2001

Dave Cohen's thesis

Dave Cohen

The University of Montana

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DAVE COHEN'S THESIS

by

Dave Cohen

BA Middlebury College 1998

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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The University of Montana

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Chairperson

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Hundt: Why did you choose Madonna?
Rosen: Well, she was someone most people would recognize. It was like using a familiar landmark, like the Statue of Liberty.
Hundt: Was it a malicious choice?
Rosen: No, not at all. I have nothing against Madonna. I think she’s very good. I have several of her tapes.
Hundt: Did your choice have anything to do with her behavior as reported in the tabloids or in televised entertainment magazines?
Rosen: No. Like I said, it was the fact of her celebrity. It didn’t have to be Madonna at all. It could have been any other celebrity. It could have been Celine Dion. Or Julia Roberts. It didn’t matter.
Hundt: But certainly choosing Madonna specifically influenced the story.
Rosen: Sure, of course. But I mean that I could have written basically the same story about Celine Dion, I just would have set it in Canada somewhere instead of Miami. Or Julia Roberts, wherever she’s associated with. Georgia?
Hundt: But why didn’t you chose Celine Dion or Julia Roberts?
Rosen: I don’t know, I guess I thought Madonna was just better. Funnier. More in line with the story I wanted to write.
Hundt: How’s that?
Rosen: She’s got more, I don’t know, she’s got more energy. She’s a more interesting character.
Hundt: How do you know this?
Rosen: Just from what I’ve seen of her on television and movies and things like that.
Hundt: So you’ve never actually met Madonna.
Rosen: No. Not until this case.
Hundt: How did you research the story, Mr Rosen?
Rosen: Well, I didn’t really do much research for it. I went on what I already knew mostly. For some of the specifics I asked my sister who knows more about Madonna than I do. I got the names of the clubs from my sister’s friend, who’s from Miami. Really, there’s not a lot in the story that requires knowledge of things. It’s mostly a character piece.
One Night I Had in 1999
by Daniel Rosen

I like to go to clubs and dance. It is declared that I am a very good looking guy; women have told me this, and it is generally accepted among my friends. I have had my share of sexual partners. I am Latino. My name is: Oskar.

So I am from Miami. And it is a Friday night, and so I am all set to go to this discotheque called Thump. It is not my favorite discotheque-- I like better The Grunt, on Washington-- but usually it does the trick. You can’t always go to the same place; that would be boring and people would start to look funny at you.

But I have made myself ready: I have on my nicest clothes (a short sleeve David Severese original with buttons, good tight black pants by Zvendi), and I have washed myself very thoroughly, and scented myself with just the right stuff (this I will keep secret), and my hair is looking good, I had it cut the week before. My friend OJ is going to pick us up, because he has the best car to ride in: a convertible 1965 Corvette which is red. We have called OJ OJ since he was little, and though he gets a lot of shit for it since OJ Simpson went bad, we still call him OJ and he doesn’t mind. What are you going to do? He’s been OJ since he was five.

So he picks me up and already there are Jake and Manny in the car, Manny in the shotgun seat and Jake in the back.

“How didn’t you pick me up first, maricón?” I say to OJ. Whoever is picked up first rides shotgun. Usually I am the one and nobody minds because I am the best looking of my friends (people have said this) and so it is best for the whole group if I do.

“It would have been out of my way, don’t worry about it, you’ll be alright.”

I give him a look but I leave it at that.

So we arrive at Thump. OJ pulls up front and we all get out and OJ drives around to find some parking. Parking is a bitch at this time of night (12:00) and usually you end up in a packed parkinglot which just this afternoon was a regular Dominos Pizza parkinglot, paying 10 bucks for a few hours, and so I am glad it is OJ and not me with the nice car.
There is a wait to get in but it is not too bad. OJ catches up right as we’re next in line. The people behind us make a fuss about him joining our group, but I tell them: Mind your own business alright? We go inside.

Thump plays Latin techno, and it is loud, but you get used to it. We could hear the music from outside the club and we could really hear it inside. I mean, we couldn’t hear anything else. But that is how these clubs are.

We break up into two groups: me and Manny and OJ and Jake. Always groups of two, until you find a girl. When your partner finds a girl, then you wait for someone in the other group to find a girl and then you partner up with whoever is leftover. Usually I make it in the first round, but this is not bragging, just the way it is. Whoever is last has to do it on his own, which is harder but not too bad. Sometimes there are girl groups of two, and that works fine, unless one of them is bad to look at and you get stuck with her. But you can always lose her, try again on your own. But sometimes when you do that that will end things between her friend and yours—and that is very bad. These things you need to negotiate and sometimes it is hard to do the right thing.

So like I said, it is me and Manny tonight. And the first stage is walking: but a very specific kind of walking. It is a slow walk with purpose and with the arms loose, maybe one hand flat against your chest as you do it. Maybe the most important part of the walk is the look on your face: like I walk this way because this is my house, okay? You walk around the edges of the place, looking for people you know so you can nod to them and maybe say a few words. It is good to be seen knowing people, having a relationship with them.

I walk first, Manny right behind me. First we run into Juan and his girl. His girl has had implants since she was fifteen; that’s how everyone thinks of her: the implant girl from 15. Nobody knows her name, except maybe for Juan. I say hello to them. (Really, it’s all shouted because of the loudness.)

“Hey man, have you seen who’s here?”

“No,” I tell him.

“Shit! Well I don’t want to ruin the surprise. All I’m saying is: keep your eyes open for someone you’ll recognize, that’s all I’m saying.”

I look at him but I can’t figure out what that means, if it is a good thing or a bad thing. He’s smiling about it, but not big enough to be about some girl I had last week who turned out to be somebody else’s little sister. I would definitely recognize that smile.

“I’ll be looking, then.” We slap hands and me and Manny move on.

“What the fuck was he talking about?” Manny says to me.
“The fuck I know,” I say back.

So we continue to walk. I see a few people I know, and I nod and raise my eyebrows at them. But before we reach even halfway around the place, Manny runs into this girl he knows from a few times before. I know her too, but from a long time ago, several months. I see her first: I nod to her and make to keep going, but Manny wants to talk to her. This is it, probably, for him. He’s found someone. It’s a cheap one, since he knows her already (not to say anything about this girl), but if that’s the way he wants to play it, there’s nothing I can say. It’s Manny and this girl, and I’ve got to go find Jake or OJ, whoever lost in the first round. It hasn’t been very long that we’ve been inside Thump, so there’s also a good chance that neither of them have found anyone, and I’ll be on my own for a while.

When you’re on your own it’s very similar to when you’re with someone-- you still move around the place with the same walk. It’s less convincing though because you don’t have someone at your back; but you make do. There are some tricks. One of them is to get a drink.

Now I am not the sort of guy who likes to lose myself in drinks: that is not why I come to these places. There are people like that, and good for them is my attitude, but it is not for me. I come for dancing and for women and to see people and for them to see me, and none of that is helped by too much drinking. Same with too much coke or X or whatever. Never too much at these places; it is not the right time.

That said, I do like to have a little something in me. I am not a baby about it. Plus most of the women like it: they like to drink some and they like it when you’ve had a little. And there is one other good thing about the drinks: there are plenty of women who wait at the bar.

So I head over there to get a bottle of something. The bar is in a separate room from the dancing room, connected by a wide corridor. People are leaning against both sides of the corridor, lining it, making it hard to get through. When I do, I see: the bar is crowded tonight. But I have come to this place enough so that the bartender recognizes me and serves me quick with no problem. I get my beer and move out to the corridor and back to the dancing room. Now I am walking with a beer.

I am sort of with one eye looking for either OJ or Jake so I can connect with them, but I can’t see them. But I do see something which is perhaps better: a girl who is very pretty leaning against a wall sort of near where the bathrooms are, by herself. She looks like she is waiting for somebody, which could be good or bad, depending on if she is waiting for a guy or a girl.
I come up to her with my beer between two fingers. She looks older than me, but this is not a problem, I’ve had older girls before, and sometimes they are better.

“Hey, my name is Oskar, what’s yours?” I say it just like that. I like being direct, no bullshit lines or anything. That is for Italian Greaseballs.

“Melody,” she says but she doesn’t look at me when she says it. Right off I can tell about her.

Sometimes that’s it for me: I just say thank you and goodbye and move on. Sometimes I harass a girl if her being a bitch catches me at the right moment. This can be trouble when the boyfriend comes back, but I’m okay most times.

So I lean up against her: “Melody. That’s a pretty name but you probably get that all the time so forget about that. What is it, French?”

“Yeah, I’m French,” she says. She’s still looking at something else.

“Well, Melody, why don’t you tell me about yourself.”

Now she looks at me.

“Yeah,” I go on, “I want to know all about you and your, you know, history.”

She looks at me and doesn’t say anything. Then she looks away.

I say to her “What are you, waiting for someone? You can tell me. It’s me, Oskar.”

“Yeah, I’m waiting for someone.”

“Good, then we’ll wait together, me and you. Oskar and Melody.”

“Look Oskar, why don’t you fuck off, okay?”

Usually it takes a girl longer to get to saying that. So I’m only just even more happy to keep talking to her.

“Come on, baby,” I say, “I think we could really have something here. Let’s go dance me and you. Let’s groove ourselves out. Let’s go out to the dance floor and show these people--”

At this point, Madonna comes out of the bathroom and walks up to Melody. This is a very big surprise, since Madonna is not someone you would normally see in your life, not in person. The closest to Madonna that I have ever seen was a very tall transvestite on South Beach I saw once. I said to OJ who was with me: “that bitch looks like Madonna!”

But this is the real actual Madonna, and I know it right away. I am very surprised by this. Who wouldn’t be, right? So there is this one moment of holy shit am I fucking surprised. But I control myself right away. The last thing I want to do, especially in front of Melody, is look like a regular asshole.
Madonna says to Melody but also a little to both of us, “Am I interrupting something?” She looks at Melody when she says it but when she’s done she looks at me.

“Yeah,” I say, “I was just getting to know your friend here, Melody.”

“Yeah?” says Madonna.

“Let’s go somewhere,” Melody says to Madonna and she pauses and looks at me as she finishes: “Else.”

“You want to go dance?” I say it to both of them. I even put my hands on both their shoulders. I have to say, I probably normally wouldn’t have had the balls to be like this, but Melody really has me going.

“Yeah,” says Madonna. “I’d like to dance. Why don’t we all dance?”

Melody shrugs my hand off her shoulder and says to Madonna: “Listen baby, this one’s a real asshole. If you dance with him, I’m going somewhere else.”

“Is that true?” Madonna says to me, “Are you a real asshole?”

My hand is still on her shoulder. “Yes. But mostly to your friend here.”

“She’s not really my friend. I just like her tits.”

Madonna moves to grab Melody’s tits but Melody gets really mad at all of this and she shrugs Madonna off and steps back. She makes a face of you are a fucking bitch beyond belief and you, you Oskar, can go fucking die. She says something as she leaves but she doesn’t say it loud enough and we don’t hear her and then she’s gone.

“She did have nice tits though,” I say.

Madonna shrugs. “Yeah. Let’s go dance.”

So we go out on the dance floor. This is normal; this is where you go with a girl when you find one, this is obvious. The way I dance is usually to start out pretty slow, depending on the music, and work up as it goes. The key to all of this is the look on my face: my eyes are most of the time right on the girl’s eyes, sometimes on the floor and sometimes on the girl’s body. Girls like to catch you looking a little at their bodies. The key is for the girl to see in your look I am only looking at you, I am not looking at any other girl and I am not looking for a friend to see me with you. Of course you do both, but very quietly, out the sides of your eyes, and to her it looks like it is just her in your eyes.

But this is Madonna, and I for some reason feel stupid giving the look to her. Who am I to give this look to Madonna? But the thing was, right after we started up dancing, I saw the look on her. I have seen girls do this before-- very upfront girls who like to try to shock you with their upfrontness, the kind that say things like “so when are we going to fuck, me and
you?" Mostly I do not like this kind of girl. But whatever, this is Madonna and she can have whatever the fuck kind of look she wants, right?

So I look around a little to see if anyone is watching this and everyone around us is watching us. Not like open mouth stares, but most of them are looking at us sideways, especially the girls. And Madonna is really laying it on. She keeps staring at me really hard and dances really close, so that we’re face to face. She grabs my ass pretty hard, so I put one hand on her waist and back and the other in the air. We move together like we’re fucking standing up, but really exaggerated. We’re like this for a little while. Everyone is really looking at us now.

Then she moves around my back and grabs my chest from behind and strokes that for a while, then moves down to my stomach and to my balls. First she grabs at them over my pants, rough, but in the right way. Then she slides her hand down inside the front of my pants and checks things out with it.

“Not bad,” she says.

Now this is not something I really want to go into, but lets just say that when it comes to that, I do all right for myself. No one has ever accused me of not having enough. Some of the guys I have seen in porno magazines, they have ones that are just too big for anything. Mine is not like that. It is more like the ones that smaller, more regular porno guys have. But enough with that.

We’ve been dancing for probably five minutes, and she says to me, “How about going someplace else?”

“Like what kind of other place?”

“My limo.”

I am just about to say You have a limo? but I catch myself because of course she does. Instead I say, “Your limo is good to me.”

“Come on, sailor boy.”

What the fuck is Sailor Boy I want to say but I don’t. Usually I say what I want, but this whole situation is fucked up and I’m thinking funny. She grabs my hand and we head for the exit. She has her other hand on my ass as we walk and she’s squeezing to the rhythm of our steps. Right there at the exit I see OJ with a girl and he is staring at us and she is staring at us. I smile at him and try not to let the smile say I mean sometimes crazy shit happens what can you do? but instead say something more confident like that’s right, yes. They watch us pass by. Pretty much everyone is watching us.
On the other side of the exit is a photographer. He’s been waiting for us— really he’s been waiting for her. I’ve never seen someone like this: he’s right up in our faces snapping away like an asshole. He’s pretty fat. I almost trip over him.

“You want me to take his camera and do something with it?” I ask Madonna.

She doesn’t say anything but she holds my hand tighter and walks faster and pulls me harder towards the street. I don’t see her limo until we’re right on it— the photographer is right in my face. It’s a light pink limo. The door opens and we climb inside and I feel better.

“Fucking Christ,” she says, and then we are moving.

“You get that every day?” I say to her.

“Sometimes it’s worse. I recognized that guy. Fat bastard. I’ll have someone send him shit in the mail.”

She sits back in her seat and lets out a big breath. She’s sitting next to me, facing the front of the car. It’s a big limo. Now I haven’t been inside too many limos, in fact before this night I haven’t been in any at all, but it’s a fucking big limo. There’s more room in the backseat here than in all of OJ’s car, and I can see a bar and a TV and a phone and what looks like some kind of radio and all sorts of knobs for I don’t even know what. She’s still leaning back and she reaches over and hits some of the buttons and twists a knob and when she’s done Like A Prayer is playing in the limo. Then she flips open a cabinet and takes out a silver M. I can’t describe it any better than that; it’s like a box made out of silver in the shape of an M, about as big as two cellular phones next to each other. Then she pops it open: the top comes off. Inside is a short thin silver straw and all this cocaine, it’s just filled with coke.

She does a lot of it and leans back even further and says “SHIT!” She takes a big breath and holds the M out to me. I take it and do a little, not even close to what Madonna did, but that’s some good shit. I can really feel it now. I tell her Thank you and give it back to her and she takes another hit from it and puts it away.

She rolls down the window and yells “FUCK!” out the window, but we’re on Mcarthur Causeway now so it’s not like anyone hears her. She rolls up the window and looks right at me like I’m about to climb on top of you and fuck you and just go ahead and stop me. It’s a long stare, and about 10 seconds into the stare she starts to sing along to her music, except she’s not singing it, she’s just saying the words: “When you call my name, it’s like a little prayer, I’m down on my knees, I want to take you there.” But she does it at the same time that her voice is singing it from the stereo, so it overlaps for an effect I don’t like. The whole time she doesn’t stop staring at me.
Then she starts towards me and goes for my pants and undoes the belt and gets it so that my dick is out of my pants and standing up. There it is: Madonna is blowing me in the back of her limo. She’s going really hard and fast because of all the coke she did, but it’s all right. Then all of a sudden she stops.

“What the fuck,” I ask her.

“Wait,” she says, and she goes for the cabinet again and takes out the M and pops it open and grabs a pinch of the coke and lays it on my dick. Right away it starts to tingle, especially on the tip, but then she gives a short laugh like hihi! then she snorts it up and the tingle is gone and she throws her head back and then gets back to sucking my dick, which she does in a more or less regular way until I get off.

There’s a wall between the driver and us and as I’m putting my pants back on she bangs on it and says “Are we almost there Leroy? For Christ’s fucking sake are we almost there?” She keeps at it for a good ten seconds of banging. I’m feeling active myself but I try to keep it in control. Plus, she has done about three times the coke as me.

She leans back and says, “Leroy is my driver. He drives me everywhere. He’s driving us right now!”

I look at her and I say, “Well, fuck.”

A new song comes on: Express Yourself. She turns a knob and the volume goes up, then she rolls down all the windows and the sunroof and sticks half her body out a window. She’s yelling her song at the cars we pass: “DON’T GO FOR SECOND BEST, BABY, PUT YOUR LOVE TO THE TEST!” She comes back inside.

“For Christ sake Leroy,” she says to me, “Sing!”

Then she sticks herself back out the sunroof.

I say to her ass which is pointed at me, “My name is Oskar, not fucking Leroy,” and I smack her on her ass.

She comes back in. “What? Sing, Leroy! Go sing!”

“No fucking way,” I tell her.

She says “Fine. Then make yourself useful.” She stands up so that she is half out of the sunroof and starts yelling again “FANCY CARS THAT GO VERY FAST YOU KNOW THEY NEVER LAST NO NO!” and as she’s yelling she’s taking off her pants. She’s got on these very regular looking panties, like white and gray. Then she takes them off too, and she’s not shaved hardly at all, which I have to admit was a very surprising thing to find; I thought Madonna would be one to shave herself there.
She bends down back into the limo and says to me: “Go to work Leroy, go to work!” And then she stands up and gets back to her sing-yelling. I guess this means she wants to me eat her out, which I don’t really mind, since I have to say it is something that I happen to have talent at. Again this is not big talking; I base this on what girls have told me. I’ll just say: I’ve been practicing at it since I was 13, and I’ve had a lot of practice, all right?

So I have all this energy from the coke, and I go at it really hard, a lot of movement. I get on my knees and grab her ass, which is pretty tight, and get to work. I’m working it pretty much like she worked me: hard and fast. I can hear her really yelling to her music, even louder than before. We turn a corner and I fall back away from her against the door.

When we’re straight again I get back to work, but like a minute after that she bats my head and comes back inside and says, “We’re almost there.”

“Where?”

“My mansion, you fucking asshole!” Then she starts laughing like my question or her answer is the most funny thing that has ever been said. She can’t stop laughing. She’s banging on the seats laughing: ha ha ha!

We stop moving and she yells out the window, “I want this door opened, Leroy! NOW!” and then the driver comes and opens the door for her. She says Thank you to him in this obnoxious voice that if it were me, I would smack her for, if I were the type who hit girls and I didn’t care about getting fired by Madonna. She gets out and she still has no pants on.

There is a long path that leads to the front door of the house, which is the biggest goddamned fucking house I’ve ever seen, probably bigger than the club we just came from, all pink and white. The door is white and I can hear a dog barking from somewhere.

She opens the door and inside facing us is this huge twisting staircase and a room to the right and a room to the left, and both rooms look like the same kind of room, with couches and pianos and tables. The walls are painted pink.

“Would you like the grand tour, Leroy?”

“My name is fucking Oskar.”

“Well?”

“All right then.”

“Well, the bedroom is up the stairs this way. Come.”

I follow her up the stairs and to a long hallway.

“This is the hallway. That is a door on the right... and this a door on the left... and here is the bedroom.”
So obviously the bedroom is huge, the biggest bedroom I’ve ever seen, and it’s all pink. There’s a round bed as big as one of those backyard above-the-ground pools, and it’s all fucking pink. There’s a piano near the corner, and a stereo system taller than I am (more than 6 feet) across from it. The ceilings are probably 20 feet high.

“And that’s the bed. Are you paying attention?”

She reaches for a remote control that’s on a table near the bed and she points it at the giant stereo and in a second more Madonna music is playing: something electronic that I don’t recognize but definitely her doing the singing. It starts off really slow but then gets moving. The words say: *Put your hand on my skin.* During the slow part Madonna takes off her shirt and bra really slow, like she’s acting out the music. She’s got that hard look the whole time. I take off my clothes.

“Come here, Leroy, I’m going to FUCK you.”

Right then I decide to really give it to her, do it to her really rough, whatever she thinks. There’s only so many times a man can be called Leroy, you know?

She leans back on the bed and makes herself ready. I don’t know how old she’s supposed to be, but she looks good for whatever age it is. The stomach is flat and tight, which is something I like in a girl. And she has really big tits, which I also like.

I come to the bed and we start going at it. She’s really rough at the beginning which is fine with me because that way I can be really rough and there’s nothing she can say. But after a little while she says, “Wait!” and she climbs over to the table with the remote control and hits a button and the song changes to another song which sounds pretty much the same as the last song, electronic and slow, then electronic and fast. She comes back over and she’s got the remote control in her hand.

“I want you on top to start,” she says.

Fine with me. I climb on her and go at it really good. This is all right!

Then she hits me: she slaps me on the side hard.

“What?”

“Slow down.”

I look at her like *shit, woman* and I keep going.

“Keep to the music. Slow DOWN.”

I notice that the music has gotten quiet and slower. She starts to sing along to it, quiet:

“Something in the sky at night, I wonder...”
I stop totally because what the fuck is she doing? She doesn’t seem to notice that I’ve stopped. I see that in one hand she’s got the remote and she’s pointing it at the radio and I can hear that she’s turning the volume up.

Then the music starts really going again; it is saying “AND I FEEL!” and she shouts “GO!” and slaps me on the side again. The music is so loud now that it is making everything shake. It is louder than at the club.

So I go, and I decide not to listen to her anymore, to do my thing and not worry about her and her music and her screams and slaps or any of it.

She’s screaming, “Do it to my music! Listen! Fuck me to my music!” but I don’t think she’s really talking to me or to anyone. I decide: she is a crazy bitch.

I also decide that maybe this is Madonna, so what, I’m going to get off and be done with her. I’m going home. This isn’t as easy as I’d like because of the blow job I’d just gotten in the limo, but I really work at it and I manage it all right.

I climb off her. She looks at me like did you just seriously do what I think you just did?

“Did you just come in me?” She sits up. “Did you just come in me?”

“Probably I did.” I walk over to my clothes and put on my boxer shorts.

“You fucking ANIMAL. You stupid fucking BASTARD.”

“I’m clean,” I tell her.

“I’m going to fucking KILL YOU. I’m going to have you ARRESTED.”

“Listen to me you crazy bitch,” I say to her and I point my finger at her. “You could have said something at any time, all right? But you were too busy--”

She cuts me off: “Be quiet. I can’t BELIEVE you. You’re fucking DEAD.”

I’ve got my pants on now. “Shut the fuck up,” I tell her.

“You shut the fuck up. YOU shut the fuck up! You... you’re going to wake the fucking baby!”

“Baby? What the fuck are you talking about?”

“My baby!”

“I’m not the one who’s fucking shouting like a fucking crazy bitch,” I shout. “You’re the one who’s going to wake the fucking baby. Not like I give a fuck anyway.”

“Get out of my mansion. GET OUT.”

“Fine the fuck with me,” I say.

I start to button my shirt. What a crazy bitch!

She watches this and doesn’t say anything. Just when I get it buttoned up and sit down on a chair to put on my shoes and socks she says to me, “Wait, don’t go yet.”
“What is it?” I say to her.

“I want to do it one more time.”

“NO WAY!”

I continue with my shoes and socks. She gets up out of the bed and walks over to me really slowly, trying to be all sexy.

“Oskar, please, before you go, do it to me one more time!”

“No way, okay? No way.”

She puts her hands on my shoulders and gives me a kiss. I don’t stop her, but I don’t kiss her back either. She sits on my lap facing me and sort of rubs herself up against my body.

“Come on Oskar, one more time.” She pushes her breasts up against my chest. “I’m sorry I got angry. Do you forgive me? I want you to forgive me, Oskar.”

It is at this point that I think of a really good line to say to her. I set it up just right: I look into her eyes and I don’t say anything for a second, and then I say to her, “Baby, why don’t you go ask Leroy.”

Then I stand up, and since she’s on my lap, she falls to the ground and thumps down on it. I walk out of the room and down the hall. Something smashes behind me but I don’t turn to look what it is. Then a silver alarm clock bounces past me very fast. I still don’t look; I just keep walking.

“FUCK YOU!” she screams at me. “FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU!”

I hurry to the door and open it and close it behind me. I walk down the path. A window opens up and Madonna comes out of it and she’s still yelling Fuck You at me. I turn to look and she’s still naked.

“I’m going to have you killed, you worthless shit!” That is the last thing that Madonna says to me.

I walk down the driveway to the gate, and there is man in a booth next to it watching a television.

I say to him, “Can you open the gate? I’d like to leave.”

“How did you get in here?” he says to me. He’s old looking and he looks Latino.

“I came in with her in the limo. We, you know, had an encounter. But she was too crazy so now I want to leave.”

“All right.” The gate starts to open.

“She’s one crazy bitch, that woman.”

The guard smiles at me. I walk out and think: how the fuck am I going to get home?
So I walk for a while until I get to a gas station and then I page OJ, who hasn’t had good luck with the woman he was with and really wants to know about my night anyway, and I get him to pick me up and drive me home, and that is the end of that.

[transcript excerpts]

Lippman: When your story appeared in print Mr Rosen, it was prefaced with the words, “This story is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.”
Rosen: Yes.
Lippman: This is obviously a lie.
Rosen: It was a joke.
Lippman: I don’t get it.
Rosen: Because obviously it was a lie. Ha ha, get it?
Lippman: No.

Lippman: Have you always had a fascination with Madonna, Mr Rosen?
Rosen: What do you mean by fascination?
Lippman: An interest that goes beyond liking her music or her movies or her work. A fixation.
Rosen: No. I liked some of her music, I thought she was interesting to watch, I liked how she handled fame. I thought she was an interesting character, that’s all.
Lippman: That’s all? How many Madonna albums do you have, Mr Rosen?
Rosen: I don’t know, probably three or four. Including the greatest hits. The Immaculate Collection.
Lippman: Eleven, Mr Rosen.
Rosen: Eleven? No, that’s too many.
Lippman: I have an affidavit from Jennifer Stewart swearing you have eleven Madonna albums. She listed them all. Please review the list and let me know if it is accurate, Mr Rosen.

[Exhibit D]

- Like a Virgin
- True Blue
• You Can Dance
• Who's That Girl (Motion Picture Soundtrack)
• Like a Prayer
• The Immaculate Collection
• Dick Tracy: I'm Breathless—Music From and Inspired by the Motion Picture
• Evita: The Complete Motion Picture Soundtrack
• Erotica
• Bedtime Stories
• Ray of Light

[transcript excerpts]

Rosen: I don’t see how having a certain number of Madonna albums says anything about anything, frankly. And there’s no way she could remember all that. She’s making that up. She’s got a special kind of memory that I don’t even want to begin to get into.

Lippman: She also said that you confided in her that in several instances you have masturbated to Madonna. Is that true?

Hundt: Objection: what is the relevance to the issue of libel?

Lippman: It goes towards motive. I’m trying to establish a particular attitude and disposition in the defendant. It goes towards malicious intent.

Judge Lowe: Objection overruled.

Lippman: Mr Rosen?

Rosen: Jesus. Jen would say something like that. We had a nasty break-up. She’s got issues. Jesus Christ.

Lippman: So you are testifying that you have never masturbated to my client?

Rosen: Well, I’m not ruling out the possibility that her image my have crossed my mind while I’ve—do I have to answer this question? Is this a question I am legally required to answer?

Judge Lowe: Yes, Mr Rosen, answer the question.

Rosen: Well, not intentionally, no, I haven’t masturbated to Madonna.

Lippman: Not intentionally. Okay. Is this your Penthouse, Mr Rosen?

Rosen: I doubt it.

Lippman: How about this Playboy?

Rosen: No. No it isn't.

Lippman: We had these issues fingerprinted, and your fingerprints are all over them.
Rosen: How did you get that? I cannot believe that that was obtained legally.
Lippman: The magazines—
Rosen: And how did you get my fingerprints?
Lippman: The magazines were given to us by Ms Stewart.
Rosen: Jesus Christ. Okay? Jesus Christ.
Lippman: I will ask you again: are these your magazines?
Rosen: Apparently those magazines belong to Ms Stewart, then, don't they?
Lippman: All right, Mr Rosen, were these magazines at any point in your possession?
Rosen: Look, I have a couple of those magazines, all right? It is possible that they are mine. But I don't see why they couldn't be anyone else's, either. People save them. I bet a million people have them.
Lippman: I request that the July 1985 issues of Penthouse and Playboy, containing unclothed pictures of my client taken when she was 19, be entered into evidence. These issues are old and rare enough to list for 35 dollars on Ebay, currently. Now, Mr Rosen, is it your contention that these two very valuable articles of pornography just so happened to fall accidentally in your possession, by chance?
Rosen: I honestly do not recall how they came into my possession. Ask Jen.

Lippman: Good morning ladies and gentleman. Thank you all for coming out today. I know we've got a lot to get through, so I'll try to make this introduction a short one. Okay. Now, we all know a lot of things are written about Madonna—a lot of untrue things, a lot of cruel things. This appeared in last September's Star, for example: Madonna’s Secret Bulimia Diet. Nothing all that surprising, right? Nothing we haven't seen in one form or another at the supermarket for the last fifteen years, right? Well, that was before the publication of Mr Rosen’s story. Now let's take a look at some of the tabloid headlines which came afterwards. Here: Madonna on Coke Binge Kills Own Cat; Exclusive: Madonna’s Secret Swedish Abortion; Madonna Loses 20 Pounds in 2 Weeks Thanks to Secret Cocaine Diet. Now I'm no scientist ladies and gentlemen, but it seems pretty obvious that there is something going on here. And we just have to look at Mr Rosen’s story. I think it speaks for itself. It is the work of a jealous, obsessive, vindictive, unkind man. Folks, this story doesn't only promote untruths, it proposes the exact mathematical opposite of truth. This story is an insult to the decades of safe-sex crusading Madonna has crusaded for. This story is an slap in the face to her public stance on narcotics. Ladies and gentlemen, this story is slander. That is what the evidence will show, and that is
what legal precedent will demand that you decide in this case. Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.

Lippman: Mr Rosen, could you please tell the court how you came up with the idea for Beautiful Stranger?
Rosen: Well, I don’t remember where I was, but once when I was listening to Ray of Light on the radio, and I got to wondering if Madonna would listen to it when she had sex. I wrote the story around that.
Lippman: Was it supposed to be humorous?
Rosen: Yes.
Lippman: And where would the humor come from?
Rosen: Well, the characters, mostly. I wanted to write funny characters.
Lippman: So, in effect, you tried to get laughs at the expense of my client.
Rosen: No. Yes. Yes. But other things too.
Lippman: But it was your purpose to manipulate my client’s character into a buffoonish drug-addled egomaniac, for laughs.
Rosen: No. That wasn’t my purpose at all, no.
Lippman: Mr Rosen, have you written any other stories about celebrities?
Rosen: No, not specifically.
Lippman: But celebrities have been featured in your writing.
Rosen: I make reference to them sometimes. It’s an easy way to give the story authenticity, a connection to reality. It’s useful.
Lippman: But that’s not what you were doing here, was it Mr Rosen?
Rosen: To some degree. But also there was more that I was doing, yes.
Lippman: Like assassinating my client’s character, for one.
Hundt: Objection.
Judge Lowe: Sustained.
Lippman: What then is the point of your story Mr Rosen? Why don’t you tell us that.
Rosen: Not all stories are supposed to have points. Plenty of stories, most stories, don’t have explicit points, per se.
Lippman: Is that so?
Rosen: Yes.
Lippman: Is that your expert opinion, as a writer?
Rosen: It is my opinion.
Lippman: So then you wrote a pointless story, to defame my client.
Rosen: I am being badgered here, your honor. This is badgering.
Lippman: Withdrawn, your honor.

Lippman: Mr Delahunt, I didn’t realize celebrity was a field in which one could be an expert.
Delahunt: Are you questioning my professionalism?
Lippman: Not exactly. I guess I’m just wondering about the authenticity of your profession. Is that what you have on your business cards—celebrity expert?
Delahunt: I earn a living at it, I’m paid for my expertise, so if that’s not a profession, then I don’t know what you consider one to be.
Lippman: How exactly do you earn a living, Mr Delahunt?
Delahunt: I am a paid consultant. Various periodicals and television programs solicit my knowledge and opinions and insight. And I write a regular column for celebrityviews.com.
Lippman: On the subject of celebrity?
Delahunt: Yes.
Lippman: Why couldn’t I, for instance, hire myself out like that? Call myself a célébrité or what have you, and give my opinions on celebrity? I watch Entertainment Tonight. I read Entertainment Weekly.
Delahunt: You are a dilettante in the field of celebrity. I am an expert. I have lectured on college campuses.
Lippman: Well perhaps you could just outline for us your qualifications then. What makes you an expert?
Delahunt: Diligent study, for one. I read a myriad of periodicals and journals on the subject. I am a savvy denizen of the internet. I was raised in Los Angeles. And I am on familiar terms with a host of actual celebrities, who provide information and insights. This is my job. I am paid to be maximally informed.
Lippman: So, in a sense Mr Delahunt, you are a gossip columnist.
Delahunt: I would say that I’m closer to an academic than a gossip columnist. I was an advisor to the University of California Los Angeles when they created their Popular Culture Studies Department.
Lippman: That exists?
Lippman: But you don’t actually teach there.
Delahunt: No I don’t.
Lippman: Thank you.

[deposition excerpt]

Lippman: You go by the name Dale Delahunt.
Delahunt: Yes I do.
Lippman: Was that your given name?
Delahunt: No, it was originally William Delahunt.
Lippman: But you changed it, at some point.
Delahunt: Yes.
Delahunt: I suppose.
Lippman: Tell me Mr Delahunt: how did the name change affect your business?
Delahunt: I changed my name before I entered this business.
Lippman: So there’s no telling what impact your name-change actually had on things.
Delahunt: Well I suppose there isn’t, Mr Lippman.
Lippman: I’ll bet a lot of celebrities changed their names, to maximize their fame.
Delahunt: They did.
Lippman: Bob Dylan, for one.
Delahunt: Yes.
Lippman: Can you think of others?
Delahunt: Sure; Tom Cruise was born Tom Mapother. Bruce Willis’ real first name is Walter. Albert Brooks was once Albert Einstein. There is very thorough list of them at celebritynames.com, if you are curious.
Lippman: So you, in a sense, did what so many others seeking fame have done: you made your name more celebrity-ready.
Delahunt: Dale is my middle name. I’ve been called Dale since I was little. My father’s name was also William.
Lippman: But you legally changed it.
Delahunt: Yes.
Lippman: Yes, you did.
Lippman: So explain to me again why you say that it’s “useful” to use celebrities in stories.
Rosen: When you’re writing stories, celebrity is like a locator. It’s a way to connect your story to real life, to fuse the two. It’s one of the tricks. It’s like writing about a McDonald’s hamburger and calling it a McDonald’s hamburger. People read it and say, oh, yeah, McDonald’s hamburger, sure, I know about those. They don’t take it seriously as a commentary on the product itself.
Lippman: But do you think they might, might take it seriously, if the story were solely about a McDonald’s hamburger, and in the story, the hamburger was made to look soft and green and to taste like turd?
Rosen: I don’t see—
Lippman: Don’t you think McDonalds would get upset? And sue?
Rosen: This is totally different, I think, from hamburgers.

Hundt: Mr Delahunt, in your most recent book, you write about something called the Braumer Ratio. Could you explain what that is?
Delahunt: Braumer was a twentieth century German sociologist. He developed a scientifically approximate method of measuring fame. It is a logarithmic scale, similar to the Richter Scale.
Hundt: How does it work?
Delahunt: Well, you plug figures into a formula, essentially. Would you like me to go into the workings of the mathematics?
Hundt: No, thank you. How about a basic layman’s overview of how it works.
Delahunt: Well, the Braumer Ratio is predicated on the idea that popularity can be quantified, and celebrity is just a grotesque incarnation of popularity. You can think of it in terms of high school popularity: imagine the most popular, well-known student in the school. The football team quarterback, say. Let’s say he knew one hundred people. Not that he was personally friends with them, but that he knew of them, of their existence. Now, think of all the people who knew of his existence—there are, say, five hundred. That is a five to one ratio. Now, you take that ratio, factor in various ancillary influences and agents, and you have your BR. But the basic premise is, the higher the ratio, the more famous the subject.
Hundt: How about some real-life Braumer Ratios—how does Michael Jackson rate?
Delahunt: Well, it takes time to actually work through the formula, but if I had to guess, I’d put his BR at about an 8.3.
Hundt: And Madonna?
Delahunt: About the same.
Hundt: What about Michael Jordan?
Delahunt: 8.5, maybe.
Hundt: The Pope?
Delahunt: Upper sevens.
Hundt: You?
Delahunt: I’m probably a .2.
Hundt: Me?
Delahunt: .1.
Hundt: That’s a bit unkind, Mr Delahunt.
Delahunt: It’s not a matter of kindness, Mr Hundt. This is scientific. You have to understand that the scale is calibrated so that the average, completely unfamous person is a 0.00. And this is a global measurement. Joe Q Average is from someplace like Honduras, or China, someplace supra-Americana. Baumer noted that the average American starts out with a 0.002. You registered a .1 because of your role in this trial. So even though BR of 5 might not seem impressive, it represents some truly enormous theoretical figures.

Hundt: Now in your book, you speculated on the effect of high Braumer Ratios on people. Could you go into that a little?
Delahunt: I believe, it has been my observation, that once a person passes a certain BR threshold, we begin to see material and quantifiable changes in behavior. There is no question that high BRs affect brain operations. The person is responding to a new set of demands and expectations.
Hundt: How deep is this change?
Delahunt: Once you pass BR 4 or 5, it is irrevocable. What happens is, when the ordinary, real-world Joe or Jane is confronted with an absurd number of strangers suddenly caring about, and having access to, his slash her life, the person forges a new meta-identity to cope with it. This new creature, the celebrity, is not quite a persona, and it is not quite a genuine human being. It is something new entirely. And it is very real; it is not affected. What it is is a mish mash of the person’s pre-fame character, together with standard mores of celebrity behavior: a shallow
and paradoxical need for privacy, a false and genial modesty, a prominent sex drive. Name changes are often a hallmark. Name changes are a very common symbolic means of announcing the inauguration of celebrity. Madonna, of course, was born with a middle and last name that no one has mentioned since she passed a certain BR threshold.

Hundt: What about people who are born with high BRs? Who never undergo this change? Delahunt: They are very rare. The late John Kennedy Jr comes to mind. Or William and Harry, the English princes. They present an interesting anomaly because a real-world character is never allowed to develop. These people are pure persona. There is no substance, no actuality to the character they exhibit. They are, in a sense, characters in a play, with no actors playing them. They are a special breed of celebrity. It is a very special postmodern, metaphysical condition.

Hundt: So, are you saying that people with exceptionally high Baumer Ratios—they are in fact not like the rest of us? That they are a different kind of person?
Delahunt: Exactly. Yes.

Lippman: Please state your name for the court.
Stewart: Jennifer Stewart.
Lippman: And what is your relation to the defendant?
Stewart: He’s my ex-boyfriend.
Lippman: How long were you together?
Stewart: Four years.
Lippman: That’s a lot of time to get to know someone.
Stewart: It sure was.
Lippman: Ms Stewart, did you notice any strange tendencies in the defendant, in relation to Madonna?
Stewart: Well, he talked about her a lot. About how he liked her, liked her music. He knew a lot about her personal life. A disturbing amount. And there were those pornos with Madonna in them, which I guess he thought I didn’t know about. But we lived together for two years, and there were a lot of pornos in general, so I don’t know how he expected me to not know. And he took me to a Madonna concert once.
Lippman: What was that like?
Stewart: It was all right. It wasn’t really a Madonna concert; it was the MTV video awards, and all these famous people were going to be there, but all he seemed to care about was that Madonna was going to be there. It was very weird.

Lippman: Did he talk to you at all about the story he was writing about Madonna?
Stewart: A little. He told me that he’d had the idea to write about her. He said she probably wouldn’t like it. He was talking as if she was going to read it. He said it was going to be funny. He thought it was so funny.

Lippman: Was there anything else?
Stewart: Well, he kept a diary, and there was some stuff written about her in it.

Rosen: You read my journals? I can’t even believe you.

Judge Lowe: Mr Rosen.

Lippman: I would now like to enter into evidence portions of the diaries of Mr Rosen pertaining to the composition of his story “Beautiful Stranger.”

Hundt: Objection. This was not on the evidence list.

Lippman: Your honor, it just recently came into our possession, not more than two days ago.

Rosen: You goddamn bitch. You goddamn fucking—

Judge Lowe: Mr Rosen that is enough.

Rosen: She stole my fucking journals. I can’t believe what a fucking whore bitch—

Judge Lowe: Mr Rosen you are in contempt. This trial will recess until 9:00 AM tomorrow morning and Mr Rosen is to be escorted to a holding facility until then. Mr Rosen, there are some kinds of behavior—

Rosen: What an evil, evil slut of a—

Judge Lowe: Remove Mr Rosen. Court is adjourned for the day.

Hundt: Before these journals are entered into evidence, my client would like it recorded that these are journals, not diaries.

Judge Lowe: All right.

Hundt: These are a record of his thoughts and ideas, not a diary-like regurgitation of his emotions and hopes and such. These journals are for Mr Rosen what a sketchbook is to a painter.

Judge Lowe: That will be noted.
Excerpts from Rosen’s journal:

Jan 1
...idea for story: sex with Madonna. Make her a total whore. Denouement: Madonna drunk at party on houseboat, lip-synching into vibrating vibrator “Cherish.”

Jan 3
... Madonna in blue movie. Unclear at first whether is movie or real life. End: M’s Oscar thank-you speech. (“I couldn’t have done it without my own sex drive.”)

Jan 13
This is the first thing I’ve written in 10 DAYS. What the fuck? Maybe give myself 2 weeks to throw away all non-collectable pornos? And stop buying new ones. Decide tomorrow.

Jan 14

Jan 15
opening (?): I am Madonna. This is the first thing I tell myself when I get up in the morning, and the last thing before I got to bed. It is my mantra. I am Madonna. I spend hours considering exactly what this means.
[also: incorporate real-life Madonna quotes]

Jan 18
Rented Evita. Not EVEN a piece of SHIT. It ASPIRES to SHIT. Music’s alright though.
Jan 21
All it takes to be famous is a secure belief in your own fame. And to be good-looking. A *Fuck You* attitude helps... All this comes (ironically) with being famous... self-perpetuating. The Famous even start to believe that they have done something to merit/deserve their fame. Which, again, helps perpetuate their own fame. It gives them the necessary attitude/disposition.
Q: Why is it that I want very badly to A) kick their asses, take them down a notch and B) be famous?
A: ???

Feb 1: Madonna story in voice of Hispanic (Carlos?). He is player. M = clown. unnecessarily explicit. “My name is: Carlos.”

Feb 2
[M]: Lots of drugs. DRUGS!
Cocaine in M-shaped box, adorned with the finest jewels of all Ethiopia.

[transcript excerpt]

Lippman: You said that celebrity changes your brain chemistry, did you not?
Delahunt: I said that extended exposure to—
Lippman: But that’s the gist of it, that being famous makes you a different person physically.
Delahunt: Physioschematically.
Lippman: Do you have any scientific evidence to back up this claim?
Delahunt: Yes.
Lippman: Yes? You do? Could I see it? This evidence?

[Exhibit L]


Tara Benedict, “Every Interview George Clooney’s Ever Given on Record,” *The Ultimate George Clooney Fanpage and Resource Center*,
http://www.clooneyclooneyclooney.com/transcripts/interviews/index.html


[transcript excerpt]

Lippman: I wonder what other reasons you may have had to make this story so outrageous, so sensational.
Rosen: Is that a question? Or a public rumination?
Lippman: You wrote the story to be famous, did you not?
Rosen: Not specifically, no.
Lippman: But if that were a consequence, would you be disappointed?
Rosen: No. Of course I’d like to be famous, just like everybody. But that has nothing to do with why I wrote the thing.
Lippman: So it wasn’t a calculated ploy on your part to feed off my client’s celebrity, like so many leeches? To use this trial to make a name for yourself, to feed your own ego?
Rosen: I’m the one getting sued here, Mr Lippman.
Lippman: And I’m sure it’s done wonders for your business.

Rosen: My business. Look Mr Lippman, if that bothers your client, may I kindly suggest that she drop the suit?

Lippman: In fact, isn’t it true that you’ve been contacted by Extra, Tabloid!, National Enquirer TV Magazine, and Hollywood movie producer Elie Samaha regarding a your story, and more importantly, your participation in this trial?

Rosen: It’s possible. I’ve talked to a lot of people about this, this situation.

Lippman: Do you recognize these documents, Mr Rosen? Could you read them to jury?

[exhibit F]

Dear Mr Rosen,

We at Extra are committed to providing the American People with the kind of Truth that they deserve to be informed about; and with regard to M.’s pending case against you, we would just like to offer you the opportunity to tell Your Side of the story to a National Audience of over 1.7 million people daily. Compensatory remuneration, for your legal defense, of course.

W. Mitchel Teege
exec producer
EXTRA

[exhibit G]

Dear Mr Rosen,

At the NATIONAL ENQUIRER TV NEWSMAGAZINE, a Hollywood-themed televised news magazine reaching an estimated 1.2 million households each day, we dedicate ourselves to the propagation and dissemination of popular "Infotainment." Compensation, perhaps for your legal woes, to be discussed.

Lisa Barbash
Executive Producer
Mr Rosen,

We will give you $15,000 to appear on our show exclusively. The interview will become the property of Tabloid! TV Daily/www.tabloidtvdaily.com. Please take a moment to read the enclosed contract.

Best,
Lucien Taylor
Exec Producer
Tabloid! TV Daily

Enclosure: contract

[transcript excerpt]

Hundt: Consider how much of this whole issue here is self-created. Sure, you can say, if this were just an unimportant, harmless story, would Madonna be suing over it? But think about it: isn’t it really the fact that Madonna is suing over it what makes the story harmful and important? The plaintiff has to prove, among other things, that a quantifiable damage was done to her reputation, but how much of the damage, if there really is any, has she caused herself by bringing this suit?

[Exhibit L]

From The Mythology of Celebrity, Chapter 11: “Celebrity Schematics”

...People believe, without considering it, that beneath each celebrity is a human person with all the attending features of a human person. In fact, this (questionable) assumption turns
out to be critical to the sustaining of the Mythology of Celebrity: *celebrities are people too.* But in many respects, celebrities have much more in common with fictional characters: they exist in a place where they can be observed but can’t be interacted with. We can keep vigil over their lives, their triumphs and failures, et cetera, but that is the extent of it—we can have no real contact. Celebrities exist outside of our sphere of influence—outside of our sphere of existence. They are, to us, storybook characters living storybook lives, *literally.*

...In a sense, celebrities are better than fictional characters—they are a postmodern improvement of them—because unlike a David Copperfield or a Roskolnikov, or even a Chastity from *As the World Turns,* these celebrity characters are supported by the underlying subconscious acknowledgement of reality. We believe in them. Celebrities are *real* fictional characters.

...This allows us to see People Magazine for what it really is: a postmodern fiction magazine. This kind of fiction permits a creative canvas bigger than any single conventional fiction writer could conceive, posits a nearly limitless array of characters, and does so in a venue that is not media-specific. The characters exist in the public domain, in the collective consciousness, and one can read about them in any variety of formats. But the underlying purpose of this postmodern fiction is no different from its more conventional cousin: to showcase the lives of curious and interesting people, people whose stories might edify or inspire us, may disappoint or surprise us. This is the new genre of *fictive vérité*—of modern celebrity.

[transcript excerpts]

Lippman: Did Mr Rosen ever seem to be unusually preoccupied with becoming famous?
Stewart: It’s not something he ever really talked about, like, openly. But I could tell he wanted to be famous. We lived together for two years; you really know someone after that. Why else would he be writing all those stories?

Lippman: I am unsure where all of this is going, Mr Delahunt. Are you contending that libel does not apply to my client, because she is a celebrity, and celebrities don’t exist? I am finding this hard to follow, to be honest.
Delahunt: Mr Lippman, in order to prove libel, you need to establish that public statements have been made that cause injury to a person.
Lippman: All right.
Delahunt: Well, the law makes no provisions for quasi-fictional characters, which is I suppose where my argument is headed.
Lippman: Are you folks listening to this? Are you getting this?
Judge Lowe: Ladies and gentlemen, please try to contain yourselves in my courtroom.
Lippman: Mr Delahunt wants us to believe that the woman, sitting right here in this courtroom, does not exist. That she is a figment of public imagination.
Delahunt: That is not what I meant to claim at all. The woman in this courtroom absolutely exists. How could she not? We can see her sitting right there. What I am arguing is that her celebrity, the being and persona created by a grotesque public interest in herself, does not exist on the same plane that the rest of us do. She does not have any claims to our lives, our reality, or to the American legal system. Madonna exists only within the matrix of celebrity. It is not the woman sitting in the courtroom here today, not Ms Ciccone, who took umbrage at Mr Rosen’s story, or really is claiming to suffer damages from it—
Lippman: Mr Delahunt—
Delahunt: It is her celebrity. And her celebrity is not a real thing. Not in the way you and I are real, or this courtroom is.
Lippman: Mr Delahunt—
Delahunt: Think of it this way. Could Hulk Hogan sue someone for writing unflattering things about the character of Hulk Hogan? No, because Hulk Hogan is an unreal wrestling identity. That would be a very silly, stupid, absurd lawsuit, Hulk Hogan suing someone for slandering Hulk Hogan.
Lippman: Mr Delahunt, thank you for this very entertaining bit of reasoning. It was most entertaining.

Lippman: Please state your name for the court.
Ebbitt: Harold Ebbitt.
Lippman: Mr Ebbitt, what is your occupation?
Ebbitt: I am a lawyer.
Lippman: What kind?
Ebbitt: I am civil lawyer. I specialize in copyright law.
Lippman: What does the law have to say about intellectual property, with respect to personalities?
Ebbitt: Well, a lot, actually. The first case in what came to be known as Peronsality Property Rights occurred in 1934. It was tried here in Los Angeles. A Mr Abner Nelson sued Columbia Pictures for attempting to produce a screenplay based on his life. Abner Nelson had once been a professional baseball player and, simultaneously, a spy for the United States government in the years leading up to the war. The movie, which was to be called “Double Play” and star James Cagney, was never made because the court found that Abner Nelson owned by default the primary rights to the personality and personal history of Abner Nelson. It might be added that Mr Nelson tried to sell those rights to a number of movie studios in the 1960s, and was unsuccessful.

Lippman: So according to the law, each individual owns the rights to his own personality.

Ebbitt: Yes. But the law makes clear that these personalities have to be distinctive in some way.

Lippman: So if someone made a movie about the life of, say, Tom Hanks, they would have to come to some arrangement with Tom Hanks. They would have to pay him.

Ebbitt: Yes.

Lippman: Now, what does the law have to say about the misappropriation of meta-identities?

Ebbitt: I’m sorry?


Lippman: Please state your name for the court.

Ciccone: Madonna.

Lippman: Briefly, please tells us what makes you an expert on celebrity.

Hundt: Your honor, I was not told that Madonna would be offering expert testimony.

Lippman: She was on the witness list.

Hundt: Well then I object to the notion that the plaintiff can also stand as her own expert witness. This is just about the most gross instance of a biased witness I have ever heard of. This is, this is a caricature of a biased witness, your honor. That is what this is.

Lippman: Who has more knowledge and experience in the field of celebrity than my client? I believe that there is no one living today who can provide more useful insights on—

Judge Lowe: Objection sustained. You will have to find another expert in this field Mr Lippman.
Rosen: What I did, I wrote a story. A fiction. And when you lose the ability to differentiate between what is real and what is a make-believe story, actually, that there, that is a symptom of insanity. Which is exactly what this suit is: insanity.
Lippman: Good one there, Mr Rosen. Very snappy.

Lippman: Please state your name for the court.
Harrelson: Woody Harrelson.
Lippman: Mr Harrelson, what is your occupation?
Harrelson: I am an actor primarily.
Lippman: Do you consider yourself a celebrity?
Harrelson: Yes, I guess I am.
Lippman: Do you also consider yourself a human being?
Harrelson: Excuse me?
Lippman: Let me phrase it this way: do you consider yourself a different person now than you did when you were growing up?
Harrelson: I’ve got more money now. And people recognize me when I go places. But I imagine I’m the same person. How could I not be the same person?
Lippman: An expert witness for the defense claimed earlier that celebrities are not in fact people, but something like characters in a book, or professional wrestlers. How would you respond to that?
Harrelson: Well I’m no expert in literature, but I am pretty familiar with my life, and I can tell you all one thing: as far as I’m concerned, that sounds like shit from a dog.
Judge Lowe: Please, Mr Harrelson.
Harrelson: Sorry your honor. What I mean is, the man who said that, he’s not famous. I’ve never heard of him. So where does he get off making up theories about being famous? What he said, that’s just ridiculous. I happen to know for a fact that I am a real person. I am not fictional. And I know Madonna, and can tell you also for a fact that she is not fictional either. She is very real. I can promise you that.

Hundt: Mr Ebbitt, Michaelangelo admitted that he stole noses and ears and eyes, and sometimes, entire faces and bodies, for his painting The Last Supper.
Ebbitt: That is not my area of expertise.
Hundt: Well, he did. Now, under the current laws of this country, could one of those people whose likeness Michaelangelo copied, could they sue him?

Ebbitt: Yes. If they had a distinctive face.

Hundt: Could someone sue him, if he felt that Michaelangelo had stolen his likeness, but painted him in an unflattering way? Made him ugly?

Ebbitt: He could sue him for stealing his features, but not for any artistic decisions. The law has nothing to say about aesthetics.

Hundt: Everyone has a right to his own likeness.

Ebbitt: Yes.

Hundt: Now, about Abner Nelson, someone could have written a biography of him and not have had to pay him, could they not?

Ebbitt: Yes. Biography and fiction differ significantly, according to the law.

Hundt: How so?

Ebbitt: Mostly this difference comes down to artistic intent. The law views biography as journalism, which has been historically off limits to copyright issues. There are first amendment issues. But fiction is art, and if you try to make money stealing someone else’s ideas, or their personality, as it were, you have to pay.

Hundt: So if Mr Rosen had attempted to present his story as factual reportage, he couldn’t be sued for personality property infringement, right?

Ebbitt: Right. But he could be sued for libel.

Hundt: Why is that?

Ebbitt: In general, biographies fall under libel law, because biographies purport to report the truth. And if, within that framework of truthfulness, you make up something nasty, well, then you can get into legal trouble. But the notion of libel does not apply to works of fiction. In general, the assumed framework of truth is not there, so it is impossible to lie.

Hundt: What was that? About libel applying to works of fiction?

Ebbitt: Libel does not apply to works of fiction.

Hundt: Libel does not apply to works of fiction?

Ebbitt: Yes Mr Hundt. There was an attempt, in 1919. A woman, a New York society girl, sued a former lover because he wrote a novel in which the woman appeared, quite recognizable, as prostitute. She lost the case.

Hundt: Because libel does not apply to works of fiction.

Ebbitt: Yes.
Hundt: After she lost the case, because of libel not applying to fiction, did she then try to sue over personality property infringement?
Ebbitt: She didn’t. That hadn’t come into play yet. She could have, I suppose, if she were comfortable arguing that the prostitute in the story was based on her unique personality.

Lippman: Who is to say what is fiction and what is not? What is creative lying and what is malicious lying? I mean, why would Mr Rosen have gone so far out of his way trying to make the story seem realistic? That’s the part I don’t understand. That part I don’t get. Explain that to me.

Judge Lowe: Has the jury reached a verdict?
Jurist: Yes your honor, we have.

Harrelson: This is all a little confusing to me, to be perfectly honest. I’m not sure I get what’s being argued here. That people are not real people? That famous people are, what did he say, made up? When did that happen? What kind of a world are we living in where that happened? I’ll admit that all I’ve got to go on is my own personal perspective, but I can tell you this: that attitude is wrong-headed. I’m sorry. You couldn’t get any further from the truth if you made it your life’s work. I’m sorry. No.
I get letters every day (from girls and women and men) telling me how my life story is a personal source of inspiration for them, how my life has served them as a positive way of striving for goals. I am so gratified by that fact. A woman with daughters told me once that hearing about my achievements has totally changed her perspective of how you can be successful, that truly I am what it means to be an American, that I should write a book about my accomplishments. I don’t know about that!

I will not deny the fact that I have been lucky, in addition to talent, genes, God, and a personal drive which comes with perseverance. This combination led to opportunities in commercials, and then to guest starring roles on shows such as Frasier and ER and Touched by an Angel, and then finally into permanent roles on the TV series From the Secret Mixed Up File of Mrs Basil E Frankwhiler (as Claudia) and Dastardly Dog (as Alex) on Showtime Kids. Sometimes old videos of those commercials and shows come up on programs like Before They Were Stars and The All New TV’s Bloopers and Practical Jokes (though I don’t see what’s a blooper about it). I won’t say that I ever became a famous TV actor because I didn’t, but I did all right for myself in terms of money and exposure, and that is what paved the way for my singing career, history turned out to show.

What happened was I was fourteen and I hadn’t done any acting for almost half a year, because I was concentrating on public high school which I had just started. Also I was concentrating on my boyfriend of the time Danny Laughton, who was the older brother of a girl I costarred with on Dastardly. Sad but true. Now, with age, I can see how stupid I was about him. You learn from your experiences is a fact of life. Anyway, what happened was that I had done some singing on Dastardly (if you’ve
never seen the show, it’s about a troupe of girls who solve mysteries with their dog, and it’s done with songs), and the producer was asked by Mitchell “Kid Boy” McDaniels (who discovered Christina Aguilera from the Mickey Mouse Club) if any of the kids on the show had any talent. He gave my name along with Bethany Deprise, Heather Laughton, and Christina Farncourt and he had us all come in together to possibly make into a girl group that was I guess supposed to be like All Saints except younger.

Well, we tried out, we sang together and by ourselves, for my solo songs I sang “2 Become 1” by the Spice Girls and “Show Me Love” by Robyn. Then after we all tried out, it turned out he only wanted to pursue me with a singing career. And my singing career was born!

The songs for the first album were all written by Kid Boy, but we really worked on how to perform them together. One thing he told me was that if I was really serious about gaining success, I would have to have an enlargement done, which I wasn’t too thrilled over, and neither were my parents especially my dad, because I was fourteen at the time. But I argued that number one Kid Boy would pay for them, number two who knew how long until Dad lost his job again and we would need my income (my dad worked in banks, but never for very long), and number three it couldn’t hurt to have them in the long run. Plus my agent was in favor of it. It turned out we (me and Kid Boy) couldn’t get it done without my parents’ permission, so Kid Boy needed to sit down and have a talk and assure them of things, and after that they signed on the dotted line so to speak.

The real breakthrough came from the album’s second single “Love You (Every Day)” which got airplay everywhere and made it to number 3 on Billboard’s Top 40 Countdown. After that it was like fast-motion movie-life: first, Kid Boy got me to join the 98 Degrees and Rising Tour with 98 Degrees, and turned it into the 98 Degrees and Rising Tour Featuring Me. For a brief span in 1999 I dated Brad Keegan from the
band, but we called it off mutually. After that I had performances everywhere, and I
was a featured audience member at award shows, and basically it comes down to I
started to get recognized in the way that you do when you get famous. Like I could
get into bars (at the time I was fifteen) for instance is one of the minor things. Or I
hardly had to pay for anything when I was out. I went to perform and have
interviews on talk shows such as Jay Leno and Rosie O'Donnell before her show went
off the air. My life became the life of a professional singer.

Another aspect to being a celebrity that everyone deals with is the press, or I
should say the Tabloids, which in reality is another species of thing altogether. I don't
understand them, how they are allowed to exist. Things get written about you... you
want to set the record straight, but what difference
would it make? I'm not saying that I'm this pristine
virgin of the hills, but I'd say the ratio of true stories to
totally false stories is five to one on the side of the false
stories. And it's not like I'm not honest about this
anyway. You can just ask me to tell the truth, and I have
no problem with that. I mean, of the people I've had
relations with, the only ones who were famous were
Howie Dorough, Jonathan Taylor Thomas, Ben Stiller,
David Duchovny, Billy Blanks (he's not gay), Woody
Harrelson, Bill Maher, D'Angelo, Jerry O'Connell, AJ
McLean, Freddy Prinze Jr, Ed Norton, Sergei Fedorov,
Q-Tip, Ryan Phillippe (before he married Reese
Witherspoon), Owen Wilson, Brian Littrell, Ben Harper,
Jake Busey, Tiger Woods, and one particular member of
a famous family who I'm not going to disclose the name
of because he personally asked me not to, not because I’m being secretive. I’m honest about these things. Which is why I get so annoyed when they print untrue lies about my life. I have never done some of the things they describe me as. Not that I wouldn’t necessarily, but so much is just not true. You wonder, can’t they find something else to write about? But I’m not even going to spend another second giving them the satisfaction of me talking about them.

For instance, one thing the Tabloids never write about is your charity work. Charity work is a major aspect of my life, specifically the KidsCanDo Scholarship Fund I started. The original idea for it was actually my mother’s, it came as a way to help out kids from different backgrounds who ordinarily wouldn’t get to go to college. My mother is now the chairman of the scholarship, while my father retired from his bank job and now is in charge of the merchandising and internet aspects of my career, I should add as a side note.

Really the origin of the scholarship is from my “Feel It” tour. It is kind of a roundabout thing. What happened was that it turned out one of the sponsors was Broadcast.com, which is owned by Mark Cuban. We worked out a deal so that I would have their banners showing at the concerts, plus I would do a few commercials for them, plus they would get to broadcast some of my shows over the internet, which is what Broadcast.com does, and instead of paying me money they would give me shares in the company, which at that time wasn’t a company that you could buy shares in unless you knew the owner. To be honest it wasn’t my idea it was my dad’s, who thought it would be to my advantage money-wise. I don’t know why he kept getting fired at banks because let me just say that when Broadcast.com got available to everyone on the stock market, my shares were worth a lot of money. I sold them (my dad sold them) and it’s not to brag to say that all of a sudden I had more than 50 million dollars, which is not something I am embarrassed about, or embarrassed to tell
people, because it’s the truth. One thing I hope I get across is my personal philosophy that if something is the truth, there’s no reason to hide it or be ashamed of it.

So suddenly I had more money than I could ever dream of, on top of the regular money that you get from being a famous singer. I thought up of the idea of doing activities for charity, and my mom came up with the specifics of the scholarship. So far we have sent over 130 kids to college which is truly a matter of pride for me. Other charities that I’ve got running are the Breast Cancer Fund and the AIDS Fund which I started with Ben Stiller when we were dating.

One thing also that came from my deal with Broadcast.com is that I got to know Mark Cuban, who if you think I got a lot of money from Broadcast.com, let me just tell you that Cubes (that is his nickname) became a double-billionaire. He was young too when I met him, younger than forty. I don’t want to get into the specifics of how it happened, but we did end up having a relationship for some time, which ended up having effects on other aspects of my life.

One thing about Cubes was that he was really into toys, like gadgets and electronic things. For instance his house was wired so that you could speak into a box next to the refrigerator and a few minutes later certain foods would come out (nothing too complicated food-wise, though). Before I met him I didn’t know that had been invented. Or a stereo system in his car that was somehow connected to the stereo system in his house (which a speaker of was built into the walls of every room of the house, you couldn’t even see the speakers unless you knew where to look) so that when he got home from driving, the inside stereo system would automatically know what the car stereo system had been doing, and play the song from the point he’d left off at in his car.
But more than toys, he liked schemes. That is the word for it, schemes. One thing he did (he showed me the videotape, he videotaped everything) was somehow use computers to reroute all the calls to the Better Business Bureau to something he set up like a fake Better Business Bureau. It was like the real Better Business Bureau in every way, people answered the phones with “Hello, Better Business Bureau,” and they would record all the information that the real Better Business Bureau would, and sometimes if they had enough complaints about a specific place they would take whatever kind of action the real Better Business Bureau would take. No one knew it was fake, somehow. Also, so the real Better Business Bureau wouldn’t get suspicious that no one was calling them, Cubes had other people call the real Better Business Bureau with pretty much the exact same complaints that had been complained to the fake one. He also told me that he had computer-hacked into the real Better Business Bureau internet site and replaced it with a basically identical fake one. He had like 45 people working for his fake Better Business Bureau.

And that was just the beginning of his “schemes.” They started to get more, I guess the word for it would be “sinister.” He had people imitate police officers. He had this giant underground homebase built on his property, like a huge cave lined with computers and TV screens, and the TV screens mostly showed inside pictures of people’s houses who didn’t know they were being broadcast. Also he had a huge room built down there for his crazy gun collection, which was not just regular guns, but weird guns that shot things other than bullets like electricity balls and plastic pills filled with gas that made you sleep. The room had a moving floor and a voice-listen-box so that if you said the name of a gun, the floor would move around and the gun would come to you. He said he wanted it to be like in The Matrix. This was all going on while we were going out, at the beginning when he first became a billionaire it was the Better Business Bureau thing, and by the time I called it off I was finding out about his plans with kidnapping people and messing with people’s ability to use electricity.
I guess his general plan was to just be destructive. He had a bunch of goons and he was their leader, they started with him on the Better Business Bureau thing and then stayed with him as he did crazier and crazier stuff. He gave them uniforms, which were a spandex bodysuit decorated to look like a real workday business suit, except it had the logo $x^3$ on the chest which was his personal logo (he had it on his towels for instance). When he wasn’t working at his Broadcast.com job, he started dressing in a costume himself, which was some kind of hard rubber suit which made it look like he had more muscles than he had, like Val Kilmer in Batman III, and had $x^3$ on his chest and on the outside of his biceps and on his back. He would go out at night with his gang in like 10 Lamborghini Jeeps and do things like dump a thousand gallons of red food coloring in the San Ancito reservoir, videotaping the whole thing. At the beginning we watched it together as a way to do, I guess the word for it would be “foreplay,” which struck me as weird even at the time, because if you think about it he was getting turned on by watching himself in a costume.

I want to highlight the fact that at the beginning of me and Cubes being together he was a really fun guy who knew how to have fun and be thoughtful. Once I got back to my hotel room and there was this huge box as big as half a minivan and inside the box it was filled to the top with rose petals, but under the rose petals was Cubes himself, who was naked with a bow wrapped around his head, so he could be funny and touching at the same time. That was probably the best memory I have from when things were good. But if you think about it, which I didn’t until after things had ended, even that whole thing was just an excuse for him to do a scheme.

One of the things that came to signify to me that it was the end of me and Cubes was once I asked if I could come along with him on his next scheme. He said no it was too dangerous but we could watch the tape of it later, which was the answer I expected. But finally I convinced him to it by first of all promising to be totally out of the way, and mainly by offering to videotape everything myself, which I made hints
that that would make the experience sexier than ordinary. So he filled me in on the plan, we were going to kidnap the president of Flexcorp, which was a company that made things that were semiconductors. I asked him if this was out of revenge or was it for his own advantage in business and he said that it was just for sport, he wanted to kidnap and release many of the people who ran the biggest companies in the world as a challenge. (Only later did I learn that it was more than for sport, because the man who we ended up kidnapping that night, Cubes had a chip implanted in his foot, and I don’t know what that chip was for.)

So that night we drive hours north to the middle of California somewhere, this line of Lamborghini Jeeps, and pull over in a place that looks like suburbs. Then we get out, and first Cubes puts on a black Lone Ranger mask to cover his eyes, then all the goons put on these full-face masks with Cubes’ own face on it, except that there’s a Lone Ranger mask built into the mask too, so unless you really know what Cubes looks like or he was right there next to the mask, you wouldn’t know that the mask was supposed to be of Cubes wearing a mask. I don’t know why he would bother to have the masks made up to look like his face if the first thing he was going to do was disguise the face by painting a black mask on the mask. Whatever. Then we run up to the house and someone attaches a thing that looks like a huge calculator to the security system and it beeps off and the door clicks open, and then twenty five guys wearing Cubes masks run into the house and run off in specific directions as if they know exactly where to be going to. Cubes wants me to follow him with the camera, and since he’s the last one in, I’m the last one in behind him.

Cubes never runs, he walks. He walks up the stairs and down the hall and we pass one of his goons every twenty feet or so, standing against the wall like they’re protecting it personally. He walks into the bedroom and there is some middle aged woman out cold on the floor, and an older man who is in being held in place by two goons in his bed, and also they are covering his mouth so he can’t yell, but you can tell
that he’s trying to yell. Then Cubes walks up to him and shoots him in the arm with
something that looks like a gun and in a few second the man is also out cold like the
woman. The two goons pick up the old man and carry him out of the room, then a
few goons lift the unconscious woman back on to the bed, one of them leaves an
envelop for her by leaving it on her stomach, and then all of the goons follow the first
goons out the door, Cubes is the last one, and I follow him. We get back to the jeeps
and all get in, the old unconscious man in the jeep with us, and as soon as we start to
pull away the goons pull off their masks and start to whoop it up, cheering and
yelling.

Though Cubes doesn’t whoop at all in front of his goons in the jeep, he tells me
later when we get back that that was the best one yet, that it’s what having a billion
dollars is all about, and that it’s making him really hot, and it’s time to watch the tape.
Needless to say, that was the end of that. At least, that was the end of me and Cubes’
relationship on a personal level, because after that night I left him.

I have to add here that this was the hardest decision I ever had to make,
because for almost ten months I had lived with Cubes, and though it’s embarrassing
now and today we’re basically enemies he was pretty much my whole life at the time.
The relationship had taken away from my singing, and I had lost touch for almost a
year with a lot of my close friends and family including Kid Boy and my parents. You
can just imagine what it was like to walk out that door.

But at that moment of walking out the door I decided to right the wrongs that
had befallen the people who Cubes had affected. Apart from personal feelings to
inspire me, I knew quite a lot of secret things that would lead to people getting hurt or
even worse. It was one way I could take control of my life back.

So the first thing I did was apologize to my parents who were at the same time
relieved to have me back and angry with me for being so stupid about a boy (again).
I didn’t deny it to them. Then, I started what I called my Personal Recovery Road
Program. I started training harder than I ever had before physically, I hired a personal trainer and a judo expert and I even got skilled in guns, which Cubes had discouraged me from, plus I naturally feel uncomfortable around them. But I hired a psychologist to get me over that, and I was fine about guns after that. I was running five miles every day and lifting a lot of weights for a girl.

Then I had a special suit made for me which in some ways was like Cubes’ suit but was a design I designed myself, with no stupid x³ logos on it. Instead it was all gray with a thin navy blue stripe running up each side. It was heavy, but first of all it was bullet-proof which would probably be useful just in case, and second I was in good enough shape now so that it wasn’t too bad. Also I had a special belt made to hold weapons and devices. The next step was to start training in my suit, which I did in a gym that I paid to have made private and turned into a personal obstacle course that my judo sensei and others helped me practice combat in. I was trying to be fully ready by the beginning of April (at this point it was March) because that was when I knew for a fact Cubes was going to perpetrate a scheme.

The truth was that I knew more about Cubes’ doings than he thought I did, especially at the end when I realized how serious things were getting with him and his crazy schemes, and I took matters into my own hands and did a little poking around. April 1st was when he was going to launch his satellite, which I had intuition had something to do with the chip I saw him putting into the kidnapped CEO’s foot. I knew where the satellite was being launched from (his secret cave bunker, that was easy to know because I was there and I saw it and the launching pad). So I thought sneaking in and putting a wrench in his plans before the launch was a definite positive step in the direction of my own Personal Road of Recovery.

So, I sneak on to the premises which I am familiar with, after all I had been living there for ten months. To get to the cave, you’ve got to go through a tunnel connected to the basement of the house, which I get to undetected, but at the point
where I try to enter the electronic code to open the tunnel door the problem is that he’s changed it. This is a problem I anticipated. My plan is to wait for someone who knows the code to enter it, and then to knock him out and enter, which is what happens, one of the goons inputs the code and I creep up to him using a martial-arts way of walking and chop him on the neck.

Everything is filled with activity, people walking around doing crucial things, which is to my advantage because when you’re concentrating on doing a task you’re not careful to watch out for a person sneaking into the base and blowing up the satellite. What I need to do is get close enough to the satellite to put my self-adhesive C4 charge on it which will take care of that and then some, but also get clear enough away from the blast so as to not get injured myself. Luckily the whole room is filled with objects that can hide my location, from computer hardware ten feet tall to I guess you’d call them container pods which contain either clones or robot clones of people I recognize, such as Cubes himself and the CEO that was kidnapped that time, although it’s possible they were the real people in there, I couldn’t tell the difference and I didn’t take time to investigate.

So as I’m creeping from one behind one pod to behind another pod, I’m spotted by one of the goons, he says Hey, you can’t be in here, but before he has time to alert anyone else I grab my tazerball gun from my belt and shoot him, taking care of him. But the commotion alerts another goon, who grabs me from behind without me anticipating, and we struggle. He’s stronger, but I know how to use this position to my advantage by judo, and I kick his knees out and in a matter of seconds I’ve got the advantage as I inject a sleeping serum into his blood with an injection gun, and then say Night Night and pat his head and move on to behind the next pod.

I creep over to the satellite and attach the C4, which means that now I’ve got one minute to get out of there. My tactic is to create a diversion, which is done by exploding a flash bomb, which is basically just a big flash that makes the room smoky.
I throw it to the other side of the cave, away from where I want to be escaping out of, and it does just what it’s supposed to, all the goons start yelling and moving extra fast towards different things. Just then, a voice I recognize (Cubes’) says, So, couldn’t get enough Cubes, and when I spin around to face him he knocks me down with a hit to the face. I flip back up athletically which my skills must be surprising him because for a second he looks confused, with a face of what happened to you?

I don’t waste that opportunity to strike, which I do with judo moves to his middle and head. He doesn’t go down but it’s clear I’m having the upper hand by using my training to my advantage. Another aspect of my suit is that it has metal wrist guards which are supposed to hold my communication devices, but which I use to bash his face. He drops to one knee and looks up at me and laughs and asks me if he thinks that he’s about to let some ex-girlfriend of his come in and ruin his whole plan at the last minute, and I say to that Looks like nobody asked you and I kick his head and send him to the ground.

I should say that at this point we are probably fifteen feet from the satellite with the C4 on it and I’m not sure how much time has run down on the timer, so I run as fast as I can away from it, knocking goons out of the way with my shoulder, and when I reach a certain point I dive, which is the moment that the bomb explodes.

I’m pretty sure the blast got Cubes, because it was so strong it knocked my wind out, and if it wasn’t for my suit I would have been in a lot worse shape than I ended up as. After the blast goons were scattered all over the floor dead or unconscious, and I looked for Cubes’ body but it was nowhere to be found.

After that I alerted the police about the events, and Cubes’ operation was put to a stop, though Cubes was never found with certainty.

For a while after that I used my costume and my skills to foil certain crimes which I had information were going to go down, including drug deals and kidnapping cases, which I was largely successful at because of the element of surprise, nobody
expects there to be a crime fighting judo girl at the scene, and also because I got even
t better at doing it with practice. Saving those kidnapping victims is one of the things
also that I am most proud of in my life outside of music along with the Scholarship
Fund.

I look at my experiences as living proof that personal achievement is a matter
of effort and self-belief. Personal faith and self-determination can accomplish any
goal. It has proven true again and again in my life in singing and in my life helping
people.

And in other areas! I don’t want to give off the
impression though that my life is totally bounded by
singing on one side and my actions for the public
good on the other. I like to do things regular people
do all the time, that is a big part of my life. Movies! I
love to go to movies, I’ll see anything with Jude Law
in it, I can’t even describe him. Sometimes I go out to
restaurants or clubs, and I love to be in malls for the
shopping. I’m no different from any American, I’m
just the product of a little aspiring in addition to it.

But the biggest joy in my life now has got to be
my little baby girl Brianna, my beauty baby girl. She’s
already 14 months old, and a day doesn’t go by that she’s not a source of inspiration.
Being a single mother all comes back to the same philosophy of believing in yourself
too, because even though right now I think I’ve found a pretty special man (if you read
the Tabloids, you know who it is, Jakob Dylan) I know that in the end it all comes
down to me, the choices I’m going to make, believing that with my abilities, I’m
capable of any success.
Biggs: I don’t understand.
Hanson: What don’t you understand? This is simple.
Biggs: I agree. Yes it is simple.
Hanson: Then why won’t you stop it?
Biggs: See that’s what I don’t understand. What is it I should be stopping?
Hanson: Come on Mr Biggs. You know exactly what.
Biggs: Brian, Holly. I’m only Mr Biggs on work days.
Hanson: That’s it! That’s what you need to stop!
Biggs: I don’t understand.
Hanson: And you need to stop calling me at my house.
Biggs: How else am I supposed to get in touch with you, Holly?
Hanson: Mr Biggs, I’m hanging up now.
Biggs: Holly,

Jeremy Nodvin
E-block
Mr Bigg’s

Weekly Journal 4/2

The bus driver said All Aboard and we all climbed aboard, twenty guys all tired and beat from the tough loss to Brunswick. I was definately the goat of the day. I struck out three times and one time looking, which if you know high school baseball you know is the worst way to strike out. Coach says No! when you strike out looking and won’t look at you when you come back to the bench. Also I made an error at third – it was a throwing error. So I was definately the goat the ride home. I got on
the bus and sat by myself in the back seat and no one talked to me, nobody really talked to anyone.

[in Biggs’ file cabinet]

Every year I ask all parents to take a moment to fill out this questionnaire. It saves time in the conferences, and it provides a written record of helpful hints that I can check back on. Plus, I wouldn’t want parents to miss out on all the standardized testing!

Thanks
Brian Biggs

• What do you hope for your son or daughter to get out of English class?
• Can you think of teaching methods that have been particularly helpful for your son or daughter in previous years?
• Does your son or daughter play any music instruments?
• Does your son or daughter have a “favorite” TV show? Website?
• Does your son or daughter have any unique or interesting hobbies?
• Is there anything else you think it would be helpful or useful for me to know about your son or daughter?

[tape containing 4/7 telephone conversation of Brian Biggs and Holly Hanson]

Hanson: How did you know it was my birthday?
Biggs: That’s not the point. I’m a resourceful guy. The point is, happy birthday Holly.
Hanson: Do you personally call all of your students on their birthdays?
Biggs: Not all of them.
Hanson: So why are you calling me?
Biggs: Did you get my card?
Hanson: Yes. Thank you. It was nice.
Biggs: Yeah?
Biggs: Yeah. Listen, I have to go. I have to go out to dinner.
Biggs: Okay. Then, have a good time. I just wanted to call to say happy birthday.
Hanson: Thank you for calling. That was very nice of you.
Biggs: Happy birthday.

[videotape of Biggs and Megan Webb]

Webb: Yes.
Biggs: Oh.
Webb: Yes. Oh.
Biggs: Oh.
Webb: Like that. Yes. Oh. My god.
Biggs: Oh.
Webb: My god. Jesus Christ.
Biggs: Oh.
Webb: Brian. Yes.

[in Biggs’ desk]
[e-mail from Holly Hanson to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: HHANSON4@aol.com
Received: 23:01 04 27 1999
Subject: RE: tell me if this reminds you of you also

mr biggs,

i appreciate your efforts to be friendly and though they are probably good-intentioned, they are, lets say, overwhelming. i am not comfortable with them. please don't be offended. but if you don't pull back a little (like with the emails and telephone calls and “academic conferences”) i will have to speak with someone like principal van nuygen.

sorry

holly

[tape containing 4/27 telephone conversation of Biggs and Helen Hanson]
Biggs: Excuse me?
Hanson: Mr Biggs,
Biggs: Because I don’t know what you’d call me for, honestly,
Mrs Hanson.
Hanson: Because I thought you and she, I know that you’re one of her favorite teachers, I thought,
Biggs: Well,
Hanson: I thought maybe she might have said something to you, or you might have some insight on her behavior.
Biggs: Her behavior?
Hanson: She hasn’t mentioned anything about having problems, in general? I know you make all of your students keep a journal, I thought maybe
Biggs: The journals are private Mrs Hanson, between me and the students, if I were to
Hanson: But I thought perhaps if there was an extreme situation, maybe
Biggs: Excuse me?
Hanson: She hasn’t said anything to you at all? You haven’t seen any signs?
Biggs: Signs? Mrs Hanson, really,
Hanson: I’m sorry. I don’t know if you’re a parent yourself Mr Biggs,
Biggs: I,
Hanson: Sometimes, it can be so, I just don’t know sometimes, Mr Biggs.
Biggs: I don’t know what to say. And what gives you the idea I’m one of her favorite teachers?
Hanson: Well she’s got your phone number.
Biggs: How did you,
Hanson: I’m sorry I called. I just, Mr Biggs, could you do me a favor? Could you just look out for her? Look out for signs of, I don’t know, problems? Anything? Maybe you could get her to talk to you about it. I try, but she and I, we don’t really, we don’t really communicate anymore.
Biggs: I don’t really know what--- all right, Mrs Hanson. I will keep an eye out for her.

[in Holly Hanson’s desk]

SEMESTER I, 1999: HANSON, HOLLY L [YR:JR]

AMERICAN HISTORY 1840-1910 HOLMES A
CALCULUS HERRING A
ELECTRONIC MUSIC GORDON A-
ENGLISH BIGGS A

EXTRA CURRICULAR

CREDITS TO DATE 89 / 120

[in Biggs’ file cabinet]

Jeremy Nodvin
E-block
Mr Biggs

Weekly Journal 4/15

To be honest I feel kind of weird writing my journal for this week and I think you know why. I guess I could talk about other things but honestly Mr Biggs I don’t have anything else on my mind. The whole thing is just very weird. I guess I’m sorry about being in there with Holly, you were right what you said about it being inappropriate. But the point is Mr Biggs could you please not tell anyone especially Holly’s parents and coach Columbo? I don’t know why you would tell them, but I would appreciate it if you didn’t, I’m already on thin ice with them. (Holly’s parent’s.)

I guess I did alright last week for the team, I made a couple tough plays at third, once I turned a single handed double play (5 - 3) to end the eighth. I had a home run on Monday.
[e-mail from Holly Hanson to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: hollacious@hotmail.com
Received: 23:01 04 12 1999
Subject: okay

mr biggs,

something wasn’t right about yesterday. you were clearly going out of your way to track us down. seriously, why did you go in the janitor’s closet anyway? were you looking for cleaning supplies? because afterwards you made sure to lock the door, but you didn’t take anything out of it. and you were outside the door for like two minutes! we heard you! okay, we heard *someone*. but come on. that is not a normal way to behave. i’m sorry if this email is too forward, but i’m really frustrated about this. you’re not being fair. if you don’t cut this out, I won’t talk to you again.

and please stop emailing me on the other account. my parents have the password.

holly hanson

[in Holly Hanson’s desk]

which Jane still displays-- the indelible marks of love; or she would blame him, and hate him, and leave immediately.

She does leave, of course; her abstract notion of theological rectitude could not allow her to play mistress to a married man. But her passionate love for Rochester, like a dumb, happy dog, accompanies her to Moor House, back to Ferndean, and forever afterwards. We see hints of all these developments, poking up through the surface, in the passage that was analyzed herein.
Holly-

Excellently argued, well written. Another fine job. Perhaps you could have focused more attention on the connection between Jane's Free-Will/Emotionality—how Rochester upsets the balance. Also, see the Maxwell book for help on how to get footnotes in the right form.

Well done, Holly.

PS: I too have been thinking about last Thursday. You know what I should have done? I should have just banged on the door and walked away. A signal for you guys to quit it without getting anyone embarrassed (including me, yes, I'll admit it). That would have been the decent thing to do. You're right. The last thing I wanted was to create some kind of awkwardness between us.

I'm sorry.
Forgive me?

PPS: did you get a chance to read that Marquez story yet? I'd love to hear what you thought of it.

[tape containing 4/28 telephone conversation of Biggs and Megan Webb]

Biggs: At the beginning, what was it about me that you liked?
Webb: That I liked?
Biggs: Like, why did you go for me? Do you remember?
Webb: What kind of a question is that?
Biggs: I must have been charming somehow. How was I charming?
Webb: Why are you asking me this? Should I be suspicious? I feel like this is something I should be suspicious about.
Biggs: Look, Megan, it’s just that I feel like I’ve lost something. Something’s been lost. By me. This worries me.
Webb: Well, we've been together four years. It’s not, like, totally unusual.
Biggs: Okay but, okay, but I want to reinvigorate our, you know, relationship.
Webb: You want the first clue? The first thing is, surprise me. I’m not allowed to tell you what to do.
Biggs: Yes, but,
Webb: That is how relationships work. It won’t work if I tell you to do something and then you do it. It’ll feel like it was just me doing something to myself.
Biggs: Yes, but that strategy seems to work fine when it comes to, when it comes to sex.
Webb: Brian!
Biggs: Look, I want to do this right. I want to do something that I know for sure you’ll like.
Webb: Anything you do I’ll like. The fact of you doing it, that’s what I’ll like.
Biggs: Not good enough!
Webb: Brian, I love you just as much now as at the beginning. This is not something you should be worried about.
Biggs: I’ve forgotten how to be romantic, Megan. I’ve forgotten how to be charming. I’m having a mid-relationship crisis here, Megan.
Webb: This is charming right now. This conversation. You have nothing to worry about.
Biggs: Shit! What is it? What am I doing?
Webb: You’re being an idiot.
Biggs: I’m, I, I don’t get it.
Webb: Right!
Biggs: The secret is, be an idiot? That’s the secret?
Webb: Yeah, in your case.
Biggs: Be an idiot. Be an idiot.
Webb: And buy me jewelry and tell me I look nice and take me on romantic weekends to New York City.
Biggs: Yes.
Webb: And always put my sexual needs first.
Biggs: Yes.
Webb: Goodbye, Brian. I’ll see you tonight.
Biggs: Yes.
Weekly Journal 5/23

It was cool that you came out to watch the game this week, I saw you there. I had a really good game as you saw. I’m glad you did come. I’m not much one for school spirit, I mean I like Lansdale for sure, but to see teachers in the bleachers is something I definately think is good, overall. It was also good that you and Holly (Holly is my girlfriend, you remember from a few weeks ago in the closet) you and Holly had a chance to talk and set things straight. I probably should keep my mouth shut (or my computer shut, as the case maybe!), but I have to say that Holly seems to think that you had something against her since the closet (and before), and I hope that you both made up and things are better with each other if there was anything to make up about (sometimes Holly can be that way, no offense to Holly). I mean, she’s my girlfriend and you’re my teacher, and it is better all around and for me if there is no bad feelings anywhere.

If you are interested, our next home game is next Wednesday, against Livingston Catholic. I can’t promise 3 for 4, but maybe you’re good luck and I’ll do it again, who knows.

[e-mail from Holly Hanson to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: hollacious@hotmail.com
Received: 23:14 04 29 1999
Subject: RE: tell me if this reminds you of you also

yes, i like it when we're friends better too.
Hanson: Seriously, Madonna is unacceptable.
Biggs: What are you talking about?
Hanson: It is a nice try, Brian, but not really, no. It’s not actually a good try. She doesn’t qualify.
Biggs: Come on.
Hanson: I’m just telling you.
Biggs: What about the Beatles? Can I still say the Beatles?
Hanson: The Beatles are different. They’re the Beatles. Forget the Beatles.
Biggs: Tell me what’s good then. Clue me in. Make me hip again.
Hanson: Again?
Biggs: Whatever.
Hanson: Look, I’ll e-mail you a list of acceptable bands. I’ll give you a study guide.
Hanson: No, not Ween Brian. That was a good try, though, I guess.

Dearest H,

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moment of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

Love, Brian Biggs

[on Biggs’ desk]

😊 HOLLY’S MAGICAL MYSTERY MIX TAPE 😊

Crush—Dave Matthews Band
Shadowboxer—Fiona Apple
Crash Into You—Dave Matthews Band
She Will Have Her Way—Neil Finn
Wise Up—Aimee Mann
You Look Like Gold (to Me)—Ben Harper
You’re So Cool (True Romance)—Hans Zimmer
The Gambler—Kenny Rodgers
Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space—Spiritualized
Possession—Sarah McLaughlin
Ice Cream—Sarah McLaughlin
Here With Me—Dido
Unbidden—Paula Cole
April Fools—Rufus Wainwright
Hallelujah—Jeff Buckley
Winter—Tori Amos
Blackbird—Beatles
Typical Situation—Dave Matthews Band
Thank You—Dido
Ain’t That A Sunshine—Day—Ella Fitzgerald

[tape containing 5/05 telephone conversation of Biggs and Holly Hanson]

Hanson: Do you like it here?
Biggs: Where? Here in Lansdale?
Hanson: Yeah.
Biggs: Sure, it’s pretty good.
Hanson: What made you come here?
Biggs: They offered me a job.
Hanson: Do you like your job?
Biggs: Sure. There’s some perks.
Hanson: Oh yeah, like what?
Biggs: Free coffee. Three months vacation. Planting a seed of knowledge in the minds of children and watching it grow into

Hanson: You don’t find it, I don’t know, boring?
Biggs: I,
Hanson: Or like, oppressive?
Biggs: The job?
Hanson: The job, the town, living here.
Biggs: Well honestly Holly it’s such a relief after my last job, professional assassin, that I really can’t
Hanson: I mean, there’s so little to do, if you’re my age, I can’t imagine that being your age there’s, like, anything to do at all.
Biggs: I get by, thank you.
Hanson: Are you married?
Biggs: No.
Hanson: Are you seeing anyone?
Biggs: Not right now.
Hanson: God. And your life doesn’t totally bore you to death?
Biggs: I,
Hanson: I mean, don’t take that the wrong way.
Biggs: How could I take that the wrong way, Holly?
Hanson: Sorry. All I’m saying is, and don’t take this the wrong way, okay, is that after high school I plan to be in a non-Lansdale environment for the rest of my life.
Biggs: Sure. I can understand that. I definitely remember wanting to get out of Phoenix, move out of my parents’ house.
Hanson: Fucking tell me about it.
Biggs: But,
Hanson: So you must have lived in other places, right?
Biggs: Sure. I grew up in Arizona. I went to school in California. I lived in New York City. I was in Mexico for a little while.
Hanson: And where does Lansdale rank on your list?
Biggs: Above Arizona, definitely. Look, Holly, Lansdale’s fine. There’s plenty of things to do here. You just have to find the right people to do them with.
Hanson: What was that?
Biggs: What?
Hanson: Was that, like, a wisdom nugget? Did you just try to give me a wisdom nugget?
Biggs: What?
Hanson: Come on, Brian. Don’t give me that.
Biggs: Sorry. But, I mean,
Hanson: Brian.
Biggs: Sorry.

[tape containing 5/05 telephone conversation of Biggs and Megan Webb]

Webb: I thought we were going out.
Biggs: What?
Webb: To dinner.
Biggs: We were?
Webb: Remember yesterday? When we were talking about going out to dinner tomorrow, tomorrow being now today, and I said, why don’t we go out to the new Applebee’s that opened up near the movie theater, how does that sound, and you said sure, that sounds good?
Biggs: I did?
Webb: Yes, you did.
Biggs: I’m sorry.
Webb: What does that mean? I’m sorry I don’t remember or I’m sorry something else?
Biggs: What?
Webb: Brian?
Biggs: What?
Webb: Are you all right?
Biggs: Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. I’m sorry. I’m just feeling a little worn out today, I guess.
Webb: What is it?
Biggs: I don’t know. Work? I’m just, I’m just really tired.
Webb: Oh.
Biggs: Look, Megan, can we do Applebee’s another night?
Webb: Sure. We can do that.
Biggs: I’m sorry. I’ll be better tomorrow, I promise.
Meggums?
Webb: What?
Biggs: I’m sorry.
Webb: We’ll talk tomorrow.
Biggs: I love you.
Webb: I love you too.

[on Biggs’ bulletin board]

Holly’s Weekly Journal
By Holly
This week for journal Mr Biggs I’ve written a parable. I call it “Parable No. 5.” Here it is:

Once in a faraway land filled with metaphor and significance there lived a little girl with a meaningful name like Chastity or Summer. Actually, she wasn’t so little. She was a goodly young age; she was basically almost a woman, for all practical purposes. She had boyfriends. She was no little girl, actually, in certain important respects.

This girl, it was her greatest wish to be... actually, to be honest, this girl was not entirely sure what her greatest wish was. But she felt that she was still young enough so that deciding this question of greatest wishes was one she could put off until she was older. Unlike her overbearing wicked-stepmotherish parents, she was not at the moment concerned that she had no concrete Greatest Wish, per se.

Right, anyhow, then what happened next was, this girl had fabulous adventures involving the slaying of dragons in caves and the rescuing of persons in distress.

So, whew, after all that, what is the point? What should we take from this story? Here: here is the moral of this parable:

Sometimes people rush to judgement on other people, and this turns out to be unfair to everyone involved, and girls
like that in faraway lands feel bad about it and want other people to know that from now on they will keep their minds open about things.

Happily ever after.

[in Biggs’ desk]

Holly,

We need to talk. I think we ought to talk. It is nothing serious, it is nothing bad. I just have some concerns about recent developments some recent things. Just things I’d feel better discussing in person.

I promise, it is nothing you should be worried about. Holly.

Please Just—Meet me after class on, say, Wednesday?

Mr—Brian Biggs Biggs Biggs B.

[in Biggs’ file cabinet]

Jeremy Nodvin
E-block
Mr Bigg’s

Weekly Journal 5/18

I’ve got to say I’m feeling pretty low. My girlfriend and I broke up yesterday. It was Holly, you remember from a couple weeks ago in the closet and also the baseball game and in addition she’s in you’re honors class. We’d been going out for two months which may not seem like a long time but it was longer then I’d been with any other girl. I liked her alot I guess, she was funny and she liked to do things. I don’t want to really write about it here no offense, I guess I’m just writing this to explain why I’m not writing more, or about other things. Plus I’ve been in a 2 for 15 slump since last Teusday. Maybe it’s all related I don’t know. But understand why this is all I’m writing. Sorry, I know I am.
[e-mail from Holly Hanson to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: hollacious@hotmail.com
Received: 23:01 05 18 1999
Subject: psssst

this is just a little thank you note for wednesday night.
thank you thank you thank you.
you make me happy.
: )

[in Biggs’ desk]

Br---

I want to explain why I’ve been acting kind of funny recently, and though I want to tell you face-to-face also, I thought it would help if I wrote things down first so I could organize things for myself. You know me. (Please excuse the Me-ness of this letter.)

Do you see that? That is an honest to god tear. I haven’t even begun writing this thing and I’ve already cried on it, B. I had such a promising, rational beginning, too. Did you see it?

So am I going to start over? Of course not. You know me.

What happened to us? God that sounds stupid. But that’s what I mean--something happened to us, and I must have been looking the other way when it did. Because I have no idea what it is. I have no idea what it could be.

I haven’t slept in your bed for a month.

You used to go down on me. Not like that was the only or best part of things, but it’s just that what happened? We haven’t done that for months. If it’s me, don’t you think you should tell me? Wouldn’t that be better for both of us? I
could try something different, something could be done. But if I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, then I’ll keep doing it, doing the wrong thing. I can’t know unless you let me know. Haven’t I always been honest with you?

I’m fucked up, Brian. See that?

When was the last time you called me? Do you remember? It was the 4th. I remember because it was the day before my sister’s birthday, and you called to see what we were going to do for it. I remember that. You used to call me at work all the time to talk about nothing. To talk about what we were doing for dinner.

This isn’t what I wanted to say. These are the things that don’t matter. I don’t know how to say what matters.

I haven’t been this depressed since I was a stupid and fucked up high school girl. I don’t know what’s happening. I know you don’t want to hear this, that writing this letter is the wrong thing to do. Is that it? Is my unhappiness bringing this on?

I love you Brian, and I know that you had feelings for me too, and whatever it is that has brought about this state of things, we can get past it. We can get through it.

[e-mail from cupid@yoursecretadmirer to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: cupid@yoursecretadmirer.com
Received: 03:01 05 24 1999
Subject: shhhh: you’ve got a secret admirer!

Dear Biggie,

We at YOURSECRETADMIRER.COM want you let you in on a little secret: you’ve got a secret admirer! Your secret admirer doesn’t want to reveal herself just yet... but she did include this brief, personal love-hint:

It’s me, Holly. ☺

If you want to find out more, you’ll have to come to yoursecretadmirer.com. Your access love-code is W7J114.
Don't delay... Love could be just a click away!

Love,

Your Electronic Cupid!

[e-mail from Holly Hanson to Biggs]

To: Biggie@excite.com
From: hollacious@hotmail.com
Received: 03:01 06 02 1999
Subject: RE: Are things any better?

exhibit A: one of my favorite exchanges:

--------
> To: HHANSON2@aol.com
> From: HHANSON4@aol.com
> Received: 23:01 05 04 1999
> Subject: RE: Please
>
> those are your threats? mom: HA.
>
> and watch that snippy tone. it's fucking irritating.
>
>
> On March 31st 1999, Helen Hanson at HHANSON2@aol.com wrote:
> >>
> >> I do not appreciate having to use e-mail to contact you,
> >> Holly. This is not how families operate. You are NOT an
> >> adult. You can NOT do whatever you please, come and go as
> >> you please. Unless you want to lose car privileges AND
> >> computer privileges, you will start treating your father
> >> and me with respect. Which starts with eating dinner with
> >> us on weeknights. And you will resume your confirmation
> >> classes. These things are NOT up for discussion. Your
> >> father and I would have wanted to sit down and discuss this
> >> with you, Holly, but what are we supposed to do? You make
> >> it hard for everyone.
Mr. B,

There’s a problem in the second floor janitor’s closet that’s going to need your attention at the beginning of F block.

One if by Land
Two if by Sea

2122 Seventh Ave
New York, NY 10011

June 24, 1999

MasterCard 4552 0032 3321 4421
Exp 3/01 Auth NO. 834876

Total 66.69
Tip
Total

________________________
Cardholders signature

The Westin Central Park South
112 Central Park South
New York City, New York 10019

June 24th, 1999

MasterCard ---- ---- ---- 4421
Exp 3/01 Auth NO. 338174

Brian S. Biggs

1 rm / qn bd
2 eve @ 135.00 270.00

Misc. charges:
rm srv 36.88
Thank you for staying with us
The Westin

[in Biggs’ desk]

[tape containing 6/6 phone conversation of Biggs and Holly Hanson]

Biggs: Let me ask you.
Hanson: What?
Biggs: Let me ask you about Jeremy.
Hanson: What about Jeremy?
Biggs: I mean, he’s in my Curriculum B class, he’s, you know,
Hanson: What?
Biggs: I mean, is he good looking? I have no idea about these things, as a heterosexual.
Hanson: Yes. He is.
Biggs: Is that why you two, you know,
Hanson: Why do you want to know about this?
Biggs: I’m just, you know, it’s interesting to me.
Hanson: Interesting?
Biggs: Well, I mean, you, you’re, you’re
Hanson: What?
Biggs: You two are a lot different. I mean, right?
Hanson: Jeremy’s fine.
Biggs: He’s just so,
Hanson: Look, at the time, Jeremy fulfilled certain, certain, look, Brian, do I need to explain this? He was fine. He served a purpose. He was fine.
Biggs: But,
Hanson: And that is where the discussion of Jeremy is going to end.
Biggs: Okay.

[in Biggs’ file cabinet]

Jeremy Nodvin
E-block
Mr Biggs

Weekly Journal 6/6

I know about you and Holly. This is not a threat, I am not threatening you. I am just telling you. I don’t know who else knows besides me. I found out when I went to her house to get some things of mine but I will not explain beyond that. I haven’t told anyone except for some guys I went to baseball camp with, who live all the way in New York, so it doesn’t matter about them knowing. What I am saying, is that I don’t want to take the final or do anymore work. After this, I’m done with Journals. I want an A for you’re class. I am not threatening you. It is a tradeoff, a bargain. Also, I want you to give A’s or A-‘s to Mike Fogel, Steve Kindel, Andrew Wentworth, Dan Clarke, Dan Peterson, Ryan James and Paul Billings. You can give a B+ to Dan Peterson if necissary. Tell me after class next Monday if this is alright. You can just say, “I got you’re assignment,” and that will be the code for YES. If NO, then, I will talk to principle Van Nuygen about it. This is not a threat, just something I will do.
Sincerely, Jeremy Nodvin

ps: I am not mad about it because I’m with Jen Napatamasso now. I am not surprised about it in some ways knowing Holly. Though it is gross, I have to say it.

[tape containing telephone conversation of Holly Hanson and Unknown (Female)]

Hanson: He records his phone conversations.
Unknown (Female): No! How do you know?
Hanson: He showed me.
Unknown (Female): No!
Hanson: It’s easy to do. I could show you.
Unknown (Female): Gross! Why does he do that? Why would somebody do that?
Hanson: He just does it with certain people. He said his older brother showed him how to do it.
Unknown (Female): Why did he show you this? God that’s creepy.

[tape containing 6/29 telephone conversation of Holly Hanson and Biggs]

Hanson: Have you ever had phone sex?
Biggs: No. Not really.
Hanson: How come?
Biggs: I found it was just better to have regular sex.
Hanson: You can’t have both?
Biggs: I guess I could.
Hanson: I think you should.
Biggs: You do.
Hanson: Yes I do. You’re never too old to try new things, is what I think.
Biggs: What does that mean?
Hanson: It means you’re old, and you should have phone sex.
Biggs: What about cybersex? Can I have that?
Hanson: One thing at a time, Brian.
Biggs: All right, I’ll have phone sex. You have my word.
Hanson: Brian.
Biggs: What?
Hanson: Brian.
Biggs: What?
Hanson: Brian, do you want to know what I’m doing right now?
Biggs: What?
Hanson: It’s dirty. I’m doing something dirty.
Biggs: What?
Hanson: Oh yeah. You want to know what it is, Brian?
Biggs: I... yeah.
Hanson: I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you what I’m doing.
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: I’m getting ready to give you phone sex, Brian.
Biggs: Yeah?
Hanson: Yeah. Are you listening?
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: Good. Listen. Do you know where I am right now?
Biggs: In your room?
Hanson: I’m on my bed, Brian. Do you want to know what I’m wearing, on my bed?
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: I’m in my panties. That’s all.
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: The black ones.
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: Brian, listen. [scratching] Do you hear that?
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: Do you want to know what that is? [scratching]
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: I’m using the phone to do more than just talk, Brian.
Biggs: Yeah.
Hanson: Mmm, Brian. Oh.
Biggs: Yeah. Oh. [indecipherable]
Hanson: Brian?
Biggs. Yeah, Holly, I’m here.
[email from Holly Hanson to Helen Hanson]

From: HHANSON2@aol.com
To: HHANSON2@aol.com
Date: 23:01 06 24 1999
Subject: What do you think? (FWD)

dear helen hanson,

are you wondering why there is an email in your inbox from yourself?

well: you're not the only one who's got the passwords to get into other
people's PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCES.

or the passwords to go behind people's backs and fuck with their lives
without telling them.

or even the passwords to assume, for example, other people's email address
and name and identity.

for, like, example.

:)

lots of love,

helen hanson

--------------
> From: HHANSON2@aol.com
> To: julius_beck@pamedical.com
> Date: 23:01 06 24 1999
> Subject: What do you think? (FWD)
> 
> Doctor Beck,
> 
> Gene Handy gave me your name (and your e-mail address). He said you
> were a busy man and e-mail would be the best way to present this to
> you. I am writing about my daughter, Holly, however I'm not sure
if a psychiatrist is what's called for in her situation. I'm not sure
if medication is the way to go. You are the professional, I'd like to
hear what you think.

We have been having difficulty for the past two and a half years. For
the past year she has spent less and less time at home, preferring to
spend it with her boyfriends and G-d knows where. This January she
disappeared for 22 days and we had no idea where she went (she was with
a friend in Baltimore). This is only the most dramatic of her
absences. She acts in open defiance of me and her father, and
sometimes the fighting gets so bad I'm afraid that I've resorted to
taking prescribed medication to keep my nerves down. We have tried
everything, threats and punishments, good-behavior-incentives, other
people's intervention, talking to her heart-to-heart (she cuts this off
after 15 seconds).

She has threatened us in subtle ways. She steals from us, money, knick-
knacks, there seems to be no system or reason to what she steals. She
writes horrible, horrible things about my husband and me in her
correspondences. Sometimes she poses as me on the phone. I find this out
later from people who claim to have spoken to me.

I've got two older children who gave me no problem (nothing like this).
Sometimes I feel that I am in this alone (with my husband), because she
does exceptionally well in school, and she seems to get on well with
other adults. She is very manipulative. It is astonishing how
manipulative she is. The people she manipulates often have no idea
they're being manipulated (that is how manipulation works, I suppose).
There aren't very many signs that she has problems, she doesn't dress
in black or listen to angry or depressing music as some kids do.

Her problems are not easy to specify. It is something you just have to
witness for yourself, and if she's being manipulative I suspect it will
be a hard thing to diagnose.

Is this a "family counseling" situation? Is family counseling a
service you offer? And do you have any suggestions on how to get
someone to family counseling who won't even be in the same room as you?
Please let me know what you think. If you’d like to discuss things further, my number is 244-1244.

Helen Hanson

[tape containing 7/17 telephone conversation of Megan Webb and Biggs]

Webb: Are you recording this?
Biggs: No, Megan.
Webb: I don’t believe you. I heard something. Turn off the tape recorder.
Biggs: The tape recorder is not on. I promise. What do you want?
Webb: I’m not talking to you over the phone, you sick fuck.

[tape containing 7/17 telephone conversation of Megan Webb and Biggs]

Webb: You sick fuck.
Biggs: What? What?
Webb: You sick fuck!
Biggs: Megan, what are you talking about?
Webb: I’m calling the police. I’m calling the police right now.
Biggs: Jesus, Megan, before you have me arrested, maybe you could maybe tell me what this is all about?
Webb: I am never talking to you again, you goddamn fuck.
Biggs: Do you want to meet somewhere? Starbucks. We could meet at Starbucks. I could be there in ten minutes.
Webb: I let you... I can’t believe I let you...
Biggs: Is this about Donna?
Webb: Who?
Biggs: What?
Webb: Who is Donna?
Biggs: What?
Webb: Who the fuck is Donna, Brian? Is she another one of your teenage whores?
Biggs: Look.
Webb: I was in your apartment today. What? I was there.
Biggs: I am hanging up now. When you’re in a better state of mind, I’ll be happy to talk to you.
Webb: [shrieking]

[tape containing telephone conversation of Holly Hanson and Unknown (Female)]

Unknown (Female): No! No fucking way! Oh my god. Holly!
Hanson: Jesus, can you not be a screaming teenage retard for one second?
Unknown (Female): I really don’t know what to say. I, I mean, are you, why,
Hanson: There are advantages.
Unknown (Female): Are you doing it for an A?
Hanson: Ha ha.
Unknown (Female): Do you like him? I mean,
Hanson: Sure I like him.
Unknown (Female): Why would you, why, I don’t, I mean,
Hanson: Brian’s fine. There are a lot of reasons. He’s fine.

[on Biggs’ floor]

First Union
Lansdale East Office
750 E Main St
Lansdale, PA 19446

July 17, 1999

--ACCOUNT CLOSURE--

16782395 7426 16
--checking--

Brian S. Biggs

$2177.24 -- Cash Withdrawal

Cashier # 11438 N. Studerman
[taped to Holly Hanson’s computer]

Dear Mom and Dad,

FUCK YOU BOTH.

see you around,
your daughter

[on Biggs’ desk]

Time prevents me from writing more.

Megan —

Mr and Mrs Hanson — I know there is nothing I can say. I know. I love your daughter. Please don’t try to find us for a while. We will be in a place you will not suspect. She has only 9 months until her 18th birthday. Though it is something I should be ashamed of, I am not. We love each other,
George and Elena were strongwilled and conservative, and they were not poor: Elena was a dental hygienist and George was an office manager at an import/export company. And so it baffled their friends, but amused them also, when they took $10,000 from an internet company to name their son after it: Iblm. $5,000 for the birth certificate, $5,000 more if the kid was still being called Iblm ten years later. The company would verify this by secret methods.

Iblm was one of ten Iblms across the country, one of three from the state of Texas. His birth was covered on the front page of the Local Happenings section of the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, in addition to the Births page. There was a picture of the two parents holding their baby between them, smiling into the camera.

* * *

George and Elena were interviewed on KLBK AM. They took the baby with them to the interview.

"I have to admit, that sure is an unusual name!" said Jeremy Steele, the DJ.
"We agree with you, Jeremy," Elena said.
"Let me ask you: is that the kind of name that draws a lot of funny looks?"
"When people hear it said: yes it is."
"Pronounce it for me. Iblm."
"Iblm."
"Iblm! I bet you’d have a hard time finding that name in a book of baby names!"

"Sir, we never even looked!"
"Iblm!"

George and Elena had a tremendous time at the radio station. Who could’ve been listening? They had to confess it was not a station they ordinarily listened to themselves, and they hadn’t told a lot of people about it beforehand. Next time, they would do better, they would plan in advance. What a blast that was! And objective listeners would have to admit: the two of them really had a flair for it.

* * *

The next logical place to take Iblm was television. First Elena called up Rich Huerring, who worked on the local wakeup show Good Morning on the NBC affiliate, and whom she knew a little because he got his teeth cleaned at her office. He told her Good Morning probably wouldn’t be interested in just a baby whose name’s got a story behind it, but maybe if she could come up with an angle in
addition to that, the show might be interested. So she went home and discussed it with her husband and the next day called back Rich: the show would bring together all the Iblms in America for a reunion.

But Rich said that Good Morning didn’t have the budget to make a reunion like that happen, but it was a good idea as far as he was concerned, maybe they’d have more luck pitching it with another venue. And so Elena pressured him until he gave up the number of the Maury Povich show, not just the number that they give you at the end of the show to call if you potentially qualify for being the subject a future show, the real number, which she called right away, but she got turned down there also, this time being told that it was too soon for a reunion, none of the Iblms were even old enough at this point to talk, which as a rule makes for lousy television.

* * *

They needed a holistic strategy. And this time it was George who came up with it: they’d make an Iblm website. It would be an intermediate step: the website would stir up some talk, which would entice the real media to be interested. So they asked the teenage son of some friends to assist. George and Elena wanted Iblm.com, but the kid checked it out and found that that already belonged to the company that had sponsored Iblm’s name.

“What about I’m Iblm dot com? Would that work?” said Elena.

“You can’t have apostrophes in the name,” said the kid.

“Plus that’s stupid,” said George. “What about Texas Iblm?”

“That might be okay. It’d have to be one word, texasiblm.”

“I don’t like Texas Iblm,” said Elena. George looked at her like she was being contrary with him just because he’d been contrary with her. She said “So? That sounds stupid too.”

But George worked on her and she agreed finally to texasiblm.com. The kid set it up: it had a timeline (with at this point only IBLM’S BIRTH and IBLM’S WEBSITE LAUNCHED) a section of baby pictures, and a way to send George and Elena an email about it. They thought about featuring a link to the IBLM corporate website, but that didn’t seem right so they left it off. Instead they put a link to the import/export business George worked at. They paid the kid two hundred bucks.

At first the Iblm emails came in at a pretty good clip: Great pictures! I can’t wait to see the timeline fill up with events! -- Barbara :) and I can’t make the pictures work, but I love the sight! Love Mom. But every email they got was from a person they already knew, and soon the flow of emails dried up. The website was not making the impact they’d counted on.
“Maybe we need more sensational pictures on the website,” offered George.
“I don’t think that’s what it is,” said Elena.
“He could turn out to be a genius, and we’d send him to a special school for geniuses, we won’t know that until he can talk.”
“I guess,” said Elena. She sighed.
“We just can’t know at this point where his potential is.”
“Maybe this whole thing is just useless,” said Elena.
“Maybe he’s a sports prodigy at for instance golf or tennis, and it’s just a matter of figuring out which sport it is.”
“BE REALISTIC!” she yelled. George was taken aback by the force of this. But Elena’s anger dissolved and then she looked despondent. She walked out of the room. Then she walked back in.
“What does it take to be a baby model? He’s as cute as any other baby.”
“Lots of babies do that!” said George.
“Thank god!”

The next day they took him to the only modeling agency in the phonebook. The agency wasn’t at present looking for baby models, but they did manage to set up Iblm with one shoot, at a furniture store. They wanted Iblm to pose on all the furniture.
They took him to the furniture store. The photographer was one of the store’s owners, Janet Haas. She had a pink shirt with HAAS FURNITURE written on it that she wanted Iblm to wear.
“What is Iblm? A boy or a girl?”
“He’s a boy,” said Elena.
“I thought this was going to be on television,” said George.
“Ha ha!” said James Haas, the other owner, putting an arm around him.
“Not yet!”
The shirt was too big for Iblm: it was a kid’s shirt, not a baby’s; Iblm’s arm didn’t make it out of the sleeves. He posed on sofas and chairs and on dressers.
“This should be ready for the Sunday Circular three Sundays from now,” Janet Haas told George and Elena, packing up her camera.
“That’s tremendous,” said Elena. “We’re so excited!”
“I’ve got a proposition for you Mrs Haas,” George said to her. “What do you say you consider making Iblm the official mascot of Haas’ furniture.”
“What?” said Elena.
“Well,” said Janet Haas.
This idea just came into my mind. It would mean basically having Iblm appear in all the advertisements, like the Energizer bunny does for Energizer. He could also appear in public wearing a Haas Furniture shirt, or maybe a costume designed with the theme of Haas Furniture. It wouldn’t be expensive at all. And the advantage is, it might stir up some public interest. We could even put it on the website,” said George.

“What website?” said James Haas.

George told them about Iblm’s website. James told him that he would need to talk it over with his wife.

* * *

On the drive home Elena expressed some reservations, but mostly the both of them were excited about the idea. They were looking at a potential stepping stone, is how George thought of it.

The Haases called them up the next day: they liked the idea. But there were some stipulations.

“He’s got to wear the shirt at all times, because he could be in someone’s presence unexpectedly,” said James Haas. “He’s a constant advertisement, remember.”

“But we will supply you with two shirts, for when one gets dirty,” said Janet Haas.

“But that’s only half,” James Haas continued. “He’s got to be taken to prominent places: to malls and outdoors to busy intersections, for example, or to various kinds of functions and ceremonies.”

“Anyplace people are is a good place for him to be,” said Janet Haas.

Haas furniture would pay them $500 a month, which was fine by George and Elena. They called up their friends’ kid and told them to overhaul the website so as to emphasize Iblm’s new status. The website now said, “WELCOME TO TEXASIBLM.COM, HOME OF HAAS FURNITURE SPOKESPERSON IBLM.” Also it now had a link to Haas Furniture’s website.

Every weekend George or Elena or both took Iblm to the Lubbock Mall. At first they brought a stroller, but the stroller was too confined to really showcase the t-shirt, so they had to carry him around the mall. Because the shirt only said HAAS FURNITURE on the front, they also had carry him facing forward, unless he started crying at it, at which times they reversed the shirt and carried him the regular way. They also brought him to Lubbock High School football games, basketball games, softball and baseball games, to the Buddy Holly Parade, and the openings of the new
Safeway and United Artists 24. Plus there was still the weekly photo shoots with Janet for the Sunday Circulars.

At one photo shoot James Haas took George aside and introduced the idea of calling Iblm “Haas Haas B’Gosh” on the advertisements, but George had to decline, because it might void the second half of their contract with IBLM, he didn’t want to test it.

* * *

By the time Iblm turned thirteen the Haases were pretty much like his aunt and uncle. Iblm and George and Elena had dinner over at their house at least twice a month, and James Haas attended all of Iblm’s sports games: pee-wee football, little league. He’d been doing tv work for them for five years, the last four of which he’d had speaking parts. At first, his part had been small: the commercial would do its business, then Iblm, sitting on some piece of furniture, would add: “down at Haas Furniture!” Then he was in every shot: silent until he closed the commercial with “down at Haas Furniture!” Then he was announcing it: check out this sofa folks, this bureau’s fine enough to be married in, you’re going to need the chair I’m sitting in when you hear how low the price is on it... down at Haas Furniture! People he knew and people he didn’t would say it to him and expect him to say it back.

He would still wear his HAAS FURNITURE shirt around: now he had over twenty different varieties, all designed and decorated uniquely. He was recognized at the Texas Tech games, he was like their second mascot.

* * *

The Haases were over for Sunday dinner.

“Look at this!” Iblm rolled up the sleeve on his right arm. It was a tattoo: it said: HAAS FURNITURE.

“How about that!” said James Haas.

“Oh,” said his mother.

“How’d you get that?” his father asked.

“There’s a place in the mall,” Iblm said.

“Did it hurt?” asked his mother.

“How much was it?” asked his father

“Is it legal for you to have that?” asked his mother.

“I think it’s great,” said Janet Haas.

“You just have to be 15,” said Iblm.

“But you’re 14,” said his mother.
“All right,” said James Haas. “I got something. You display that tattoo in public on a regular basis, and I'll pay you another two hundred bucks a month.” At this point Iblm was being paid $2000 a month.

“Oh,” said Iblm’s mother.

“How about three hundred,” said Janet Haas.

“Three hundred,” said Iblm’s father.

“No: another five hundred dollars!” said Janet Haas.

“What do you say,” said James Haas.

“It’s already on your arm,” said Janet Haas, “it wouldn’t be much work on your part, if you look at it that way.”

Iblm was smiling, looking at his tattoo. “I’ll do it.” He flexed his arm.

“All right!” said James Haas, shaking hands with George.

* * *

Later that night George and Elena discussed the tattoo.

“What’s your opinion?” Elena asked her husband.

“I’m a little surprised at it.”

“Do you think it’s right?”

“I personally have no problem with it at all. I think we’ve got to respect his decision, is the ultimate thing.”

Elena told him she agreed with that attitude.

* * *

Iblm cut all the sleeves off all his Haas Furniture t-shirts. The tv ads had a new ending: a closeup shot of his tattoo: his flexing arm would mime Down at Haas Furniture! People wanted to see the tattoo, touch it, wanted to watch Iblm make it speak. He started keeping a journal: his first entry began, My life has filled me with surprises at every corner. He slept with his first girl, a twenty five year old teachers-aide from his history class.

* * *

Iblm was interviewed on the radio. His parents brought him to the interview but they had to wait in the reception area and listen to it over the office speakers.

“Who came up with ‘Down at Haas Furniture?’”

“It was Janet Haas. She’s the brains of the operation. But I like to think that I’ve made it my own.”
Elena turned to George but George shushed her before she could make her comment. She stared at the speakers. Who was this? This did not sound like Iblm. It was certainly not a voice Elena could have taught him.

“Do a lot of people ask you to say it?”

“All the time, Jeremy.”

“Okay then. Lay it on me.”

“This is Iblm from Haas Furniture telling you that you’re listening to KLBK... down at Haas Furniture!”

“Ha! Fantastic!”

George and Iblm reenacted the interview on the drive home, adding commentary. Elena didn’t want to speak.

* * *

Jerry Häagblom ran the local Coca Cola distributorship. He called up George with a proposition: what would Iblm say to having a Coca Cola insignia tattooed on Iblm’s open arm? He wouldn’t have to even actively promote the product, he’d just have to agree to drink Coke products to the exclusion of all other sodas. Payment would come primarily in a lump sum for the tattoo work, but Jerry Häagblom would see to it that there’d be a regular pension for holding to the agreement. And this would be a clandestine arrangement. This sort of thing is definitely not endorsed by the suits in Atlanta.

“Do you guys make Dr Pepper?” George asked him. “Iblm really loves drinking Dr Pepper.”

“Dr Pepper is independent of Coke. But I don’t see anything wrong with him drinking it if it’s in private, number one, and number two, if he pours it into a glass and throws away the Dr Pepper bottle and has an empty can of a Coca Cola product standing next to the glass, just in case someone sees him, if you know what I’m getting at. Or lets say he buys a two liter bottle of Coke and dumps it out and refills it with the Dr Pepper from a two liter bottle of Dr Pepper, and then takes steps to see that no one accidentally tastes what’s in the bottle. Reconstituting the soda, so to speak. I don’t see having a problem with that.”

George ran it by James and Janet Haas, who said they had no problem with it as long as Iblm didn’t deviate from wearing the Haas Furniture shirts. Hell, they themselves enjoyed Coca Cola: who didn’t? And maybe interest in Iblm would be stirred up in a new area, which would consequently spill over onto Haas Furniture. Elena wondered if so much Coke might pose adverse potentialities for his health. Iblm was one hundred percent in favor of it.
The more companies that came to Iblm with tattoo propositions, the more companies were interested in tattooing Iblm. It was like a gravitational law: the attention Iblm was attracting was attracting attention. It was feeding on itself, and growing large. Companies like: Rubbermaid, Phillips, CMGI, Brown and Williamson, Abercrombe and Fitch, Hershey’s, Miramax, Subway, Safeway, 3COM, Staples, Citicorp, Toyota, Sega, along with nonprofits like Oxfam and People for the American Way. Iblm was a millionaire. He went on talk shows: Maury Povich, Conan O’Brien, Live with Regis and Kelly, Howard Stern. He had cameos in tv shows and movies. Nastysluts.com offered Iblm one million dollars to put their name on his penis, and a webcast of Iblm getting Johnson & Johnson on his back drew half a million visitors.

* * *

George was discussing a new tattoo for Iblm with a woman from Tommy Hilfiger:

“Is there any outstanding talent he’s got? For instance football: do you think he’s got the potential to be a star at football? Because I know with certainty that if he were an athlete of some standing, people would want to emulate his activities. People would take our body advertisement more seriously.”

“Those kinds of talents are not relevant. You know exactly what kind of one-of-a-kind talents you’re getting with Iblm. If you want a superstar, go ask Tiger Woods.”

“George, look,” said the Tommy Hilfiger woman.

“Ask him to put your corporate logo on his body.”

“George,”

“And then display it in front of cameras, at golf tournaments. See what he says to you.”

* * *

One afternoon Elena fielded a phone call:

“The reason I’m calling you, Elena, is because I am with AOL Time Warner, the parent company of IBLM, and here at AOL Time Warner IBLM we’ve noticed the great interest surrounding your son, and we’ve got concerns about it, I’ll be frank. He is receiving huge corporate attention, and since your son has the name of one of our subsidiaries, by design, we naturally have concerns about the problematic ways this attention might influence our reputation, being that this affiliates us by
implication with companies that we really have no business with at all and could potentially be our rivals.”

“Well, I,” Elena started.

“Listen to me right now,” said George, who had picked up an extension and was listening silently, “you’ve got no claim on our son. No claim in any way. Our business was settled six years ago when you signed over that second $5,000. Which was a bargain as far as I’m concerned. You know how much attention that boy has got you. You’d pay him $5,000 every day of his life if you had any sense of fairness in your bones.”

“We at AOL Time Warner IBLM are just concerned at the proliferation of corporate sponsorships, the conflicting corporate sponsorships that—”

“They’re not sponsorships. That’s not the word for them,” said George, huffing.

“You have no say over how his life can go,” said Elena, almost crying.

“Now look, Elena, George—”

“He is his own man, apart from you,” said Elena.

“Now look, folks, now, I didn’t want to bring up the issue copyright infringement, the issue of who’s got proprietary ownership of the name IBLM, but if certain—”

“No you look mister,” said George, holding the phone so that he was staring at its earpiece in front of him. “You know how much water that threat is going to hold in court, absolutely zero and we both know it. We’ve still got our copy of the contract, and there’s nothing you can do about that. Now my wife and I are going to hang up the phone and I suggest that this be the last thing we ever hear from you people. Now goodbye,” he shouted.

* * *

Iblm put some of his journal entries on the website in a section called IBLM’S DIARY. It was his idea. He would write it and give it to his father to proofread and his father would give it to the webmaster.

He wrote, The most often question I get asked, is does tattooing hurt. Yes it does! but you think about others things during it. The best part is, it’s a way of expressing yourself in addition to regular ways. You get to say something without even using your mouth, it’s a voice!

He wrote, Today I was recognized at Foot Locker. The man asked me why don’t I have Foot Locker anywhere on me? Then, we laughed about it.

He wrote, I wouldn’t recommend going my route to everybody, it’s something I lucked into and stuck with. One example is my friends, when you’ve got a lot of people
interested in you, it’s harder to stick with real friends, I haven’t spoken to Eugene Thomlinson in a year, and he was my best friend until age 11, though now he goes to Monterey and I go to Coronado (go Mustangs!). Things just work out in a particular way is all. If you’re reading this Eugene send a line, okay?

* * *

His father was trying to secure him a book contract, but the book people were refusing to budge on their unfavorable terms.

“He is a one of a kind article, which people have proven to have an interest in, judging by all the talk shows and television programs and exposure of other kinds that he has received since he was born. He is the definition of famous. Plus his life is an inspiration to many people.”

“That’s not being disputed here,” said the book man.

“And I don’t think I need to remind you that he’s got a Viacom sponsorship on his calf, a six incher, among the biggest on his body.”

The book man said, after a pause, “That is not how things work in this business, sir.”

“Don’t get ruffled. I’m just saying, is all I’m saying.”

“Well I don’t appreciate it.”

“We’ve got a desirable product, and you’ve got a means of delivering that product, and I think it is in our mutual interests to come to an agreement on this, is all my point was.”

“Well you’ve got our offer.” The book man hung up.

* * *

Iblm slept with a different woman every night. He would go to Skooners, which usually had a wide selection of college girls, and if nothing developed after an hour, he would try Wolfy’s and then Boss Office and then The Exitos. The bouncers and bartenders were all friendly with him. He catalogued the women in the back of his journal and when he didn’t know their name he would enter a physical description.

* * *

James Haas met George for lunch. Iblm only did ads for Haas Furniture a couple times a year, and George considered them a favor to Janet and James Haas.
“I know we’re no longer top priority on Iblm’s list,” said James. “But I have to tell you, I feel that Haas Furniture is becoming a nonentity in Iblm’s life.”

“Iblm realizes that you and Janet are largely responsible for giving Iblm that initial opportunity to showcase his talents. You took a chance on him when nobody else would. He is tremendously grateful.”

“I’m going to be direct, George: I’m not seeing any manifestations of his loyalty these days.”

“He’s very busy, with his commitments.”

“We’ve still got a contract with him.”

“I know this James.”

“A contract Janet and I intend for him to honor.”

“I wouldn’t take that tone with me if I were you.”

“Because we could do our communicating in the courts, if that’s how you’d prefer it.”

“We’ve got some very sympathetic and powerful people in various positions, James. I’m warning you of this as a friend, okay?”

“Well I hope one of them is a lawyer,” said James, who got up and left the restaurant.

* * *

Iblm asked his father if he could get a tattoo of his own name on the space left on his lower calf: a special personal tattoo for himself. He had drawn up what it would look like, straight roman letters resting between thick horizontal lines, like superbowl numerals. Maybe there could be some ivy growing around the letters. His father said it was a terrific idea, he loved it, but space was right now at such a premium that if they allowed themselves to indulge in this little bit of sentimentality it was going to cost them tens of thousands of dollars, conservatively, and he wanted to know if Iblm was sure it was an indulgence he was comfortable being responsible for.

Iblm said he didn’t. He wrote in IBLM’S DIARY, *I’ve learned a lot as part of my experiences, one of them is, part of being an adult is compromising, you have to accept things and be smart about them, even if it’s not your number one choice.*

* * *

It was becoming clear: Iblm was running out of skin space. Parts of the middle of his back were clear, along with some space on his legs and the back of his hand. Plus he still had clean skin on the bottom of his feet and on his private part,
and he still had hair, so that was one more potential open area, if it came to that. His face was mostly clear, from the lower cheeks up. Coverage ran about 80%.

“How effective are tattoo removal procedures?” George was asking the doctor. “The ones with lasers?”

“Pretty effective, overall. The ink never completely leaves the skin, so the result is a kind of permanent, faded bruise where the tattoo was. But you won’t be able to recognize the design that used to be there.”

“And you can do this selectively, keep one tattoo while eliminating the one right next to it, say?”

“Yes sir.”

“Can you then tattoo over the removed tattoo?”

“Not advised. The skin is prone to get infected. Plus the tattoo looks blurry.”

George banged the steering wheel on the way home. He honked the horn. “God damn it!” he shouted at the windshield.

* * *

“What about your face?” George asked Iblm.

“That’s not up for discussion,” said Elena.

“It’s not your face, I’m not asking you.”

“I don’t care who you’re asking. I’m not letting my baby’s face get covered.”

“I’m not a baby.”

“You don’t understand, Elena!”

“This is not up for discussion! This discussion is over!”

* * *

Thanks to heavy lobbying from IBLM, the Texas legislature passed a law determining how much bodyspace could be devoted to advertisements: fifty percent. But thanks to the effort of a number of other corporations (which had not yet staked themselves on Iblm), a rider was attached to the bill exempting any person already corporately tattooed at the time of the bill’s passage.

* * *

Iblm himself came up with a solution: he would increase the space he had left.

“If I can get to 350, I figure I can get 40% more out of the remaining spaces.”

“Then what?” said his mother.
“Then there’d be 40% more space to fill up.”

“Then what, Iblm? Once it’s all filled? Then you’re a 350 pound fatty with no space left and nothing to offer!”

“But we can charge more as the space gets filled up. It’d be more at a premium, because there’d be less of it. It’s like oil prices, with the using-up of a natural resource.”

George laughed.

“This isn’t funny George! He’s talking about ballooning himself up to obesity! It’s short sighted. And it’s not healthy. And he’ll look like a freak!”

George said, “he can lose the weight after. The tattoos will just shrink down in size.”

“And the corporations will be none the wiser,” said Iblm, and George laughed again.

Elena shrieked and left the house and went for a long drive in her car.

* * *

George joked that Iblm’s real talent was gaining weight: Iblm put on a hundred pounds in three and half months. Elena had moved out temporarily, so every meal George was bringing fast food from chains that had sponsored Iblm: McDonalds, KFC, Taco Bell, DQ.

Iblm grew a beard to camouflage his new fatness, but Toys ’R Us, which had a spot on his neck, complained that it obscured Jeffery Giraffe. Iblm bought a golf cart to help get around and sold corporate spots on it. In private he walked with a cane.

He told his father, “I’d really like to sell the remaining spots so I can start to lose the weight.”

“We’re very close. We’ve just got a couple holdouts on finalizing the terms.”

“I’d even be willing to take a reduction in price in exchange for speeding things along.”

“All right son, I’ll see what I can do.”

* * *

His mother came by to see him.

“Jesus, you must weigh 400 pounds. Can you even sit up on your own?”

“Mom, I’m aiming to lose the weight,” he started to say

“I wanted to name you Christian! Or Daniel!”

“I’m proud to be,” Iblm started to say.
“Listen to me Iblm.” She looked at her hands in her lap, then at Iblm. “I’m moving to Abilene with your aunt Judy. You’re going to come with me and we’re going to fix it so that you can lose this weight and normalize yourself again. So you can get your respect back.”

“Mom, I can’t move to Abilene. There’s too much preventing me! Why can’t you stay here?”

Elena stood up.

“When people ask me if I’m the mother of you, I lie and tell them no, and it breaks my heart every day.” She left.

* * *

Iblm was having trouble losing the weight. He couldn’t seem to crack 300 pounds.

“What about exploring the avenue of liposuction?” he asked his father in a low tone.

“See the problem with that is, is that liposuction leaves a scar, and there aren’t any places in the liposuction region that it would be possible contractually to scar up. We could hire you a personal trainer, though.”

“Yeah,” said Iblm.

* * *

A number of corporations joined in a breach of contract suit against Iblm. His obesity lay him up in bed too much of the time; he couldn’t fulfill minimum public exposure levels as stipulated in his agreements. His legal strategy was to argue that the 24 hour webcam in his bedroom rendered all that irrelevant legally; the way his life was set up, it was impossible to remove himself from the public’s attention. A court date was set.

* * *

Iblm was visiting his physician for a check up.

“The first thing is of course drop some weight, because frankly being as heavy as you are is going to usher in any number of health problems, the first of which is heart failure and death. The second thing is, I’d like to run some blood tests.”

The doctor summoned Iblm and his father to his office a few days later. The blood tests revealed that somehow the ink from his tattoos was leaking through his skin into his bloodstream. This posed grave and immediate risks to his life.
“I want to know,” Iblm’s father asked the doctor, “number one how such a thing is possible, number two why nobody told us this was possible, and number three what kind of immediate steps we can take to stop the leakage.”

The doctor told him that he didn’t know any of the answers. He’d never heard of anything like this before, but Iblm was a rare person. It was the doctor’s inclination to bring Iblm in to be studied, but he would understand one hundred percent if Iblm was against it.

“What about removing the tattoos with lasers?” asked Iblm.

“There’s got to be a better solution than that,” said his father.

“But would it work?” Iblm persisted.

The doctor said, “In theory, it might, although—”

“How long will it take to find an alternative solution? I mean, doctor, how pressing is the issue of leakage? Is it an any-minute kind of danger, or do we have a little time to work with here?”

“I really have no way of determining.”

Iblm and his father discussed it on the way home. His father was fixedly against the lasers. They noticeably alter the nature of your skin in irreversible ways, number one, and number two, they’re an unproven technology which, who knows, could be lethally dangerous.

Iblm didn’t say anything. Then he whispered, “I’m scared for my life.”

“What was that?” said his father. “Look, don’t worry, something will be figured out by somebody, there is absolutely no question about that.”

* * *

Iblm was not eligible for cosmetic surgery, such as laser tattoo removal, unless he had the consent of a parent or guardian. His mother lived in Abilene and hadn’t spoken with him in two months. He called the Haases, but they didn’t want to hear his pernicious voice, unless it was on the legal witness stand. He went to some of the less popular bars, Otto’s and Happy Trails, to try to pick up an older woman whom he could sleep with and then ask to pose as his legal guardian, but his obesity made seducing women a joke. He looked for a prostitute and couldn’t find one.

* * *

Iblm removed all the towels and toilet paper from the bathroom, plus all the aerosol cans, then turned on the shower. He had a can of motor oil and a lighter and he was going to light his body on fire. After five minutes he was going to put himself out in the shower. He had an alarm clock to time the five minutes: he
wanted to make sure that the fire did its job, and he wasn’t sure he could trust himself to gauge time accurately in such discomfort. He covered his face and head in Vaseline, which he assumed to be flame retardant.

He poured the motor oil over his chest and shoulders and watched it in the mirror drip slowly over itself down to his legs. He was disgustingly fat. He remembered he should lock the door, because his father was at home in the basement and he was afraid he’d interfere, but his hands were slick with motor oil and there were no towels to mediate the slickness, and he had to do it with his teeth.

He watched the motor oil catch: a tight simmering flame that spread fast but did not grow large. For a few seconds, nothing. Then, pain: worse than anything, a million times worse than the worst pain he’d ever felt, a million infected tattoo needles stabbing into his skin and ripping it in every direction at once.

He screamed. Maybe ten seconds had passed.

He ran into the shower. The water wasn’t putting out the fire. He tried to wipe the motor oil off his body with his hands. Vaseline was getting in his eyes.

“What is it!” his father yelled into the bathroom. “What are you screaming about! Are you on fire! I’m smelling fire!”

“Open the door!” Iblm yelled.

“It’s locked!” Iblm’s father shook the door handle, then launched into with his shoulder. Iblm battered it from the inside, but he couldn’t get traction with his feet wet and greased up, and he kept slipping to the floor.

“Don’t move! I’m going for the axe!”

George ran to the garage but couldn’t locate the axe so he ran back with a softball bat. He hit the door what seemed like a hundred times. Then, finally he splintered open a serviceable crack and worked it wide enough to slip his hand through and try to undo the lock.

“I’m coming through!”

But the lock on the inside too was slippery to maneuver and plus the lock’s metal was too hot to hold: the door had caught fire. George took off his shirt for a potholder and reached through and twisted the lock open. But the door was still stuck: Iblm had collapsed in its path. George forced it open.

His son was passed out on his back. His body was dark and slow burning like a briquette. Fire was spreading from the door to the wallpaper.

“Iblm! Wake up!” He kicked Iblm’s face and it flopped one way then back into place.

“Iblm!”

He ran to call the fire department. He ran back and tried to drag Iblm from the bathroom: his body was too hot to touch so he took off his jeans and hooked Iblm’s neck and tried to pull, but Iblm was too heavy to move. He wet the jeans in
the shower and tried to dab out the fire on Iblm. His skin was bubbling up colors: dark blues and deep greens. Skin adhered to the jeans where they touched. Then the smoke got too bad and George had to leave to wait outside the house for the fire trucks to arrive.
Emilio Entaban and Vitór Mapasa were born on the same day one year apart: first Emilio, then Vitór. Emilio, for that first year, had a look of perpetually mounting anxiety, like he was waiting for something to happen; something to arrive. His eyes attended any movement. He made people uncomfortable.

As a baby Emilio would refuse to stop crying unless Vitór was nearby: he could sense him within twenty paces. Vitór himself never cried. As a kindness to Emilio’s mother, Vitór’s mother agreed to let them nurse together, though Emilio should have been too old for it: side by side, each at a breast. And so Emilio and Vitór grew to be something like brothers: they grew to be hermanandos.

For six years neither Emilio or Vitór spoke a word. This was a great concern. Doctors were sent for from the city. None of their prescriptions had any effect: mud and coloba berries and honey rubbed on their chest; wedges of lemon lodged in their mouths as they slept; severe tongue-lengthening procedures. Vitór’s first words came after his family had at last acquiesced to his silence, after church: They were: “please, I’m hungry.” Emilio, too, was speaking within the week.

Neither Emilio nor Vitór showed any interest or aptitude for games. When they were placed in their positions on the ball field, their attention inclined towards the insects below or whatever moved in the sky, and they often finished the game where they had first been placed, looking. When darkness ended the game, they would compare with each other what they had noticed, or collected. Shortly they were not asked to play at all; they used the time instead to forage in new areas: along the river, in the streets of the town.

By their early teens Emilio and Vitór were acknowledged to be the best fishermen in the village. They knew where in the river to find the fish, and how to coax them into their nets. It was told that Emilio could catch fish with dried leaves, and Vitór could do it with finger shadows. The men from the village watched them in secret from the woods, trying to learn their tricks.

During his thirteenth year, Vitór grew astoundingly. Until then, both boys had been small; people assumed it was because they shared one lifeforce, enough for one vigorous boy or two short boys. But Vitór grew to more than six feet by the end of the year, and the hair on his face came so fast that he had to shave in the mornings and the afternoons. He was as skinny as the trunk of a mabano tree, and often walked about with no shirt. Emilio showed no ability in matching Vitór’s growth; though this seemed to go unnoticed between them.

Mid teens: time for the boys to do serious work. Emilio showed skill as a goatherd, and Vitór, so tall, was to tend the banana fields. It was the first time the two had been apart
for extended time. When Emilio demonstrated himself capable of handling the goats without
a chaperone, he tried to bring the herd to the banana fields, but the goats proved too clever at
eating the bananas off the trees, and he had to take them back to the rocky hillsides.

This is how three years passed, Vitôr in the banana fields and Emilio with his herd.
Sometimes before sunrise they fished together, catching lunch, talking a little. Emilio grew
to be a sturdy young man, as tall as his father.

In Emilio’s eighteenth year, there was a development with a village girl, Lucia. To
everyone she had been simply Manuel the corn farmer’s daughter, with tangled hair, reckless,
often dirtied with mud. But one day in the spring (no one could say which one exactly) a
force of nature captured her and returned her to the village changed. Everyone noticed. She
moved differently, as if nature had seasoned her blood with sleepiness. Her face seemed to
smile without smiling. Here was a new creature who had stolen the name and shape of
Lucia—but no, if you looked closely, her shape was different somehow, and her name meant
something new. The women of the village remarked on it. The men, a little bit wary, kept
quiet.

This new creature did not go unnoticed by Emilio and Vitôr. They spoke about it
early one morning, fishing.

“What do you think happened to Lucia?” said Emilio.

“She is beautiful now,” Vitôr said.

“It is very strange. I don’t like it.”

Vitôr pulled a thingilled trout from the river. “Maybe she will return to normal.”

That evening Vitôr paid a visit to Lucia to see if she had returned to normal. He
brought her a bunch of bananas. She was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed beneath
her. Vitôr laid the bananas out in front of her.

He said to her, “I brought you a bunch of bananas.”

She looked at him.

“It is the best bunch. The bananas at the bottom are not quite ripe, but the ones at the
top are just right. By the time you eat the ripe bananas, the other ones will be ready.” He
looked at his bananas. “I carried them here from the fields.”

She looked at the bananas, then back at Vitôr. “I will be seeing you around,” he said,
and left her house.

News of the bananas reached Emilio. Later, as they fished, Emilio asked him, “So
you gave her some bananas?”

“Yes.”

“What did she do?”

Vitôr was silent for a minute. “I don’t think she did anything.”
That morning Emilio gathered some goat milk, and spent the afternoon pressing it into a cheese. He spiced it with some basil and crushed habanía seeds that grew on the hillside, and in a few weeks he had enough to fill a small bucket. He brought it to Lucia.

“Sometimes,” he told her, speaking as if he were reading the words off his shoes, “the afternoons pass very slowly. I have made you some cheese.” He set the bucket on the ground in front of her. “If you let it sit out the taste will be stronger. But it is good to eat now too.” He looked around to see any evidence of bananas, but he couldn’t find any. “Have you been to the hillside where I tend the goats? There is a cave I’ve discovered, where rock spears that hang from the ceiling do battle with ones that rise from the floor. I can show you, if you’d like to see it, some afternoon.”

Every afternoon for two weeks Emilio thought about her visit, what he would say when she arrived. They would get to talking about his work, about the goats he looked after, how years of goatherding had taught him to recognize individual animals by their coat or their call or their gestures. Sometimes she was coming: her shape approaching from the direction of the village, but no, she always resolved into a faraway goat or a cloud’s shadow.

Maybe she had forgotten his offer. He changed his route from his house to his herd so that he passed Lucia’s house. He looked for signs, signs of any kind: that she was home, that she had been home, that Vitó had been by, that she had tried the cheese. One evening at dusk Emilio passed her house and the odor from the open door announced frying fish. It smelled delicious. Then Emilio looked up to see tens of fish hanging from the clothes wire on the balabo tree. Vitó! He brought her these fish! He counted them: twenty eight. He kicked a rock bigger than his own foot the rest of the way home. He thought, all right, we’ll see about that, rilocón.

Vitó’s ladder had lost a rung and he was repairing it. His stomach had been bothering him for the past few weeks and he didn’t know what it was or how to remedy it. He wasn’t even sure his stomach was the problem; he felt a little less than nauseous, fluttery but weighted down, sad and slow. It was somehow tied to his emotions; it took very little to turn him downhearted, and the melancholy was thicker than he was used to. He had thrown up unexpectedly three times in the last week. His mother had asked him what the matter was, and he had said Nothing without looking at her.

He finished the ladder, tested it. Then he looked at the sun: almost four o’clock. Lately around this time Lucia would come from the river, east of the banana fields, on her way home. Running an errand, Vitó had run into her accidentally one afternoon; the next afternoon he timed his chore to see if their meeting had indeed been a coincidence of routine,
or just one afternoon’s good luck. When he ran into her that second afternoon, it was decided: every day he would head back just after four.

He put away his tools and ladder and gathered two heavy bunches he had cut to bring home. They pained his back, but maybe she would recognize how heavy they were, how much he could carry. He reached their meeting place, but he couldn’t see her anywhere. He slowed his pace; maybe today she was late. If he slowed himself enough, she would catch up: it was a matter of mathematics. He took half steps and then quarter steps. He wanted to set his bananas down, but he didn’t dare, because if that were the moment she spotted him, she might think him lazy or weak. He stopped altogether and pretended to look at something along the path. He took a few steps and then stopped again.

He heard her voice: “Vitór.”

“You all right?”

“It is nothing.” He attempted to smile, but he couldn’t control the proper muscles; he had no idea what his mouth was doing. He tried to sober up his expression, but that too was difficult because the pain in his back was vying for control of his face. At least she would notice his fortitude, mastering his pain.

They walked to the town side by side. He waited for her to say something, but she was silent and he was forced to say, “how have you liked the fish?”

She said, “there’s so much,” and then was silent again. He was sure his face was red and distorted, so he looked at the ground and let his hair fall over his eyes.

They reached her house and she said “goodbye,” and he said “goodbye, Lucia.” As soon as he was out of sight from her house he dropped the bananas on the ground and fell to his knees, holding his back.

Before dinner, his mother asked him, “What is the matter, Vitór?”

“I will be fine,” he said. He was lying on his stomach on his bed.

“Are you hurt?”

“My back is a little sore today. I will be fine.”

“You can’t do your work with a sore back. Here.” She brought a plate of rice and bananas and set it on the ground in front of him. She soaked towels in warm tea and laid them on his skin, then massaged his back through the towels as he ate. “Go easy tomorrow.”

That night, awake from the pain, he imaged their next walk home. Perhaps he would walk with a limp and she would see it and assist him. She would take his arm and place it on her shoulder: you can lean against me, she would say. Her grasp would be at once gentle and firm. He would only lean on her slightly, and she would sense his hesitation and say, I mean it Vitór, you don’t have to be gentle. Her kindness made something clog his throat.
Early the next morning Emilio picked up Vitór for the morning’s fishing. These days they were only fishing together twice a week. Emilio sat on a riverside log and teased his line. Vitór stood on the bank working his net.

“Why aren’t you sitting?”

“I can’t sit today. I tried to carry too many bananas at once.”

Emilio nodded, thinking, too many bananas at once? This is a suspicious thing; he is bringing her more bananas. He wants me to know this, or why would he say it?

“I should be going,” Emilio said, tying away his line. “I should get back to the goats.”

Vitór pulled in a mudback catfish and tossed it back. He was thinking if he should catch more fish for Lucia; if she meant yesterday’s “there’s so much” to tell him and you’re so generous to give it to us, or Vitór, all right, enough is enough. He considered how she said it: what her body motions implied. She was so beautiful. “What?” asked Vitór.

“I’m leaving.”

“See you. Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.”

Emilio spent the afternoon crafting a plan. He would wait until dark and go himself to the banana fields and cut a bunch and hide them. Then, weeks later, when they had browned and softened, he would leave them at her door: what could she think except that Vitór had left her rotten bananas? What kind of a man brings rotten bananas? No kind she would be interested in, for sure. And Emilio would bring her more cheese. Vitór: forgotten. And when Lucia was Emilio’s, he would show her the best places in the hillside, and take her there as he pleased.

It took Vitór’s back a week to straighten itself out. The pain was worse on the second day, and even worse on the third, but less and less after that. He walked with a slight limp, his hands above his backside, forging a look of placid dignity. If people remarked on it, on his injury and his courage in enduring it, if word reached Lucia, if her heart were overcome or at least infiltrated by compassion and admiration, well, that wasn’t something so hard to imagine happening.

Vitór waited every day after four for Lucia; he wanted desperately for her to see him limp. He walked the route so slowly that it took him fifty minutes instead of fifteen. He would drop a button from his shirt on the ground and pretend to be searching for it, looking sidelong in the direction she might come from. A number of times he lost the button in the underbrush; his shirt was shortly out of buttons. Some days Lucia caught up, others not.
They didn’t speak very much. They didn’t touch. He maintained his limp for two weeks after his body stopped demanding it of him.

Emilio left the goats untended and stood in the shadow of a nariño tree beyond Lucia’s house. He witnessed Vitór and Lucia emerge together from the path a number of times, sometimes two days in a row. Often they walked in silence, as if they had something to hide. Well: things had gone far enough. It was time to do something: that night he retrieved the mushed bananas, and hours before sunrise he planted them at Lucia’s door.

The next morning he checked: they were gone. He imagined Lucia’s reaction, frowning, disgusted. Boy had she been wrong about Vitór. How could she have let herself get so carried away by a man who leaves rotten bananas at someone’s door? That afternoon, though he had slept very little the night before, Emilio felt energized and light: alone with the goats, he smiled often, and even wrestled with some of the young ones.

Emilio strategized. Now that Vitór had been dispatched, it was his time to act. He could not rely upon his tongue: the last time he had approached her, with the cheese, he had rehearsed his words several hours a day for a week, and he had managed barely seven sentences. And it would have to be more eloquent than an ordinary gift, because the cheese hadn’t even worked, and what’s more, look where Vitór’s bananas and dozens of fish got him: nowhere.

And then an idea: poetry. He would give her a book of poems. This was definitely the best approach. He could reveal the force of his feelings: he could smuggle her the words he himself could not say in other people’s poems. He would copy the most potent-looking poems he could find onto a scroll, and deliver it personally to her, so that there could be no question of his purpose.

Emilio obtained a book of poetry from his uncle, a collection his great-great grandfather had assembled for his great-great grandmother. The book was worn and on the even pages the printing was hard to make out, but Emilio couldn’t read anyway, so he selected poems from the odd-numbered pages which featured the most attractive and passionate pictures. He copied the letters, one after the other: Isabella When I look at your face I’m amazed By the grace Of your face I love to taste the taste Of your face And gaze At your chaste necklace of grace. He even sketched some of the pictures from the book, which were mostly sunsets and sunrises, sometimes adding goats to the scene as a personal touch Lucia would recognize.

It took him three weeks to finish. He couldn’t locate a blank scroll, so he copied the poems onto individual leaves of paper and bound them together with a paste made from crushed juniper berries and salt. When the town’s priest, from whom he had stolen the paper,
interrupted him on his second day of work and tried to persuade him return it, Emilio chased him off with a rock. He spent an entire afternoon inspecting it for blemishes, and then, the following morning, brought it to Lucia. He said, “I have made this for you. Here.” He put it into her hand, looking into her eyes. “We will see each other,” he said, and walked on to the hillside.

Vitór’s back had healed, but without the insistent distraction of pain, his melancholy and upset stomach reasserted themselves. Vitór was vomiting twice a day now, often in the evenings as he lay in bed. He had learned to recognize the compressed, hollow feeling in his throat which usually preceded it, and two out of three times he made it outside. He used a foot-sized piece of slate to bury his vomit, and then sprinkled burned jasmine and habano leaves over the hole to conceal the smell.

There was more: at odd and unforeseeable moments, Vitór would begin to cry. He couldn’t determine what brought it on; sometimes, hearing of people’s kindness or heroism would set him off. Sometimes simply imagining it. Thinking of a favorite melody. Watching the sunrise. Or it was nothing—his vision would blur, and he would feel under his eyes and his fingers would wet with tears. He was himself bewildered; he had not even cried as a baby. Something had tenderized his emotions, left him unbalanced.

He was losing weight; his cheeks had begun to turn inward, and without his trousers his legs looked like fractured candles. He often noticed he was lightheaded. He walked into walls and trees and other people, and once he fell asleep on his feet, walking somewhere. He fell weeks behind tending the bananas fields. And sleep: he rarely slept more than a few hours at a time. His dreams woke him; they were fierce and living, mostly filled with incarnations of Lucia. She ran off with his bananas, hiding them one by one; he brought her to her first dinner with his parents and grandmother, and she was bashful; after many years of marriage she had died, and he stood alone with the priest at her funeral, wanting to die.

It was the last Sunday of the month and his grandmother was over for dinner. After prayers, Vitór’s grandmother said, “Vitór, you look terrible. What is the matter with you? Is your back still bad?”

He looked up from his chicken. “My back is fine.”

“Eat your food. You look like death.”

He wondered if he really looked that bad. Was it obvious enough for anyone to see? Was it bad enough to hope for sympathy and concern? Because sympathy and love are like
parallel vines: they help each other grow. Maybe Lucia would even be compelled to pay him a visit, to see if he was okay.

He tried to concentrate on eating. His parents were not talking but his grandmother spoke constantly, so much that it stayed her eating: the fork remained perched just above her plate. She spoke about all levels of government and about town gossip and about people who had died before Vitór had been born. She mentioned something she had heard about Lucia’s family: that they had managed to obtain four bottles of wine from Europe, but this week the bottles had gone missing and Lucia was suspected. Vitór watched his plate with intensity.

“What? What is it?” his grandmother said to him.

“What?” he said, eyes on his plate.

His grandmother was silent for the first moment of the evening, scrutinizing him.

Then she said, “Vítór! It is that girl!”

“What?” Vítór mumbled.

“This is terrible!” She turned to Vitór’s mother: “How long has he been like this?”

“It’s been so gradual,” she said.

She leaned over to Vitór’s father and hit him in the back of the head. “It could be fatal, you ass. You two should know better.” She turned back to Vitór. “Haven’t you heard the story of the winged demon baby who shoots love arrows at the innocent?”

“Yes Abuela, everyone knows that story.”

“Well it is true. He is real! He shoots gnarled rusty arrows right into your flesh.” She approximated this sound with her mouth. “You bleed from it, for sure, and the wound gets infected and if you don’t treat it right away it kills you. You die! It has killed plenty of men stronger than you, boy.”

Vítór kept his eyes on his plate and was silent.

“Your father had a burro infected with the disease. It wouldn’t do any work. Tell him about the burro, Jorge.”

“The burro wouldn’t do any work.”

“He would just stand there. He would stand there and look at his beloved. The burro stopped eating. He wouldn’t pull anything or carry anything, no matter how much you whipped him. The animal loved the whip! And he kept the other animals up at night with a terrible moaning.”

“Yes, the moaning was awful,” said his father.

“Does the boy cry in his sleep?” Vitór’s grandmother asked.

“Sometimes he cries out,” his mother said softly.

“Do you know how that burro died, boy? He died on his feet. He didn’t even fall over; he passed from life to death standing up. He had been bones for so long that no one noticed. The only difference death brought was that his head wouldn’t follow that other
damn burro.” She put her fork on her plate and stood up. “We are going to fix this first thing tomorrow.”

She slapped Vitôr across the face and left the room. Vitôr spent the night throwing up into a bucket.

The next day was a big one for Emilio. It was the first day that he would see Lucia since giving her the poems. It would decide things, resolve them. He would tell her how things stood. He had accumulated a small collection of rocks: curiously shaped, unusually colored, beautiful, rare, grotesque. He would bring some of them to her. She would appreciate them.

In the morning he gathered flowers from a sibosa bush and rubbed their fragrance into his neck and chest. He used a needlegrass seed to clean the dirt from his fingernails and the skin of his elbows. As he was polishing some of his rocks in the river, the goats began to bleat and scatter. He scanned the hills: what? Then he saw it—it was a mountain lion. Emilio had only heard of mountain lions from other herdsmen; he had never seen one. He was furious. He seized the most dangerous rock, a pointed spear tip as large as his forearm, and set off sprinting after the mountain lion.

There was no question the mountain lion was Vitôr’s retaliation for the rotten bananas. But this was a profane revenge: it was like burning the banana fields, burning Vitôr’s house. Emilio hadn’t set fire to anything: though certainly he could have. He could have done much worse than spoiled bananas. This: this was out of bounds. This was unforgivable.

He ran up on the mountain lion, busy with an adult goat he had brought down. The lion heard Emilio coming: it turned its head, keeping the goat pinned with a paw. Emilio ran at him screaming. The lion looked at Emilio for a second, then turned completely towards him, snarling. Emilio dove at the cat from two bodylengths away and landed the rock in its throat, just as it had adjusted itself for an attack. The two creatures struggled on the ground, biting and tearing at each other. The cat bit into Emilio’s shoulder and held on. Emilio found the rock with his free hand, ripped it from the lion’s throat and plunged it into the flesh at the base of the its neck, pounding it deeper with his fist. Each blow drove the cat’s teeth deeper into his own shoulder.

When the mountain lion stopped moving, he pried its teeth from his shoulder, ripped the rock from its neck and walked out towards the banana fields.
Vitór had been in Lucia’s bedroom for the greater part of the morning. He sat on the bed. His grandmother had spent most of that time pacing about the room, speaking in bursts. Lucia had not yet returned home; she was out running errands, and though she was expected back before noon, her reliability had lately shown signs of diminishing. Vitór’s grandmother told Lucia’s mother that they would wait in her bedroom: this was of great importance.

“This is terrible. Do you know that? This is terrible because you are my grandson. Grandmother and grandson: that is the right kind of love. Not the kind that eats you from the inside out. That kind is good for nothing. That kind of love was given to us by demons.”

Vitór wasn’t speaking. He was terrifically tired. He had thrown up all he could; sitting on Lucia’s bed, he gagged on the air. His eyes were dry; they confessed a capitulating weariness.

“I’ve never seen a case as bad as yours end up well. I have to say it. Your face—it looks like it’s already lost. It’s going to take as much will as you can muster, boy. And frankly—”

Lucia walked in. She had a slight smile, whose meaning was hard to parse.

“Afternoon Vitór, Señora.”

“Now you listen to me, girl,” Vitór’s grandmother said, coming at her. “You know exactly what is going on here, and I should break your neck right here for letting it go on this long.”

“I—” said Lucia, backing away.

“Look at him. Look at my boy! He’s fit to die! And you—you watched it happen! Did his dying make you feel good? Did it amuse you? Ah! You deserve death, ilojo.”

“Abuela,” said Vitór.

“I—” said Lucia.

Vitór’s grandmother slapped Lucia hard, then slapped her again. Lucia felt at her face where she had been hit.

“Come with me,” Vitór’s grandmother said to Lucia, taking her by the wrist and leading her out. She pointed at Vitór: “Stay here!”

Emilio arrived at the banana fields: no Vitór. He decided to burn down the whole field, but he had no matches or glass to start a fire, and his mind couldn’t seize on another way to carry this out. Screaming a curse, he stabbed a banana tree with the arrowtip rock, fracturing his wrist. The rock stuck in the bark; he pulled it out and hacked at the tree until he lost his breath. Maybe Vitór is catching his lunch. He set off for the river.
When Lucia and Vitó’s grandmother returned to the room, Vitó hadn’t moved: he was sitting on the bed. Lucia had her hands folded in front of her; she approached him, looking at the floor.

“Vitó, I have no feelings for you. I don’t even like you very much. You’re like a dog that follows me around, except you speak even less than a dog. How can I have feelings for a dog?”

She paused, unsure. She looked to Vitó’s grandmother: Vitó’s grandmother looked as if she was ready to gut her with her hands.

Lucia continued, “I don’t want to see you around from now on. I hope I don’t see you anymore. You waste my time.”

Vitó was not at the river, not at any of the fishing spots Emilio knew about. It had been months since they had fished together; maybe he had found a new spot. He walked upstream for some time; he could keep on walking, he could walk forever. The river was endless. But no: Vitó is not there, this is useless. He would go to Vitó’s home: he would wait there until he returned from wherever he was.

Vitó still hadn’t moved. His face looked emptied out, like there was nothing inside his body to keep it living, and at any moment the air would scatter his atoms.

“Let’s go,” his grandmother said to him. “We’re leaving.”

He didn’t move, so she grabbed him by his hair, and his body pitched forward on to the floor. Lucia backed out of the way.

“Get up!” his grandmother said.

Emilio positioned himself in the bushes behind Vitó’s house, but he couldn’t keep himself still: his itching bloomed into twitching and then into pacing. Finally he walked up to the house, and then inside. Vitó’s mother was in the front room, working in a far corner, kneeling.

“I need to see Vitó,” he said.

Vitó’s mother looked up, startled, at Emilio: bloodied, wet, twitching, vacant. She said, “Oh God.”

“Where is Vitó!” Emilio yelled, slamming the arrowtip rock against his hip.

“At Lucia’s house...”
Lucia’s? Emilio stared at her. She stood up and backed away, out of his line of vision. After a minute, he walked out of the house, unable to make sense of his own thoughts.

Vitór’s grandmother succeeded in raising Vitór to his feet. She walked in front of him, at once pulling him and supporting him through town.

“Where are we going now?” he managed to ask.

“We’re going home. Then you’re going to live with your cousins.”

“But,” he breathed, “The banana fields…”

She yanked on him, jerking him forward. “To hell with the bananas!”

Thoughts settled, one by one, in Emilio’s brain: he would deal first with Vitór, then with Lucia. What had happened? Vitór, yes, his perfidy was well known, but what cause had he given Lucia to do this to him? He loves her, he will provide for her, he will take care of her needs; why would she look elsewhere for anything? She must be wretched. That is it: Lucia is falsehearted. He must have overlooked this somehow. No. No. He would settle things with both of them.

Vitór’s grandmother had to rest; she leaned Vitór up against the wall of a neighbor’s house and took a position next to him. His head settled slightly back, angling to the left. She breathed hard.

“Damn this,” she said.

When her breathing evened she gathered up Vitór and headed on.

Emilio spotted Vitór: he was being walked like an unwieldy, oversized doll. Everything tensed. He howled. He came at Vitór, knocking him and the old woman to the ground together. He kicked him until the two bodies were separated, then dove onto him, stabbing his shoulder with the rock, stabbing, driving it through his shoulder and into the ground. The rock pinned him there. Emilio worked at prying Vitór’s arm off: twisting and pulling at it, biting into it, jerking it furiously. When the arm wouldn’t detach, he pulled the rock out and reached into the wound and pulled at the bones until the tendons between them came free. For a moment, skin, like loose soup membrane, held the arm and body together, but Emilio tore it with his hands and had the arm free.
Vitôr looked. He saw his arm tossed away from his body, and Emilio gathering the rock and striking at his other shoulder. Vitôr looked at Emilio’s eyes and couldn’t see pupils. Emilio’s mouth was open, the rictus of a scream, but for Vitôr everything was silence. His grandmother entered his vision, clutching Emilio’s back, biting Emilio’s ear. Emilio shook her off; when he rose to dispatch her Vitôr saw the messy bud of blood where Emilio’s ear had just been. He saw two men, men he recognized, tackling Emilio, beating him and holding him to the ground as he struggled, screaming without sound.

Vitôr looked to his arm, lying on the ground below his legs. His thoughts collected in the silence; pain, waiting, existed outside, where sound did. He thought: I have no arm. I will be an old man with one arm. But at least there is this: my arm will keep me from being sent away. I must be tended here. And maybe she will come to see me. Maybe, seeing me, she will cry: she will confess her regret at the terrible things she said. She will take my hand in both of hers. And then, after years…. His thoughts loosened, images swirled in: his grandmother screaming, Emilio howling, the two men grunting, his own dull moan.

Emilio and Vitôr were buried in the town’s cemetery, a respectful distance from one another, though one service was held for them both. All the town turned out. Lucia wore a sun hat she bent downwards to cover her face; she cried evenly, with almost no sound. The families of Vitôr and Emilio sat next to each other; Vitôr’s parents acknowledged that the cat’s bite which shortly killed Emilio must have first driven him mad; Vitôr’s mother had personally witnessed the effects. Vitôr’s grandmother, wheezing out of a punctured lung, voiced her doubts.

The priest read from scriptures and the service ended. The town lined up behind the families to place bobella petals and salted water on the graves. Vitôr’s grandmother went first: she bent down to release the petals, and the pain in her chest was so piercing she couldn’t speak, she couldn’t breathe. She remained in that position until the pain rolled her eyes up in her head and her son had to reach under her arms and lift her away.
I am a man with troubles. The Lord has heard them a multitude of times. He has no doubt come to be personally familiar with my voice from all the prayers and supplications which I have so many occasions to offer Him, I do it on a daily basis. Great! It’s Walt again! Here we go!! He must think.

But I do not think it is without foundation that I take up so much of his time. He knows all about it. Plus He can’t be all that surprised to hear from me, because it was after all His doing that I am the way that I am. Which is bent! Which is attracted sexually to other men in deviant ways! Damn it! So, He can’t fault me for taking up so much of his time, at least, He was the one who afflicted me with my condition to start with, the least He can do is listen.

I am not trying to disown responsibility for my life and my thoughts, but I am surely not the first person to point out the contradiction of logic in asking His forgiveness and His guidance for a problem He gave me. I’m sure He’s already aware of this, plus two steps ahead of me. He knows everything, and I trust in Him.

I have terrible thoughts! Terrible terrible TERRIBLE! I have so far inflicted the following injuries upon myself as a method of combating my thoughts: I have cut my skin on my arms and legs and stomach, I have burned my skin with cigarettes and cigarette lighters (mostly on my hands), I have pulled my hair out noticeably, I have gouged both eyes with my thumbs, I have stabbed myself in the leg with a fork and left it in for minutes, banged my head into walls more times than I can remember (this is probably the most common method), I have bitten myself in numerous places (arms), I have smashed my own head in my car door repeatedly, and this is just for starters.

The method of self-injury gets my mind back on track better than any other method, at least. I would love to say that praying to God works better than slamming my head in a car door over and over (three times maximum, I’ve never been able to do it more than three times at once), but I can’t. But God made car doors, and God gave me the idea of slamming my head in them, so at least He gave me that.

I masturbate many times a day! I do it at work! I masturbate to thoughts of people I work with, people I know outside of work, people I see on television, people in magazines. I buy GQ and masturbate to the ads! Everytime I buy it, I have to make myself believe that I’m someone interested in highstyle fashion, that it’s reasonable for a guy like to me to be buying GQ. I buy it at the supermarket, it’s the last item I add to my cart. Like it’s a last minute thought, what’s missing from all these groceries for a fashion-conscious person like me? (I’m pretending for the benefit of the cashier, but really for the benefit of me). I am so low!
And! Sometimes I put on makeup and go on purpose to tough-guy bars or preppy college bars in the hopes that they'll beat me until I don't even know my own name anymore!

I can't keep my head straight in any situation, so I'm not even going to begin on my relationship with Shelly, my sham of a fiancée, who I do love and deserves someone better than me, anyone would be better than me, and sometimes I think about telling her everything as an act of generosity to her so she'll be rid of me forever, but I am prevented from doing this on account of I'm a COWARD!

A terrible inhuman monster coward of hell!

Oh God!

My secrets have complicated and fouled everything about our relationship. When we are intimate, my thoughts typically turn to thoughts of being with another man in general, and then to specifics such as using wax on each other, 69ing, using costumes and then ripping off the costumes in the heat of the moment, being tied up and whipped and bitten and cut, being raped by strangers, and the list gets worse and worse! This is sick! Why would God do this?

Alo! So I am driving in my Peugeot through Quebec with my girl friend all right? And we are discussing our conversations in the manner of lovers who are familiar with each other from a long time.

— I prefer such a sauce for the accompaniment of the food which I enjoy!
— But that sauce is not best! she counters me.

And so forth as that. Perhaps I invent the particulars for this. Whatever it is! we are driving.

And then what do I see by the road side? But it is a hitchhiker woman! In the province of Quebec! I see her from half a kilometer and I slow my Peugeot to accommodate stopping.

— What are you doing with this? says my lover.
— I am stopping to pick up this hitchhiker of course!
— Pick up this hitchhiker? Has madness entered your brain today?
— I can choose to, I tell her.

So I stop and the woman runs up and I see from close away that she is yet a SEXY HITCHHIKER! I could tell, she wore a bikini for a shirt.

— What is your destination? I say to our new passenger.
— I am trying to get to Montreal for my lover!

My own girl friend puts her eyes in her head and makes of face of OH!
— As it happens we also are going to Montreal, the luck is yours!
This guy’s all over me, right, he won’t leave me alone, and I’m giving him every signal in the book of Leave Me Alone, I am not interested in you, all right? But it’s like he’s willfully neglecting my attitude, he’s all over me like I Think You’re So Pretty It’s Hurting Me to Look at You, and I’m like So Go Away and Look at Somebody Else if It Hurts So Bad, but he keeps at it, buying me drinks, trying to chat me up with humor, telling me jokes, he’s got like an arsenal of jokes, boom boom boom one after the next one, and some of them are funny but I’m not laughing on purpose so he’ll get the message of Go Away, but he tells me one that’s pretty funny, about what do you call two stripper lawyers, and I have to smile at it, and I try to hide it by drinking and smiling into my drink instead of at him, but he sees it and thinks that’s his opening, he’s got someone who’s interested in him back.

So at that point we begin a two sided discussion of what I find attractive in a man, which is I guess his method of trying to get my mind operating in sexual terms, and I’m like first of all, Not You, so don’t get any ideas about that, I’m just having this conversation in the interest of politeness. And he says, but you obviously like guys, so what does it for you? And I’ve given this an amount of thought I’ll be honest, so I tell him, all right, well the guy’s got to excite me, he’s got to offer me something in the way of energy, he’s got to have juice. That’s what does it for me, juice. I don’t care how well a guy’s put together, if he doesn’t have electricity in his
language and pop in his attitude then forget it. Forget it! That’s the building block of a man. I get really into my telling him my outlook, I get a little worked up, I spill my drink a little on the bar. Money, looks, I don’t care, I tell him. I don’t care! If your life is in order, if you’ve got a well constructed routine, if the furniture in your house is all fine and in the right place, I say boring! I’m young enough to not care about that. It’s the confidence of having a spark, it’s knowing you’ve got Juice, or I’m bored with you instantaneously.

That’s just my theory of attraction in my particular case, I tell him.

And so he’s says he knows all about juice, he doesn’t want to brag but in his particular case he’s full of juice, he’s overflowing with it. And I’m like, now that’s just gross, you obviously don’t understand anything about it, that comment was proof to me, and I turn my back on him as a clear signal of what I mean. But he’s persistent with his jokes and with buying me drinks, and I guess I should say that one part of my theory that I didn’t mention to him was that if I have enough drinks a lot of things get a lot more attractive, across the board. So I turn back around and I ask him, all right, so what theories do you have?

You know what about the internet seems great but is actually the most destructive part? No: not destructive: sinister. The most sinister part is: the friends you make. Because are they real friends? I have I would say over one hundred friends online, that I know individually on a personal basis, but.... Do they count? Is it a personal basis?

Because the two coin sides are, online I can invent a persona (even a new name: JYNX), and I can act like whoever I want, I can put on any kind of personality there is, and yes absolutely there’s freedom in that... but if I’m doing it, how do I know everybody else isn’t also? Are their responses and answers and personalities genuine to who they are?

How do you ever know! With anyone! In life!

How are you supposed to make a connection with someone if you can’t ever know them?

I think too much. But there’s nothing I can do about that!

Sometimes I get the thought that everything is just an experiment. That my brain’s been put here to see how a brain will react to stimulations from a madeup experimental life. The experiment is, invent a bunch of rules and customs and see how this brain does with them. Because look at the customs! 50 hour work weeks? Dating services? This isn’t a test to see how I’ll react?
I don’t want to bring this up online because there I’m known for being smart and cutting, and I know exactly what JYNX would have to say to someone with an idea like that. But why would I have that thought if there was nothing to it? It doesn’t make sense for it to spontaneously come into my brain from nothing.

Of course the question then comes up, if this is all an experiment, okay, who exactly is behind it? God? Beings from another dimension? I know how this sounds: Beings from another dimension. I’m not an idiot and I’m not crazy. I know what this sounds like! I can’t help my thoughts! But listen to me: is the idea of a fancy experiment any stupider and crazier than how things are?

And I’m not going to say anything about it to anyone, but the evidence of my life is starting to make me believe that forces are at work, that something is preventing people from connecting. That nobody can know anybody else. That I’m underneath some joke. Because at this point what’s real doesn’t seem any more reasonable to me than the possibilities of an infinite joke.
I got a boyfriend with roving eyes, and it's getting to be a problem. At first it wasn't a problem, it was kind of funny and a little bit fun: I pretended like it bugged me when really it didn’t, I just liked playing the game of pretending that it bugged me. I'd say *Stop it, Brian*, and I'd slap him on the chest or the arm, and even if I tried to have my face look angry I’d have a babysmile that would ruin the effect.

So then he takes that as a sign: this is a fun game! That Janine loves to play! But the thing is, this becomes like a totally one sided game. There is no equality in it at all: not only does he get the individual pleasure that comes from looking at girls (and the freedom to do it! while he's with his own girlfriend!), he also gets pleasure from it being Our Little Game. So he takes the initiative of looking at *every girl who is in the ballpark of attractive.*
It’s like Jesus, you know?
It gets easier to have my face look angry.

But he keeps it up: he starts asking me, what do you think of her, and do you think those are real!, and at first I’m like, gross. It’s like he’s trying to shock me! Well it worked! Stop it! I tell him, and I deliver it with absolutely no trace of a smile anywhere within the vicinity of my face.

But Brian is obviously a bad listener, in addition to everything else, because later he tells me about his friend from work, Danielle, who I’ve met before, who would definitely be into some kind of experimentation, if the topic was introduced in the right way, she’s mentioned to him that she thinks I’m attractive.

JESUS!
WHAT KIND OF GIRL DOES HE THINK I AM?
But this is not an offense you break up over, I love him, this is something that if I sit down and talk to him about, and he understands what kind of a position he’s putting me in, and what kinds of feelings he’s making me feel, this is something we can work out.

But the talk goes like this: it goes like him telling me that this experimentation will not in any way affect the love that he has for me, that that love exists on a separate plane, that it’s just him answering a call that his body is putting out, and he can’t answer it without me, and that if the love I have for him is anything like the love he has for me, in intensity and deepness and size, then this is something that I should very seriously consider, out of the obligations of love.

Now I don’t know what to do! Oh! I thought I knew for sure, but all our talking has undone my opinion. I’m a modern woman! I want to do the right thing, but feel like I don’t have a foundation. What am I supposed to do, love is making complicating demands! What do I listen to? What’s the right thing?

Jesus Christ this woman is like a hurricane of sex, what do you want me to do about it? Shit of the Lord. A woman who wants it three times a day, four times a day, six times a day, what is the name for a woman like that? The name for her: I don’t even know it. I call her My Pretty Flower when we are One on One, but Black Hole of My Dick is closer to what I mean, shit.

I did math on her, she works two jobs, at the lawyer’s office and at the phone bank, so why isn’t she slowed down? I can’t understand it. Plus add up the day and night hours: I don’t even see how it’s possible, where the time for it even appears from.
Once at the beginning when it was fun still I brought home a thick browncolored scented candle as a joke for her and I gave it to her saying, For when I am not here, you know how to light it up, but she didn’t get the joke, she thought I was bringing her gifts and that made her want to have more sex with me.

She doesn’t even ask for it now, she’s got a Look on Her Face which she gives me. Sometimes she grunts in combination with it: a special grunt of What She Wants to Have Me Do To Her. What do you say to that? We don’t even have regular conversations anymore, which at the beginning I thought would be okay with me, but now I don’t know, you know? That’s our whole language, it’s a language with one word in it, we say it over and over, maybe some days we pronounce it different a bit, that’s it, shit.

I wanted to have a dialogue with her. I said to her, “I’m tired Bonita, can’t we take it easy for a change okay? Let’s maybe go for a walk for instance.” Of course her answer was to get on top of me and that was the end of that discussion, Snap like that. What do you want me to do about it? Juevos de Diós, I am too young to have my dick worn out by some woman, I need to open up a better dialogue about it, I got to find some way to an answer.
Oh yeah.
You like that? You like that?
Yes. Yeah.
Yeah.
That’s nice. Right like that.
Yeah.
Oh.
You like that?
Wait, hold on.
What?
Who’s that?
What?
On Conan.
Her? That’s Catherine Keener.
Oh! I love her. Wait, don’t stop.
Don’t stop?
No.
All right.
Yeah. Like that.
All right.
Hold on, pass me that.
What?
The remote.
I’m not going to give you the remote.
Come on! Don’t be a baby.
Honey,
Don’t stop.
But honey,
Honey, I just can’t hear what she’s saying, that’s all.
You want the remote? Here, fine, here’s the remote.
Get back on! I’m just going to adjust the volume.
Good.
Come on, don’t be like that. It’s fine. Catherine Keener’s got a really sexy voice.

Conan doesn’t.
Come on. We’ve done it before with, we’ve done it when a basketball game was on.

The game was on, but I wasn’t watching the game.
Well, I was.
Ha ha.
No, please, come on!

Please?

Please?
Fine.
All right. Is this better?
That’s nice.
Yeah?
Yeah. That’s real nice.
Oh.
Mmm.
Hey.
Hmm.
Honey. Can we turn it off now?
I kind of like it on.
This check cashing commercial is doing it for you then.
You’re doing it for me.
Right. Let’s turn it off. Here.
No! Let’s find something good! Yes!
What?
Where’s the remote? Let’s find a good show! An animal show!
How about this?
Turn the channel!
You like this?
Keep going!
What about this channel baby? You like this channel?
Oh!
What?
Yes!
Yeah? You like this channel?
Leave this channel!
Yeah?
Oh! Leave this! Oh! Leave it on this channel!