material water, how are they ever going to be sound?”

Edward let fly with a whistling fart then, but everyone chose to ignore his breach of social graces.

“Children torment one another more frequently and more insidiously these days because they have no empathy, and they have no empathy because they suffer no chores and no punishments. Each goes about willy-nilly, twittering away and texting, all the while never once enduring any consequences for their transgressions and lackadaisical ways. We’ve fallen prey to the damaged pop psychologists and over-privileged, town mouse housewives and the fairy clippers who cry on and on about how terrible a spanking is and all because they themselves are too delicate and hypersensitive to handle the sight of a child’s tears. That’s why the kids are so cruel these days, I tell you, and why so many are killing themselves and others. They are weak and psychotic, like penned rats or puppies in a stinking mill. They are akin to thin, little seedlings grown in a paper cup, deprived of natural sunlight. They have no inner strength.”

Peter belched almost imperceptibly and then sipped from his drink once again. Finishing, he thanklessly accepted another transparent cup, this one full. No one else could speak.

“Children today get praised for taking a shit. They expect a trophy for the effortless act of showing up, and not one of them can do a fucking thing aside from histrionically emoting and emoting senselessly, on and on, as if life is nothing more than their personal, fifteen minute drama set on record and repeat.”

It wasn't the drink. He was more so simply giving the time travelers their money's worth.

He was definitely on a role, casting his wealth of observations into the future, one might say, or so he mused.

“You don't get it, do you? Any of you?” Peter bellowed, “Hello? Unless one knows the suffering incurred from the cleaning of one's room, or cleaning a dirty bathroom, of washing dishes... unless one weeds the yard, takes out the trash, mows the lawn; unless one repeatedly endures the

insufferably mundane and the boredom involved in the completion of simple tasks, one does not develop character or empathy. It is formulaic, people, as well as being formative.”

Looking into all of their prettied, yet dull and nearly lifeless eyes, he added, “Can’t you people see this? You are breeding veal! Sociopathic and heartless veal and it will come back to haunt you. Trust me.”

Peter left the party shortly afterwards. However, not one of the people within earshot learned a fucking thing they could take back to the year 8015 and aptly apply, or so he’d wrongly imagined.



### Chapter Three

For having such an acute and accurate way of seeing so many things so damn clearly, it could equally be said that Peter Durant suffered terribly from the lack of a proper, social filter while sharing.

When it came to sharing, Peter was like a kid with no arms and a big bowl of Skittles; he was more than willing to share, but hardly capable of doing so without making a mess.

What he lacked was a most necessary trait if one is to get along with others, for without such a trait; one's only hope for success in life is to work

nights as a standup comic or to be hired on as a film critic.

However, Peter didn't lack this critical trait because he was born without one. Peter's filter was, in fact, circumcised by his parents when he was just a young boy.

What happened to Peter was that he was raised by two raging alcoholics, and having been raised in a household in which his overtly inebriated guardians spoke their minds openly, without hesitation and without restraint, he developed similar characteristics to those of a tipsy fucktard.

Furthermore, his particular rancor was overstimulated by their constant need to argue.

So, it wasn't his fault that he turned out to be an asshole.

However, at his age, it was about time he'd taken responsibility for his words and actions, and visits from the three ghosts of Christmas and all the many travelers from times yet to come notwithstanding; he would soon be receiving his

comeuppance, as karma would have it, for he was far from gentle and kind in all of his ways.





## Chapter Four

What if Buddha had just up and quit his whole gig and said *screw it* to humanity? What if Martin Luther King Jr. had surrendered and given up the cause? What if Gandhi had withdrawn his determination? What if George Washington had said, “Fuck off all you minute men, I am joining up with the Redcoats!”

What if Colonel Sanders had never fried his chicken?

Those are just some of the many validating examples of why Peter Durant often acted the way in which he did. They were also the reasons for

which he said the many things he had said, despite the personal suffering it caused him, which often manifested itself in the form of loneliness, something social outcasts tend to experience quite often.

Whatever.

Nevertheless, on that rainy Wednesday evening shortly before yuletide, Peter Durant bit the bullet and dealt with his circumstances solidly because he truly felt that certain things need to be said, whether they are popular ideas or not. However, Peter was no martyr by any means.

You see, Peter actually enjoyed pissing people off. But... in the bitter man's defense, it's not what you might be thinking.

Peter didn't actually get off on hurting others. It was just that, well, he suffered from a seemingly never ending sense of befuddlement due to the fact that he found stupidity and ignorance to be indigestible, and in trying to swallow such an abundance of inanities, his innards were crippled and his mind became ultimately constipated.

He also knew that the truth hurts, and that getting a little pissed off by the truth once in a while is what mature individuals refer to as *growing pains*.

Peter did not own a TV because television commercials often caused him such visceral discomfort that he would physically vomit up his supper.

*“Buy our product before your neighbor does or they will be better than you and then there will be no possible way that anyone will ever find you attractive! By the way, are you aware that you need to buy our corn chips or there will be no joy in your home? Your breath stinks, you have a mental disorder and need our drugs, which may cause rectal bleeding among other horrible side effects and you might want to call our attorneys now, because we will fight for you! Oh, and have you noticed the neighbor kids have better stuff than your kids? Doesn’t that make you want to BUY? Buhuhuwaahahahaaaaa.”*

In short, Peter could not stomach the influx of mindless manipulation so pervasively tolerated by his earthly brothers and sisters.

However, he knew that none of it was as mindless as their appearances might imply.

What Peter knew was something most people do not. What he understood was that the somewhat softer science of psychology was no longer in its infancy. He also knew that when results are provable; when a theory can be proved by repeated experimentation which always yields the same results, that we indeed have real science, and hence forth: tools.

And he knew that others were plying these tools wantonly and without restraint, like a newly divorced woman with a brand new box of sex toys.

“We have learned that intermittent reinforcement is the most powerful form of reinforcement during conditioning. Therefore, we hold the right to conclude that we can make a

mint off of gambling as long as the frequency of winnings remains random and unpredictable!”

“We can also start rumors of winnings! We can fudge the numbers by lying. They will fall for it. It’s proven!”

“Awesome-sauce!”

Through reading books, Peter knew that all the biggest piggy-wigs knew exactly what they were doing, but he was also quite convinced that the average idiot walking around did not.

His impression was that they were all lost in the corn chip infused fog of sophomoric daily wonders.

Peter, unlike his halfwit counterparts from the office party, could see it all clearly, and the fact that so many others could not disturbed him to the point at which he’d developed gastritis and hemorrhoids, IBS and a spastic colon, itchy scalp syndrome, sweaty feet and dry palms .

And so, despite his many ailments, Peter picked on them. The people around him, I mean.

But he didn't bully them.

What he did was to merely sit back and wait, and then he would react to them, which is altogether different from bullying.

In many ways, he considered his mental musings and the soft abuse of others to be a form of self-defense.

## Chapter Five

Ever since that fatefully predetermined date on which Peter's unyielding wife finally up and left him, his depth of sarcasm, his woefulness and his deeply seated wont to leap at any opportunity to snap at others had increased to a such a level that it began to affect his work.

Have you forgotten that he not only held a job, but also built clocks and painted portraits of clocks in his spare time? Well, he did. It's a fact.

But like his alcoholic father before him, nothing really did it for him any longer aside from the pleasure he received from any opportunity that



afforded him a quip. His fakebook page was foaming up and bristling with filthy and snide remarks.

However, unbeknownst to him at the time, ninety percent of his two hundred and thirty-four friends had already hid his posts from view. Most couldn't take his brand of what they termed *negativity*, and so handled the situation by gracefully bowing out of the ring.

However, it was not often that he was denied their endless stream of what he considered malignant fucktardedness, so he was delighted to be afforded every chance to respond.

For the record though, he actually enjoyed a lot of what he saw in his news feed.

Some of his friends posted real articles about real things that really matter. Some posted fairly good recipes and very funny images and videos of cats and kittens as well. He loved those.

There was one guy he'd never met who always posted funny videos with commentary about what

his children were doing. He enjoyed many of those posts terrifically.

Then there was that one highly charged young woman Allison St.-something-or-other, who always had something to say about politics. He loved her posts most of all.

Then, oh, and this is where it got ugly; there were the people who posted things they saw or read and reacted to without thinking...

...or fact checking!

Those sorts of posts were the ones that really got under Peter's pale skin and twisted his knickers.

However, as time went by, people stopped ignoring him and went straight to deleting him. Being as it were that over half his friends had deleted him, he had to pick his words carefully in order to retain the few that still cyber-loved him.

Then, as one might expect, there came a time when he simply could not quell his wrath long enough to select his words appropriately and he

paid for it by earning another deletion. The post was about the current president of the time.

Reading it boiled his tits.

It read, “Can you believe our president actually signed a bill into law that makes showing affection for your children in public illegal! And, he wasn’t born in the United States, we all know that.”

He couldn’t believe it was really happening.

Not only did he find it hard to believe that someone had taken the time to create a post [with very fine graphics] intended to spread such nonsense, but he could not fathom the possibility that a second human being would be daft enough to repost it, and yet there it was.

Beneath the meme (pronounced *meem*) was written the comment, “I hope all of you who voted for this socialist monster are happy now. You know he invented Ebola, right?”

By the time he finished reading her comment his nuts were on fire.

What he wrote in response to her insanity went something like this, “If I was in the same room with you right now, I would kick you so hard in your stubbly little baby maker that your mother, wherever she might be, would reel from the pain of my big-toe-driven shoe pinging off your vagazzled mons! Not to mention your beef-curtain vulva! I would then force you to wear Katy Perry’s flame ensemble from the Super Bowl and kick you so hard a second time, but this time in the buttocks, masterfully, so that even your father would hiccup, shit and then spit out his beer!”

“You curfew breaker!”

“You should be held underwater in a clear tank of hog’s piss in a public square beneath a canopy of pigeon droppings so that all might behold the gloriousness of your impassible stupidity! You are a walking, talking crime against humanity. Fucktidiot! Fucktard! Fucky-fuck!”

And he’d meant ever single word of it.

Unfortunately, the woman simply deleted him and then went about living her life merrily

cherishing her own opinions as her spineless and ignorant husband continued to support her mode of thinking because, he too, was nothing more than a castrated fucktard and he didn't want to spoil his chances of getting laid.

Ah, but for the inalienable rights of the fortune cookie crackers... Ah, but for the laws that protect them.

For a moment he was briefly reminded of a certain oddball from childhood – one whose name began with a V – then he blocked it out.

And so it went, day by day, that Peter's inner child continued to be molested, battered and abused, dare I say *bullied*, by the vomitus, unfounded and empty expressions and the right to make those expressions that others held onto like so many a baby squirrel to its mothers back or belly, depending on the clemency of the weather.

Yet he could not look away!

Upon waking, he would invariably race to his desk to turn on his computer. Then, after smiling

somewhat capriciously at the many videos of willy-nilly cats and kittens that he would find there, he would move on to more gregarious piques in the reading of work-centered memes, coffee drinking memes, the ever-so-humorous teacher-needs-a-cocktail memes, the ever-present *mom needs a glass of wine* memes, tee hee, and the slightly irritating posts from older, less attractive women that always seemed to mention large penises.

Skipping over the pages that were carefully selected for and suggested to him by the curators of Facebook, he would find himself on the verge of being let down, but then...

Then he would see it.

The fantastic frilly fucktardian fringe post!

It was the one type of post he found to be most repulsive of all: *A picture of someone's dinner!*

He asked, "What type of human being stops before eating a meal to take a photo of their plate with their phone?"

Then he thought, ‘Besides that, what could possibly be their true intentions?’

Peter often imagined that the underlying sickness in our cultureless society; *the need to outdo others*, had grown so viral that people had, in their quit desperation, discovered a new avenue by which to make themselves feel superior to other human beings.

How would they set about to accomplish this feat? They would do this, not by posting a photo of their home, their new car, their furniture, their vacation, their new boob job or muscles, or, sadly enough, a new pair of shoes... some of the many normal and acceptable means by which to impress, but rather, by posting photos of how well they are eating during any given meal.

*What sort of pillow sack would even allow such a thing to cross their mind?* He would think this while drooling like one of your average trolls might.

Peter could see that it was no longer enough for people to be in a restaurant, well-dressed and

apparently able to afford [the right] to mingle and dine alongside the other patrons, but had come to need other people, people who weren't even present at the time, to know exactly how well they were eating.

He made a note of this in his little book.

Peter always jotted down notations regarding any human behavior that stirred within him the wont to poop in a pickle jar and mail said floating feces to the individual in question.

*The sickness has reached such levels as to far exceed all previous tolerances. This modern diet of attention, this attention seeking drive, the banality of baseline competitiveness has finally torn down the last remaining boundaries to have survived the change. I fear for humanity. I fear the next step will be...*

*...Toilet bowl selfies!*

*Yes, it is my deepest fear and regret that soon, before the turn of the next decade, people will be posing and photographing themselves next to the*



*products of defecation that have resulted from said meals.*

*Poop Selfies! Pelfies! Poofies! Smelfies!*

He was mortified.

His pen stopped moving.

His eyesight became blurry.

What stopped his Peter's pen from flowing; the thing that forced his writing implement to suddenly take on the avatar of the waning member of an flaccid elephant's trunk stricken with bad case of erectile dysfunction was the sudden onset of delirium brought about by his immediate recollection of everything that had ever annoyed him during the course of his existence.

He could not refuse this specter's knock at his mental door.

As if taking dictation from some ghastly ghost from within, he turned the page in his little notebook and wrote out a list:

## Things that annoy the piss out of me.

1. People who move their mouths in sync with my own while I am speaking.
2. People who post photos of themselves holding a dog wherein the dog's genitalia is blatantly visible.
3. People who think that pointing out the habits of others equates to small talk, i.e., *"I see you like to take off your glasses and wipe them now and again. Durp durp."*
4. People who use assumed pronouns, such as, when someone walks into a room and abruptly announces, "Do you know what *she* did yesterday?" when the subject of the verb is not present. Who the fuck is this *she*?
5. People who order a beer and then immediately feel the need to inform you as to how good a cold beer tastes after a long day.
6. People who display offense when you blow your nose in public.
7. Dogs that fart and then blame it on their owner.

8. People who refuse to check facts before repeating what they've read or heard.
9. People who say they want to take you out for a juicy steak dinner and a martini at a steakhouse and then, on the way, change their mind and say, "Wait, I have a coupon for Applebees!"
10. Men who trim their facial hair to parameters of minuscule thinness, such as a narrow line that borders the face.
11. Women who wax their eyebrows into a hair-thin line. (It was Peter's firm belief that no woman under the age of seventy-nine should ever do such a thing. He found it a horrid form of self-abuse, and even worse upon the eyes of the beholder.)
12. Women who use the word *tinkle* to describe anything other than the character from Peter Pan.
13. Pinto beans.
14. People who simply repeat the opinions their parents held instead of having original

thoughts or developing an opinion for themselves.

15. People who use the phrase, “Everyone thinks...” when they are the only person they know that holds that opinion.
16. Parents who adopt their children’s hip lingo to try to sound young instead of raising the standards of speech within the home.

Then Peter lowered his hands. His hands were shaking. He then found himself shouting out, “But everyone is at a different stage in their mental, physical and spiritual development and no one is to blame!”

Then he vomited his supper onto the table and stared at the viscus and malodorous mass for a moment before wiping the splatter from the lenses of his eyewear.

Feeling quite uncomfortable, yet resolute, he got up to get some paper towels from the kitchen. Then, in turning back to view the resulting issue

of his distress, he noticed something quite remarkable. The pattern his effluent had formed upon the table struck an insolent yet familiar chord deep within.

The effects of pareidolia were staring him in the eyes.

Walking back without having retrieved any towels, he stared down at the table and thought, ‘My God... it’s in the shape of a heart.’

## Chapter Six

The days ticked by like the hands on one of the retrofitted clocks he'd nimbly finished, but passed more so like the immovable hands portrayed within his paintings.

Time seemed to stand still.

Recurring chest pains began to nag at him like a fishmonger's wife shouting for more paper from the toilet. Food didn't taste right. Alcohol didn't feel right. Nothing felt right.

"I think I'm dying." He said these words to the image that presented itself to him in the mirror that morning.

Nothing was going right at work.

He worried that he may indeed be out of time.

He had not painted in weeks, but then he started again after he saw a really cool clock in an old movie.

His neighbor was spying on him from the eaves of her curtains, as per her usual, and he'd foregone his cockcrow Facebook viewings because he could not keep himself from screaming through the keyboard with his words. Then he remembered that it was an election year and he laughed.

That had to be it!

Everyone, as of late, had been duly posting their thoughts, if you could call them thoughts, on everything from who was to blame for breaking it to whom it was that could surely fix it.

Election years always made Peter vomit.

Over the passing days, he'd been trying new things to alleviate his anger and the frustration he felt towards the beings with which he found himself sharing the planet, but nothing seemed to work.

One day he would wish that a plague would simply wipe everyone out, then war the next. Peter didn't own a gun, but he often wished everyone would just shoot one another and wipe the global slate clean. He imagined the Earth would do fairly well having less than five hundred human occupants.

One of the many problems with Peter, but this one would not become apparent for quite a while, was that he no longer took part in any of the normal, human social activities that most of us enjoy.

He did not go out, play sports, watch sports, meet up for coffee with others or partake in casual or vigorous bicycle riding. In fact, aside from



going to work daily and to the market once a week, Peter never left the house, nor did he watch TV. All he did was paint clocks and build clocks, over and over again.

He was a downright clockaholic.

And it was starting to show.

One thing he did noticed though was the fact that, while painting his clocks, time seemed to fly by at unprecedented rates. Another thing he noticed was that in his present state he would sometimes mess up the numbers by painting them out of order. Such mistakes did not bode well for his mind.

Time consuming as his hobby was, and it was still a hobby as he was not getting paid for any of it, he soon found himself diving in even harder and deeper, thrusting away at his clockwork like a mighty saber-wielding fencer, sometimes staying up all night.

One evening he looked over his work, starting with the paintings he had done some years before. Some were created as far back as the previous decade, some even two decades before, back when he was happy.

Then he noticed something.

What he noticed was that the paintings he had done, although all quite magnificent in his eyes, and the differences he noted would appear more than palpable even to the common onlooker, he was sure, was that the ones he had accomplished during the most difficult of times - such as during the times when he and his wife were fighting, and the period during which he thought he might lose his job, and after his wife left him, then even worse; after he saw his elderly neighbor undressing and realized it was turning him on - were all better than the others.

It was the keenest of observations: *During the worst moments of his life, his work had always improved.*

He briefly played with this revelation as if it were a boogie on the end of his finger.

Why would stress, anger and misery improve upon one's skill, he wondered?

He thought it preposterous.

Why were all the numbers, which beckoned longingly from the canvas, like the eyes of the Lady Hamilton as Circe, so well defined? And the subtle details of the arms of the clock and the other objects pictured in the frame so... what was the word he was looking for?

Perfect? Or does perfect sound too arrogant?

And what could possibly explain the other untold and innumerable differences he was seeing?

Surely anger and distress must be considered poison to the artist?

So how?

Mulling it all over, he decided upon a tall scotch and, shortly before pouring, decided upon two cubes of fresh ice. Peter never allowed ice to remain too long in the freezer. Why, he did not know.

His preference was neat, yet he sipped at the chilled scotch and harrumphed, as was his predilection, his way back into the living room where, now that Cheryl, his ex-wife, was no longer living with him, he found himself free to display his work upon every wall.

All told, there were 427 clocks in the house, both real clocks and paintings combined.

*Salvador Dali painted images of clocks and no one ever thought he was a weirdo...*

Wandering the house from room to room, he recalled with tenderness his penchant for painting tiny clocks, more often than not upon carefully chosen scraps of wood no larger than a matchbook.

Strangely enough, since Cheryl had taken the Kuerig, only two clocks in his home still functionally display the proper time. He thought it would be much too creepy to bear the impression of so many active clocks all telling time in just one place, so he stopped all the others long ago. For the time being, he felt that each clock being correct twice a day was satisfactory.

Turning back to the question, he pondered, “What is it all about? I paint images of clocks to remind people about the precious gift of time and yet no one appreciates them.”

He felt saddened.

“Their beauty is undeniable, and yet, how can it be that the very best of them were all created under duress?”

*How can this be?*

Peter’s sadness gave way to melancholy as he slowly paced the room, which was, by all means, a small gallery.

He then recalled the words of an author he’d once read while on vacation in Duluth. The writer had penned, on the inside of the jacket, of course, “Forget the ideal place to achieve your goals. When I write, I forgo the mahogany desk, the vase filled with cut flowers, the lovely window with a view and I find someplace nasty, noisy, smelly, if not altogether unforgiving, and once there, I sit and escape. My reasoning is that no true artist ever feels a need to escape a lovely view, and writing, by nature, is an escape.”

And why had that author written those words of advice and had it all been merely a coincidence that he had read them?

Then he also recalled that someone else had once said that there is no such thing as a coincidence, but he could not recall the direct quote.

There was plenty on his plate to consider, and since there is no better time than the present, he thought it best to dive right in.

What was the author trying to convey?

Was he saying that he does his best work when he is far from content with his surroundings? Was he saying that a person trying to write a book might spend too much time looking out the window before him or her, thereby wasting precious time? Was he saying that the flowers in the vase would be a distraction, or something more Jungian in the sense that the flowers would

represent a reward for work that had not yet been completed and so stifle all motivation?

What was the author saying?

Peter doubted that any writer would, in his right mind, select a miserable location in which to pen a masterpiece, but then he began to think about his lair beneath the basement stairs.

Hadn't he always worked in the bleak and empty spaces beneath the house, spaces somewhat reminiscent of a tomb? And if he'd always worked in the very same place, a place he felt was satisfactory, what would explain the differences in the paintings?

He then, in order to reassure himself, checked some of the dates which accompanied the signatures and confirmed a direct correlation. Sure enough, the worse off he'd been on each of the corresponding dates, the better the outcome. The product proved it so.



Peter then mulled over the idea that many couples will subconsciously cause fights within their relationship each time their minds recall the sex having been all the more stimulating after the last squabble. How one partner might sit and cry when, after starting an argument, the other, thinking they are quite mad, retreats to the bar or the garage or to the supermarket or shoe shopping in order to escape the madness.

How, he thought, that the formula must be doomed to fail if it is forced or contrived. One simply cannot fake a fight in order to enjoy make-up sex. It just doesn't work that way. The success of the formula demands the emotions be real.

Could that be it?

Had Peter's mind subconsciously noticed the subtle, and often blatant, differences in his work, and, paralleling the author's need, had his mind too, sought out misery so that he might better paint?

Had he unknowingly sabotaged his life in order to create masterpieces of art in the same way some lovers do in order to experience vibrant and stimulating make-up sex?

Peter found himself intrigued.

Then he thought he would try something out. An experiment! If a person can start a fight on the false promise of replicating a desirable sexual experience, then perhaps, he imagined, he could try to generate some misery within himself and use that to his advantage in his studio!

Rapidly he thought of means and methods.

His itinerant conclusion was that in order to achieve the desired results, he would have to get into an argument or something and then return to his brushes and easel.

But with whom should he pick the fight?

Ah, but therein lies the rub, he thought. If he should pick a fight and the desired effect was not gained, he might just find himself sitting on the couch frustrated while all his talents ran off in bitter unison to the proverbial bar for a cold one.

What to do? What to do..?

## Chapter Seven

Two days later Peter got into a spat with his nosey neighbor over her spying. She was a degenerate old woman with a seething need to know everything about everyone around her. Like an animal in a cage, she would peer out through her imaginary bars and sneer at people walking by, peeking auspiciously into the windows of others and finding fruitfulness in her hopes of glancing something she ought not see.

Peter grumbled on his way back into the house after venting in her general direction. He felt completely, well, not completely angered, so he thought it might be a good idea to log onto Facebook and add just an extra helping of misery to his plate. Fitfully reddened in both eye and

cheek, he typed in his password, ready to spend the rest of the evening painting.

Then he recalled it was an election year.

Then he recalled the election was only two months away!

Good golden buttons, man, if ever there was a time both rife and ripe with possibility, it was that very moment, indeed.

Then there it was...

Everyone was posting feverishly, as if it were a contest to see who was the less informed and most easily mislead, and there were more than an abundance of photo memes that included an image of the president. Some even included his family. Oh, and to his delight, and it was such a reward for his perseverance, people were slinging cross and malignant words over their politics like prison hash in a cold cafeteria, and it was

beautiful, simply a darling sight to Peter's sore eyes.

“Our president is a card carrying communist! Can you believe he wants to use our hard earned tax dollars to help Americans? What kind of socialist freak would do that?”

His nipples began to burn and twitch like popcorn seeds in a pan filled with searing hot oil. Then a few photos of cats made him smile, so he scrolled more quickly and with greater intent so as not to thwart the intended outcome.

Almost immediately, as if placed there for him personally by the gods of Facebook tyranny, he found what he was looking for. It was pure gold, like the stuff wet dreams are made of, and it was posted by someone he grew up with, so it was sure to make him extra mad.

This is what it said:

“What we need is a God fearing Christian in the White House who will defend our first amendment to own guns AND our right to keep America free from immigrants.”

Ahhh... Eeeee... Iiiii... Oooo, and the very best part, the part that made it all so delectably and most gruesomely succulent and scrumptious, was that, not only had they invoked the incorrect amendment during their rant, but two of the words had been spelled wrong!

Peter bit down firmly on his lower lip. Then, without further hesitation, he scurried to the basement where a fresh jar of water, a bright white canvas and a clean set of brushes awaited his timely return.

But it didn't work.

To Peter's regret and most dismal dismay, it felt as if he'd signed up for a Viagra trial and unwittingly received the placebo.

The clock he'd spent three hours painting appeared to him distorted and mediocre at best. The subject of the painting was one of those old brass alarm clocks with two bells atop the frame. However, to downtrodden Peter, the image he'd forged looked more like a novice's drum set seen through the dystopic and misshapen eyes of a drunken, out of work window washer with cataracts.

Peter was devastated. Feeling more than defeated, he walked the staircase upwards and fetched himself a scotch. He took it neat that eve.

"Son-of-a-bitch," he said aloud, "I can't win. No matter how hard I try to remind the world about the precious gift of time through the medium of my art, I fail. Then what do I do? I try to improve my work through applied psychology, and I failed again! I should just give up and find my true calling before it's too late."



Feeling undeniably like a wretched, older version of his former self, he counted his options. He saw very few there before him.

## Chapter Eight

In the weeks that followed, Peter Durant found a new enemy to hurl his anger towards and that enemy showed its face almost hourly on social media forums of all kinds.

What incarnation had his nemesis taken this time around?

They were the *online quiz takers*!

Peter's anger was only further fueled and nourished by their insatiable need to know such things as what type of crystal their soul color is, and what famous actor should they share a hospital room with after surgery, and what kind of

sandwich would they be if they were a sandwich, and so on.

Oh, and there was also:

Who was your mother from another brother?

What flavor ice cream would you be if you were living in a Bangkok whorehouse?

What five celebrities should be at your funeral?

Pick a crystal, any crystal, and we will tell you when your toaster oven will accidentally reveal your biggest crush!

*Who is your soulmate, Susan Boyle or Honey Boo-boo?*

He switched from drinking coffee to espresso that evening stayed up to all hours, slinging filth in the form of verbal missiles and well thought out projectiles of mimicry derived from a

combination of unbridled disgust and a lack of sleep.

He set his alarm clock early so he could begin before sunrise each day.

Adding both male and female fakebook profiles to his rank and file, he friend requested anyone he could think of and, when that was not enough to satiate his thirst, he set about enlisting strangers.

He lowered his standards to such benthic levels that he found himself accepting friend requests from women with hot, sexy, semi-nude photos and only three other friends, but sultry promises of more photos to come if he would visit her website.

Some black guy from Nigeria who thought Peter's profile looked like that of a respectable American friend?

Why not?

A pudgy woman from the Philippines named Pjang juong with a flower behind her ear?

But of course.

Single Russian women who, like the Volga River of their motherland, were cold and beautiful all at once?

Why the fuck not?

Surely each of those people would be expressing opinions, and he could always lure them in closer to his web and snare by sharing links to quizzes he himself pretended to take.

What is the phone number of your animal spirit guide?

Which member of the cast of Real Housewives of Fucktardia are you?

Which member of congress has a secret crush on you?

Which nation's anthem best describes your labia?

What kind of tree is your inner child?

Which cartoon would you be if you could have sex with Abraham Lincoln?

Would you survive the zombie apocalypse if all you had for prosthetic arms were vibrating dildos?

Can we guess where your favorite mole is?

How did I die in my past life and did it have anything to do with Miley Cyrus' twerking?

What color unicorn am I?

Can you name all of these terrible diseases?

What would I be if I wasn't a fucktard?

What fabric should line your coffin? Tell us your birthday and we'll let you know!

Is kibitzing right for you? Just answer these seventy-five easy to read questions!

The list went on and on, and although Peter had never once taken any of the quizzes he shared, the people of the world seemed to eagerly take the bait every time.

Even under the guise of many imposters, he continued to be a wiseass and he lost friends daily, but gained friends quickly, like a single chick does with her weight while dating.

On some days he'd double down and go for broke, losing four or five friends before lunch and then picking up seven more before supper.

The days became like a blur.

The hours flew by like birds nearing sunset.

The scotch bottles piled up like the bills of a the recently unemployed.

He started forgetting which day it was and before long his lonely laughter began to take on a slightly maniacal tone and cadence, like the footsteps of a demented canary hopping across the surface of snare drum.

No more the clockaholic he once was, he now found himself on the verge of becoming an altogether solemn and insipid new creature, something, from the looks of him; more hideous and stinky as well.

Dr. Frankenstein, both Mary and Percy Shelley, as well as the discriminable Lord Byron would have surely been admires of his exhumed self-sculpture.

Doomed to the spiraling effect that came with the onset of his self-inflicted malady, he slumbered through his lunch breaks at work and spent his weekends in the dark.



Peter Durant had not picked up a paintbrush in nearly four months.

## Chapter Nine

Seething with disdain and armed with a plethora of recently acquired and stinging hurtful terms of damnation, Peter typed so quickly he was rapidly losing weight. People he knew had asked him if the divorce diet had finally taken hold. He told them all where they could go and I assure you it was not heaven.

He rarely shaved anymore. His only life's desire was to spot an online quiz taker, perhaps a newbie or someone unfamiliar with his ploy and take them down using as few key strokes as possible.

Like shooting tin ducks at a fair, he was increasing his score by tenfold daily and actively seeking new victims by the week.

“This is how you spend the precious gift of time the universe has allotted you? By discovering what 1940’s hair style you wore in a past life? You premenopausal pusstard!”

Peter had become both ruthless and relentless in his nearly endless pursuit of slaying cyber souls.

Yet, he thought that he was, in some way, saving them. But like most zealots, the finger he had taken up for judgment was better suited to be pointed within, as you will see.

On one particular Saturday, while the rain came down in torrents outside his cobwebbed windows, Peter Durant upset the wife of a man he should not have messed with. The man hunted him down online, eventually finding his address by starting with an old Myspace profile Peter hadn’t used

since the ninth grade. That defunct profile led the unlicensed detective to an adult dating website where a picture-less, unfinished profile Peter had once started then led the man to a coupon site his ex-wife Cheryl had once visited, where she listed their names and address.

With scribbled notations of his own held tightly in hand, the man then drove to Peter's home under cover of darkness.

The scene, although protracting slowly as it unfolded, was not pretty.

What transpired in front of Peter's humble home between him and the woman's husband eventually made its way through the rumor mill via his over-observant neighbor and had caused some folks to turn their heads away when in site of the forsaken painter, but only for about a week and then it blew over.

However, that does not change the fact that the man Peter encountered had some pretty harsh words to say that afternoon.

From safe within the confines of his car, the man sat watch, curbside, all alone in his vigil, waiting for Peter to rouse.

When at last our partially bearded Peter finally exited his home that day, the man, in a quasi-desperate attempt to defend the honor of his aging wife, approached Peter and called him an asshole, really loudly, and then told him to go fuck himself, and then added, “Is this what you do with your time? You lousy prick! What kind of yellow belly picks on old women? You are a pathetic excuse for a man.”

The gentleman must have been seventy-five years old if he was a day, and his words were harsh and meant to be caustic, but the only word that Peter heard was *Time*.

## Chapter Ten

Crushed like an aluminum can onto which no one had been required to place a deposit, the sharpened teeth of the old man's words had sunken in deeply and had wounded poor Peter rather than serve to anger him. His fingers limped across the keyboard as if they were in fact the slender buckling legs of a teenage porn star after her first interracial gangbang.

He felt tired.

That evening, as his paintings slowly aged upon the walls of his lonesome and dire abode, Peter sat at his kitchen table and contemplated suicide. Then he poured himself a second glass of scotch and murmured, "Fuck this shit. That old fuck was

a class a turdtard. Who gives a rat's ass if I offended his wife? Any fucktard that feels the need to find out what type of 1940's haircut they may have worn in another lifetime is a downright offense to humanity. Screw 'em both." Then he thoroughly enjoyed his drink.

Hope.

Don't ever let anyone tell you that there is no hope, because that is a lie.

Just hang on. Things will get better, you'll see.

## Chapter Eleven

It was the fifth day of March when the cold of winter finally broke Peter Durant.

Hope is one thing, but all the scotch in the world and all the self-righteous back patting one can muster cannot deliver a man through the valley of being a complete shithead.

Don't ever try it.

Peter's words and actions were catching up to him in ways he could have never imagined, in the way words and actions always do.

The negative energy he had released into the universe had formed a time spiral, and then a dark matter squiggly, and then gravity took hold and all



that negative energy began barreling back through the dark void of space right in his direction.

Not a single time traveler from any year in the future felt any inclination to witness what was about to take place.

If that doesn't tell you how bad it was, nothing will, because, when it comes to time travel, paying to watch the shit hit the fan in some place within history is usually considered priceless entertainment. So, when everyone opts out of wanting to watch you get ass-rammed by karma, watch out. Because shit is going down.

However, let it be known that ticket sales in the eighth millennium were unmatched with regard to most all of Peter's locations over the coming months.

Why?

Because no matter how hard you hate him, or no matter how hard you really want to hate him,

Peter was about to change the course of humanity forever, and change it for the better, he would.



## Chapter Twelve

By this time in the story, most of Peter's clock paintings had been relegated to the attic. All of the clocks he'd restored to their former beauty were similarly packed away.

Empty scotch bottles filled the recycling bin, which had not been moved for few weeks, and his shaving razor remained untouched for even longer.

Just two days prior to the events of which I am about to describe, Peter had been caught by a superior, intoxicated, having brought to work a bottle of Snapple Iced Tea filled to the brim with Dewar's, while using his company issued

computer to harass a particularly sensitive, yet scrappy quiz taker.

He was fired right there on the spot.

Then, while driving home with all his office supplies and clock paintings on the front and back seats of his car, he got a DUI.

He was fucked.

Not a single time traveler witnessed his arrest because no one thought it was worth it.

No one from Peter's century came to post bail.

It was a really shitty day to spend in county. What made it even worse was the fact that he hadn't even finished off that bottle of faux Snapple he'd smuggled to work, so it really sucked.

After all of that shits-skababadoo, Peter found himself sitting at the kitchen table, once again, but this time around it was on the fifth day of March during a spell of particularly inclement weather, and he was truly miserable at last.

He thought, ‘I’ve got enough cash to carry me through until I get my license back, so it’s not like I need to run out and find myself a new job. Hell, I should take advantage of this time and get on with my life’s work! I should Google some images of old clocks and paint myself up a storm!’ but he was too shitfaced.

‘What to do, what to do...’ He thought to himself. ‘Ah, maybe I’ll just masturbate.’

Then there came a faint but audible knocking at the door.

It was his neighbor’s absentee daughter stopping by to inform him that they’d put her nosey mother-in-law in a home and that the house adjacent to his was about to go up for sale.

“Ah, small wonders never cease. We must thank God for each and every blessing,” but the woman had no idea to what he was referring.

He promptly shut the front door.

Afterwards, finding himself hungry for the first time in three days, (His hunger having stemmed from learning that the old bitch was getting shipped out) he fixed himself a plate of spaghetti and sat down, and for the first time in his life, he wished he'd owned a TV.

“Fucking shit is boring with nothing to watch.” He looked around at all his books and said, “Fuck you” directly at the bookcase.

He found his meal to be quite agreeable, far better than the poor excuse for pasta they'd ladled out to him in county jail.

Ugh, the memory made him shudder.

“I cannot believe I had to spend six hours in that hell hole. Never again, never again.”

After finishing the spaghetti, he opted for going online. It was his first venture into cyber space that day. What he discovered there made his jaw drop.

There in the upper left hand corner of his page he could see that only two people remained friends with him. One of them was his cousin, the fucked up one, and the other was an ex-girlfriend with whom he'd reconnected, but then he remembered that she was dead.

He could not believe what had transpired in his absence.

Heart racing, he checked his other fake profiles and found that similar travesties had taken place on all of those as well. There were even some private messages informing him that he was being defriended for being such a jerk.



“Yeah, but at least I don’t have to take a fucking quiz to figure out what constellation my heart cries out to, you weasel blowing fucktard.”

The game had been taken away.

There would be no more cheerful tomorrows for him.

Not only did Peter Durant have no friends, but even strangers no longer wanted to associate with him.

Peter Durant was all alone.

## Chapter Thirteen

Eventually Peter created for himself a brand new avatar complete with a hijacked photo, family photos replete with many grandchildren, and an ironclad phony description that lured in friends from all walks of life.

He'd become a grandmother, a likeable woman, aged sixty-five, recently retired from the Ohio school system which had formerly employed [her], and he was poised and ready for action.

All his new friends welcomed [her] to Facebook and gave [her] friendly tips and clues as to how to navigate the cyber universe. Then, like any good Facebook troll might, Peter rudely sat back and watched their activities without posting.

After a few days of waiting, he began liking a few posts and people found it cute that [she] was finally joining in.

Then he tossed in a few comments here and there for good measure, if not just to establish his presence. Then, after posting a few photos of his recently adopted, faux grandchildren, he shared a quiz, and like any dastardly fisherman, he waited patiently for someone out there to come along and take the bait.

*Which one of the Olsen Twins are YOU! Mary-kate or Ashley?*

Hehehe.

Then he waited a bit longer.

His quiz result told the world that Agatha, his gentle avatar, the blue-haired grandmother he was portraying, was: Ashley, the preppy blonde and stylish, out-about-town Olsen twin.

He waited to see what answer the others might get.

However, as per fucking usual, they each received the exact same answer: Everyone was Ashley Olsen.

*Why the fuck wasn't anyone Mary-kate?*

The question not only began to consume him, but pissed him off to no end.

“It’s always like this.” Peter was scratching away at his scraggily beard, “Do you know why nobody is ever Mary-kate? Because the fucktard that generated that quiz didn’t establish proper parameters that would eventually lead *equally* to one of two results.

“That mentally deficient quiz maker had failed to delineate each possible outcome based on opposing responses, so, everyone ends up in the same percentile and winds up being Ashly fucking Olsen, that’s why!”

Peter was becoming infuriated, but simultaneously, he was slowly edging towards joining the ranks of the quiz takers.

He soon found himself aiming that white hot glare of his at the quiz makers instead of the takers as had been his proclivity.

He then decided to do a little investigating.

As it turned out, the Olsen quiz had been generated by a glitter-faced, post-adolescent blogger named Allison, and her website was actually listed on the quiz!

Holy mother fuckers getting rammed by fucking truckers! He went right for the proverbial throat.

Now remember, he is approaching the young woman in avatar form, disguised as 65 year old Agatha.

“Dear Allison, let me ask you something sweetheart; were your parents fucktards too, or did you develop your particular skillset

autonomously? I took your quiz, you dimwit-in-a-training-bra, and it sucked. NOT EVERYONE CAN BE AHSLEY OLSEN! My four year old grandson, bless his little heart, could have generated a better quiz, you carrot poker!”

Allison’s response was even better, “You know, you look like a sweet, older lady in your photo, but you are most certainly not. That quiz is for fun. I didn’t even get paid to do it. Grow up.”

Grow up? Peter, under the disguise of Agatha or not, was not going to take that sort of abuse from some college freshman who liked to blog about hairclips, of all things.

So what did he do?

Peter went online, as Agatha, and smeared Allison’s pretty little, glitter covered name all over [her] page in front of all of [her] friends.

That’s right.

In the best old lady lingo he could muster up and articulate, he royally smacked that Keisha-loving, little sparkly Pop-tart down.

Having Agatha on his side made him feel like the operator of a remote controlled robot of destruction!

After only three short months, he'd already acquired seven hundred and thirteen new friends, posing as a grandmother, but what he did not know was that four hundred and thirty-seven of them were actually fakebook accounts as well.

That's right: Fake accounts.

They had all been created by the time travel company in the future.

But why?

And how?

The people at the time travel company in the future created them using tachyon particles so potential time travelers could monitor Peter's antics from beyond our present dimension, that's how and why.

But wait... Why?





## Chapter Fourteen

Meanwhile, somewhere in the far distant future, a young woman was reading up on the life of Peter Durant.

The young woman's name was Linda, or is Linda, or will be Linda. Fuck, I don't know; the whole time thing kind of fucks with the tense, right?

Anyhow, Linda was not only a student of the fine arts matriculating within the future super global network of unprecedented universities, but a very wealthy young woman who happened to have inherited one of Peter Durant's famous and altogether priceless early paintings.

Didn't see that coming, did ya?

The painting in her possession was a depiction of an alarm clock, one of only a dozen or so examples of Peter's work to have survived the great conflagration that eventually engulfed his modest home.

That and about six thousand years of time.

One of many things the young lady Linda had learned through her extensive investigation into the artist's life, and this was for an extra-credit project since she'd missed some school that semester, was that during the year 2015, Peter had a very strange encounter with an unnamed woman, and something that young woman handed him turned out to change his life.

Odder still, was the fact that the thing the young woman handed him turned out to be a letter.

Even more stranger still, was the fact that when Linda read a digital copy of the letter in her mind zone, she noticed that it was undeniably written in *her own handwriting!*

This was a fact that could not be argued.

Later that day she sat down and wrote the exact same words that she had read in that art history book, a book she'd uploaded into her mind zone, and when she compared the two, she was incapable of denying the fact that she must have been the individual to not only have written the letter he'd received nearly six thousand years before her birth, but it was quite possible that she was the one to have handed it to him.

Without any consideration for her schedule, she checked the date the history book had recorded as the date Peter had received the letter, then checked the location and time and any other details about the event that were preserved for posterity, and promptly downloaded all of that information into her cerebral cortex.

Later that evening she called the time travel agency with her brain and purchased a trip to the year 2015, to arrive during springtime, and after receiving detailed instruction on how she was in no way to make contact with the subject of her

temporal observations, she solidified her plan to hand the letter to Peter.

She was so excited she could hardly contain herself and quickly agreed to the company's terms and conditions of time travel by clicking the little box in the lower left hand corner of her mind, with a finger she held out in the air.

Done.

## Chapter Fifteen

Peter, busied with his efforts, which all revolved around playing Agatha, soon found that things can get complicated when impersonating a sexagenarian grandmother of twelve on Facebook.

It was not always easy.

Sure, she'd liked a few knitting pages, became a fan of many cruise lines, and made her presence known on Pinterest as well. All things said and done, she was doing quite well for herself with regard to friendships and expected protocol. However, many a stray or abandoned young woman had taken to viewing her as sort of a trusted figure, a grandmotherly figure, someone they could turn to, and that was all well and good

until one of them started asking her vagina questions and shit like, “What’s the best way to get blood stains out of your panties or jizz stains out of a bra?”

What the fuck is all that about?

Thank God you can Google that shit.

And then one day, a young man put up a post that changed Agatha’s, or should I say Peter’s, outlook considerably.

His name was Philip Rosenberg, and this is what it said:

“For once in my life I would like to read a horoscope that doesn’t only have good things to say, or a quiz result that reads something like, *‘You’re not any one of The Spice Girls. In fact, you’re a fool for even being curious. And you’re fat!’*

When Peter read those words it was as if an angel, a very soft and beautiful, large breasted and glowing, and very naked angel, had touched his long unattended penis with one of her magical feathers.

(The feather that looked like a hand.)

In that brief moment, he'd felt a stroke of brilliance come upon him that remained unsurpassed for many days to come. With waves of inspiration flowing through him, he grabbed a pen and notepad and began to frantically scratch down his ideas. His new goal in life, the legacy he would one day leave behind, would be to create online quizzes that would ultimately rattle and insult anyone who dared to waste the precious gift of time by taking them.

His plan was to cleverly disguise each of these explosive devices as innocent quizzes, but despite the odds, each and every person's fate would be the same; they would each be slapped in the proverbial face for being a fucktard.



Slapped really fucking hard, like so it stings quite a bit but doesn't leave a mark.

He was tickled pink and giggling like a schoolgirl with glitter toenails as his deviant thoughts grew within. He, like that young female student of fine art living six thousand years in the future, whose name he would never know, but one who would ultimately change his life, could hardly contain the thoughts his mind was brewing.

Then he hit a roadblock.

It was something he'd forgotten to factor in, something that, once acknowledged, flipped his lid and sent him smashing just about everything in sight.

This is how it all started:

First he did a search for free quiz sites. Then he read the terms and conditions, which he would have to agree with in order to generate an original

quiz, and found that each and every site demanded the very same thing: *None of your quiz results can in any way be considered offensive.*

WTF? Who came up with that rule?

Peter felt undone.

He felt as if the angel of heavenly hand-jobs had suddenly morphed into a devil wearing sandpaper gloves instead of Prada.

Peter entered a blind and drunken rage and leapt about smashing glassware and picture frames and a row of potted plants whose occupants had long since withered.

He smashed those in succession to the floor.

But it wasn't until his rage took him into the kitchen that any truly abhorrent and unnatural devastation occurred.

An hour earlier, Peter had set a pot of chicken cacciatore on his gas stove, and after slamming the pot and its piping hot contents to the smooth tiled floor, where it clanged with a clank and a

bang and a pitter, he kicked at the stove until he heard an unmistakable, a horrid and nasty, unforgiving hiss. His tantrum had led to breaking the gas line, and before he could do a thing to stop it, the kitchen was ablaze.

His first thought was that he was far too intoxicated to deal with a house fire.

The second thing to cross his mind was that he was about to lose his home and all of its contents.

Thirdly, he would probably be deemed negligent and not collect a dime from his insurance!

Then finally, his sense of self-preservation took over and his last thought was to get the hell out of the house and to call the damn fire department.

In his manic attempt to gather his thoughts and to collect himself, he managed to grab his laptop computer and the only box of his artwork that had not made the trip to the attic, and that one box, the one that contained the painting of the fucked up beginner's drum set, the one he loathed, were the only two things to make it out to the curb with

him when at last the roiling curls of smoke forced him out into the air.

In quiet desperation, he watched as his house nearly burned to the ground.

Everything in the attic was lost.

All he had left to prove that he had ever been an artist were eighteen paintings of clocks he could hardly bear to look upon because they were all ugly and out of proportion and he didn't like the colors he'd chosen.

That box contained nothing more than what Peter considered his life's greatest failures and that's all he was left with.



## Chapter Sixteen

In the weeks that followed, Peter Durant found himself residing, most discontentedly, in a small apartment on the other side of town, nearer to the city than he had ever lived before. With no claim check in sight from the insurance company, he was forced to use up much of his savings to purchase everything a person might need to start over.

Sparsely furnished, his apartment reminded him of one of his lonesome paintings in which a single clock rested on a mantle, accompanied by little more than a solo house plant or a nick-knack of some sort. Maybe a twig might be present, or a tidbit.

Dejected, he resorted to purchasing used books from the shop down the street and a few weeks after settling in, he even broke down and purchased a TV. By mid-April he'd begun a habit of watching Saturday Night Live on the weekends, but rarely turned the thing on for any other reason.

Then, on a Friday afternoon, after stopping to purchase a table top easel and a new set of paints and brushes, he was approached by a striking young woman who simply asked for his name, and then, after having given it to her, she handed him a folded piece of paper. She then abruptly walked away.

Confused, he too abruptly walked away.

Later, inside his apartment, he opened the curious letter and read it. This is what was written on the paper he'd received:

“Dearest Peter, by now you may have come to the realization that your negativity, like rays of sunlight, having been focused through a magnifying lens, has returned to you and burned

you, divested you of everything you had, nearly costing you your life. You have much to offer this world, Peter, so please, for the love of God, stop being such an asshole and live.”

The letter bore no signature or closing.

That letter broke Peter’s heart.





## Chapter Seventeen

Sitting in front of his laptop, Peter contemplated the young stranger's words as he continued to try and find a way to booby trap the world of online quizzes and all quiz-like things. But then, as he folded up the letter and placed it back into the pages of his used and tattered copy of *Flittering Bugnuts* by Richard Winsley, he looked into the computer's screen and got another brilliant idea.

What if he were to take advantage of all the available websites through which one might generate a free online quiz, and in following their rules and guidelines, find a way to get people to laugh at themselves, as opposed to feeling insulted?

What if he decided to give up, and to throw his hat into the crowd, and where he found that he could not beat them, *join* them?

The feelings that came over him were odd ones. He took a much needed moment to think.

He thought, ‘If they want stupid, I’ll give them stupid, alright. I’ll come up with shit that is so horribly inconceivable and benignly absurd that those slippery fucktards won’t be able to get enough!’

Yay!

Then he tried to come up with his very first quiz.

At first, it wasn’t easy.

He looked around the room for inspiration, some suggestion offered up by the universe perhaps, but the room seemed to offer nothing. Then, there on the side of a small jar of non-GMO

roasted peanuts he saw the logo for The Peanut Corporation!

‘That’s it!’ he thought.

Like orgasmic and tickly moths dancing around the flickering flame of a smallish candle, gleeful thoughts tumbled about inside his head like so many overweight fucktards in a three-legged race, all wearing white, of course, ‘cause they are supposed to represent moths in this instance.

His first quiz would invariably be, “What kind of peanut are you?”

The thought of it alone made him laugh, and for the first time in many years, his laughter was derived from pleasant thoughts as opposed to maleficent and treacherous ones.

Peter found a piece of scrap paper and started a list.

*What kind of peanut are you?*

With the voracity of a gambling addict filling out race cards at an off-track betting outlet with only four minutes to the gate, he scribbled; Happy Peanut, Silly Peanut, Confident Peanut, Life of the Party Peanut, Buttery Peanut, Brittle Peanut and a whole bunch more.

Then it was time to visit the website and learn how to generate a quiz.

What he learned there was that the templates the websites provide make the process quite easy, but that coming up with original and unique questions and answers does not follow suit.

By the time he was done, three hours later, he had a brand new quiz that no one had ever seen before, and then he took the quiz himself.

The experience caused him to laugh out loud as he answered each question.

Then, as he began to imagine millions of lonely people sitting at home or at work laughing and smiling along with him, he began to experience something he had not felt in years.

It was joy.



## Chapter Nineteen

Well I can tell you, and believe me, because I have tried: generating a properly functioning online quiz is no simple undertaking. There is math involved if you want to do it right, and there were times when Peter sorely wished he had befriended an actuary or a calculus teacher during the process.

The first fifty-two times Peter took his own quiz, he was informed that he was a Happy Peanut every time.

“Son-of-a-fucking-bitch!”



Before taking the quiz for a fifty-third time though, he wrote an apology letter to Allison, the young blogger who liked to write about hair clips.

For the first time in Peter's life, he had admitted he was wrong.

He almost cried writing that sincerest of apologies.

Peter's next step in growing was for him to discover, and then to accept, just how easy it truly can be for everyone to be Ashley Olsen.

Then he stopped and put his thinking cap back on because he was still kind of a prick in general and he really wanted to get back to work.

'There has got to be some way to figure this out,' he thought to himself.

He fetched another piece of scrap paper.

'There are twelve questions. Each has either: two, three or four possible choices, but, damn it!

In the end, there can be so many friggin' combinations it could drive a person mad.'

This is when the question of probability entered the picture.

'I've got to set this up so there is an equal chance of getting any one of the eight different answers. Not everyone can be the Happy Peanut.'

He was determined.

It took him four days to figure it out.

Why so long?

It took him that long because he decided to figure it all out on his own instead of using the law of probability to assist him because he was still a stubborn ass and refused to ask for help.

Working it all out, he was eventually able to answer the questions differently and attain a different result almost every time.

Once or twice he was the Confident Peanut. More often than not he was the Silly Peanut, but he'd set it up that way because he wanted more people to be the Silly Peanut because he believed in his heart that if a person was to be told that they are a Silly Peanut, they would somehow feel happier inside.

He thought, 'Being the Silly Peanut will bring about more smiles, even more so than being the Super Peanut or the Confident Peanut, but even still, not everyone should be a Silly Peanut all the time.

That would appear unbecoming of anyone.

'If people start their day with one of my quizzes, I can guarantee they will begin each day with a smile, maybe even a laugh. Then they will share my quizzes, and like some contagious disease, people will become happier while I am alive.'

Why was he even thinking such things?

Why did he even care?

He began to feel like the Grinch on that day in the snow when his heart grew three sizes, having started off two sizes too small, like Peter's penis.

But what Peter failed to realize, was that his quizzes, (eventually all seven hundred of them) along with many interesting and beloved examples of his paintings, would continue to affect people for thousands of years to come.



## Chapter Twenty

During the months that followed, and eventually over the course of the many years that followed, Peter Durant took to painting like a pro, but this time around, he chose to paint an assortment of items within his still life imagery, never once painting a clock or anything with numbers on it ever again.

He was done with that shit.

Furthermore, he all but quit drinking and found that laughter and a focus on purpose provided him with much more from his daily existence and gave him so much more to look forward to each day that he could hardly stand to look back on his past.

In many ways, he could hardly believe that he was once the man he recalled himself to have been.

That old and dusty personality had become dead to him.

Agatha's Facebook persona continued on, but eventually he pretended that she died and created his own Facebook page with his real name.

People he'd known throughout his past were at first quite leery of accepting his friend requests, but many eventually came around and forgave him his previous digressions into acting like a shit stain.

"Wow, you're like a whole new man," many had written him.

"I don't know, I sort of found my purpose in life and it's very fulfilling, so I am just trying to spread it around."

Then one day, he came up with his baby. He was dining out, enjoying a lunch of Chinese food when a fortune cookie, neatly wrapped in plastic before him, caught his eye. When inspiration struck him, as it had been doing daily and most generously as of late, he wrote the concept down:

*What does your fortune cookie say?*

That very evening, Mr. Peter Durant, the very same man you met back at the beginning of this story, began a list of fortune cookie fortunes that would never be outdone. Penning lines that would one day bring tears of joy and elation to women both older and young; he reached into the depths of his being to find the perfect words in which to tell someone that they are more so beautiful, unique and unparalleled than even they could have ever imagined.

He showed the unloved that they were truly loved.



He brought smiles to the faces of people with really bad teeth.

Shooting for ten words or less, he managed to make even the most lonesome and broken of souls believe that there was hope.

He gave millions upon millions of people a brand new outlook on life.

And they shared those feelings with everyone.

Tickling the fancies of just about everyone who played his games online, he made them smile endlessly, proving to the world once and for all that we, as many people have believed and chanted about in the past, are all just one big conglomeration of energy.

And when the positive energy outdoes the negative? Well, wondrous things can happen, and do.

However, it wasn't until Peter changed his ways completely that he became fit to show the world how easily the universe and all its occupants can change.

His goal was to set the world on fire with positivity, in the hopes that all evil might one day be destroyed.

Well, let's just say, it didn't happen overnight, but it did happen rather quickly, well, in all actuality it took a few hundred years, and then there was finally peace on Earth for all humankind.

And it all began with one simple person taking that very first step.

But it didn't happen overnight because not everyone got on board right away. You see, his only means of advertising his quizzes and the digital fortune cookies he was generating were by sharing his personal results online and by tweeting them. BUT, his quizzes were all so fucking funny that everyone within his circles, and then people

within their circles, would take them and then share their results online.

In other words, he needed help to make it all happen.

Then, because his fortune cookies were so empowering, touching and inspiring, people began to share those.

Soon enough, he had thousands and then hundreds of thousands of people taking his quirky quizzes and reading his cookies, and the laughter that accompanied each of their experiences warmed their hearts, and his.

Some other examples of his works are:

What were you born to be?

What kind of jelly are you?

Who would you be if you weren't you? (But this one he fixed so that everyone got the same answer, and that answer was always: "You'd still be you because no one else can be you. You're so

fucking amazing even a quiz does not have the power to tell you otherwise or differently. You are so very special in so many ways, but perhaps you just don't see it? Or maybe it's because people just don't go around telling each other how special they truly are these days and that is quite a shame. So smile, because you are you and you are loved and you are awesome. Now, why don't you go and make a point of telling someone else how special they are today, before it is too late, you beautiful son-of-a-bitch!"

After generating his fiftieth online quiz, Peter started his own website and this led directly to selling ads. The money barely trickled in at first, but eventually he was making enough to pay the bills and he could afford to do his artwork with all his free time.

Down the road a ways he asked a local hotspot if he could do an installation of his artwork on their walls, seeing that the walls were all well-lit but mostly barren. The owner agreed, and they

settled on an 80/20 split from any sales that might arise, and soon enough he was making a name for himself in real life.

Peter met a lovely woman, and, because they were older and didn't have time for that shit, they quickly settled down and got to fucking like they always wanted to because they sure as hell weren't getting any younger, ya know?

Soon thereafter, they purchased a house together using Peter's quiz money, but he didn't care though. To him, all the money he earned was actually money bequeathed to him from a striking young woman he'd met on the street one Friday afternoon. During moments of quiet solitude, he'd often dare to think that she could have possibly been a traveler from the future... something that, once upon time he used to dabble in imagining. Perhaps she had been an adventurous young female stranger who could afford the eight millions dollars to travel back through time just to deliver him a very important massage, and not

really his ex-wife's friend from work who simply despised him after hearing all the dirt about him from Cheryl?

Perhaps she was someone so very special that all the stars around us in all the heavens above had selected her to play a part in changing the universe for the better for ever now, and forever after...

However, when he stopped to consider that eight million dollars might only be worth like fifteen dollars and thirty cents to the people in the far distant future, well, then none of it seemed all that risky or special to him any longer and he sort of forgot about time travel and the chick with the letter and all the crap he used to think about before he met the love of his life Casandra.

Casandra had once been a very annoying vegetarian who suffered from irritable bowel syndrome until she met Peter and said fuck it and ate a steak. Now she shits regularly and smiles a

lot more often than she had prior to meeting her handsome painter, best friend and husband-to-be.

“Some things never change and everything else remains the same,” some old, wise man once told Peter back when times were different. Well, either that or some idiot at the bar said it, but either way, one very important issue has yet to be addressed, and that is: the well-kept secret to happiness.

Unfortunately, Peter and Casandra were far too busy enjoying what remained of their lives together to ever learn what that secret was.

The End.

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